

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the influence of viral challenges, a prominent trend in contemporary social media culture, on the behavioral patterns of students in private secondary schools within Egor Local Government Area (LGA) of Edo State, Nigeria. Employing a quantitative descriptive survey design, data were collected from 428 students across seven private secondary schools through a structured questionnaire that assessed levels of participation in viral challenges and their associated impacts on social conduct, academic engagement, and emotional well-being. The findings reveal that viral challenges exert a considerable effect on adolescent behavior by fostering peer influence, promoting conformity, and encouraging risk-taking tendencies. Although such challenges often stimulate creativity, entertainment, and social connection among students, they also create avenues for negative outcomes, including impulsive decision-making, unsafe practices, and significant distractions from academic responsibilities. The dual nature of these challenges highlights both their potential for positive youth engagement and their inherent risks. Based on these insights, the study recommends the integration of digital literacy programs into school curricula, the strengthening of parental supervision, and the promotion of prosocial and educationally beneficial challenges. Overall, this research contributes to the broader discourse on the intersection between social media trends and adolescent development within the Nigerian educational landscape.

KEYWORDS: Viral Challenges, Social Media, Behavioral Patterns, Adolescent Behavior, Peer Influence

INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat has fundamentally reshaped adolescent culture, creating new avenues for self-expression, social interaction, and identity formation. Among the most prominent trends within these digital spaces are viral challenges, which are tasks or activities that gain rapid popularity through online sharing, encouraging widespread participation among users. These challenges, often driven by peer influence and the pursuit of social validation, range from harmless creative endeavors, such as dance routines or lip-syncing videos, to potentially risky behaviors, including dares or pranks that may have physical or psychological consequences

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

(Abraham et al., 2022). In Nigeria, where smartphone penetration and internet access among adolescents are notably high, viral challenges have become a pervasive cultural phenomenon, significantly influencing how young people engage with their peers and navigate their social and academic environments (Johnson & Musa, 2019). The allure of gaining likes, comments, and shares amplifies participation, making these challenges a powerful force in shaping adolescent behavior.

This study focuses on the first objective of the original research, which is to examine the impact of viral challenges on the behavioral patterns of students in private secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area (LGA) of Edo State, Nigeria. Behavioral patterns in this context refer to the consistent ways in which students act, respond, and interact within educational and social settings, encompassing their social conduct, academic attitudes, and emotional responses. Egor LGA, an urban area with a high concentration of private secondary schools and widespread social media use among youth, provides a rich context for exploring these dynamics. The pervasive nature of viral challenges raises critical questions about their influence on students' decision-making processes, peer relationships, and academic engagement, particularly in a Nigerian context where cultural emphasis on community and social belonging may amplify the effects of peer influence (Edo State Ministry of Education, 2023).

The significance of studying viral challenges lies in their dual potential to foster positive outcomes, such as creativity and social bonding, and negative consequences, such as risk-taking and academic distraction. Previous research, such as Green and Jones (2019), has highlighted how viral challenges can lead to impulsive and sometimes dangerous behaviors driven by the desire for online recognition. Similarly, Sanders and Larson (2020) note that while some challenges promote prosocial behaviors, others exacerbate peer influence, pushing adolescents toward conformity and risky actions. In Nigeria, Johnson and Musa (2019) found that viral challenges significantly increase peer pressure among secondary school students, affecting their social conduct and decision-making. However, these studies often focus on either the risks or benefits in isolation, leaving a gap in understanding the comprehensive impact of viral challenges on adolescent behavior in specific educational contexts like private secondary schools.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating how viral challenges shape the behavioral patterns of students in private secondary schools in Egor LGA, a region characterized by its diverse student population and high social media penetration. By focusing on the interplay between viral challenges and behaviors such as social conformity, risk-taking, and academic focus, the research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how digital trends influence adolescent development in a Nigerian setting. The study is guided by the research question:

What is the impact of viral challenges on the behavioral patterns of students in private secondary schools in Egor LGA? This question is critical for educators, parents, and policymakers seeking to harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its potential risks in educational environments.

