



---

## Cohabitation Attitudes and Behaviours of Undergraduate Students in Taraba State, Nigeria: The Mediating Role of Social Media and Peer Pressure

---

Rahman O. SAHEED<sup>1</sup>  
Mariam SEEDAT-KHAN<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

This study examines the impact of social-media and peer pressure on attitudes and behavior of undergraduate students towards cohabitation. The study sampled 1,970 undergraduate students from three universities in Taraba State, Nigeria. Data was collected with an online questionnaire. The study adopts social learning theory and Berger and Luckman's social construction of reality. The data was analyzed using multiple regression and mediation analysis. The results reveal significant positive effects of attitudes towards cohabitation, social media use, and peer pressure on behaviours towards cohabitation. The finding revealed that a one-unit increase in attitudes towards cohabitation corresponds to a 0.41-unit increase in cohabitation behaviours. It also revealed that, a one-unit increase in social media use and peer pressure leads to a 0.21-unit and 0.25-unit increase, respectively, in cohabitation behaviours. Furthermore, the study shows that age negatively affects cohabitation behaviours, indicating a decrease in behaviours as age increases. The mediation analysis reveals that attitudes towards cohabitation significantly predict behaviors towards cohabitation (coefficient = 0.26  $P < 0.001$ ). The study further revealed that social media use and peer pressure partially mediate the relationship between attitudes and behaviours towards cohabitation (0.19 ( $P < 0.001$ )) with a 95% confidence interval of 0.14, 0.24). The study concludes that social media use and peer pressure play essential roles in shaping attitudes towards cohabitation and cohabiting behaviour among undergraduates in Taraba State.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, Behaviours, Cohabitation, Peer Pressure, Social Learning Theory, Social Media.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Federal University, Wukari, Nigeria and Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author's e-mail:* [lanreandrahman@gmail.com](mailto:lanreandrahman@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Current Vice-President of the International Sociological Association (ISA-RC46), and adjunct Professor at Taylor's University, Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

*ORCID:* <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9056-2282>

## Introduction

Cohabitation, a form of living arrangement between unmarried heterosexual partners (young male and female undergraduates) involved in intimate relationship especially in university settings, presents multifaceted challenges and complexities within Africa. In African societies, the notion of male-female cohabitation as lovers outside the framework of legal marriage remains largely taboo and stigmatized. While traditional norms and cultural values emphasize marriage as the ideal context for male-female relationships, there exists a discrepancy between these ideals and the realities faced by undergraduates in Nigeria. Cohabitation has gained popularity among undergraduates in Nigeria in recent years, with various intersecting factors contributing to its rise. Thus, such practice in Nigeria's universities presents a striking paradox. Despite deep-rooted cultural norms that prioritize marriage, an increasing number of undergraduates are choosing to live together without the bonds of matrimony. This growing trend reflects a significant cultural shift within African societies, where such practices historically have been considered taboo.

Several interrelated factors contribute to the rising prevalence of cohabitation. Economic constraints, including inadequate campus housing and the high cost of living, compel students to seek more affordable living arrangements, often leading to cohabitation with romantic partners (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017). Additionally, the quest for intimacy and independence from parental oversight in university settings encourages students to cohabit (Ojewola & Akinduyo, 2017). Peer influence and the pervasive impact of social media also play crucial roles, shaping perceptions and normalizing cohabitation among the youth. These arrangements are not without implications.

The consequences of this living arrangement are multifaceted. While cohabitation may provide emotional support and financial relief, it also poses risks. Studies have shown that cohabitants are more likely to engage in unprotected sex, face higher risks of unintended pregnancies, and experience relationship instability (Pollard & Harris, 2013; Bain et al., 2021). The academic performance and mental health of cohabiting students often suffer due to the complexities of managing intimate relationships alongside academic responsibilities.

It must be stated that previous research on cohabitation among university students has largely focused on its prevalence and immediate social and health impacts. Studies such as those by Adeoye et al. (2012) and Manning et al. (2010) have provided valuable insights into the behavioral patterns and outcomes of cohabiting relationships. However, there remains a notable gap in understanding the role of social media and peer in these arrangements. Hence, this study examined the mediating role of social

media and peer pressure in shaping cohabitation attitudes and practices among Nigerian undergraduates. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how these factors influence students' decisions and experiences regarding cohabitation among undergraduates in Taraba State, Nigeria. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that peer pressure and social media significantly mediate the relationship between attitude and behavior towards cohabitation among undergraduates. By understanding the role of social media and peer influences, this research aims to provide insights that could inform policies and interventions to support students' well-being and academic success. The findings of this study will be crucial for educators, policymakers, and social workers who aim to address the challenges associated with cohabitation in university settings, promoting healthier relationships and better academic outcomes for students.

### **Cohabitation: Definitions, Types, and Motivations**

Cohabitation refers to the arrangement where two people who are not married live together in an intimate relationship, typically sharing a common residence (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004). This definition encompasses various forms of relationships, including those among unmarried couples who consider themselves as part of a family unit without formal legal recognition. It can be seen as a trial marriage, a stepping stone towards marriage, or an alternative lifestyle choice

Research has identified different types of cohabitation, which vary based on the nature and expectations of the relationship. These include:

1. **Transient Cohabitation:** where partners cohabit for a short period as a trial before marriage (Smock, 2000).
2. **Substitute Marriage:** a long-term relationship where couples live as if married but without legal recognition (Kiernan, 2004).
3. **Precarious Cohabitation:** often driven by economic necessity or social convenience rather than a commitment to a shared life (Liefbroer & Dourleijn, 2006).

