



## Digital Intimacy and Perception of Morality among Undergraduates of Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** In today's era of advanced technology and pervasive Internet access, young individuals increasingly engage in digital intimacy, particularly through the exchange of intimate content such as nude pictures. With the widespread use of social media platforms and messaging applications, this behaviour has become routine among undergraduates, raising concerns about how such practices shape their perception of morality.

**Objective:** This study appraised the relationship between digital intimacy and undergraduates' perception of morality, drawing on Social Learning Theory and Cultivation Theory as its theoretical framework.

**Method:** A mixed-method approach, combining a key informant interview and a survey research design was employed. The study population comprised 1,480 undergraduates of Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State. A multi-stage sampling technique (simple random, systematic and purposive) was used, and Krejcie and Morgan's sampling formula informed the sample size of 302 survey respondents and one key informant interviewee. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and an independent t-test.

**Result:** The findings indicate that 71% of respondents engaged in sharing nude pictures. Peer pressure emerged as the strongest motivator, while entertainment was identified as the main reason for their involvement in digital intimacy. The t-test results indicated no significant relationship between frequency of social media use and the sharing of nude pictures.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that digital intimacy is widely practised among undergraduates; however, the absence of a significant relationship between social media use frequency and nude-picture sharing suggests that motivations may be shaped more by social and psychological factors than by digital exposure alone.



**Unique Contribution:** This study offers context-specific evidence from a Nigerian university setting, demonstrating how peer influence and entertainment motives drive digital intimacy while revealing the complex interplay between digital behaviour and moral perception among young people.

**Key Recommendations:** Government agencies should implement and enforce strong digital-privacy and consent-protection policies. Institutional policymakers should also provide structured educational interventions that address the risks and moral implications of digital intimacy, particularly the sharing of nude images.

**Keywords:** Digital intimacy, Morality, Nude pictures, Sexting, Young people.

## INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution and the widespread adoption of Internet-enabled mobile devices have altered not only how young people communicate, but also how they form intimacies, express sexuality and negotiate moral norms. Social media platforms, instant-messaging applications and cloud services make it trivially easy for users to produce, exchange and disseminate visual material, including nude and sexually explicit images, in ways that transform private acts into potentially public harms (Nwonyi et al., 2024). As a result, digital intimacy (including sexting and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images) now occupies an uneasy place at the intersection of youth sexual behaviour, privacy, mental health and moral evaluation (Bandura, 1977; Gerbner, 1969). Evidence from recent reviews and empirical studies indicates that image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), the non-consensual taking, sharing or threatening to share intimate images, is an increasingly prominent form of digital harm with serious psychological, social and legal consequences for victims (Paradiso et al., 2023; Henry, 2024).

In many countries, including Nigeria, cultural norms around chastity, reputation and public decency shape strong moral expectations for young people's sexual behaviour. When private images are circulated without consent, victims frequently experience reputational damage, social stigmatisation and severe psychological distress; in some cases the consequences include blackmail, financial loss and suicidality (Finkelhor, 2024; Hellevik, 2025). These outcomes make it imperative to understand not only the prevalence of intimate-image exchange among youth, but also how such practices affect undergraduates' perceptions of morality, that is, their beliefs about right and wrong, social norms and acceptable sexual conduct. Recent Nigerian empirical work underlines the link between sexting and mental-health outcomes and points to complex intersections between substance use, family dynamics and risky online sexual behaviours (Yisa, 2024).

Empirical evidence shows that a substantial proportion of young people engage in sending, receiving or forwarding sexually explicit images; at the same time, the irreversible dissemination or weaponisation of such images is associated with acute harm to victims' mental health, social standing and economic security. Within the local context, anecdotal and documented reports suggest that many undergraduates both share intimate images and adopt ambivalent attitudes about the moral status of doing so: while some regard consensual sharing as a private choice or a



legitimate form of self-expression, others view the practice as morally problematic and socially risky. Non-consensual dissemination and sextortion have caused individual tragedies, including severe emotional distress and, in some cases, suicidal ideation, illustrating the urgent practical need for evidence-based interventions, policy measures and educational programmes that protect vulnerable youths and promote responsible digital behaviour (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019; Finkelhor, 2024).

