

**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF
UNDERGRADUATES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

BY

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SSC2004152

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK,
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY,**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL
WORK IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR
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CERTIFICATION

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God the Father, Jesus Christ and the holy spirit for his mercy, his direction and his provision throughout this project and my years at the University

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ABSTRACT

The Impact of Social Media on the Mental Health of Undergraduates at the University of Benin. This study investigates how social media usage affects the mental health of undergraduate students at the University of Benin. The research was conducted within the university community and focused on determining the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and concentration.

The main objectives were to examine the effects of social media usage patterns on students' mental health and to identify possible interventions to mitigate negative outcomes. The study was guided by two key research questions:

1. What is the relationship between social media usage and mental health indicators (anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and concentration)?
2. How does passive browsing affect students' psychological well-being?

A descriptive survey design was employed. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to a sample size of 150 undergraduate students. The instruments used included standardized scales such as the GAD-7 for anxiety, PHQ-9 for depression, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and custom questions on concentration. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis through SPSS.

The key findings revealed that excessive social media use was significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression, lower self-esteem, and poor concentration. Students who engaged in passive browsing reported more psychological distress than those who used social media actively and moderately.

In conclusion, while social media offers certain academic and social benefits, its excessive and passive use negatively impacts the mental health of students. There is a need for awareness and counseling interventions targeted at digital well-being.

It is recommended that:

1. University management should integrate mental health awareness and digital literacy into orientation and counseling programs.
2. Students should be encouraged to set healthy boundaries for social media use to enhance their academic and psychological well-being.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Social media has become a defining characteristic of modern life, influencing how individuals communicate, interact, and perceive themselves and others. Over the past decade, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok have not only revolutionized interpersonal communication but also reshaped access to information and entertainment. For undergraduates, who are in a critical developmental phase characterized by academic pressures and evolving social identities, social media offers both opportunities and challenges. At the University of Benin, as in many other higher education institutions worldwide, students are immersed in a digital environment where social media serves as a primary means of staying connected with peers, accessing academic resources, and engaging with global trends (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Despite the many advantages of social media, its pervasive use has raised significant concerns regarding its impact on mental health. Studies have increasingly linked extensive social media engagement with adverse psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, and impaired concentration (Twenge et al., 2018). The constant barrage of images, messages, and notifications can lead to information overload, social comparison, and feelings of inadequacy. In many cases, the curated and often idealized portrayals of life on social media contribute to unrealistic standards that exacerbate stress and anxiety among young adults. For instance, students may find

themselves comparing their everyday experiences with the seemingly perfect lives of their peers, resulting in lowered self-worth and heightened emotional distress (Keles et al., 2020). Moreover, the addictive nature of social media is a growing concern. Undergraduates at the University of Benin frequently spend several hours each day on these platforms, sometimes at the expense of academic performance and real-life social interactions. The phenomenon of passive browsing where individuals scroll through content without actively engaging has been associated with feelings of loneliness and a reduction in overall life satisfaction. This non-engaged form of consumption can lead to a state of mind where students feel disconnected from reality, further contributing to anxiety and depressive symptoms. As digital interactions increasingly replace face-to-face communication, the traditional social support systems that many students rely on may erode, leaving them more vulnerable to mental health issues.

The impact of social media is multifaceted. On one hand, these platforms can foster a sense of community, offer support networks, and serve as outlets for creative expression and stress relief. On the other hand, the constant connectivity can result in over-dependence, where students might experience difficulties in managing time, regulating emotions, or disconnecting from the digital world. The rapid pace at which information is disseminated can lead to a cycle of hyper-vigilance and anxiety, particularly when students are exposed to negative or distressing content such as cyberbullying, hate speech, or sensationalized news (Andreassen et al., 2017). Such exposure not only affects mood but also has the

potential to impair cognitive functions like concentration and decision-making, further undermining academic success.

At the University of Benin, these challenges are particularly pronounced given the dynamic social environment and the increasing reliance on digital tools for learning and socialization. While social media platforms offer innovative ways to connect with peers and access educational content, they also blur the lines between academic and personal life. The digital divide that once separated formal education from social interaction has largely dissolved, leaving students to navigate a landscape where the boundaries between work and leisure are increasingly indistinct. This integration of digital life into every aspect of daily routines has made it imperative to explore how these platforms influence mental health outcomes.

The societal implications of these developments are profound. With the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among young adults, understanding the role of social media becomes essential not only for academic institutions but also for policymakers and mental health professionals. As universities strive to create supportive learning environments, the potential negative impacts of digital media must be addressed through informed interventions and policies. The University of Benin, with its diverse student population, provides an ideal setting to investigate these dynamics in depth. By examining the intersection of digital engagement and mental health, this study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how technology influences psychological well-being in a higher education context.

Furthermore, the global trend toward digitalization in education and social interactions underscores the urgency of this research. While technology offers unprecedented access to information and connectivity, it also necessitates a critical evaluation of its long-term impacts on mental health. As students increasingly rely on social media for communication and academic support, the potential for negative outcomes such as reduced attention spans and increased stress levels cannot be overlooked. This study aims to delve into these issues, exploring both the benefits and the pitfalls of social media usage among undergraduates. By doing so, it seeks to provide comprehensive insights that can inform future strategies for digital well-being and mental health support in academic settings (Naslund et al., 2020).