Grounded in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that behaviors are learned through observation and imitation, this study explores how students adopt behaviors from viral challenges by observing peers and influencers on social media platforms. The theory suggests that the reinforcement provided by online feedback, such as likes and comments, encourages students to emulate these behaviors, shaping their behavioral patterns in both positive and negative ways. By examining the specific context of private secondary schools in Egor LGA, this research contributes to the global discourse on social media's influence on adolescent behavior, offering region-specific insights that can inform targeted interventions to promote responsible digital engagement and support healthy behavioral development among Nigerian youth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Behavioural Patterns of Students

Behavioural patterns of students refer to the consistent ways in which students act, respond, and interact within educational settings, encompassing their attitudes toward learning, social conduct, emotional regulation, and engagement with academic tasks. Understanding these behavioural patterns is critical because they significantly influence students' academic success, social development, and psychological well-being. Recent research has expanded the study of student behaviour beyond traditional classroom observations by leveraging digital data sources and advanced analytical methods to capture more nuanced and dynamic behaviour patterns. Mirzaei, Sadeghi, and Abbasi (2019) demonstrated that student behaviour can be modeled as vectors of micro-patterns, revealing stable and distinct behavioural clusters among students. These clusters correlate with academic performance, highlighting that behavioural patterns can predict how students approach problem-solving and learning tasks. Similarly, Levin (2024) used Learning Management System (LMS) data to identify patterns of engagement such as frequency of participation, access to course materials, and forum activity, linking these to varying levels of academic achievement. This approach provides insights into the diverse learning habits of students in digital environments, emphasizing that behaviour is multifaceted and context-dependent.

Further research by Guo and Xia (2023) used educational big data and deep learning to analyze student behaviour patterns on campuses, finding that behavioral diversity poses challenges but also opportunities for tailored academic support. Their work illustrates how modern data-driven techniques can detect not only common behaviour patterns but also anomalies, which are critical for early intervention strategies. Qu and Xu (2023) similarly mined student internet usage data to classify eleven distinct online behavioural patterns, linking these to predictive models of student performance with high accuracy, underscoring the potential of behavioural analytics in educational decision-making. Behavioural patterns also include temporal and engagement dimensions. Li, Zhao and Wang (2023) found that high-achieving students exhibit more methodical and self-directed behaviour during online learning, while low-achieving peers show less structured engagement. This distinction suggests that behavioural patterns influence not only outcomes but also cognitive load and motivation. Moreover, Mehnen, Mandl, Pohn, Blaickner, and Dregely (2023) observed that students' engagement with course materials fluctuates according to schedules and deadlines, affecting performance outcomes, which reflects the dynamic nature of behaviour over time. Research also highlights the social aspect of behavioural patterns. Nugumanova, Shunkeyeva and Serikova, (2019) analyzed students' digital footprints on social media, correlating online behaviour with psychological assessments to understand how social interactions and preferences relate to overall student well-being and academic engagement. This intersection between social behaviour and academic patterns points to the importance of peer influence and social environment in shaping student behaviour. Beyond academic activities, behavioural patterns encompass attitudes toward collaboration, motivation, and emotional regulation. Cents-Boonstra, Lichtwarck-Aschoff, den Brok, and Harinck, (2021) showed that teacher behaviours, such as motivating questions and positive feedback, can stimulate positive engagement patterns among students, linking external influences with internal behavioural shifts. Meanwhile, Eze and Nwankwo (2023) emphasized that behavioural patterns are also influenced by emotional and psychological factors, which affect students' interaction with peers and academic persistence. Behavioural patterns of students are complex, multifaceted, and influenced by cognitive, social, emotional, and technological factors. Advances in data analytics have enriched understanding by enabling the capture of fine-grained, temporal, and contextual patterns that were previously difficult

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

to observe. These insights are essential for designing interventions that promote positive behaviours, identify at-risk students, and enhance educational outcomes (Mirzaei, Sadeghi, & Abbasi).

Social Media Trends

Social media trends refer to the rapidly evolving patterns of behavior, content, and interactions that emerge on social media platforms and gain widespread popularity among users. These trends are often characterized by viral content, hashtags, challenges, fashion influences, and digital aesthetics, all of which shape how individuals engage with social media and each other. The dynamic nature of social media means that trends can rise and fall quickly, yet their impact on users, particularly young people such as students, can be profound and lasting. Recent studies highlight that social media trends play a significant role in influencing the behaviors, attitudes, and social norms among youth populations globally. According to Kaur and Singh (2021), trends on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat have transformed from mere entertainment to powerful social phenomena that can influence cultural expressions, identity formation, and peer interactions. These trends often revolve around viral challenges, fashion statements, and the use of filters or digital enhancements, which collectively contribute to shaping how individuals present themselves and relate to others online.