While a growing body of literature addresses the prevalence, correlates and harms of sexting and IBSA, several critical theoretical and empirical lacunae remain, especially in relation to how these practices reshape young people's moral perceptions in specific cultural contexts. First, much of the extant research emphasises prevalence and risk correlates (e.g., gender, substance use, sexual orientation) or documents legal responses to IBSA, but fewer studies probe the ways in which repeated exposure to digital intimacy (and to publicised cases of image dissemination) alters moral reasoning, normative beliefs and conceptions of decency among youth over time (Paradiso et al., 2023; Henry, 2024). Second, where moral implications are discussed, analyses commonly rely on either quantitative surveys or qualitative case studies in isolation; there is a relative paucity of mixed-method work that couples representative survey estimates with in-depth, contextualised testimonies from victims and key informants to illuminate causal and interpretive mechanisms. Third, much international research is concentrated in Western settings; comparatively fewer rigorous studies explore the moral consequences of digital intimacy in Nigerian university contexts, where cultural, religious and familial norms mediate responses to both consensual sexting and non-consensual image sharing (Aborisade, 2022; Yisa, 2024).

Previous studies have documented that sexting is not marginal among youth and have identified motivating factors such as peer pressure, romantic relationships, entertainment and identity exploration (Drouin et al., 2013; Lippman & Campbell, 2014). Systematic reviews have consolidated risk factors for IBSA and called for trauma-informed policy responses (Paradiso et al., 2023). Recent nation-level research in Nigeria has begun to map prevalence and correlates, and to point to links with mental-health outcomes (Yisa, 2024).

No study to date has fully synthesised these strands for undergraduates in Ogun State, an omission given the particular social dynamics of Nigerian university campuses and the documented harms that can follow non-consensual image circulation. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine digital intimacy and perception of morality among selected undergraduates of Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do undergraduates engage in the exchange of nude pictures?
2. What are the primary motivations and reasons behind undergraduates' involvement in digital intimacy?
3. How does engaging in the sharing of nude pictures impact undergraduates' perception of morality?



## **Hypothesis**

There is a significant relationship between undergraduates with higher frequency using of social media and those with less frequency use of social media.

## **Study Context**

This study focuses on the appraisal of the relationship between digital intimacy and undergraduates' perception of morality with emphasis on undergraduates in Nigeria within age 16 to 24 years, as this age group is typically are more actively engaged in digital communication, including the sharing and receiving of intimate content.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Concept of Internet**

The Internet is a global network of computer networks. It comprises of millions of computing devices that carry and transfer volumes of information from one device to the other. Desktop computers, mainframes, GPS units, cell phones, car alarms, video game consoles, are connected to the Net. Internet coupled with other communication technologies birth social media platforms of diverse content and operation. Social media is a digital platform that allows users to create, share, and exchange information, ideas, and content with others in virtual communities and networks. It encompasses a wide range of online communication channels, including social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, as well as content-sharing platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The concept of social media has evolved over time and has become an integral part of modern communication and interaction.

Social media platforms typically offer various features such as profiles, timelines, news feeds, messaging, commenting, sharing, liking, and tagging, which facilitate user engagement and interaction. Users can connect with friends, family, colleagues, and even strangers from around the world, forming social connections and networks that transcend geographical boundaries. The emergence and widespread adoption of social media have been extensively studied and analysed by scholars from various disciplines, including sociology, communication studies, psychology, and computer science.

### **Digital Intimacy**

Digital intimacy births the concept of sexting, selfies, dating apps and other online relationship phenomenon. The term sexting stands for a combination of sex and texting. It often also involves sending nude, semi-nude, or suggestive photos. Sometimes, the messages also include sexual or explicit videos. Sexting can happen via messaging on cell phones or other messaging services. It also can happen through apps or direct messaging on social media sites. Sexting refers to sending, receiving, and forwarding sexually explicit texts and images via cell phones or the Internet (Döring, 2014; Klettke et al., 2014). Public concern and academic interest, however, have mainly been directed at the digital communication of images, rather than text messages (Cooper et al., 2016; Lim, 2013). Exact prevalence rates of sexting differ widely across studies due to differences in their definition and methodology, but studies do suggest that it is not a marginal phenomenon among youth (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2016).



