

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Social media in recent years has become a vital part of the daily lives of students, especially in the jurisdiction of higher education. In Nigeria, Mass Communication students are not left out of the global shift toward digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Tiktok and more. According to a Datareportal (2024) report, social media had more than five billion global users, which is equal to more than 62% of the world population. This includes apps or websites designed for messaging and chat, social platforms (like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok), and community forums, such as Reddit and Discord.

The earliest forms of social media appeared almost as soon as technology could support them. In the words of Driscoll (2022), the standard account of internet history took shape in the early 1990s, as a mixture of online services, university networks and local community networks mutated into something bigger, more commercial and more accessible to the general public. E-mail and chat programmes debuted in the early 1970s, but persistent communities did not surface until the creation of the discussion group network User's network (USENET) in 1979. Usenet distributes thousands of topically oriented discussion groups, reaching millions of readers worldwide. (Baym, 1994). USENET allowed users to post and receive messages within subject areas called newsgroups.

According to Adebisi and Ogunlade (2011), the first recognisable social network sites were Classmates.com and SixDegrees.com. These platforms were the first companies to launch web-based social networks. Classmates.com, which was launched in 1995, used an aggressive pop-up advertising campaign to attract visitors to its website. It built its social network around

existing connections between members of high school and college graduating classes, military branches, and workplaces. In the same vein, SixDegrees.com, which was launched in 1997, is said to be the first true social networking website. Boyd and Ellison, (2007) note that the social networking site began with the majority of the features that would come to define such sites: members could build profiles for themselves, keep lists of friends, and communicate with one another using the site's private message system. SixDegrees.com promoted itself as a tool to help people connect with and send messages to others and attracted millions of users, it however failed to become a sustainable business and in 2000, the service closed.

In the words of Adegoke and Adebisi, (2021), social media as a concept gained popularity in the early twenty-first century. Social networks like Friendster and MySpace emerged, allowing family members, friends, and acquaintances to communicate online. These two sites were later surpassed by Facebook, which has billions of users worldwide. The primary objective of early social media platforms, including MySpace and LiveJournal, were designed for people to connect with friends and family. MySpace, which allowed users to create personal profile pages and share information about themselves, became the first network to reach one million active monthly users in 2004. Similarly, LiveJournal, a platform where users could share journal-like entries with either public or private networks, reached over 2.5 million active accounts in 2005. Social media, initially designed for social interaction, has gradually expanded into a platform for news, education, activism, and entertainment. However, concerns have arisen regarding its impact on mental health, particularly among young adults. While social media has facilitated communication and collaboration among students, there are concerns that excessive use may contribute to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017).

The concept of mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which includes their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It is an important constituent of general health that affects how people handle obstacles in life, reach their full potential, and give back to their communities. The ease of access to online content and the constant need for validation through likes and comments can lead to emotional distress. Most of the students are often exposed to the pressures of maintaining an online presence; these issues may be even more pronounced. (Ebere and Orji 2020).

Furthermore, the rapid advancement of digital technology has led to the widespread adoption of social media platforms, with over 5.24 billion people worldwide using social media in 2025, representing roughly 63.9 % of the global population . This fundamentally transforms the way people communicate, access information, and engage in social interactions. (DataReportal, 2025). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and others have become integral parts of students' lives, particularly among undergraduates pursuing Mass Communication. These students, who are constantly engaged in media-related activities, often rely on social media for news, networking, academic collaboration, and entertainment. However, while social media offers numerous advantages, concerns have been raised about its potential negative impact on mental health, (Twenge, 2019). Social media usage has been linked to various mental health concerns, including anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem, (Primack, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz, Hoover, Sitzer and Miller 2017).

In the words of Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020), among Mass Communication students, who are often required to be active on digital platforms for academic and professional reasons, the risk of social media-induced mental health issues may be even more pronounced.

Chou and Edge (2012),emphasise that students who are exposed to social media frequently encounter curated and idealised portrayals of their peers' lives, which can lead to negative self-perceptions and heightened stress levels. Huang, (2017) further supported this, indicating that prolonged social media engagement correlates with higher levels of depressive symptoms, particularly among young adults.