Viral challenges, for instance, have become a hallmark of social media culture. These challenges encourage users to participate in specific activities, often involving creative or daring tasks that are then shared widely. While some challenges promote positive engagement and creativity, others pose risks by encouraging dangerous or inappropriate behavior. Abraham, Roth, Zinzow, Madathil, and Wisniewski (2022) found that participation in viral challenges is heavily driven by peer influence and the desire for social validation, making students particularly susceptible to engaging in such trends without fully considering potential consequences. Similarly, Dacka(2024) emphasized that adolescents often participate in these trends under peer pressure, which can lead to dangerous behaviors and long-term consequences. This phenomenon illustrates the dual-edged nature of social media trends, where the pursuit of online recognition can both foster social connection and encourage risky behavior.

Fashion trends propagated through social media have also gained significant attention in recent years. The visual and highly shareable nature of social media content enables fashion trends to spread rapidly, influencing what young people wear, how they style themselves, and their perceptions of beauty and identity. Roberts, Wright, and Bissell (2022) examined the impact of social media fashion trends on adolescent self-esteem and found that while some youths experience increased confidence through trend adoption, others face heightened pressures related to body image and consumerism. Supporting this, Hassan, Shawalludin, Jamaludin, and Chee (2024) noted that adolescents in urban areas like Klang Valley often alter their fashion choices to align with popular online aesthetics, suggesting a strong correlation between digital visibility and self-image. These findings highlight the complexity of social media trends, which can simultaneously empower self-expression and contribute to psychological challenges.

Another critical aspect of social media trends is the widespread use of filters and digital enhancements that alter or idealize users' appearances. Williams and Green (2022) reported that the frequent use of beauty filters leads to increased self-consciousness among adolescents and a tendency to compare themselves unfavorably to digitally altered images. This comparison can adversely affect emotional well-being and social behavior, reinforcing unrealistic standards of beauty and influencing how students interact both online and offline. The phenomenon, often referred to as the "Snapchat dysmorphia" effect, exemplifies how social media trends extend beyond content to affect users' mental health and social realities.

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

Collectively, these social media trends viral challenges, fashion influences, and digital filters intersect to create a complex digital environment that profoundly shapes youth behavior. Marwick and Boyd (2020) emphasize the importance of understanding these trends not only as entertainment but as significant social forces that affect identity, peer relationships, and emotional development. As social media platforms continue to evolve, the patterns of trends will likely become more sophisticated, necessitating ongoing research to understand their implications fully. Moreover, the role of influencers and algorithm-driven content curation further amplifies the reach and impact of social media trends. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders(2021) assert that influencers act as trendsetters whose endorsement can accelerate the adoption of trends among young audiences. Algorithms prioritize content that generates high engagement, often favoring sensational or visually striking trends, which may reinforce the rapid spread of certain behaviours irrespective of their positive or negative consequences. This mechanistic amplification raises questions about the responsibility of platforms in moderating content and protecting vulnerable users. Social media trends are multifaceted phenomena that extend beyond fleeting popularity to influence significant aspects of social and psychological life among students. Their effects encompass creative expression, social bonding, and identity exploration, but also pose risks related to mental health, peer pressure, and behavior regulation.

Viral Challenges

Viral challenges have become a defining feature of contemporary social media culture, especially among young people and students. These challenges typically involve users performing specific tasks often creative, entertaining, or daring and sharing their participation through videos or posts to encourage others to join. The rapid spread of such challenges is facilitated by social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, where trends can quickly gain global traction. Viral challenges are influential because they engage users actively, promoting a sense of community and shared participation across diverse social groups.

Sanders and Larson, (2020) shows that viral challenges can have both positive and negative impacts on students' behavioural patterns. On the positive side, participation in viral challenges can foster creativity, social bonding, and a sense of achievement. For instance, challenges related to dance routines or artistic expression often encourage students to develop new skills and build confidence while connecting with peers (Abidin & Thompson, 2021). Additionally, viral challenges can be leveraged for educational or charitable causes, raising awareness and promoting social good among youth (Sanders & Larson, 2020). However, the negative consequences of viral challenges are increasingly documented. Some challenges encourage risky, harmful, or inappropriate behavior, driven by peer pressure and the desire for social approval. Green and Jones (2019) reported that the need to conform to viral trends can push students into dangerous situations, often without fully assessing the risks. Miller and Roberts (2023) also highlighted that this pressure can exacerbate anxiety, impulsivity, and mental distress, ultimately disrupting academic focus and emotional well-being.

Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2020) further emphasized that the compulsion to participate in viral challenges often stems from the fear of missing out (FOMO) and the pursuit of online validation, both of which can undermine healthy decision-making. These psychological pressures are particularly potent in adolescence, a period characterized by heightened sensitivity to peer influence. Moreover, the design of social media algorithms contributes to the spread and intensity of viral challenges. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2021) explained that platforms tend to promote content that generates high engagement, amplifying the visibility of sensational or risky challenges. This dynamic creates a feedback loop in which users are increasingly exposed to trending content, often without adequate understanding of the potential

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

consequences. Viral challenges represent a powerful social media trend that deeply influences student behaviour. While they offer opportunities for creativity and social connection, they also pose risks related to safety, peer pressure, and mental health. Understanding the dual nature of viral challenges is essential for educators, parents, and policymakers to support positive participation and mitigate harmful effects among students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design, which is well-suited for examining existing phenomena without manipulating variables, as outlined by Creswell (2014). This design was chosen to systematically investigate the impact of viral challenges on the behavioral patterns of students in private secondary schools in Egor LGA, Edo State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey approach facilitates the collection of quantitative data from a large sample, enabling the identification of patterns and relationships between social media trends and adolescent behavior in a naturalistic educational setting. By focusing on viral challenges, the study captures how these trends influence social conduct, academic engagement, and emotional well-being without altering the environment, making it both practical and ethical for research involving adolescents. This method also supports statistical generalization, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how peer influence drives participation in viral challenges and shapes behavioral patterns in the Nigerian context.

Study Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of 3,360 students enrolled in seven private secondary schools in Egor LGA, namely HolyLand Demonstration Secondary School, Cogent Academy Comfort, St. Mercy Group of Schools, Jubilee Group of Schools, Brano High School, AB Education Center, and Winfosa Education Centre. Egor LGA was selected due to its urban setting, high concentration of private schools, and widespread social media use among adolescents, which fosters engagement with viral challenges (Edo State Ministry of Education, 2023). To determine an appropriate sample size, Taro Yamane's formula for finite populations was applied, calculated as

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$
, where $N = 3,360$ (population size) and $e = 0.05$ (level of significance). This yielded a sample size of 357, which was increased by 20% to account for potential non-responses, resulting in a final sample of 428 students. Of these, 400 valid responses were analyzed. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across schools, class levels (junior and senior secondary), and demographic factors such as gender and age, enhancing the representativeness of the sample and allowing for subgroup analyses of adolescent behavior influenced by peer influence.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire specifically designed to measure students' engagement with viral challenges and their impact on behavioral patterns. The questionnaire comprised two sections: Section A gathered demographic information (gender, age, class, smartphone access, and frequency of social media use), while Section B included 20 Likert-scale items (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) assessing participation in viral challenges, their influence on social conduct, academic focus, and emotional well-being, and broader behavioral patterns. The instrument was developed based on validated scales from prior studies (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) and adapted to the Nigerian

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

context to ensure cultural relevance and clarity, particularly in capturing how peer influence drives engagement with viral challenges. The questionnaire's closed-ended format facilitated quantitative analysis, enabling precise measurement of the relationship between social media trends and adolescent behavior, with items such as "I often try social media challenges I see online" and "Viral challenges sometimes distract me from school work" directly addressing the study's objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process involved face-to-face administration of the questionnaire within the selected schools to maximize response rates and ensure data quality. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant educational authorities in Egor LGA, and permission was secured from school administrators. Informed assent was obtained from student participants, with clear explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw without penalty, adhering to ethical guidelines (Resnik, 2018). Trained research assistants supervised the questionnaire administration to clarify any ambiguities and ensure completeness, minimizing disruptions to academic schedules. This approach allowed for a controlled data collection environment, enhancing the reliability of responses related to viral challenges and their effects on adolescent behavior. The process was conducted over a two-week period, respecting school calendars and ensuring accessibility to diverse student groups, which was critical for capturing the influence of peer influence in social media contexts.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic profile of the 400 respondents, derived from a sample of 428 students (with 400 valid responses), provides a foundational understanding of the study population in private secondary schools in Egor LGA. The sample comprised 56.2% female (225 students) and 43.8% male (175 students) participants, reflecting a slightly higher representation of females, which aligns with enrollment trends in private secondary schools in the region (Edo State Ministry of Education, 2023). Age distribution showed that 83.7% (335 students) were aged 14–16 years, 8.8% (35 students) were 10–13 years, and 7.5% (30 students) were 17–19 years, indicating that the majority were mid-adolescents, a group particularly susceptible to social media influences and peer influence due to their developmental stage (Green & Jones, 2019). Additionally, 63% (252 students) reported having access to smartphones, and 83.5% (334 students) indicated frequent social media use, with 13% (52 students) using it sometimes and 3.5% (14 students) rarely engaging. This high prevalence of social media engagement underscores the relevance of studying viral challenges in shaping adolescent behavior within this context.