### **Factors Contributing to Cohabitation among Undergraduate Students**

Various motivations drive the decision to cohabit. Economic factors are often significant, with couples choosing to live together to share expenses and mitigate financial hardships (Seltzer, 2004). Emotional and relational aspects also play a role, as cohabitation can provide intimacy, companionship, and a testing ground for compatibility before marriage (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Additionally, societal acceptance and changes in norms have decreased the stigmatization associated

with premarital cohabitation, making it a more viable option for many young adults (Sassler, 2010).

The prevalence of cohabitation among undergraduates is notably influenced by infrastructural challenges, including inadequate campus accommodations. This situation forces many students into off-campus living arrangements, inadvertently promoting cohabitation as a pragmatic solution to housing and financial constraints (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017). Insufficient housing options, coupled with rules prohibiting male and female students from entering female and male hostels, compel undergraduates to seek alternative off-campus accommodation, increasing cohabitation outside the bounds of traditional notions of marriage and family (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017). These contextual realities result in cohabitation becoming a pragmatic solution to housing insecurity and fulfilling emotional and physical needs outside marriage.

Moreover, peers play a pivotal role in shaping social norms and exerting peer pressure, contributing to the adoption of cohabitation as a social norm (Baranowska-Rataj & Abramowska-Kmon, 2019). Thus, when individuals witness their peers engaging in cohabitation, they may experience pressure to conform to this behavior, thereby increasing the likelihood of cohabitation. This social influence extends beyond mere observation, as peers actively communicate information and advice about cohabitation. Eggebeen and Dew (2009) opined that peers share their own positive and negative experiences, which can significantly influence individuals' attitudes towards cohabitation. This exchange of information and advice plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' decision-making processes regarding cohabitation. Furthermore, the process of peer selection and homophily contributes to the link between peer influence and cohabitation. Individuals tend to form friendships with others who share similar characteristics and values. Studies such as Baranowska-Rataj & Abramowska-Kmon (2019) found that individuals with friends who cohabit are more likely to cohabit themselves. This suggests that peer selection and homophily facilitate the transmission of cohabitation norms and behaviors within peer networks.

The link between peer influence and cohabitation among young people can be facilitated through various mechanisms through which peers shape individuals, perceptions, decisions, and behaviors regarding cohabitation. Parmer, (2017) highlights one such mechanism, suggesting that perceptions of peer experiences in cohabitation serve as “vicarious trials” for dating couples contemplating cohabitation. By observing the experiences of their peers who are cohabiting, individuals can gain insights into the challenges and benefits associated with cohabitation, which may inform their own decisions.

Similarly, social media used significantly shapes attitudes, behaviors, and patterns related to cohabitation among young adults. By providing exposure to various relationship models and lifestyles, social media platforms influence individual's perceptions of cohabitation (Arikewuyo, et al., 2019. McDaniel et al., 2017). For instance, individuals may observe portrayals of cohabiting relationships on social media and perceive them as desirable or normative, thereby influencing their decisions to cohabit. Moreover, social media facilitates the formation of cohabiting relationships by connecting individuals with similar interests and values (Wang et al., 2021). Besides, individuals can meet potential partners and establish relationships through online platforms, including cohabitation arrangements. This ease of connection provided by social media contributes to the prevalence of cohabitation among young adults.

However, the impact of social media use on cohabitation patterns is not solely positive. Research suggests that social media use may lead to relationship instability and lower commitment, which can affect cohabitation dynamics (Morris, 2020, Wang, et al., 2021). Excessive use of social media may result in distractions and decrease investment in the relationship, undermining the stability of cohabiting unions (Morris, 2020, Wang, et al., 2021). Furthermore, social media usage has been found to have both positive and negative effects on relationship satisfaction among young adults. On one hand, social media facilitates communication and connection with partners, potentially enhancing relationship satisfaction (Arikewuyo, et al., 2019. McDaniel et al., 2017). Conversely, negative outcomes such as jealousy, privacy invasion, and relationship conflicts arising from social media use can detract from relationship satisfaction ((Morris, 2020, Wang, et al., 2021). In terms of relationship commitment, social media use has been associated with lower commitment levels among young adults (Morris, 2020, Wang, et al., 2021). The availability of alternative connections through social media platforms may reduce individuals' commitment to their current partners (Arikewuyo, et al., 2019. McDaniel et al., 2017). Additionally, distractions caused by excessive social media use can detract from individuals' investment in their relationships, further weakening commitment levels.

### **Effects of Cohabitation on Undergraduate Students**

Fundamentally, the effects of cohabitation are numerous and disturbing. It must be noted that the consequences of cohabitation extend beyond the immediate living arrangements of undergraduates with broader health implications, academic performance, family dynamics and the sacred institution of marriage. Cohabitation among university students has significant health implications. This arrangement frequently results in unprotected sexual activity, heightening the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS, and leading to unplanned

pregnancies (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017; Pollard & Harris, 2013). Such outcomes not only pose serious health risks but also impact students' mental well-being due to the associated stress and stigma (Bain et al., 2021). The repercussions of cohabitation extend into the academic sphere. Students involved in cohabitation face distractions and emotional turmoil, particularly when relationships are unstable. For female students, the incidence of unplanned pregnancies can lead to decisions about abortion—often in unsafe conditions—or carrying the pregnancy to term, both of which can severely disrupt their education (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017).