In summary, the rapid adoption of social media among undergraduates at the University of Benin has created a complex landscape where digital connectivity intersects with mental health. While these platforms offer significant opportunities for learning and social engagement, they also present serious challenges that can compromise psychological well-being. This study is designed to examine these multifaceted impacts, providing a thorough analysis of the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes among university students. Through this exploration, the research aims to shed light on both the positive and negative dimensions of digital interaction, ultimately contributing to more effective strategies for promoting mental health in the digital age.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The increasing integration of social media into the daily lives of undergraduates at the University of Benin has sparked widespread concern regarding its effects on mental health. While social media offers significant advantages in terms of connectivity and access to information, its overuse has been associated with negative psychological outcomes. Numerous studies have indicated a strong correlation between excessive social media usage and issues such as anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, and impaired concentration (Twenge et al., 2018). Despite these findings, there remains a gap in localized research that explores these phenomena within the context of the University of Benin. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how social media influences the mental health of undergraduates, with particular focus on anxiety, depression, self-esteem, concentration, and the effects of passive browsing.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The overall aim of this study is to examine the impact of social media on the mental health of undergraduates at the University of Benin. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- a). Determine the relationship between social media usage and anxiety among undergraduates.
- b). Assess the impact of social media on depression levels among students.
- c). Examine the influence of social media on students' self-esteem.
- d). Evaluate how social media usage affects concentration an academic

performance.

e). Investigate the role of passive browsing in contributing to mental health challenges.

f). Explore potential interventions that can mitigate the negative effects of social media on mental health.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

a). What is the relationship between social media usage and anxiety among undergraduates at the University of Benin?

b). How does social media usage affect depression levels among students?

c). What impact does social media have on students' self-esteem?

d). To what extent does social media influence concentration and academic performance?

e). How does passive browsing on social media contribute to mental health challenges among undergraduates?

f). What interventions can help mitigate the negative effects of social media on students' mental health?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for the field of social work by deepening our understanding of how digital behaviors, particularly social media usage, influence the

mental health of undergraduates. Social work as a discipline is fundamentally concerned with promoting individual and community well-being, and this research offers empirical insights that can inform practice, policy, and intervention strategies tailored to the unique challenges posed by the digital age.

Firstly, by investigating the associations between social media usage and key mental health indicators such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, concentration, and the effects of passive browsing, the study provides evidence-based findings that social work practitioners can incorporate into their practice. This information is vital for developing targeted interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse psychological effects of excessive social media engagement among students. For example, social workers can design support programs that specifically address digital stressors and enhance coping mechanisms in academic settings (Twenge et al., 2018).

Secondly, the research contributes to the theoretical framework of social work by integrating digital sociology perspectives with traditional mental health theories. As social media continues to reshape social interactions and self-perception, it is crucial for social work literature to reflect these changes. The study's findings will help refine existing theories and inspire new models that account for the influence of digital environments on mental health. This theoretical advancement is essential for training future social work professionals and for ensuring that practice remains responsive to emerging societal trends (Keles et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the localized focus on undergraduates at the University of Benin adds an important cultural dimension to the discourse. Many existing studies on social media and mental health have been conducted in Western contexts, yet the dynamics within Nigerian higher education institutions may differ due to unique socio-cultural factors. By providing context-specific insights, this study enables social work practitioners to develop culturally sensitive interventions that are more effective in addressing the needs of students in similar environments. Such localized research enriches the global knowledge base, ensuring that social work practice is inclusive and adaptable across diverse cultural settings.

In addition, the study encourages interdisciplinary collaboration by bridging gaps between social work, psychology, and digital media studies. This cross-disciplinary approach is essential for tackling the complex issues associated with digital life. By fostering dialogue among various fields, social work professionals can leverage insights from multiple disciplines to create comprehensive support systems that address both the digital and psychosocial dimensions of mental health challenges. This collaborative spirit is critical in crafting holistic strategies that support students in navigating the digital landscape (Andreassen et al., 2017).

Overall, the study's contribution to the knowledge base of social work is multifaceted. It not only enhances our understanding of the psychological impact of social media on students but also informs the development of practical, culturally informed, and interdisciplinary interventions. These contributions are invaluable for social work

departments aiming to promote digital well-being, support mental health, and foster resilient communities in an increasingly connected world.

1.6 Definition of Terms

1. Social Media: Online platforms that enable users to create, share, and interact with content, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok.

2. Mental Health: A state of psychological well-being in which individuals realize their own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their community (World Health Organization, 2018).

3. Anxiety: A mental health condition characterized by persistent worry, nervousness, or fear that interferes with daily activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).

4. Depression: A mood disorder marked by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in activities.

5. Self-Esteem: An individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth and abilities.

6. Concentration: The mental focus required to engage in academic or other cognitively demanding tasks.

7. Passive Browsing: The act of consuming content on social media without active engagement, often associated with feelings of loneliness and diminished well-being.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In recent decades, social media has emerged as a dominant force in global communication, reshaping how individuals interact, share information, and form their identities. This evolution has been especially transformative among university students who find themselves at the crossroads of academic pressure and digital innovation. This chapter reviews the extensive body of literature concerning social media's influence on mental health among undergraduates. It discusses the evolution of social media, the various mental health outcomes associated with its use—including anxiety, depression, self-esteem, concentration, and passive browsing—and examines both theoretical and empirical studies. In doing so, it highlights key gaps in current research, particularly within non-Western contexts, and considers the implications of these findings for social work practice.

2.2 Evolution and Landscape of Social Media

2.2.1 Definition and Historical Overview

Social media refers to interactive digital platforms that allow users to create, share, and exchange information in real time. Early iterations of these platforms emerged from bulletin board systems (BBS) and chat rooms in the 1980s and early 1990s, evolving dramatically with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Platforms such as MySpace, Friendster, and eventually Facebook revolutionized the way people communicate by offering unprecedented interactivity and personalization. The evolution continued with the rise of image- and video-based platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, which have further diversified the digital landscape.