Once an image is shared online, the poster loses control of where it ends up and the image could be reposted and shared reaching a massive number of viewers. Sharing a person's image online can cause devastating effects on people's lives and jobs, causing problems instantly and also for months and years to come. People are spending more time on their phones so the temptation to send a photo to perhaps get your own back on an ex has never been higher. What might feel like a short-term win when you share a person's image could actually cause serious complications and result in a prison sentence. Body image is understood as the idea one has about oneself based on perceptions, thoughts, and behaviours related to appearance, which allows the individual to feel they are in charge of their body and actions.

### **Morality**

Morality is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been explored extensively in disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and biology. Researchers have investigated the origins of moral beliefs and behaviours, the role of empathy and altruism, the influence of socialization and cultural norms, and the dynamics of moral decision-making.

Morality is a set of codes or rules (Wong, 2013) and is defined as a person's judgment about rights, welfare, and justice (Turiel, 1983). Moral intuitions include harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Graham et al., 2011). Morality refers to the principle of right or wrong behaviour. It has its etymological origin from the Latin word "mores" which means "conduct or custom". Ezekwu (2008:16) has therefore noted that "morality is used to denote a generally accepted code of conduct in a society or within a subgroup of society that comes to be regarded as essential to its survival and welfare". These accepted norms or codes of conduct in any society often appeal to the moral nature of man "for the human nature is a moral nature, and the moral sphere is exclusively the human sphere" (Omorgbe, 1993: 102). They appeal to the sense of humanity and relevant for the welfare of the entire members of any society including Nigeria.

Some of the common moral codes of conduct, in Nigeria, for instance, include respect or sacredness of human life, respect for elders, hard work and industry, avoidance of premarital sex, and so on. To this end, any conduct that is not in tandem with these and more accepted norms or laid down principles of behaviour in the country is declared as immoral and unacceptable. Also, a consistent and unchallenged abandonment and overlook of the moral principles of conduct in a society by members of the society, is what often leads to moral decadence or degeneration in such society, which seems to be the case in Nigeria. There are various perspectives on morality, often influenced by cultural, religious, philosophical, and psychological factors. Some theories attempt to provide a rational basis for morality, such as utilitarianism, which emphasizes maximizing overall happiness or utility, and deontological ethics, which prioritizes adherence to moral rules or duties. Others focus on the development of moral character, such as virtue ethics, which emphasizes the cultivation of virtuous traits like courage, honesty, and compassion.



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Cultivation Theory. The Social Learning Theory first formulated by Albert (later developed into Social Cognitive Theory) in the 1970s (Bandura, 1977). The theory emphasises that individuals learn behaviours, attitudes and normative cues through observation, modelling and vicarious reinforcement—processes mediated by attention, retention, reproduction and motivation, so that behaviours witnessed in one’s social environment (including mediated environments) can be internalised and enacted (Bandura, 1977); recent work extends and tests these ideas in digital contexts, showing how online modelling, peer feedback and platform affordances shape intimate practices and norms among young people (Schneider, Beege, Nebel, Schnaubert, & Rey, 2022; Paradiso, Rollè, & Trombetta, 2023). Supporters argue that Social Learning Theory parsimoniously explains how digital behaviours such as sexting and the sharing of intimate images spread across peer networks through imitation and reinforcement: for example, studies of sexting and image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) identify peer modelling, normative expectations and the perceived rewards or reputational gains of sharing intimate content as proximal mechanisms for adoption (Paradiso, Rollè, & Trombetta, 2023; Yisa & Orji, 2024). Critics of Social Learning accounts caution that the theory can underplay individual agency, cognitive mediation and contextual moderators in contemporary digital settings, arguing that mere exposure or observation is neither necessary nor sufficient for behavioural adoption without attending to identity work, power relations and platform-specific dynamics (Widodo, 2024).