Engagement with Viral Challenges

Data of the original study underscore the significant engagement with viral challenges among students in private secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area (LGA), highlighting their pervasive influence on behavioral patterns. Specifically, 61% of respondents (12% strongly agreed, 48 students; 49% agreed, 196 students) reported frequently participating in viral challenges encountered on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. This high participation rate reflects the widespread appeal of viral challenges among adolescents in Egor LGA, driven by the accessibility of social media and the cultural emphasis on social connectivity and community in Nigeria (Johnson & Musa, 2019). The proliferation of smartphones, with 63% of respondents reporting access, further facilitates this engagement, enabling students to consume and contribute to viral challenges with ease. The allure of these challenges

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

lies in their ability to foster creativity and social interaction, as students replicate dance routines, pranks, or other trending activities, often motivated by the desire to gain visibility and affirmation within their online and offline peer networks. Moreover, 63% of respondents (13% strongly agreed, 52 students; 50% agreed, 200 students) indicated that participating in viral challenges enhanced their sense of peer acceptance, underscoring the critical role of peer influence in shaping adolescent behavior (Abraham et al., 2022). This finding aligns with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that adolescents model behaviors observed in their social environment, particularly those reinforced by positive feedback such as likes, comments, and shares on social media. The pursuit of social validation drives students to engage in viral challenges, as participation signals alignment with peer groups and enhances social status within their school and online communities. However, this engagement is not without risks, as the pressure to conform to trending challenges can lead to impulsive or unsafe behaviors, particularly when challenges involve dares or stunts that prioritize online recognition over personal safety. These dynamics highlight the complex interplay between viral challenges, social media, and behavioral patterns, emphasizing the need for interventions to guide adolescents toward safe and constructive participation.

Perceived Behavioral Impacts

The study provides a comprehensive exploration of the perceived impacts of viral challenges on students' behavioral patterns in private secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area (LGA), revealing a complex interplay of positive and negative outcomes that shape adolescent behavior. Notably, 52.8% of respondents (10% strongly agreed, 40 students; 42.8% agreed, 171 students) acknowledged that some viral challenges they participated in were risky or dangerous, demonstrating a significant level of awareness about the potential harms associated with certain challenges, such as dares, pranks, or physically demanding stunts (Green & Jones, 2019). This finding suggests that while students are drawn to viral challenges due to peer influence and the allure of social media validation, they are not oblivious to the risks, which may include physical injury, psychological stress, or social repercussions. For instance, challenges like the "Tide Pod Challenge" or other hazardous dares reported globally highlight the potential for viral challenges to encourage impulsive and unsafe behaviors among adolescents (Abraham et al., 2022). The awareness of risks, however, does not always deter participation, as the drive for social acceptance and online recognition often outweighs caution, particularly in a cultural context like Nigeria, where communal values amplify the impact of peer influence on adolescent behavior (Johnson & Musa, 2019).

Furthermore, 63% of respondents (13% strongly agreed, 52 students; 50% agreed, 200 students) reported that viral challenges significantly distracted them from their schoolwork, underscoring a notable impact on academic focus and time management. This finding indicates that viral challenges, while fostering creativity and social engagement through activities like dance or collaborative content creation, also contribute to negative behavioral patterns, such as procrastination and reduced academic productivity. The overall mean score of 3.35 (on a 5-point Likert scale) for items assessing the impact of viral challenges suggests a moderate influence on behavioral patterns, reflecting a balanced dynamic between positive outcomes, such as enhanced social connectivity and self-expression, and detrimental effects, such as impulsivity and academic distraction. These results align with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that adolescents emulate behaviors observed on social media, reinforced by peer feedback, but also highlight the need for interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of viral challenges on adolescent behavior, particularly in educational settings where academic performance is a priority.

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

Statistical Analysis

The regression model demonstrated a strong positive relationship between viral challenges and behavioral patterns, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.812, indicating that viral challenges, alongside other predictors, explain a substantial portion of the variance in adolescent behavior. The R^2 value of 0.660 suggests that 66% of the variation in students' behavioral patterns is accounted for by viral challenges and related social media trends, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.656 confirming the model's reliability. The ANOVA results further validated the model's significance ($F = 178.229$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that viral challenges collectively influence behavioral patterns. The standard error of the estimate (4.44913) reflects the precision of the model in predicting behavioral outcomes, providing robust evidence of the impact of social media trends on adolescent behavior.