According to WHO (2022), mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. WHO (2022), asserts that mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders, suggesting that mental health is about managing active conditions and maintaining wellness and happiness. It is an essential component of health and well-being, supporting individuals and groups' ability to make decisions, form relationships, and create the world. It is critical to individual, communal, and socioeconomic development. Importantly, mental health encompasses more than just the absence of mental diseases. It exists on a complex continuum that is experienced differently by everyone, with variable degrees of difficulty and distress, as well as potentially very different social and therapeutic results. It is against this background that the study investigates the Influence of Social Media on the Mental Health of Mass Communication Undergraduates in Select Universities in Edo State, Nigeria.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Mental health among university students is a growing concern globally, with social media usage often cited as a major contributing factor. (Fuchs, 2017). Social media has a profound effect on the mental health of young adults, leading to increased cases of stress, anxiety, and depression (Ogunyemi, 2020). Undergraduates studying Mass Communication use social media extensively as a tool for academic and professional networking because of their distinct and

related line of work. However, the constant exposure to curated content, cyberbullying and the pressure of online validation can negatively affect their mental health (Akinmoladun and Oluwole, 2019).

Despite the increasing reliance on social media among Nigerian students, there seems to be a lack of in-depth research on its specific impact on the mental health of undergraduates Mass Communication students in Edo State. Mass Communication students face unique challenges due to the nature of their academic discipline, which requires them to engage actively with digital platforms. While social media provides them with opportunities for learning, networking, and professional development, it could expose them to risks such as cyberbullying, addiction, sleep disturbances, and mental fatigue.

Another major concern is the phenomenon of social media addiction, which leads to compulsive and excessive usage that interferes with students' daily lives. Many students struggle to balance their academic responsibilities with their social media activities, leading to decreased productivity and concentration issues. This compulsive usage can also contribute to stress and anxiety, as students feel pressured to remain constantly connected and updated on trending topics. Another significant issue is the impact of social comparison on students' mental health. Social media platforms often present idealised portrayals of people's lives, leading students to compare themselves unfavourably with their peers. This can result in feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and even depression. Mass Communication undergraduates, who are more immersed in digital culture, may be particularly vulnerable to such effects.

Additionally, cyberbullying and online harassment have become major issues in the digital space. Many students report experiencing negative interactions online, which can lead to emotional distress, social withdrawal, and a decline in overall mental well-being. The anonymity

provided by social media platforms often encourages hostile behaviours, further exacerbating the problem. Furthermore, information overload and constant exposure to distressing content contribute to mental exhaustion among students. With the vast amount of news and digital content available, students often feel overwhelmed, leading to cognitive fatigue and difficulty in processing information effectively. This has implications for their academic performance and overall psychological health. Despite the existing body of research, there remains a gap in understanding the specific experiences of Mass Communication students in Edo State concerning social media and mental health.

Given these concerns, it is imperative to investigate the specific ways in which social media affects the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates. There is a need for a more focused study that examines how students in media-related fields like Mass Communication navigate these challenges. Therefore, this study examines the Influence of Social Media on the Mental Health of Mass Communication Undergraduates in Select Universities in Edo State.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Examine the extent of the use of social media by Mass Communication undergraduates in select universities in Edo State.
2. Ascertain how the preferred type of social media affects the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State.
3. Find out the Influence of the use of social media on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State.

4. Determine the factors contributing to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates due to social media engagement.
5. Find out the challenges Mass Communication undergraduates face in Edo State in their use of social media

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State use social media?
2. How does the use of preferred type of social media affect the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates?
3. What is the influence of social media use on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in select universities in Edo State?
4. What factors contribute to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates because of social media engagement?
5. What are the challenges faced by Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State in their use of social media?

#### **1.5 Hypothesis**

H1: There is a significant relationship between social media usage and the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in three selected universities in Edo State.

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Understanding the influence of social media on Mass Communication undergraduates in three selected universities in Edo State will be of relevance to stakeholders including students, educators, counsellors, policymakers, mental health professionals, as well as social media

platforms. The outcome of this study can serve as a guiding frame and a template that can be used to devise strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media while promoting the positive use for academic and professional growth. Furthermore, the study is relevant, as it will help policymakers to formulate guidelines and policies that regulate social media content and usage among young people. Through the data gathered, policymakers will understand the psychological impact of social media and advocate for initiatives that promote online safety, mental health awareness, and responsible social media consumption. Also, mental health professionals, through the research will gain insights into the specific mental health issues faced by Mass Communication undergraduates due to social media exposure. This will help in designing targeted interventions, counselling programmes, and support groups that cater to the unique needs of students.