The Cultivation Theory introduced by George Gerbner in 1969 complements SLT by emphasising long-term, cumulative media exposure as a force that shapes people’s sense of social reality and normative expectations, heavy exposure to particularised symbolic environments produces “mainstreaming” effects that alter perceptions of what is normal, safe, or morally acceptable. Recent cultivation-oriented scholarship and reviews confirm that sustained digital content diets can alter moral schemas around intimacy and privacy (Ruddock, 2024; Paradiso, Rollè, & Trombetta, 2023), while critics of cultivation point to methodological challenges (measurement of “exposure,” endogeneity of media choice, and cultural variability) and caution against simplistic, linear claims of media determinism (Ruddock, 2024).

These two theories are applicable to this current study in the sense that, Social Learning Theory helps explain how undergraduate students may adopt attitudes and practices around digital intimacy through observation of peers, influencers and platform-mediated interactions, especially when such behaviours are rewarded, normalised or unpunished, whereas Cultivation Theory helps account for the gradual reshaping of moral perceptions that results from sustained immersion in sexualised or privacy-ambiguous digital environments; together, they justify a mixed-method inquiry that attends both to proximate learning mechanisms (peer modelling, reinforcement) and to broader, cumulative shifts in normative belief systems (mainstreaming of new intimacy norms), while also signalling the need to investigate contextual moderators (religiosity, institutional culture, gendered expectations) that have been underexplored in Nigerian campus settings (Anaeto, Onabajo, & Osifeso, 2008; Paradiso, Rollè, & Trombetta, 2023; Yisa & Orji, 2024).



## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Aftab (2015) in a thesis on the behavioural changes of young adults in different age groups (18-30) on social media. The study relying on Uses & Gratification Theory (Katz, 1973) and Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1979). Found that there is no significance difference between age and behaviour of people (young and adults) on social media. People react or behave according to their personality and their wish while on social media. Also, this study shows that, though a large number of respondents think social media has a positive impact on their life especially in their career, building network and connecting to each other but social media is creating a distance between their social lives.

Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Ponnet (2019) in a study on “An Explorative Study of Sexting Behaviours among Heterosexual and Sexual Minority Early Adolescents”. The purpose of which is to investigate differences in the prevalence of a wide range of sexting behaviours among a convenience sample of heterosexual and sexual minority early adolescents using survey of 3,109 adolescents (53.5% girls; n = 1,647) aged between 12 and 15 years (mean = 13.01 years; standard deviation = .83). The findings show that sexual minority youth were more likely to have sent, received, and asked for sexting images. They were also more likely to have experienced pressure to send sexually explicit pictures. There were no associations between sexual minority status and the perpetration of non-consensual forms of sexting.

The article by Drouin et al. (2013) "Let's talk about sexting, baby: Computer-mediated sexual behaviours among young adults" examines the prevalence and nature of sexting among young adults. It highlights sexting as present in various types of romantic relationships, with text messaging being the primary medium used. The study underscores the complexity of sexting practices and suggests that future research should use detailed definitions and consider the different contexts and types of sexting behaviour. The sample consisted of 253 college students (105 men and 148 women) from a medium-sized university in the Midwestern United States. The findings show that engagement in sexting behaviours among young people ranges from occasional to frequent, with the majority participating sporadically rather than habitually.

## **METHOD OF STUDY**

The study adopted a mixed-methods design that combined a survey with a Key Informant Interview. The population comprised 1,480 undergraduates of Crawford University, a choice that reflects the need to study a digitally active, youth-dominated environment where issues of intimate image exchange and moral evaluation are socially relevant. Using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling framework, a scientific sample size of 302 was initially determined; however, because mixed-method studies often prioritise depth alongside numerical adequacy, 40 per cent of the computed sample (128 respondents) was purposively utilised for the quantitative phase to allow for a more manageable yet sufficiently representative dataset. For the qualitative component, one willing participant, a victim whose nude image had been non-consensually disseminated online, was selected because key informant interviews often rely on unique experiential knowledge rather than numerical representation. A multistage sampling strategy guided the selection process: simple random sampling was used to select Ogun State and the university; systematic sampling was employed to identify participating departments; and



purposive sampling was used for the key informant because her experience provided the depth required for contextual interpretation. Data were gathered using a researcher-designed questionnaire containing both closed- and open-ended items, complemented by an interview guide for the victim; the instruments were validated through expert review and pilot testing, consistent with recommended validation procedures in social research. Reliability was ensured through internal-consistency checks and refinement of ambiguous items before final administration. Data collection was conducted in person to ensure clarity, encourage response completeness, and promote ethical engagement. The quantitative data were presented in tables and frequency distributions and analysed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in students' perceptions, while the qualitative data were transcribed, thematically coded and interpreted to illuminate meanings that numerical trends alone could not fully capture.