Furthermore, cohabitation challenges the traditional family structure and societal norms prevalent in African cultures, where premarital cohabitation and sexual relations are often viewed with disapproval. The last two decades research has shown a significant increase in the number of young adults engaging in premarital sexual behaviour. The World Health Organization (2021) confirmed that premarital sexual activities are intensifying in Africa, with a particular emphasis on Nigeria. Adeoye et al., (2012), found that 66.7% of undergraduate students engaged in premarital sex in selected private universities in Nigeria. Adeoye et al., (2012), revealed that peer pressure, lack of parental guidance, media influence, and curiosity were significant. Ifeanyi-Brian et al., (2016) investigated sexual behaviour among undergraduates in Southeast Nigeria and found that 64.9% of the respondents had sexual intercourse, with 82.1% being unmarried, and 17.9% having between two to five sexual partners. Uzobo & Enoch (2020) found that 72.5% of the undergraduates in Nigeria had engaged in premarital sex, with 59.6% of them reporting multiple sexual partners. The study indicates that the culture of chastity and purity is no longer valued among undergraduates in Nigeria. This is because admission to tertiary institutions is seen as an opportunity for freedom to act independently, most especially in sexually risky behavior. The practice can lead to a perceived decline in moral standards and an erosion of cultural values, as cohabiting couples live together without the societal and familial blessings typically associated with marriage (Duyilemi, Tunde-Awe, & Lois, 2018; Onimajesin et al., 2020).

Beyond this, the dynamics of cohabitation, often characterized by lack of formal commitment and unequal power distributions, can expose individuals, particularly women, to higher risks of gender-based violence. This is compounded by the physical absence of familial supervision, which otherwise might act as a deterrent (John & Alhassan, 2019). In addition, cohabitation, especially when entered into at a young age, can instill patterns of behavior that might not align with the individuals' long-term interests. For example, cohabitation is linked with higher rates of infidelity and lower relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the independence associated with living away from parental oversight can lead to risky sexual behaviors, as indicated by rising trends

in premarital sexual activity among Nigerian undergraduates (World Health Organization, 2021; Adeoye et al., 2012; Uzobo & Enoch, 2020).

Cohabitation, while often discussed in the context of its impact on female students, significantly affects male undergraduates as well, influencing their academic performance, financial situation, relationship dynamics, personal development, and social support systems. For male students, cohabitation often leads to increased distractions and a reduced focus on their academic responsibilities. The shared living environment and the potential conflicts that arise within the relationship contribute to stress, which can adversely affect their concentration and academic outcomes. Studies highlight that the challenges posed by managing relationship dynamics and academic duties simultaneously can significantly impact a male student's grades and overall academic success (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017; Bain et al., 2021; Nwikpo & Offodueze, 2022). Also, cohabitation imposes financial burdens on male students. While sharing living expenses might initially relieve some financial pressure, it simultaneously introduces new responsibilities, such as rent, utilities, and groceries. Balancing these expenses with academic expenditures requires careful financial management, adding a layer of stress and complexity to their lives (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017; Bain et al., 2021; Nwikpo & Offodueze, 2022).

Furthermore, the dynamics of romantic relationships are notably influenced by cohabitation. Living together can enhance intimacy and shared responsibilities, fostering deeper emotional connections. However, it also presents challenges such as communication issues and conflicts over daily decisions. Successfully navigating these challenges necessitates robust communication and conflict resolution skills, crucial for maintaining the health and stability of the relationship (Nwikpo & Offodueze, 2022). Similarly, studies such as Bain et al., (2021) has revealed that cohabitation can both provide and restrict opportunities for personal growth. This is because, living with a partner demands a level of maturity, requiring individuals to handle responsibilities and make decisions akin to those faced by adults. This situation can promote personal development and independence. Conversely, it might limit the exploration and self-discovery typically experienced during university life, posing a challenge to finding a balance between personal growth and maintaining a healthy relationship dynamic (Bain et al., 2021).

Besides, having a live-in partner can offer significant emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for the well-being of male students. However, cohabitation can also be a source of mental health challenges, especially when relationship conflicts arise. These challenges are further exacerbated by the blurring of boundaries between personal relationships and academic responsibilities, which can detract from focus, time management, and long-term career

aspirations (Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017; Bain et al., 2021; Aremu et al., 2019; Nwikpo & Offodueze, 2022). Therefore, the increasing normalization of cohabitation among university students challenges traditional notions of partnerships and marriage, potentially altering societal perceptions of family structures. This shift could have lasting implications on the societal landscape, influencing future generations' views on marriage and family life.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Social Learning Theory***

Social Learning Theory (SLT), articulated by Albert Bandura, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how behaviors are acquired through the observation of others. In the context of cohabitation among Nigerian undergraduates, SLT can be expanded by integrating George Gerbner's cultivation theory, which posits that prolonged exposure to media reshapes an individual's perception of reality to align with the media's portrayals.

In the digital age, social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are not merely tools for social interaction but powerful agents of cultural transmission. These platforms frequently depict idealized lifestyles, including portrayals of cohabitation that may appear more glamorous or fulfilling than reality. Studies (such as, Hernandez, 2012) have shown that, such exposure could cultivate a distorted perception of cohabitation, influencing undergraduates' attitudes and expectations. The social media algorithms that curate personalized content create an echo chamber effect, reinforcing existing beliefs and potentially leading to confirmation bias. This process makes students more susceptible to adopting attitudes and behaviors aligned with those they observe online (Manco-Chavez et al., 2017).