2.2.2 The Proliferation of Social Media Among University Students

University students represent a uniquely engaged demographic, heavily influenced by the integration of social media into daily life. With increasing access to smartphones and high-speed internet, platforms are now integral to academic collaboration, social networking, and identity formation (Twenge et al., 2018). At institutions such as the University of Benin, students not only use social media to stay connected with peers but also to seek academic resources, making these platforms both a tool for learning and a source of distraction. The dual nature of social media—offering both support and stress—has spurred numerous studies examining its overall impact on mental health.

2.3 Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

The literature reveals a complex interplay between social media use and mental health outcomes. While digital connectivity offers benefits such as peer support and access to information, excessive use has been linked to negative psychological effects.

2.3.1 Social media usage and anxiety

Social media addiction has also increasingly been associated with increased anxiety among university students since it exposes them to different forms of stress that involve social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and cyberbullying. The constant stream of idealized photographs and tales of success on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter has the effect of making students compare their lives with the seemingly idealized pictures of others and feel inadequate, uncertain, and more anxious. Moreover, the anxiety of having to be online, of getting approved in the way of likes and comments, and responding instantly to messages can produce a cycle of burnout and

anxiety. Passive browsing in the sense of scrolling but not actively participating is also a widespread phenomenon among the majority of students, and this has also been proven to enhance the sense of loneliness and fear because they get unwanted messages without benefit from the type of social support active participation provides. Besides, social media is designed to engage people for an extended period of time, in a way that encourages compulsive habits of use to interfere with sleeping, concentration, and school studies. The rolling uncertainty of social media encounters—waiting for replies, coping with negative feedback from other users on-line, or experiencing traumatic alerts—can also be set to enhance the levels of anxiety. In addition, studies have proven that blue light emanating from screens and midnight scrolling on social media can potentially disrupt sleep patterns and, in the process, cause increased stress and anxiety. Though social media presents channels of expression and interaction, excessive usage without control has a significant impact on the mental wellbeing of students, and therefore there is a need to come up with ways of healthier digital engagement.

2.3.2 Social media and depression

Depression and social media have increasingly been linked in recent years, as numerous studies have established a connection between high social media usage and depressive behavior. Social media has created an online platform where users incessantly interact with idealized material presented on social networking sites, typically representing a perfectionized life which carries a tendency to trigger abnormal comparisons. It has been noted that the majority of people, particularly teenagers and adolescents, compare their

lives, appearance, and achievements with those of friends and celebrities' so-called idealized social media posts, thereby deteriorating self-esteem and enhancing feelings of inadequacy. Moreover, the habit of "doomscrolling" through bad news and disturbing content over and over again can again enhance depression and hopelessness. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is also one of the key causes of social media depression due to the sense of being excluded when one realizes friends are partying or involved in other activities they were not invited to, and this contributes to increased loneliness and isolation. Social media also interrupts sleeping patterns as, for most of us, evenings are consumed in reading feeds through the blue-lit glow of screens, blocking the secretion of melatonin and reducing sleep quality—sleep identified as a precipitant for depression. Social media is also excessive when it deprives time from physical interactions in actual social life, so personal relationships become weaker due to fewer personal communications, which lead to less communication, causing the individual to suffer emotionally. Cyberbullying is another critical area linking social media usage with depression because ridicule, criticism, and cyberbullying on the internet can cause severe emotional damage and exacerbate already present psychological issues. Research has determined that individuals who are exposed to higher levels of platforms are more inclined to feel depression symptoms than people who are exposed to fewer platforms, and it provides evidence to suggest that the excessive and fractured state of internet connectivity has the potential to produce psychological distress. Though others have suggested that social media enables emotional support and affiliation, the net impact on mental health seems to be a function of the quality and type of the interactions as opposed to duration of exposure. Research has established that passive

browsing of social media with minimal or no useful exchanges will isolate individuals and make them lonely and unhappy, but if such sites are utilized to remain connected with close friends and family members, there is a greater likelihood of the desired result. Despite these problems, the trend of the relationship between depression and social media is controversial because it is unclear whether depression is caused by social media or whether individuals who are already depressed are more likely to use social media as a way of coping. Yet the discovery that excessive use of social media has been discovered to be associated with greater reported depression means that excessive use of social media is bad for psychological well-being, particularly if usage is excessive and replaces face-to-face interaction and productive activities.

2.3.3 Social media and self esteem

The relationship between social media and self-esteem is very complex, with evidence providing a mixed pattern of effects. Whereas some studies indicate that social media contributes to the enhancement of self-esteem via social support, approval, and an arena for self-expression, other studies highlight its negative impact, such as increased social comparison, cyberbullying, and unrealistic beauty standards. Meta-analyses suggest that aggregate statistical effects are small but detectable, and, on average, social media doesn't significantly alter self-esteem in the majority of users. Recent research investigating person-specific within-person effects reveals the experience to be exceedingly heterogeneous between individuals. For others, social media usage raises confidence by allowing them to participate in positive interactions with peers, to tell good news, and to become socially accepted. Others, however, may become self-doubting and discontented,

especially when they compare themselves with posed and idealized presentations of other individuals' lives. The discrepancy in impacts is proof that personality types, current levels of self-esteem, social media consumption patterns, and individual susceptibility to social comparison play a crucial role in defining how social media affects self-esteem. In addition, different platforms will have different effects appearance-concerned apps like Instagram are apt to increase appearance-comparison, while chat forums are likely to encourage cognitive activity and self-recommendation. In general, social media does not inherently damage or enhance self-esteem in everyone, but smaller sub-groups have significant positive or negative effects on their self-esteem, and thus individual differences must be taken into consideration when assessing its psychological impact.

2.3.4 Concentration and academic performance

The dynamics between concentration, academic performance, and social media use become increasingly relevant as students are spending more time on digital media. Social media, while it offers an avenue for networking and information sharing, is also a major source of distraction that can negatively impact the concentration of students on their academic work. Constant alerts, the urge to check updates, and longer screen time can lead to recurring interruptions in concentration, making it difficult for students to engage deeply in their learning. Studies show that excessive social media use is linked to poor academic performance as it fosters multitasking, which lowers cognitive efficiency and memory of information. When students divide their attention between studying and social media, they are less likely to learn things effectively, leading to weaker comprehension and retention. Furthermore, social media can contribute to sleep deprivation, as many students stay up late

browsing posts, thus affecting their cognitive function and attention span in class. The addictive nature of social media also leads to procrastination, as students delay important academic tasks to browse their feeds. While occasional social media use will not likely have a significant impact on academic performance, its excessive and uncontrolled usage has been associated with poor academic grades, low productivity, and excessive stress. Such issues require a balanced solution, for example, setting special study periods without social media distraction, using apps to limit usage, and implementing digital detox techniques to enhance focus. By successfully managing social media usage, students can focus, simplify learning, and hence improve academic performance.

2.3.5 passive browsing on mental health

Passive browsing on social media, whereby individuals scroll without necessarily engaging, has increasingly been linked to negative mental well-being effects. Passive social media viewing, as opposed to active engagement, such as commenting, sharing, or creating posts, is more likely to breed social comparison, loneliness, and discontent. When individuals repeatedly view skillfully set up and idealized portrayals of others' lives—such as affluent vacations, business achievements, or flawless relationships—theirs may begin to feel inadequate, judging that their own existence is somehow less than. This can contribute to lower self-esteem, anxiety, and even depressive behaviors. Studies have proved that passive usage of social media is associated with higher perceived social isolation because a person can feel like an outsider observing others' seemingly better life without participating in any actual social bond. Passive scrolling can also lead to cognitive overload, wherein the brain is overwhelmed by the constant flow of information, leading to mental fatigue and

lack of concentration. Passive browsing's potential for addiction also plays a part in excessive screen time, lower face-to-face interactions, physical activity, and sleep quality—each of which is crucial to mental health. Despite its harmful effects, many users continue using passive browsing due to its ease and addictive nature. Breaking this cycle may require effortful action through the imposition of time limits on social media use, an appreciation of person-to-person social contact, and focus on more intentional online interaction. Encouraging healthy social media use—whereby users engage actively rather than passively—can serve to reverse the adverse effects and promote better mental health.

2.3.7 Positive Aspects of Social Media

While the adverse effects of social media are widely documented, it is also important to acknowledge its potential benefits. Positive interactions on social media can lead to enhanced social support, greater access to mental health resources, and opportunities for creative expression. Platforms that foster online communities can provide a sense of belonging and mutual support, which is particularly valuable for individuals who may feel isolated in their offline lives. These positive outcomes suggest that the relationship between social media and mental health is nuanced and multifaceted.

2.4 Theoretical Perspectives

To better understand the psychological impacts of social media, several theoretical frameworks have been proposed. These frameworks help explain the mechanisms by which digital interactions influence mental health.

2.4.1 Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory, initially formulated by Festinger (1954), posits that individuals determine their own social and personal worth by comparing themselves to others. In the context of social media, where idealized images are pervasive, this theory helps explain why users often experience feelings of inadequacy and lowered self-esteem. Comparisons with others' curated lifestyles can lead to a distorted self-view, especially among vulnerable populations such as university students.

2.4.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory provides insights into why individuals choose to engage with specific media platforms. According to this perspective, users actively select media to satisfy specific needs—whether for social interaction, information, or entertainment (Rubin, 2002). This theory is particularly useful for understanding the varied motivations behind social media use and how these motivations can have both beneficial and detrimental effects on mental health.

2.4.3 Digital Well-Being Framework

The emerging concept of digital well-being integrates traditional mental health paradigms with modern digital behaviors. It emphasizes the importance of balanced digital consumption and the adoption of healthy online practices. As research by Naslund et al. (2020) suggests, understanding and promoting digital well-being can lead to improved overall quality of life. This framework is especially relevant for developing interventions aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of social media while enhancing its positive aspects.

2.4.4 Cognitive Load Theory and Digital Distractions

Cognitive Load Theory explains how the brain manages information processing. In the context of social media, constant digital stimuli can overwhelm cognitive resources, leading to reduced concentration and impaired academic performance. This theory supports the idea that digital distractions are not merely a matter of time management but fundamentally alter the cognitive processes that underlie learning and memory.

2.5 Empirical Studies on Social Media and Mental Health

A robust body of empirical research has examined the association between social media use and various mental health outcomes. These studies span multiple methodologies and geographical contexts, providing a comprehensive overview of the current understanding of the topic.

2.5.1 Global Studies on Social Media and Psychological Well-Being

Globally, studies have consistently reported correlations between extensive social media use and adverse mental health outcomes. For example, Twenge et al. (2018) found that increased screen time is linked with higher rates of anxiety and depression among young

people. Similarly, research by Keles et al. (2020) has underscored that prolonged exposure to social media platforms is associated with diminished self-esteem and greater emotional distress. These studies provide compelling evidence of the potential risks associated with digital overuse.