## RESULTS

### RQ 1: To what extent do undergraduates engage in the exchange of nude pictures?

**Table 1**

*Involvement of undergraduates in sharing and receiving nude pictures*

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Social media is a digital enable platforms that enable sharing and receiving of nude pictures.</b>		
Yes	200	71
No	75	27
I don't know	6	2
<b>Have you share or receive nude pictures?</b>		
Yes	150	53
No	110	39
I don't know	21	8
<b>What are the sources of sharing and receiving nude pictures?</b>		
Websites	143	51
Social media	73	26
Air drop	52	19
Other sources	13	4

**Source:** *Field Survey, 2025*

Table 1 suggests that digital platforms play a central role in shaping how undergraduates encounter and engage with nude images. A substantial proportion of respondents acknowledged that social media functions as a key facilitator of intimate content exchange, signalling the normalisation of such behaviour within everyday digital interactions. Although not all respondents admitted personal involvement, the number who did indicates that sharing or receiving nude images has become a familiar part of the online experiences of many students, even if some choose not to participate directly. What stands out most strongly is that the pathways through which these images circulate extend beyond mainstream social networking sites to include websites and close-range sharing tools, reflecting both intentional searching and opportunistic or unsolicited exchanges. This diversity of sources suggests that students are



exposed to intimate content through multiple channels, reinforcing the idea that digital intimacy is not merely an isolated behaviour but part of a wider digital ecosystem that shapes undergraduates' perceptions, relationships and moral negotiations. The findings therefore highlight the need for stronger digital literacy, ethical awareness and safeguarding measures, as students operate within an environment where intimate content is readily accessible, easily transferrable and often normalised within peer networks.

**RQ2: What are the primary motivations and reasons behind undergraduates' involvement in digital intimacy?**

**Table 2**  
*Motivations and rationale for sharing nude pictures*

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Does the under-listed motivates you to share nude pictures?</b>		
Peer Pressure	108	38
Romantic Partner	70	25
Money	13	5
Sexual Pleasure	60	21
Celebrity Influence	20	7
None of the above	10	4
<b>What are the reasons for digital nude pictures?</b>		
Desire for connection	43	15
Self-Expression	58	21
Emotional fulfilment	<b>39</b>	<b>14</b>
Escapism	25	9
Entertainment	101	36
Confidence/Self esteem	15	5

**Source:** *Field Survey, 2025*

Table 2 paints a picture of digital intimacy as a behaviour shaped by a mix of social influence, emotional needs and personal gratification. Peer pressure emerges as a particularly powerful force, suggesting that many students engage in nude-picture exchange not purely out of personal desire but in response to expectations within their social circles. This hints at a campus culture where conformity, acceptance and the fear of being left out may quietly steer students' digital behaviour. Romantic relationships also appear to play a significant role, pointing to the way intimacy is increasingly mediated through screens, with partners sometimes encouraging, or demanding, visual expressions of closeness. At a deeper level, the data show that undergraduates do not approach digital intimacy solely as a sexual act, but also as a means of expressing themselves, connecting with others and managing their emotions. The prominence of entertainment and self-expression suggests that, for many, sharing such images is embedded in broader digital practices that combine play, curiosity and experimentation. These insights indicate that digital intimacy among undergraduates is driven less by deviance and more by the interplay of social validation, emotional fulfilment and the search for identity within an increasingly digitalised social world.