Beyond media influence, SLT emphasizes the role of peers in behavioral adoption. Cohabitation can become normalized within a student community if it is a common practice. Observing peers who cohabit and seem to benefit from it can serve as a strong behavioral model, encouraging others to follow suit (Bandura, 1977; Montoya & Pittinsky, 2011). Conversely, witnessing the adverse outcomes of cohabitation, such as relationship breakdowns or emotional distress, might serve as a deterrent, an example of vicarious punishment that informs students about the risks associated with such lifestyle choices.

The theory of social comparison, as proposed by Festinger, complements SLT by suggesting that individuals evaluate their own lives in relation to others'. For undergraduates, seeing peers in cohabitative relationships that are perceived as happier or more fulfilling can prompt a reevaluation of their own relationship choices.



The desire to emulate successful models of cohabitation could be motivated by upward social comparison, where individuals strive to match or surpass the achievements of their peers.

Furthermore, SLT asserts that reinforcement significantly influences the acquisition and perpetuation of behaviors. SLT posits that behaviors which are positively reinforced are likely to be repeated. For Nigerian undergraduates, cohabitation may bring positive reinforcements such as social approval, admiration, or validation from their peers, crucial factors in their social environments (yang et al., 2021). These reinforcements make cohabitation a more appealing choice, as students often seek approval and belonging within their peer groups. Social media further amplifies this effect by providing a platform where positive reinforcements are publicly given and received, thus encouraging more students to display and engage in cohabitative behaviors.

Another facet of SLT is vicarious reinforcement, where individuals observe and internalize the outcomes of behaviors exhibited by others. When students see their peers in cohabitating relationships receiving social benefits or transitioning into more committed relationships like marriage, these observations can serve as strong motivational factors that endorse cohabitation. The visibility of such positive outcomes through direct interaction or via social media can make cohabitation seem not only viable but also desirable. However, the cultural context in Nigeria, characterized by its collectivistic nature, places significant emphasis on family approval and societal acceptance. These cultural norms can influence the effectiveness of peer-based reinforcement. For instance, while peer approval might encourage cohabitation, disapproval from family or significant community elders can act as a strong counterforce, deterring students from cohabitation if it is seen as conflicting with cultural or familial expectations. Therefore, the cultural context must be considered when applying SLT. In Nigeria, a collectivist society places high value on family approval and communal harmony. This cultural backdrop can amplify the effects of peer pressure and make the social reinforcement from cohabitation—whether approval or disapproval—particularly potent. Parental and community influences may also play critical roles in reinforcing or dissuading behaviors associated with cohabitation.

### ***Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality***

While Social Learning Theory (SLT) provides insights into observational learning and behavior reinforcement, Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality (SCoR) offers a profound framework for understanding the societal and interpersonal dynamics that influence cohabitation decisions among Nigerian undergraduates.

SCoR underscores the pivotal role of social interactions and the shared meanings that emerge from these interactions in shaping perceptions and behaviors.

SCoR highlights the concept of habitualization, where repeated interactions create taken-for-granted patterns of behavior and understanding. This can be applied to understand how cohabitation becomes normalized within certain social circles. According to studies such as those by Mustafai (2019), the concept of habitualization plays a crucial role in SCoR. If cohabitation is frequently observed within a student's network, it gradually transforms into a standard practice, subtly shaping the collective perception of relationship progression. This normalization embeds cohabitation within the accepted social fabric by altering its perception from an unusual arrangement to a typical phase in a student's relational trajectory.

The SCoR also highlights the significance of language in constructing reality. The way cohabitation is discussed among peers can profoundly influence students' interpretations of its implications and appropriateness. The study by Kaya (2023) emphasizes the importance of discourse analysis in SCoR, showing how language frames understanding. For instance, if cohabitation is commonly referred to in discourse as a 'trial marriage' or a 'financially pragmatic arrangement,' these descriptions can lead to a more favorable view of cohabitation, enhancing its acceptability among peers.

Furthermore, SCoR acknowledges that reality is subjectively constructed through social interaction. Students within the same social circle might hold different interpretations and justifications for cohabitation. Studies (e.g., Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) explore the concept of narrative in SCoR. Examining how students narrate their own reasons for considering or rejecting cohabitation can unveil the subjective meanings they attach to this lifestyle choice. These narratives are constructed through ongoing social interactions and negotiations within their social circles. Research conducted by Alebiosu (2020) and Columbus (2014) delves into how deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms in Nigeria influence family dynamics and perceptions of cohabitation. These studies reveal that the social construction of cohabitation is heavily mediated by cultural and religious contexts, which can either sanction or discourage such arrangements. For example, in more conservative communities where traditional values predominate, cohabitation might be constructed as an inappropriate relationship form, heavily stigmatized due to prevailing religious or cultural doctrines.

## Methodology

The research design for this study is online survey design. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 1,970 undergraduate students in Taraba State, Nigeria.

The questionnaire was posted on the Universities' social media platforms where and 1,970 students accurately filled the questionnaire. Hence, participants for this study were recruited from the students' social media platforms of the following three universities in Taraba state, Nigeria:

1. Federal University Wukari,
2. Taraba State University, and
3. Kwara University.

These three Universities were selected because the undergraduate students from these Universities have visible and active social media platforms where the students share information and interact socially. The online survey consisted of a series of questions, including demographic questions, questions about media use, attitudes towards cohabitation, and behaviours towards cohabitation. The questionnaire took approximately 10 to 20 minutes to complete and include questions about attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation, social media use, peer pressure, and demographic information. The questionnaire includes several measures, including the Attitudes towards Cohabitation Scale, the Behaviors towards Cohabitation Scale, the Social Media Use Scale and the Peer Pressure Scale. The Attitudes towards Cohabitation Scale and the Behaviors Towards Cohabitation scale was used to measure participants' attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation. The Social Media Use Scale was used to measure participants frequency of social media use, the types of social media platforms they use, and their engagement with social media content related to cohabitation. The Peer Pressure Scale was used to measure participants perceptions of peer attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation and the degree of pressure they feel to conform to peer norms.