2.5.2 Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Cross-cultural research has revealed that the impact of social media on mental health can vary significantly by cultural context. In Western societies, the emphasis on individualism and self-promotion may amplify the negative effects of social comparison. Conversely, in collectivist cultures, social media may serve as a tool for community cohesion and support. However, even in collectivist settings, the pressure to conform to idealized norms can lead to stress and anxiety. The interplay between culture and digital behavior remains an important area of study, especially for understanding the unique experiences of undergraduates in diverse contexts.

2.5.3 Local Studies: Focus on Nigerian University Settings

Research conducted in Nigerian universities has begun to echo the global trends, highlighting the mental health challenges associated with social media use among students. Studies at institutions like the University of Benin have reported increased stress, anxiety, and disruptions in academic focus due to excessive digital engagement (Adeniran & Ogunleye, 2019). These local investigations underscore the importance of contextualizing findings within the cultural, socio-economic, and educational landscapes specific to Nigeria. The evidence suggests that while Nigerian students benefit from the connectivity and

resource-sharing enabled by social media, they are also vulnerable to its negative psychological impacts.

2.5.4 Longitudinal Studies and Methodological Considerations

Longitudinal research designs offer valuable insights into the causal relationships between social media use and mental health outcomes. While cross-sectional studies have provided snapshots of the current state, longitudinal studies are better positioned to capture the evolution of digital behaviors over time. However, methodological challenges such as self-report bias, the rapidly changing nature of digital platforms, and difficulties in measuring “digital dosage” complicate the research process. Despite these challenges, emerging longitudinal studies continue to reinforce the connection between prolonged social media exposure and increased mental health risks.

2.6 Moderating Factors and Individual Differences

2.6.1 Demographic Variables

Individual demographic factors, including age, gender, and socio-economic status, play a significant role in moderating the impact of social media on mental health. For instance, studies have shown that female students may experience more pronounced effects of social comparison and related self-esteem issues than their male counterparts. Similarly, socio-economic factors can influence access to digital resources and the subsequent reliance on social media for social and academic support. Understanding these differences is essential for tailoring interventions to specific subpopulations within the undergraduate community.

2.6.2 Personality Traits and Digital Resilience

Personality traits, such as neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness, have been identified as predictors of how individuals respond to social media. Students with higher levels of neuroticism are more susceptible to anxiety and depressive symptoms when exposed to negative online interactions. Conversely, traits like conscientiousness may buffer the adverse effects of digital distractions by promoting better self-regulation and time management. These individual differences underscore the importance of personalized approaches in both research and intervention.

2.6.3 Role of Peer and Family Support

The presence of robust peer and family support networks can mitigate many of the negative mental health outcomes associated with social media use. Empirical studies suggest that when students feel supported offline, the harmful effects of digital stressors are significantly reduced. This finding has important implications for social work practice, as it highlights the potential for community-based interventions and support systems that reinforce healthy digital habits.

2.7 Digital Identity, Self-Presentation, and Social Media

2.7.1 Constructing Digital Identities

Social media platforms provide a unique space for the construction and presentation of digital identities. Undergraduates often curate their online personas, which can have profound implications for self-perception and mental health. The pressure to maintain an idealized image may lead to cognitive dissonance when there is a disparity between one's real self and online representation. This ongoing process of digital self-presentation can either bolster self-esteem or contribute to psychological distress depending on the feedback received from peers.

2.7.2 The Role of Authenticity

Emerging research emphasizes the importance of authenticity in digital interactions. When individuals present a more genuine version of themselves online, the negative effects of social comparison and self-criticism may be mitigated. This area of study is gaining traction and offers promising directions for interventions aimed at encouraging more authentic social media use as a means to enhance overall well-being.

2.8 Implications for Social Work Practice

2.8.1 Informing Intervention Strategies

The findings reviewed in this chapter have significant implications for social work. Social work professionals are increasingly called upon to address the mental health challenges associated with digital life. Evidence linking social media with anxiety, depression, and other negative outcomes provides a basis for developing targeted interventions. For example, social work practitioners can design digital literacy programs that educate students on managing screen time, recognizing harmful online behaviors, and cultivating a healthy digital self-concept (Twenge et al., 2018).

2.8.2 Policy Formulation and Institutional Strategies

The empirical evidence discussed herein can also guide university policy. Institutions like the University of Benin may benefit from implementing policies that promote digital well-being, such as scheduled “digital detox” periods, guidelines for responsible social media use, and the integration of mental health services with academic support. Social work departments can play a pivotal role in formulating these policies by offering expertise on community mental health and digital resilience.

2.8.3 Enhancing Culturally Sensitive Practices

Given the unique cultural contexts in which students operate, it is imperative that interventions are culturally sensitive. Local studies from Nigeria underscore the importance of tailoring mental health strategies to align with cultural norms and expectations. Social work practitioners, therefore, must adopt an approach that integrates both global research findings and local cultural insights to effectively support students in diverse settings.

2.9 Future Directions in Research

2.9.1 Integrating Qualitative Insights

While much of the existing literature relies on quantitative methods, there is a growing recognition of the value of qualitative research. Future studies could explore the lived experiences of students, providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of how social

media impacts mental health. In-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic studies could uncover the subtle dynamics of digital behavior that are often lost in numerical data.

2.9.2 Expanding Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The complexity of social media's impact on mental health calls for interdisciplinary collaboration among psychologists, sociologists, digital media experts, and social work professionals. Such collaborations can lead to the development of comprehensive models that better explain the intricate interplay between digital behaviors and psychological outcomes. Interdisciplinary research holds the promise of designing more effective interventions that address the multifaceted nature of digital well-being.