**RQ3: How does engaging in the sharing of nude pictures impact undergraduates' perception of morality?**

**Table 3**

*Acceptability and impact of sharing and receiving nude pictures on undergraduates' perception on morality*

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Is sharing and receiving nude picture acceptable among young people?</b>		
Morally Acceptable	81	29
Morally Unacceptable	153	54
Unsure	47	17
<b>What impact does sharing and receiving nude pictures have on young people's perception of morality</b>		
Positive	73	26
Negative	167	59
Unsure	41	15

**Source:** *Field Survey, 2025*

The responses in Table 3 suggest that many undergraduates approach the issue of sharing nude images with a clear moral hesitation, shaped largely by concerns about personal values, social judgement, and the wider implications of digital behaviour. Although a small portion consider the practice acceptable, the larger pattern points to an unease that goes beyond simple preference and reflects a deeper discomfort with how such behaviour aligns with established moral expectations. This sense of discomfort becomes even more pronounced when students consider the impact of the behaviour: most respondents link the sharing of intimate images with a negative shift in moral perception, implying that they see it not just as a private act but one capable of influencing their broader ethical outlook, self-respect, and interpersonal boundaries. The minority who view the impact positively or remain unsure highlight the ongoing negotiation of morality in a digital age, where young people are constantly navigating between personal autonomy, peer influence, and societal norms. Overall, the pattern of responses suggests that while digital culture exposes undergraduates to new forms of expression, many still weigh these behaviours against long-standing moral frameworks, resulting in a predominantly cautious and value-protective stance.

**Hypothesis Testing**

The study adopted the independent sample t-test to test the hypothesis on “There is a significant difference between undergraduates with higher frequency of using social medium and those with less frequency of using social media in engaging in exchange of nude pictures”.



**Table 4.24**  
*Group Statistics for Engaging in Exchange of Nude Pictures*

Frequency of using Social Media		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Engaging in Exchange of Nude Pictures	Young people with higher frequency using social media	48	1.4792	.50485	.07287
	Young people with less frequency using social media	56	1.5893	.49642	.06634

**Table 4.25**  
*Independent Samples Test for Engaging in Exchange of Nude Pictures*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Engaging in Exchange of Nude Pictures	1.323	<b>.253</b>	-1.119	102	.266	-.11012	.09841
Engaging in Exchange of Nude Pictures			-1.117	99.049	.266	-.11012	.09854

In this test, if the value in the sig. value (2-tailed) column is equal or less than .05, then there is a significant difference in the mean score on the dependent variable for each of the two groups. However, if the sig. value is above 0.05, then there is no significant difference between the two groups. The independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the Engaging in Exchange of Nude Pictures score for undergraduates with higher frequency of using social media and those young people with less frequency of using social media. From the result, it is demonstrated that there is no significant difference in scores for undergraduates with higher frequency of using social media (M=1.5893, SD=.49642) and those with less frequency of using social media (M=1.4792, SD=.50485) in terms of engaging in exchange of nude pictures;  $t(-1.119)=102$ ,  $p=.266$  (Two tailed). Furthermore, the sig. value (2-tailed) value of .266 suggest that the value is



above the threshold of 0.05, the finding therefore concludes that there is no statistical significant difference in the mean Engaging in Exchange of Nude Pictures.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal a clear picture of digital intimacy among undergraduates, with 53% reporting that they had shared or received nude images and 27% stating that they had never done so, suggesting that while the behaviour is not universal, it is sufficiently common to be considered part of contemporary youth digital culture. This aligns with earlier work such as Van Ouytsel et al (2019), who reported that roughly half of undergraduates engage in some form of sexting, and with Drouin et al (2013), who found that participation is often sporadic rather than habitual. One possible reason for the slightly higher engagement rate in the present study could be the increasingly central role of smartphones and social media platforms in the everyday lives of Nigerian undergraduates, where digital communication is often intertwined with relationship maintenance, peer bonding and identity expression. The findings further show that motivations for sharing nude images are varied, with peer pressure (38%), romantic partners (25%) and sexual pleasure (21%) emerging as leading drivers, and additional motivations such as celebrity influence, escapism and emotional fulfilment also appearing. These results resonate with Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2012), who argued that digital intimacy often serves relational and emotional needs, and with Livingstone, Ólafsson and Staksrud (2014), who described digital platforms as spaces for entertainment, experimentation and escapism. Drawing from Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, the prominent role of peer influence in the present study is unsurprising, as young people often model behaviours to gain social acceptance or avoid exclusion; the growing influence of celebrities and online influencers also suggests the diffusion of mediated norms through aspirational online cultures. However, the slightly higher influence of peers compared to findings in Western settings may reflect Nigeria's collectivist social orientation, where peer groups exert significant social pressure on behaviour and moral reasoning.