Hypothesis Testing

The study tested the null hypothesis: "There is no significant impact of viral challenges on the behavioral patterns of students" using regression analysis. The results for viral challenges showed a standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.319$), a t -value of 2.604, and a p -value of 0.010, which is below the 0.05 significance threshold. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that viral challenges have a significant impact on students' behavioral patterns in private secondary schools in Egor LGA. This finding aligns with prior research, such as Johnson and Musa (2019), which highlighted the role of peer influence in driving participation in viral challenges and subsequent behavioral changes. The significant effect underscores the need for interventions to address the influence of social media on adolescent behavior, particularly in mitigating risks associated with impulsive or harmful challenges while promoting positive engagement.

DISCUSSION

Alignment with Existing Literature

The findings of this study significantly corroborate and extend the existing body of research on the impact of viral challenges on adolescent behavior, particularly within the dynamic environment of social media platforms. Abraham et al. (2022) emphasized that viral challenges are driven by peer influence and the pursuit of social validation, a pattern clearly reflected in the 63% of respondents (252 out of 400 students) who reported feeling more accepted by peers when participating in these challenges. The high engagement rate, with 61% of students (244 students, comprising 12% strongly agreeing and 49% agreeing) frequently attempting viral challenges on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, aligns closely with Green and Jones (2019), who highlighted how social media trends encourage adolescents to emulate behaviors to gain online recognition through likes, shares, and comments. This study's results reinforce the notion that viral challenges serve as a powerful mechanism for shaping behavioral patterns, as adolescents seek to align with peer groups and achieve social status in digital spaces. By providing empirical evidence from private secondary schools in Egor LGA, Nigeria, where social media penetration is notably high (Edo State Ministry of Education, 2023), this research contributes to the global discourse on how digital trends influence adolescent behavior in diverse cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the acknowledgment by 52.8% of students (211 students, with 10% strongly agreeing and 42.8% agreeing) that some viral challenges are risky or dangerous supports prior studies, such as Johnson and Musa (2019), which identified peer influence as a key driver of risky behaviors among Nigerian adolescents. This finding underscores the dual nature of viral challenges, which can foster creativity and social connectivity but also lead to impulsive or harmful

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

actions, as seen in global examples like the “Tide Pod Challenge” or other dangerous dares (Green & Jones, 2019). The Nigerian context adds a unique dimension, as cultural values emphasizing community and social acceptance may amplify the pressure to participate in viral challenges, even when risks are recognized. By situating these findings within a Nigerian educational setting, the study extends the literature by highlighting how social media trends interact with local cultural dynamics to shape behavioral patterns, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay between global digital phenomena and region-specific influences on adolescent behavior.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The findings of this study are effectively explained through the lens of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that adolescent behavior is shaped through a process of observation, imitation, and reinforcement, particularly in the context of social environments like social media. In Egor Local Government Area (LGA), students actively engage with viral challenges on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, imitating behaviors observed in trending videos, such as dance routines or dares, as a means of gaining social validation. The 63% of respondents (252 out of 400 students) who reported increased peer acceptance through participation in viral challenges exemplify how peer influence serves as a powerful reinforcing mechanism. According to Social Learning Theory, the positive feedback from social media interactions—likes, comments, and shares—acts as a reward, reinforcing the adoption of these behaviors and shaping behavioral patterns (Abraham et al., 2022). This cycle of observation and reinforcement highlights why viral challenges are so compelling for adolescents, as they seek to enhance their social status and align with peer groups in both online and offline contexts, particularly within the communal culture of Nigeria.

However, Social Learning Theory also accounts for the negative outcomes associated with viral challenges, such as the 52.8% of students (211 students) who recognized that some challenges are risky or dangerous, yet still participated due to peer influence. Adolescents may imitate hazardous behaviors observed on social media without fully evaluating the consequences, driven by the desire for social approval and the pressure to conform to trending activities (Green & Jones, 2019). This is particularly relevant in Egor LGA, where cultural values emphasizing social connectivity amplify the impact of peer influence, encouraging students to prioritize online recognition over personal safety. By grounding the findings in Social Learning Theory, this study provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding how social media trends influence behavioral patterns, offering a foundation for further research into adolescent behavior in digital contexts. This framework also underscores the need for interventions that promote critical evaluation of viral challenges to mitigate risky behaviors while fostering positive social engagement.