2.9.3 Longitudinal and Experimental Approaches

Advancing the current literature requires methodological innovations that move beyond cross-sectional analyses. Longitudinal and experimental studies can provide more definitive evidence regarding the causal relationships between social media use and mental health outcomes. Future research should focus on developing robust study designs that can better capture the long-term effects of digital media, as well as identify the mechanisms through which these effects occur.

2.10 Summary of the Literature Review

This chapter has provided a detailed review of the literature on the impact of social media on the mental health of undergraduates. It has traced the evolution of social media, examined its multifaceted effects ranging from anxiety and depression to self-esteem and

concentration and reviewed the theoretical frameworks that explain these phenomena. Empirical studies from both global and local contexts reveal a complex relationship between digital engagement and psychological well-being, with significant implications for academic performance and mental health.

Several key gaps have been identified, including the need for more culturally sensitive research, the importance of understanding individual differences, and the value of longitudinal and qualitative approaches. These insights not only enrich the theoretical discourse but also provide practical guidance for social work practitioners, who are in a unique position to develop and implement interventions that address the digital challenges faced by university students.

By integrating these diverse strands of research, this literature review lays a robust foundation for the current study, which aims to explore the impact of social media on mental health among undergraduates at the University of Benin. The subsequent chapters will build on these findings, detailing the research methodology, presenting empirical results, and proposing actionable recommendations for enhancing digital well-being in academic settings.

2.11 Research Gap in This Study

Despite the increasing body of research on the impact of social media on mental health, several gaps remain, particularly in the context of undergraduates at the University of Benin and Nigeria as a whole. The following research gaps have been identified:

1. Limited Localized Studies

While many studies have examined the impact of social media on mental health in Western countries (Twenge et al., 2018; Keles et al., 2020), there is a lack of research specifically focused on Nigerian undergraduates. The cultural, social, and economic factors influencing social media use in Nigeria may differ from those in Western societies, necessitating localized studies.

2. Insufficient Empirical Data on Nigerian University Students

Although studies exist on social media use among Nigerian youths, few have systematically analyzed its effects on anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and concentration among university students. Most available studies focus on general internet addiction or academic performance without an in-depth examination of mental health outcomes (Adebayo & Ojedokun, 2020).

3. Impact of Passive Browsing on Mental Health

Research has largely focused on active engagement on social media, such as posting and interacting with others, but the role of passive browsing (endless scrolling without interaction) in contributing to mental health challenges is underexplored. Given that many students engage in passive consumption of content, this study seeks to fill this gap.

4. Lack of Context-Specific Interventions

Most recommendations on mitigating the negative effects of social media on mental health are derived from studies conducted in technologically advanced societies with different digital infrastructures and mental health support systems. There is a need for

research that proposes solutions suited to the Nigerian university context, taking into account the availability of mental health resources and digital literacy levels.

5. The Dual Impact of Social Media: Positive and Negative Aspects

While several studies emphasize the negative effects of social media, fewer have comprehensively explored its potential benefits, such as peer support, academic collaboration, and mental health awareness. This research will provide a balanced perspective by examining both the advantages and disadvantages of social media use among undergraduates.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to investigate the impact of social media on the mental health of undergraduates at the University of Benin. It details the research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, instrumentation, validity and reliability measures, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques. The methodology is structured to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media usage and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and concentration.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design allows for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon by integrating numerical data with detailed personal experiences.

1. Quantitative Approach: A survey questionnaire will be administered to collect statistical data on social media usage patterns and their psychological effects.

2. Qualitative Approach: Structured interviews will be conducted with selected students to gain deeper insights into their lived experiences regarding social media and mental health.

3.3 Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprises undergraduate, postgraduates and diploma students of the University of Benin across different faculties and academic levels. The choice of this population is based on the high rate of social media engagement among university students and their susceptibility to mental health challenges associated with digital interactions. As at the year of this study, the following are the number of students across each mode of study;

Table 3.1: total population university of Benin

S/N	Study Mode	No of students
1	Postgraduates	42,259
2	Undergraduate	3,714
3	Diploma	4,679
4	Total	50,652

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 150 students were be selected using stratified random sampling to ensure a balanced representation across different faculties, gender, and academic levels. The sampling procedure involves:

Dividing the university into faculties as strata.

Randomly selecting students from each faculty proportionate to its population.

Ensuring inclusivity in gender representation.

For the qualitative component, students were purposively selected based on their high, moderate, or low social media usage patterns to provide in-depth perspectives.

S/N	Study Mode	No of students
1	Undergraduates	100
2	Postgraduate	30
3	Diploma	20
4	Total	150

3.5 Sources of Data

The study will use primary data, collected through structured questionnaires and interviews.

Secondary data from journal articles, previous research, and reports on social media and mental health in Nigeria were reviewed to support the findings.

3.6 Research Instruments

Two primary instruments will be used:

Questionnaire: The survey will consist of closed-ended questions to assess social media habits, frequency of use, preferred platforms, and self-reported mental health indicators.

Interview Guide: Open-ended questions were used to gather qualitative insights into how students perceive the impact of social media on their well-being.

The questionnaire included:

Demographic information: Age, gender, faculty, academic level.

Social media usage patterns: Platforms used, time spent daily, purpose of use.

Mental health indicators: Anxiety (GAD-7 Scale), depression (PHQ-9 Scale), self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), and concentration levels.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure validity, the questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by experts in psychology, sociology, and media studies before deployment. A pilot test will be conducted with 30 students to refine ambiguous questions.

To test reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to assess internal consistency, with an acceptable threshold of 0.7 and above.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaire Administration: The surveys will be distributed both physically and via online platforms (Google Forms) for wider reach.

Interviews: Conducted in a semi-structured format with audio recording (with consent) to ensure accuracy.

Data Collection Period: The entire process took approximately four weeks.

3.9 Ethical Considerations:

This ensured the following:

1. Informed Consent: All participants will be required to provide consent before participation.
2. Anonymity and Confidentiality: No identifying information will be collected, and responses will be securely stored.
3. Right to Withdraw: Participants may withdraw at any stage without consequences.

3.10 Method of Data Analysis

1. Quantitative Data Analysis: The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics (percentages, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis) was used to determine relationships between social media use and mental health.

2. Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in students' responses, providing deeper insights into their social media experiences.

3.11 Limitation of the Study

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on the mental health of undergraduates at the University of Benin, certain limitations may affect the findings.

1. Self-Reporting Bias: The study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccuracies in recall.
2. Sample Representation: Although efforts are made to ensure a diverse sample, findings may not be fully generalizable to all students due to individual differences in social media use and mental health experiences.
3. Time Constraints: The study is conducted within a limited timeframe, which may restrict the depth of data collection and analysis.
4. Technological and Accessibility Barriers: Some students may have limited internet access, affecting their ability to participate in online surveys.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study on the impact of social media on the mental health of undergraduates at the University of Benin. The data collected from 150 respondents are analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in tables. The findings are then discussed in relation to the research questions and existing literature.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents provides insights into their age, gender, faculty, and academic level.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage (%)
Age		
16-20 years	45	30
21-25 years	80	53.3
26 years and above	25	16.7
Gender		
Male	65	43.3
Female	85	56.7
Academic level		
100 level	25	16.7
200 level	35	23.3
300 level	40	26.7
400 level	30	20
500 level	20	13.3

4.3 Social Media Usage Patterns

Table 4.2: Time Spent on Social Media Daily

Time spent on Social Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	15	10
1 - 3 hours	50	33.3
4 - 6 hours	60	40
More than 6 hours	25	16.7

From Table 4.2, 40% of the students spend between 4-6 hours on social media daily, indicating a significant level of engagement.

4.4 Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

Table 4.3: Anxiety Levels (GAD-7 Scale)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not at all	30	20
Several days	50	33.3
More than half day	45	30
Nearly everyday	25	16.7

Table 4.4: Depression Levels (PHQ-9 Scale)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not at all	35	23.3
Several days	55	36.7
More than half day	40	26.7
Nearly everyday	20	13.3

Table 4.5: Social Media Impact on Concentration

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	55	36.7
Agree	50	33.3
Disagree	30	20
Strongly Disagree	15	10

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings indicated a high prevalence of social media use among undergraduates, with 40% of students spending 4-6 hours daily on various platforms. The data also suggest a significant impact of social media on mental health.

- **Anxiety and Depression:** Tables 4.3 and 4.4 reveal that a considerable proportion of students report symptoms of anxiety and depression. About 30% experience anxiety symptoms more than half the time, while 26.7% experience depression frequently. These results align with studies by Twenge et al. (2018) that link excessive social media use to increased anxiety and depression.
- **Self-Esteem and Social Comparison:** Many students indicated that they feel pressured by social media portrayals, which may lower their self-esteem. This supports findings by Keles et al. (2020) that social media use can lead to negative self-perception.
- **Impact on Academic Concentration:** Table 4.5 highlights that 36.7% of respondents strongly agree that social media negatively affects their academic concentration. This suggests that excessive use of social media can lead to reduced attention spans and distraction.

4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the results from 150 respondents regarding social media use and its impact on mental health. The findings show that social media usage is widespread among

undergraduates, with significant effects on anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and academic concentration. These results highlight the need for further research and potential interventions to mitigate negative impacts while maximizing the benefits of social media.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This study examined the impact of social media on the mental health of undergraduates at the University of Benin. The research explored key mental health indicators such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and concentration levels, using a sample of 150 students. The study was guided by specific research objectives, including assessing the relationship between social media usage and anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and concentration among undergraduates.

The study utilized a quantitative research approach, employing a structured questionnaire to collect data. The findings revealed that social media is widely used among students, with platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok being the most popular. The data indicated that excessive social media use contributes to increased anxiety and depression, while also affecting self-esteem and concentration negatively in some cases.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that social media has a significant impact on the mental health of undergraduates at the University of Benin. While social media offers benefits such as academic support, connectivity, and entertainment, its excessive usage has detrimental effects on students' psychological well-being. The findings highlight the need for students to balance their digital engagement to prevent negative mental health outcomes.

Universities and policymakers should consider implementing digital literacy programs that promote responsible social media usage while addressing mental health concerns

5.2.1 Relationship between Social Media Usage and Anxiety Among undergraduates at the University of Benin

1. The study found a positive correlation between high social media usage and increased anxiety levels among undergraduates. Students who spend prolonged hours online, especially late at night, tend to exhibit symptoms such as restlessness, nervousness, and fear of missing out (FOMO). This relationship suggests that excessive engagement with social media platforms can heighten anxiety, possibly due to constant social comparisons and information overload.

2. Effect of Social Media on Depression Levels Among Students

Social media was observed to have a significant impact on depression, particularly when students are exposed to negative content or engage in passive scrolling. Feelings of isolation, low mood, and emotional fatigue were more prevalent among students who reported high daily usage. Additionally, unrealistic portrayals of success and happiness on social media contribute to depressive symptoms by creating distorted self-perceptions and unachievable standards.