In addition, the study is relevant for students, as it will shed light on how social media influences their mental well-being, helping them become more aware of the risks associated with excessive usage, thereby improving their overall well-being and academic performance. Similarly, it will also inform future research into the mental health challenges faced by students in other disciplines and regions of Nigeria. Likewise, for educators and academic institutions, the study will provide empirical data on the challenges faced by Mass Communication undergraduates in balancing social media usage with academic performance. It can inform the development of policies and programs aimed at promoting digital well-being within universities.

Lastly, for social media platforms and technology developers, the findings can encourage the adoption of ethical digital design practices that prioritize user well-being. Platforms can introduce features such as screen time reminders, mental health resources, and algorithm adjustments that reduce exposure to harmful content. Overall, this study will contribute to the

growing body of knowledge on the intersection between social media and mental health, specifically within the context of Mass Communication undergraduates.

### **1.7 Scope of Study**

This study focuses exclusively on Mass Communication undergraduates in select universities in Edo State. Mass Communication undergraduates became the focus of the study because social media is a course inherently linked to the field of Mass Communication and as such, students in this discipline are regularly required to use digital platforms for both professional and academic goals. Undergraduates were considered as they are the most active social media users and are at a critical stage of psychological and emotional development. By narrowing its focus to Mass Communication undergraduates, the study seeks to provide in-depth insights into how individuals in media-related disciplines navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by social media.

Geographically, this study will be conducted across three selected universities in Edo State, each representing one senatorial district within Edo State. These institutions include: (i) University of Benin, Benin City (Edo South), (ii) Samuel Adegboyega University now Glorious Vision University, Ogwa (Edo Central) and Edo University, Iyamho, (Edo North). These universities were selected because they offer Mass Communication as a degree programme and are representative of the three senatorial districts in Edo State.

The selection of two public universities and one private university in Edo State for this study became imperative because of the necessity of ensuring a well-rounded representation of Mass Communication undergraduates from diverse institutional settings. Public and private universities differ significantly in terms of academic culture, access to mental health support services, digital literacy levels, and students' socio-economic backgrounds. By selecting

University of Benin and Edo University and Edo University (publics) alongside Glorious Vision University (private), the study captures a wider range of undergraduates' experiences as well as institutional perspectives, thereby enhancing the depth and applicability of its findings.

Furthermore, Universities were specifically chosen over polytechnics because the research targets students enrolled in full undergraduate degree programmes in Mass Communication. Unlike polytechnics, which primarily offer diploma-level and vocational training. Also, University students are more deeply involved in academic activities that often require social media use for research, collaboration, and engagement, making them more suitable for a study exploring the mental health implications of such usage.

Lastly, the study will explore how different social media platforms influences students' mental health as well as examine the time spent on social media, the types of content consumed, and the psychological effects of prolonged engagement. It will consider both positive and negative influences, including whether social media serves as a source of academic collaboration, emotional support, or stress relief.

### **1.8 Limitations of Study**

The limitation of this study stem primarily from the research design and instrument adopted. The study could have been enriched through the inclusion of participant observation; however, this was not feasible due to time constraint, which made it difficult to employ multiple instruments. As a result, only the questionnaire and interview were used, which limited the depth of data collection and influenced outcome of the study. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from questionnaires, which may be subject to biases and may not accurately reflect the participants' experiences at one point in time. Furthermore, the study was limited to Mass Communication undergraduates in three selected universities within Edo State, which may not be

representative of the experiences of undergraduates in other states or region. To address some of these limitations, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaires with qualitative interviews to provide richer and more nuanced insights. In addition, to minimize costs and enhance accessibility, questionnaires were distributed through students' social media platforms.

### **1.9 Operational Definition of Terms**

Terms frequently used in this study are defined based on their contextual usage. This is to avoid misinformation and misinterpretation

**Anxiety:** Anxiety in this study is a state of heightened worry, fear, or nervousness by mass communication undergraduates that can be triggered by excessive social media use, online interactions, or negative digital experiences.

**Cyberbullying:** The use of digital communication tools to harass, intimidate, or demean individuals, often leading to emotional distress and psychological harm.

**Depression:** A mental health condition characterized by persistent sadness, low energy, loss of interest in activities, and feelings of hopelessness, which can be exacerbated by social media usage.

**Emotional Well-being:** The ability to manage emotions, cope with stress, and maintain a positive mental state despite challenges faced by mass communication undergraduates.

**Influence:** The effect or impact of social media usage on the mental health of undergraduate's mass communication students, which can be either positive or negative, affecting the thoughts, behaviours, emotions, and mental well-being of the students.

**Information Overload:** A state of cognitive exhaustion caused by excessive exposure to digital content, news, and online interactions, making it difficult to process information effectively.

**Mass Communication Undergraduates:** In this context, Mass Communication is a degree program in offered at the selected universities in Edo State, focused on media studies, journalism, public relations, advertising and other related fields within the communication discipline.

**Mental Health:** In this Study mental health refers to the psychological well-being of Mass Communication undergraduates encompassing aspects like emotional stability, stress levels, anxiety, depression etc.

**Psychological Distress:** A general term encompassing negative emotional states such as anxiety, depression, and stress that arise due to prolonged social media exposure.

**Social media:** Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and others that facilitate online social interaction, sharing of content, and networking digitally.

**Social Comparison:** The tendency of individuals to evaluate their own abilities, achievements, and self-worth in relation to others, often exacerbated by idealized representations on social media.

**Social media Addiction:** compulsive and excessive use of social media platforms that interferes with an individual's daily activities, academic performance, and overall well-being.

**Undergraduates:** undergraduates are Students enrolled in degree programmes in Mass Communication at the selected universities in Edo State, focused on media studies, journalism, public relations, advertising and other related fields within the communication discipline.

**Universities:** In the context of this study, universities refer to accredited higher education Institutions located in Edo State, Nigeria offering degree programmes in Mass Communication

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Preamble**

This chapter presents the literature review. The review is presented in the following subheadings.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.2 Challenges Faced by Students in their use of social media

2.3 Types of Social Media platforms and their associated psychological effects

2.4 Empirical Review

2.5 Theoretical Framework

#### **2.1 Conceptual Clarification**

##### **The Concept of Social Media**

The concept of social media has evolved significantly over the years, transforming from a simple platform for connecting with friends and family to a complex ecosystem that influences various aspects of our lives. Social media encompasses digital platforms that enable interaction, content sharing, and networking. Boyd, D. M., and Ellison, N. B (2007), define social media as web-based services that allow users to construct profiles, connect with others, and navigate a networked communication system. Similarly, Olise (2021), sees social media as a platform where users are both consumers and producers of online content, which enables them to interact, share, and collaborate over the web. These include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Blogs, Micro-blogging, YouTube, Twitter, Wikis, Mash-Up, Digg, Delicious Second Life, Flickr, Picasa, among others. Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, snapchat and TikTok, have significantly influenced how students communicate and

consume information. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Mass Communication undergraduates often depend on these platforms to stay updated with industry trends, participate in discourse, and engage in multimedia content creation.

Social media according to Kietzmann et al. (2011) consists of seven fundamental conceptions. Identity, sharing, presence, relationships, conversations, reputation, and groups. These are represented as functional building block. They noted that these functions do not necessarily have to be included in every social media activity, and they are not exclusive of each other. Instead, they illustrate how different aspects of social media function. Smartphones have also greatly facilitated the growth of digital media and made the use of social media “almost inescapable”. Srivastava et al. (2019).

### **The Concept of Mental Health**

Mental health is commonly defined as a state of well-being in which individuals are aware of their abilities, can handle everyday life stressors, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their community (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). It encompasses emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of well-being. According to this WHO definition, optimal mental health empowers individuals to navigate life’s challenges effectively and function as productive members of society.

However, Dragomirov (2025), critiques the WHO's conceptualization for focusing predominantly on positive emotions and functioning. He argues that this perspective may overlook the broader spectrum of human emotional experience. Given that individuals in good mental health can still experience unpleasant emotions due to life’s inherent challenges, he advocates for a more nuanced definition. One that incorporates the dynamic nature of daily life,

interpersonal communication, and emotional intelligence, as emphasized by Galderisi et al. (2015).

Factors influencing mental health, include genetic predisposition, environmental exposures, traumatic life experiences, social support systems, and lifestyle habits such as nutrition and physical activity (Moradi Sheykhjan, 2017). Moradi further conceptualizes mental health as encompassing joy, self-acceptance, and societal contribution. Similarly, Alemi, