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SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFORMATIONAL RISKS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Résumé en français: Partout en Afrique, les adolescents utilisent de plus en plus les plateformes de médias sociaux, en particulier YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook et Instagram, non seulement pour se divertir mais aussi pour s'auto-éduquer, réviser des matières scolaires, apprendre des langues, acquérir des compétences numériques, explorer des carrières et rejoindre des communautés d'apprentissage par les pairs. Nous soutenons que les médias sociaux peuvent accroître les opportunités d'apprentissage informel, en particulier là où les écoles sont confrontées à des contraintes de ressources, si les adolescents développent des connaissances médiatiques et informationnelles, bénéficient d'une orientation légère par les adultes et pratiquent l'autorégulation. Les recommandations politiques se concentrent sur l'intégration de routines de vérification des informations et d'habitudes d'apprentissage numérique structurées dans les programmes scolaires et communautaires, alignés sur les priorités éducatives africaines.

Mots clés : Médias sociaux, Auto-éducation, Adolescents, Risques informationnels, Burkina Faso.

HIGHLIGHTS

- YouTube and TikTok are the primary networks used;
- Social media serve both as academic support and as channels for long-term personal development;
- There is a significant vulnerability inherent in how adolescents engage in self-education via social media.

INTRODUCTION

Faced with structural constraints, young people are increasingly turning toward alternative learning pathways, made possible by the rapid expansion of mobile connectivity. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok have become part of the everyday infrastructure, serving not only as tools for communication and entertainment but also for seeking information and learning. This shift has given rise to a growing trend of self-directed

education via social media, through which adolescents acquire knowledge and skills outside of formal schooling by watching short explanatory videos, following educational content, participating in peer-led study groups, or resolving academic challenges through online networks.

1. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study was conducted in three contrasting settings an urban center, a secondary town, and a peri-urban or rural area in order to reflect the inequalities in access to digital technology (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Bingimlas, 2009; Boyd, 2014; Jackson, 2013) and educational resources frequently observed in African contexts. The sample consisted of 240 adolescents aged 13 to 18, selected using stratified sampling to ensure a balance in terms of gender, grade level, and degree of Internet access. In addition, 20 teachers and 15 parents or guardians were included as key informants, providing complementary perspectives on the adolescents' learning behaviors, cognitive engagement, and exposure to online risks. This multi-stakeholder design made it possible to situate the adolescents' self-directed learning practices within broader family and school ecosystems.

2. RESULT Nº 1: YouTube and TikTok are the primary platforms used.

YouTube and TikTok are mainly utilized as tools for individualized, explanatory learning (78.5% and 64.2%, respectively), while WhatsApp functions as an infrastructure for peer-to-peer learning (71.3%). Facebook and Instagram serve as spaces for study resources, career information, and academic advice, respectively. These platforms are used less frequently than the first two.

3. RESULT Nº 2: Social media serve as both a form of academic support and a channel for long-term personal development

Adolescents perceive social media as a space that offers both immediate academic support and long-term personal development. Language learning emerges as a major area of autonomous engagement, reflecting both global digital trends and the multilingual realities of African educational systems. The presence of digital, creative, and entrepreneurial learning underscores the role of social media in broadening adolescents' horizons beyond the school curriculum.

4. RESULT Nº 3: There is a major vulnerability in adolescents' self-education practices.

One-quarter of participants demonstrate robust verification habits, while nearly one-third rely on superficial credibility indicators, such as popularity metrics. This distribution suggests that the quality of learning is uneven and closely linked to adolescents' information literacy skills. It highlights an imbalance between critical and non-critical approaches to online information.

CONCLUSION

The findings confirm that social media platforms have become significant sites for informal learning among adolescents, particularly in contexts characterized by limited access to textbooks, tutoring, and individualized classroom support. Adolescents reported acquiring academic knowledge, language skills, and practical competencies through short videos, peer-based WhatsApp groups, and online tutorials. These results resonate with studies from Africa,

which show that learners often prefer accessible, peer-oriented digital spaces for learning interactions over formal learning management systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➢ **For adolescents**

- Reframing their perspective on social media to prioritize the most effective ways of learning.

➢ **For those in positions of responsibility**

- Regulating the use of social media through legislation and oversight, with the aim of enabling adolescents to use these platforms appropriately.
- Ensuring, where possible, that adolescents are better guided by providing access to social media platforms that are more educational and age-appropriate.

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