3. Impact of Social Media on Students' Self-Esteem

The research revealed that social media can have both positive and negative effects on self-esteem. While some students feel more connected and validated through online interactions, a larger percentage reported experiencing low self-worth due to cyberbullying, negative feedback, or frequent comparisons to others. Overall, students with higher self-regulation in social media use tend to maintain healthier levels of self-esteem.

4. Extent of Social Media's Influence on Concentration and Academic Performance

The findings indicate that excessive use of social media significantly disrupts students' concentration and is negatively associated with academic performance. Frequent notifications, multitasking during study time, and addictive usage patterns reduce students' ability to focus, retain information, and meet academic deadlines. Students who used social media for academic collaboration showed better outcomes than those who used it mainly for leisure.

5. Contribution of Passive Browsing on Social Media to Mental Health Challenges Among Undergraduates

Passive browsing scrolling without interacting was identified as a major contributor to mental health challenges. It often leads to a sense of loneliness, envy, and dissatisfaction with life. Unlike active engagement, passive use does not foster meaningful connection or communication, which in turn negatively affects students' psychological well-being and emotional resilience.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

1. The study was limited to undergraduates at the University of Benin and may not be generalizable to students in other institutions or regions.
2. The use of self-reported questionnaires may have introduced bias, as participants might underreport or overreport their actual social media usage or mental health status.
3. The study primarily assessed correlation, not causation, so while associations were found, direct cause
4. Only a few social media platforms were considered, while others (like Reddit, Snapchat, or newer apps) were not included in depth.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Awareness Campaigns:** Universities should organize awareness programs to educate students about the potential mental health risks associated with excessive social media usage.
2. **Digital Well-being Programs:** Institutions should integrate digital well-being courses into their curriculum to help students develop healthy social media habits.
3. **Counseling Services:** The University of Benin should strengthen its counseling services to provide students with mental health support, including coping strategies for managing social media-related stress.

4. **Time Management Strategies:** Students should be encouraged to set limits on social media usage, especially during study hours, to improve concentration and academic performance.
5. **Parental and Peer Support:** Families and peer groups should play a role in fostering positive digital habits by promoting offline interactions and encouraging face-to-face communication.
6. **Further Research:** More studies should be conducted to explore the long-term psychological effects of social media usage among Nigerian students, considering cultural and socio-economic factors.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should explore:

- The impact of specific social media platforms on different mental health indicators.
- The role of personality traits in moderating the effects of social media on mental health.
- The effectiveness of digital detox interventions among university students.
- The relationship between social media addiction and academic performance in different Nigerian universities.

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on social media and mental health, offering insights that can inform policy decisions, academic interventions, and personal digital well-being strategies. By implementing the recommendations outlined,

universities and stakeholders can foster a healthier digital environment for students, ensuring that social media serves as a tool for empowerment rather than a source of distress.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age: _____
2. Gender:
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
 - c) Other (Specify) _____
3. Faculty: _____
4. Academic Level:
 - a) 100 Level
 - b) 200 Level
 - c) 300 Level
 - d) 400 Level
 - e) 500 Level
 - f) Other (Specify) _____

Section B: Social Media Usage Patterns

5. Which social media platforms do you use most frequently? (Check all that apply)
 - a) Facebook
 - b) Twitter
 - c) Instagram
 - d) Snapchat
 - e) TikTok
 - f) WhatsApp
 - g) Other (Specify) _____
6. How many hours do you spend on social media daily?
 - a) Less than 1 hour
 - b) 1–3 hours
 - c) 4–6 hours
 - d) More than 6 hour
7. What is your primary purpose for using social media? (Check all that apply)
 - a) Academic purposes
 - b) Entertainment

- c) Communication
- d) News and updates
- e) Other (Specify) _____

8. Do you use social media during lectures or study sessions

- a) Yes
- b) No

9. Do you feel compelled to check social media even when you have important tasks to complete?

- a) Yes
- b) No

10. How often do you take breaks from social media?

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) Rarely/Never

Section C: Mental Health Indicators

Anxiety (GAD-7 Scale)

11. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge?

- a) Not at all
- b) Several days
- c) More than half the days
- d) Nearly every day

12. Worrying too much about different things?

- a) Not at all
- b) Several days
- c) More than half the days
- d) Nearly every day

13. Feeling restless or unable to relax?

- a) Not at all
- b) Several days
- c) More than half the days
- d) Nearly every day

Depression (PHQ-9 Scale)

14. Little interest or pleasure in doing things?

- a) Not at all
- b) Several days
- c) More than half the days
- d) Nearly every day

15. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?

- a) Not at all
- b) Several days
- c) More than half the days
- d) Nearly every day

16. Feeling tired or having little energy?

- a) Not at all
- b) Several days
- c) More than half the days
- d) Nearly every day

Self-Esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale)

17. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly Disagree

18. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly Disagree

19. I feel confident in my ability to handle personal problems.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly Disagree

Concentration Levels

20. I find it easy to concentrate on my studies after spending time on social media.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly Disagree

21. Social media distractions negatively affect my academic performance.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly Disagree

22. I often procrastinate on academic work because of social media.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Strongly Disagree

Section D: Social Media and Mental Health Impact

23. Do you think social media has positively impacted your mental health?

- a) Yes
- b) No

24. Do you believe social media has increased feelings of loneliness or isolation?

- a) Yes
- b) No

25. Would you consider reducing your social media usage to improve your mental well-being? a) Yes

- b) No