The need to collect data through online platform is hinged on the fact that collecting data through an online medium has several strengths. First, it allows researchers to reach many participants from diverse geographic locations without the need for physical proximity. This can increase the sample size and enhance the generalizability of the findings. Second, online surveys can reduce social desirability bias as respondents may feel more comfortable providing or answering sensitive questions honestly in an anonymous and private setting. Third, online surveys are time-efficient and cost-effective compared to other data collection methods such as face-to-face interviews or paper-based surveys. Finally, online surveys allow for easy data management and analysis, with the ability to export data to statistical software for further analysis. The inclusion criteria for participation were being enrolled as a full-time undergraduate student at a Nigerian university and being 18 years or older.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are readily available and accessible to the researcher. In this study, participants were conveniently recruited from three Universities in Taraba State through students' social media platforms/groups such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

Data collected from the online survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the variables' distribution and provide a sample profile. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationships between attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation, social media use, and peer pressure, while controlling for demographic variables. Mediation analysis was also conducted to examine the mediating role of social media use and peer pressure in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nigeria. SPSS software was used for data analysis.

**Table 1: Bio Data**

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequencies	percentage
<b>Age</b>	18-21 years old	800	40.61
	22-25 years old	680	34.52
	26-29 years old	250	12.69
	30 years old and above	240	12.1
<b>Gender</b>	Male	890	45.18
	Female	1080	54.82
<b>Religion</b>	Christian	1240	62.94
	Muslim	540	27.41
	Other	190	9.64
<b>Institution Type</b>	Public	1250	63.45
	Private	720	36.55
<b>Education Level</b>	200-level	550	27.92
	300-level	670	34.01
	400-level	480	24.37
	500-level and above	270	13.71

\*N=1,970

Source: Researchers' Survey, 2024.

The table provides the frequency distribution of the demographic variables of the participants in the study. The demographic variables include age, gender, religion, institution type, and education level. The table shows that most of the participants were female (54.82%) and Christian (62.94%). The age distribution shows that the highest frequency was in the 18-21 age group (49.61%). In terms of institution type, 63.45% of the participants were from public universities, and most participants were at the 200 and 300 levels of education (27.92% and 34.01%, respectively).

The statistical implication of this table is that, the sample may not be representative of the entire population of undergraduate students in Nigeria. For example, most participants were from public universities, which may not be representative of the proportion of students in public vs private universities in the country. Similarly, the sample may not be representative in terms of age or education level. However, the sample size for each category of the demographic variables is large enough to enable meaningful statistical analysis. Additionally, the distribution of the demographic variables provides a good representation of the population under study.

**Table 2:** *Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Age	22.1	3.3	18-40
Gender (1 = Female)	0.55	0.50	0-1
Religion (1 = Chr.)	0.63	0.48	0-1
Institution (1 = Pub)	0.64	0.48	0-1
<b>Education Level</b>			
(1 = 200 level)	0.28	0.45	0-1
(2 = 300 level)	0.34	0.47	0-1
(3 = 400 level)	0.21	0.41	0-1
(4 = 500 level)	0.17	0.37	0-1
Attitudes	3.89	0.67	1-5
Behaviors	3.45	0.82	1-5
Social Media Use	3.72	0.88	1-5
Peer Pressure	3.59	0.78	1-5

Source: Researchers' Survey, 2024.

From the table, the mean age of the participants was 22.1 years old, with a standard deviation of 3.3. The range for age was 18 to 40 years old, indicating a wide range of ages among the participants. The mean score for gender was 0.55, indicating that the sample had slightly more female participants. The mean score for religion was 0.63, indicating that most of the participants identified as Christian. The mean score for institution type was 0.64, indicating that most of the participants were from public universities. In terms of education level, most of the participants were in the 200-level (28%) and 300-level (34%), with smaller percentages in the higher levels of education. The mean score for attitudes towards cohabitation was 3.89, indicating that the sample had moderately positive attitudes towards cohabitation. The mean score for behaviors towards cohabitation was 3.45 indicating that the sample engaged in cohabitation behavior moderately often. The mean score for peer pressure was 3.59, indicating that the sample perceived moderate levels of pressure from their peers.

Statistically, the implications of these findings are that, the sample was diverse in terms of age, gender, and religion, but it was primarily composed of students from

public universities. The sample also had moderately positive attitudes towards cohabitation, engaged in cohabitation behavior moderately often, and use social media at moderate levels. These descriptive statistics provide a foundation for further analysis and interpretations of the data.

### Inferential Statistics

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation, social media use, and peer pressure, while controlling for demographic variables. Table 3 below provides the regression coefficients for the model.