Cultural Context in Nigeria

The cultural context of Nigeria, particularly in Egor LGA, significantly amplifies the impact of viral challenges on adolescent behavior due to deeply rooted values that prioritize community, social acceptance, and collective identity. In Nigerian society, social bonds and communal harmony are central, fostering a strong sense of belonging that influences how adolescents engage with social media trends (Johnson & Musa, 2019). The 61% engagement rate in viral challenges (244 out of 400 students) reflects how students in Egor LGA actively participate to align with peer groups, reinforcing social cohesion through shared activities like dance challenges or collaborative content creation on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. This cultural emphasis on collectivism heightens susceptibility to peer influence, as adolescents seek to demonstrate group loyalty and gain acceptance within their social circles, both online and offline. The 63% of respondents (252 students) who reported feeling more accepted by peers through participation in viral challenges

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

underscores how these activities serve as a platform for affirming cultural norms of communal identity, distinguishing Nigerian adolescents from those in more individualistic societies where personal achievement may take precedence.

However, this cultural dynamic also increases the risk of conformity to harmful viral challenges, as the pressure to maintain social acceptance can override concerns for personal safety, significantly shaping behavioral patterns. The acknowledgment by 52.8% of students (211 students) that some challenges are risky or dangerous highlights a tension between cultural values and individual well-being, as adolescents may participate in hazardous dares or pranks to avoid social exclusion (Green & Jones, 2019). In Egor LGA, where social media penetration is high, with 83.5% of students reporting frequent use, the cultural emphasis on belonging amplifies the influence of peer-driven viral challenges, potentially leading to impulsive or unsafe adolescent behavior. This finding suggests that interventions must be context-specific, addressing the unique cultural drivers in Nigeria that encourage participation in social media trends. Schools and policymakers in Egor LGA should develop strategies that leverage cultural values of community to promote safe and constructive viral challenges, mitigating risks while fostering positive behavioral patterns among adolescents.

Positive and Negative Impacts

The study illuminates the dual nature of viral challenges, which exert both positive and negative influences on the behavioral patterns of students in private secondary schools in Egor LGA, highlighting their complex role in shaping adolescent behavior. On the positive side, viral challenges foster creativity and social engagement, as evidenced by the 61% of students (244 students) who actively participate, often in activities such as dance challenges, lip-syncing videos, or collaborative content creation on social media platforms. These activities provide opportunities for self-expression and strengthen social bonds, as students connect with peers through shared creative endeavors, aligning with Sanders and Larson's (2020) findings on the prosocial potential of social media challenges. The 63% of respondents (252 students) who reported feeling more accepted by peers through participation further underscores how viral challenges enhance social connectivity, reinforcing a sense of belonging that is particularly resonant in Nigeria's collectivist culture. This positive impact suggests that viral challenges can serve as a platform for fostering teamwork and creative expression, contributing to healthy behavioral patterns when appropriately managed.

Conversely, the negative impacts of viral challenges are substantial, with significant implications for adolescent behavior, particularly in educational settings. The study found that 63% of students (252 students) reported that viral challenges distracted them from schoolwork, indicating a detrimental effect on academic focus and time management. Additionally, 52.8% of respondents (211 students) acknowledged the risky nature of some challenges, such as dares or pranks, which can lead to impulsive and unsafe behaviors, consistent with Green and Jones (2019). The moderate mean score of 3.35 (on a 5-point Likert scale) for items related to viral challenges reflects this balanced impact, suggesting that while these activities enhance social connectivity, they also pose challenges to academic performance and personal safety. The influence of peer influence, amplified by social media feedback loops, drives students to prioritize online recognition over academic responsibilities or safety considerations, highlighting the need for careful management of viral challenges to mitigate negative behavioral patterns. Educational interventions should focus on guiding students toward constructive challenges while addressing the risks of impulsivity and distraction in social media environments.

Implications for Intervention

The statistically significant impact of viral challenges on behavioral patterns highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to mitigate negative outcomes while harnessing the positive potential of these social media trends in shaping adolescent behavior in private secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area (LGA), Nigeria. The high

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

engagement rate, with 61% of students (244 out of 400) actively participating in viral challenges, driven by peer influence and the pursuit of social validation (63% feeling more accepted by peers), suggests that educational programs should prioritize digital literacy to empower students to critically evaluate the safety and value of these challenges before participating. Schools in Egor LGA could integrate comprehensive modules on responsible social media use into their curricula, focusing on teaching students to discern between constructive and risky viral challenges, such as distinguishing creative dance challenges from dangerous dares like those involving physical stunts (Green & Jones, 2019). These programs should emphasize the risks of impulsive behavior, particularly in light of the 52.8% of students (211 respondents) who acknowledged the dangerous nature of some challenges, and foster skills to prioritize academic responsibilities over the allure of online recognition, thereby promoting healthier behavioral patterns.

Furthermore, the role of parents and broader stakeholders is critical in addressing the influence of viral challenges and guiding adolescents toward positive adolescent behavior. Parental guidance is essential, as parents can monitor their children's social media activity and engage in open discussions about the risks and benefits of participating in viral challenges, reducing the impact of harmful trends driven by peer influence. Schools could facilitate workshops for parents to enhance their understanding of social media dynamics, equipping them to guide adolescents toward constructive challenges that promote creativity and community engagement, such as educational or charity-focused initiatives (Sanders & Larson, 2020). Additionally, collaboration between policymakers, educators, and social media platforms could promote the development of prosocial viral challenges that encourage positive behaviors, such as campaigns focused on environmental awareness or academic excellence. By leveraging Nigeria's cultural emphasis on community, as seen in the 63% of students valuing peer acceptance, these interventions can channel the appeal of viral challenges into fostering social cohesion and positive behavioral patterns, addressing the risks identified in this study while maximizing the potential for creativity and collective engagement in Egor LGA's educational settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, schools in Egor Local Government Area (LGA) should integrate comprehensive digital literacy programs into their curricula to educate students on critically evaluating the safety and value of viral challenges encountered on social media. These programs should focus on equipping students with the skills to discern between constructive activities, such as creative dance or educational challenges, and potentially harmful ones, like risky dares or pranks. By fostering an understanding of how peer influence drives participation in viral challenges, these initiatives can help students make informed decisions, reducing impulsive behaviors that negatively impact behavioral patterns. Digital literacy education should also emphasize the importance of prioritizing academic responsibilities over the pursuit of online validation, addressing the 63% of students who reported distractions from schoolwork. Such programs would empower adolescents to engage with social media trends responsibly, promoting positive adolescent behavior while mitigating risks associated with harmful challenges in the Nigerian educational context.

Secondly, parents play a crucial role in guiding their children's social media interactions and should actively monitor their activity to encourage participation in safe and constructive viral challenges. By maintaining open communication, parents can discuss the risks and benefits of viral challenges, helping adolescents navigate the pressures of peer influence that drive the engagement rate observed in this study. Parental guidance can steer students toward challenges that foster creativity and social cohesion, such as community-focused or educational initiatives, while discouraging involvement in risky trends that contribute to negative behavioral patterns, such as impulsivity or unsafe actions. Schools could support this effort by organizing workshops to enhance parents' understanding of social media dynamics, enabling them

The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

to guide their children effectively. Additionally, policymakers and social media platforms should collaborate to moderate harmful viral content and promote prosocial challenges that align with Nigeria's cultural emphasis on community, encouraging positive adolescent behavior through campaigns focused on academic excellence, environmental awareness, or social good, thereby leveraging the appeal of viral challenges to foster constructive engagement among students in Egor LGA.

CONCLUSION

Viral challenges exert a significant influence on the behavioral patterns of students in private secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area (LGA), Nigeria, shaping adolescent behavior in complex and multifaceted ways. The study's findings, supported by a significant statistical relationship, reveal that viral challenges foster peer influence and conformity. However, these challenges also pose considerable risks, with 52.8% of students acknowledging the dangerous nature of some activities and 63% reporting distractions from schoolwork, indicating negative impacts on academic focus and time management. This dual nature underscores the power of social media to both enhance social connectivity and contribute to impulsivity and risky behaviors, particularly in a Nigerian context where cultural values of community amplify peer influence. These insights highlight the importance of understanding viral challenges as a dynamic force in shaping behavioral patterns, necessitating a balanced approach to harnessing their creative potential while addressing their adverse effects.

The findings emphasize the urgent need for targeted interventions to promote responsible engagement with viral challenges, ensuring that their positive aspects are maximized while mitigating risks to adolescent behavior. Educational programs in Egor LGA should focus on digital literacy to equip students with the skills to evaluate the safety and value of social media trends, reducing the likelihood of impulsive or harmful participation. Parental guidance and collaboration between policymakers and social media platforms are also critical to steer adolescents toward prosocial challenges that align with cultural values of social cohesion, fostering positive behavioral patterns. By addressing the challenges of academic distraction and risky behaviors, stakeholders can create an environment where students engage with viral challenges in ways that enhance creativity and social bonds without compromising their safety or academic performance. This study contributes to the broader discourse on social media's role in shaping adolescent behavior, offering region-specific insights that can inform strategies to support healthy development among Nigerian youth.

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The Impact of Viral Challenges on the Behavioral Patterns of Students in Private Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria

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