With regard to morality, 54% of respondents considered nude-picture sharing to be morally unacceptable, a finding that both supports and complicates existing scholarship. While Baumgartner, Sumter and Valkenburg (2011) observed that digital intimacy can facilitate moral disengagement, the majority moral condemnation seen in this study suggests that cultural and religious values remain strong anchors for moral judgement among Nigerian undergraduates. This contrast highlights how local cultural contexts can mediate global digital behaviours: although undergraduates may participate in digital intimacy, many still perceive it as inconsistent with prevailing moral norms. The qualitative insights from the key informant interview further deepen this understanding. The participant's account of being secretly photographed and having her image circulated without consent underscores the severe emotional, social and psychological toll associated with image-based abuse, aligning with current research that documents how non-consensual sharing of intimate images can lead to shame, anxiety, reputational damage and even suicidal ideation (as she personally experienced). Her reflections on peer pressure, celebrity influence and the misuse of digital intimacy provide experiential validation for the quantitative trends, while her emphasis on parenting, value systems and belief structures highlights additional layers of moral socialisation that may explain why many respondents still find nude-image



sharing morally unacceptable. The collective findings therefore reinforce broader societal condemnation of non-consensual intimate-image dissemination, often framed as “revenge porn” or image-based sexual abuse, but they also reveal a persistent contradiction: participation in digital intimacy coexists with moral disapproval of the behaviour.

Taken together, these findings help extend existing knowledge in three important ways. First, they demonstrate that while Nigerian undergraduates engage in the same digital practices documented in global literature, their moral evaluations are more strongly shaped by cultural, familial and religious expectations, offering a culturally situated perspective that is underrepresented in the literature. Second, the study shows that peer influence remains the most powerful driver of digital intimacy, suggesting that interventions targeting peer norms, rather than individual behaviour alone, may be more effective. Third, by integrating experiential evidence from a victim of non-consensual image sharing, the study highlights the real-world consequences of digital intimacy, thereby contextualising moral judgement within lived experiences rather than abstract norms. This combination of behavioural data, motivational insights and moral evaluations provides a richer and more context-sensitive understanding of digital intimacy among Nigerian university students and contributes empirical evidence that can support policy development, digital-safety education and further academic inquiry.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study is that digital intimacy through the sharing of nude pictures is prevalent undergraduates, with social media being the primary platform for such activities. A significant majority of the respondents believe that engaging in sending or receiving nude pictures affects one's perception of morality, suggesting digital intimacy can lead to moral disengagement. The perception that this behaviour is common suggests a shift in the moral landscape, where digital intimacy may be increasingly normalized. However, the presence of differing opinions on the extent of this behaviour indicates ongoing debates and diverse moral perspectives within the youth demographic. The findings from the qualitative aspect of this study depicts that there is a clear stance on the morality of sharing intimate content without consent, emphasizing that such actions are fundamentally wrong and deserving of punishment.

## **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes and their participation was voluntary.

## **Acknowledgements**

We acknowledge Falowo Seun and Adetunji Wale for assisting us with data collection. We equally appreciate the University Library staff for their cooperation and support.

## **Sources of funding**

The study was self-funded.



### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Authors' Contributions**

Dr. Oluyemi Abimbola Adekemi conceived the study, including the design and collating the data. Dr. Odunlami Olusegun Abimbola analysed and interpreted the data, Dr. Adefemi Victor Oluwole discussed the findings of the study, while Dr. Odigie Joseph Dayo did the theoretical review and editorial work on the paper. The authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

### **Availability of Data and Materials**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

### **Citation**

Oluyemi, A.A., Adefemi, V.O., Odunlami, O.A., & Odigie, J.D. (2025). Digital intimacy and perception of morality among selected undergraduates of Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State. *International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research*, 3 (4), 225-241

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