**Table 3:** Multiple Regression Analysis of Behaviors towards Cohabitation

Variable	B (Beta Coefficient)	Standard Error	T-value	p-value
Attitudes towards Cohab.	0.41	0.05	7.88	<.01
Social Media Use	0.21	0.04	5.36	<.01
Peer Pressure	0.25	0.05	5.18	<.01
Age	-0.04	0.02	-2.18	0.03
Gender (1 = Female)	-0.03	0.03	-1.04	0.30
Religion (1 = Chr.)	0.01	0.03	0.24	0.81
Institution (1 = Pub)	0.03	0.03	1.05	0.29
<b>Education Level</b>				
(1 = 200 level)	-0.02	0.04	-0.58	0.56
(2 = 300 level)	0.03	0.04	0.87	0.38
(3 = 400 level)	0.03	0.04	0.78	0.44
(4 = 500 level)	0.01	0.04	0.31	0.75

Source: Researchers' Survey, 2024.

Table three presents the results of a multiple regression analysis of behaviors towards cohabitation using attitudes towards cohabitation, social media use, peer pressure, gender, religion, institution type, and education level as predictor variables. The results indicate that social media use, attitudes towards cohabitation, and peer pressure all have significant positive effects on behaviors towards cohabitation, ( $P < .01$ ), specifically, for each one unit increase in attitudes towards cohabitation, there is a 0.41 unit increase in behaviors towards cohabitation, holding all other variables constant. For each one unit increase in social media use and having friends who cohabit peer pressure, there is a 0.21 unit and 0.25 unit increase in behaviors towards cohabitation, respectively. Holding all other variables constant age significantly negatively affects behaviors towards cohabitation ( $P .03$ ), indicating that as age increases, behaviors towards cohabitation decrease, holding all other variables constant. However, gender,

religion, institution type, and education level do not have significant effects on behaviors towards cohabitation.

Mediation analysis was conducted using the process macro for SPSS to test the mediation hypothesis. The analysis revealed that the indirect effect of attitudes towards cohabitation on behaviors towards cohabitation through social media use and peer pressure was significant. Indirect effect equals 0.19 as he equals 0.0395% CI 0.130.24. This suggests that social media use and peer pressure partially mediated the relationship between attitudes towards cohabitation and behaviors towards cohabitation. The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Results of Mediation Analysis

	Coefficient	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	p-value
Attitudes -> Behaviors	0.26	0.03	[0.20, 0.32]	< 0.001
Attitudes -> social media	0.35	0.02	[0.31, 0.39]	< 0.001
Social media -> Behaviors	0.33	0.03	[0.27, 0.39]	< 0.001
Attitudes -> Peer Pressure	0.18	0.02	[0.14, 0.22]	< 0.001
Peer Pressure -> Behaviors	0.22	0.03	[0.16, 0.28]	< 0.001
Indirect Effect of Attitudes on Behaviors via social media	0.09	0.02	[0.06, 0.13]	< 0.001
Indirect Effect of Attitudes on Behaviors via Peer Pressure	0.10	0.02	[0.07, 0.14]	< 0.001
Total Indirect Effect of Attitudes on Behaviors	0.19	0.03	[0.14, 0.24]	< 0.001

Table 4 presents the mediation analysis results conducted to examine the mediating role of social media use and peer pressure in the relationship between attitudes towards cohabitation and behaviors towards cohabitation.

The coefficient values represent the strength and direction of the relationships between variables. The results indicate that attitudes towards cohabitation significantly predict behaviors towards cohabitation (coefficient = 0.26 P <0.001). This suggests that individuals with positive attitudes towards cohabitation are more likely to engage in cohabitation. Moreover, attitudes towards cohabitation significantly predict social media use (coefficient =0.35 P<0.001, and peer pressure (coefficient =0.18 P<0.001). Social media use also significantly predicts behaviors towards cohabitation (coefficient = 0.33 P< 0.001), and peer pressure significantly predicts behaviors towards cohabitation (coefficient = 0.22 P< 0.001). The indirect effect of attitudes on behaviors via social media was found to be significant with the coefficient of 0.09 (P 0.001) and a 95% confidence interval of (0.060, 0.13). This suggests that social media use partially mediates the relationship between attitudes towards cohabitation and behaviors towards cohabitation. Similarly, the indirect effect of attitudes on behaviors via peer

pressure was significant, with the coefficient of 0.10 ( $P < 0.001$ ) and a 95% confidence interval of 0.07, 0.14, indicating that peer pressure also partially mediates this relationship. The total indirect effect of attitudes on behaviors through both social media use and peer pressure was found to be 0.19 ( $P < 0.001$ ) with a 95% confidence interval of 0.14, 0.24. This suggests that social media use and peer pressure partially mediate the relationship between attitudes towards and behaviors towards cohabitation.

The results of the inferential statistics suggest that social media use and peer pressure partially mediate the relationship between attitudes towards cohabitation and behaviors towards cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

This study investigates the mediating role of social media and peer influence on cohabitation attitudes and behaviors among undergraduates in Taraba State, Nigeria. The findings indicate a positive disposition towards cohabitation among most participants, influenced significantly by social media and peer pressure. This aligns with studies like Svodziwa and Kurete (2017), who also noted accommodation issues and a desire for intimacy as common factors driving cohabitation among students in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the research mirrors findings from Aremu et al. (2019), highlighting that social factors, notably peer pressure, critically shape cohabitation trends among Nigerian tertiary students, often seen as a strategy for gaining social influence and protection. Kalu et al. (2021) support this view, adding that despite negative perceptions, peer relationships and affection significantly prompt cohabitation, particularly off-campus.

Distinctly, the current study emphasizes the substantial impact of social media in shaping cohabitation perceptions, a point less explored in Kalu et al.'s research but pivotal in understanding contemporary influences on student behavior. This digital dimension is crucial, considering the persuasive power of online narratives in forming attitudes towards cohabitation. Moreover, Manning et al. (2011) contribute to understanding the social underpinnings of cohabitation, which suggest that peer and family opinions profoundly affect individual cohabitation decisions and partner selection. These insights underline the complex interplay of social learning, where behaviors are learned through observation and imitation, as demonstrated in the prevalent peer influences and the impactful role of social media observed in this study. The findings from Adeyera et al. (2023) also underscore the importance of demographic factors such as age and gender, enriching the current study's narrative by situating social media and peer pressure within the broader socio-demographic context that influences cohabitation behavior. Based on the findings, the social



learning theory is highly applicable to this study. The theory suggests that people learn by observing others and imitating their behavior. This study found that peer pressure plays a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nigeria. The findings showed that students who reported having friends who cohabited were more likely to have positive attitudes towards cohabitation and engaging cohabitation behaviors themselves. This finding supports the social learning theory, as it suggests that individuals learn and adopt new behaviors by observing and imitating their peers.

Based on the findings of this study, each research question is answered as follows:

1. What are the attitudes of undergraduate students in Taraba State towards cohabitation? The results of the study suggest that undergraduate students in Taraba State generally have positive attitudes towards cohabitation. The mean score for attitudes towards cohabitation was 3.81 (out of 5), indicating a generally positive attitude towards this form of relationship.
2. What are the behaviours of undergraduate students in Taraba State towards cohabitation? The results of this study indicate that undergraduate students in Taraba State engage in cohabitation to a significant extent. The mean score for behaviours towards cohabitation was 3.58 (out of 5), indicating that most of the participants reported engaging in cohabitation to some degree.
3. To what extent do social media and peer pressure mediate the relationship between attitudes and behaviours towards cohabitation among undergraduate students in Taraba State? The results of this study indicate that social media use and peer pressure partially mediate the relationship between attitudes and behaviours towards cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nigeria. Specifically, social media use and peer pressure partially explain the relationship between positive attitudes towards cohabitation and engaging in cohabitation behaviours. These findings suggest that social media and peer pressure significantly shape attitudes and behaviours towards cohabitation among young adults in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study provides valuable insights into the factors that shape attitudes and behaviours towards cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nigeria. The findings suggest that social media use and peer pressure play important roles in shaping these attitudes and behaviors, and that attitudes towards cohabitation significantly predict cohabitation behaviors. The study highlights the importance of

considering social and environmental factors when examining attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation and underscores the need for further research in this area. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on cohabitation by examining the role of social and environmental factors in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation among young adults in Nigeria. The study's findings have important implications for policymakers and practitioners working to promote healthy relationships among young adults and underscore the need for targeted interventions that address the social and environmental factors that contribute to attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations were made. First, policymakers and practitioners working to promote healthy relationships among young adults should consider the role of social and environmental factors in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation. Specifically, interventions that target social media use and peer pressure may be effective in promoting positive attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation. Second, further research is needed to understand better the complex interplay between social and environmental factors and attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation among young adults in Nigeria. Longitudinal studies that examine the development of attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation over time and explore the role of cultural and societal norms in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards cohabitation may be particularly informative.

## References

- Adeoye. (2012). Prevalence of premarital sex and factors influencing it among students in a private tertiary institution in Nigeria. *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.5897/ijpc11.030>
- Adeyera, O., Omisore, A. G., Balogun, O. D., Akinwusi, M. D., Oyekanmi, O. D., Abiodun, O. M., & Adesina, K. A. (2023). Prevalence of, disposition towards and factors associated with cohabitation among undergraduates in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria. *Research Journal of Health Sciences*, 11(4), 384-392. <https://doi.org/10.4314/rejhs.v11i4.12>
- Alebiosu, Y. O. (2020). Demographic determinants of couple life behaviour among undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 7(1), 160-171.
- Aremu, O. D., Aliyu, M. A., Jibril, A. T., & Abubakar, A. (2019). An investigation of co-habitation and academic achievement among students of tertiary institutions in Niger State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Advances in Scientific Research and Engineering*, 05(10), 263-270. <https://doi.org/10.31695/ijasre.2019.33566>

- Arikewuyo, A., Ozad, B., & Lasisi, T. T. (2019). Erotic use of social media pornography in gratifying romantic relationship desires. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sjp.2019.60>
- Bain, L. E., Ahinkorah, B. O., Seidu, A.-A., Budu, E., Okyere, J., & Kongnyuy, E. (2021). Beyond counting intended pregnancies among young women to understanding their associated factors in sub-Saharan Africa. *International Health*, 14(5), 501-509. <https://doi.org/10.1093/inthealth/ihab056>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>
- Baranowska-Rataj, A., & Abramowska-Kmon, A. (2019). Number of children and social contacts among older people: The moderating role of filial norms and social policies. *European Journal of Ageing*, 16, 95-107.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality: A treatise on the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor.
- Columbus, O. (2014). African cultural values and inter-communal relations: The case with Nigeria. *Developing Country Studies*, 4(24), 208-217.
- Duyilemi, A. N., Tunde-Awe, B. M., & Lois, L. O. A. (2018). Cohabitation in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions: A Case Study of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities (IJSSH)*, 3(1), 27-37. Retrieved from <https://ijssh.ielas.org/index.php/ijssh/article/view/23>
- Eggebeen, D., & Dew, J. (2009). The role of religion in adolescence for family formation in young adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(1), 108-121.
- Hernandez, E. A. (2012). *Using cultivation theory to analyze college student attitudes about the dating process following exposure to romantic films* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Heuveline, P., & Timberlake, J. M. (2004). The role of cohabitation in family formation: The United States in comparative perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(5), 1214-1230.
- Ifeanyi-Brian, A. J., Umeononihu, O., Echendu, A. D., & Eke, N. (2016). Sexual behaviour among students in a tertiary educational institution in southeast

- Nigeria. *Advances in Reproductive Sciences*, 04(03), 87-92.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/arsci.2016.43010>
- John, J., & Alhassan, D. Z. (2019). Factors influencing cohabitation among undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology Minna, Niger State, Nigeria: Implications for counselling. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(9). <https://doi.org/10.7176/jep/10-9-02>
- Kalu, M. U., Ejiogu, N. H., Chukwukadibia, C. N., & Nleonu, E. C. (2021). Social-economic and Health Effects of Cohabitation Among Off Campus Students in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions: A Case Study Of Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri, Imo State. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 9(3).
- Kaya, J. (2023). The expectations-reality dissonance in student teaching: a discourse analysis of one pre-service teacher's perspective. *Educational Linguistics*, 2(1), 29-50.
- Kiernan, K. (2004). Unmarried cohabitation and parenthood in Britain and Europe. *Law & Policy*, 26(1), 33-55.
- Liefbroer, A. C., & Dourleijn, E. (2006). Unmarried cohabitation and union stability: Testing the role of diffusion using data from 16 European countries. *Demography*, 43(2), 203-221.
- Manco-Chavez, J. A., Uribe-Hernandez, Y. C., Buendia-Aparcana, R., Vertiz-Osores, J. J., Isla Alcoser, S. D., & Rengifo-Lozano, R. A. (2020). Integration of ICTS and Digital Skills in Times of the Pandemic COVID-19. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 9(9), 11-20.
- Manning, W. D., Cohen, J. A., & Smock, P. J. (2011). The role of romantic partners, family, and peer networks in dating couples' views about cohabitation. *Journal of adolescent research*, 26(1), 115-149.
- McDaniel, B. T., Drouin, M., & Cravens, J. D. (2017). Do you have anything to hide? Infidelity-related behaviors on social media sites and marital satisfaction. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 88-95.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.031>
- Montoya, R. M., & Pittinsky, T. L. (2011). When increased group identification leads to outgroup liking and cooperation: The role of trust. *The Journal of social psychology*, 151(6), 784-806.

- Morris, M. E. (2020). Enhancing relationships through technology: Directions in parenting, caregiving, romantic partnerships, and clinical practice. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 22(2), 151-160. <https://doi.org/10.31887/dcns.2020.22.2/morris>
- Mustafai, A. (2019). The Reality and its Instances: Review on Bergers and Luckmann's Theory of the Social Construction of Reality. *Knowledge-International Journal*, 30(5), 1319-1323.
- Nwikpo, M. N., & Offodueze, O. A. (2022). Prevalence causes and consequences of premarital cohabitation and academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe university, Awka. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, 5(4), 45-60.
- Ojewola, F.O., & Akinduyo, T.E. (2017). Prevalence and factors responsible for cohabitation among undergraduates of Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo State, Nigeria. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 5(6), 650-654. <https://doi.org/10.12691/education-5-6-10>
- Onimajesin, S. I., Saheed, R. O., Atiku, A. A., & Olasunkanmi, O. A. (2020). Globalization, sexual exploration, and cohabiting culture among undergraduate students at university of Ilorin, Nigeria. *Journal Manajemen Bisnis (JMB)*, 33(2).
- Parmer, D. W. (2017). *Choosing Marriage in a Period of Decline: The Role of Homogeneity, Religion, and Social Networks in the Marriage Market among Jewish Young Adults*. Brandeis University, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management.
- Pollard, M., & Harris, K. (2013). *Nonmarital cohabitation marriage, and health among adolescents and young adults*. RAND Corporation. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7249/wr997>
- Rena, R. (2006). Premarital sex-lessons from American experience, Ilorin (Nigeria). *The Nigerian Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 11 (1), 134-155.
- Seltzer, J. A. (2004). Cohabitation in the United States and Britain: Demography, kinship, and the future. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(4), 921-928.
- Smock, P. J. (2000). Cohabitation in the United States: An appraisal of research themes, findings, and implications. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 1-20.

- Stanley, S.M., Whitton, S.W. & Markman, H.J. (2004). Maybe I do: Interpersonal commitment and premarital or non-marital cohabitation? *Journal of family Issues* 25:496-519.
- Svodziwa, M., & Kurete, F. (2017). Cohabitation among tertiary education students: An exploratory study in Bulawayo. *Human and Social Studies*, 6(1), 138-148. <https://doi.org/10.1515/hssr-2016-0009>
- Uzobo, E., & Enoch, R. O. (2020). *Social Media use and Sexual Behaviour of Undergraduate Students in a Nigerian University*. Research Square Platform LLC. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-34051/v1>
- Wang, L., Qiu, J., Yan, S., & Liu, W. (2021). *Does mobile social media undermine our romantic relationships? The influence of fear of missing out (fomo) on young people's romantic relationship*. Research Square Platform LLC. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-636141/v>
- World Health Organization. (2001). *Sexual relations among young people in developing countries: Evidence from WHO case studies*. Geneva: WHO.
- Yang, X., Tseng, Y., & Lee, B. (2021). Merging the social influence theory and the goal-framing theory to understand consumers' green purchasing behavior: Does the level of sensitivity to climate change really matter?. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 766754.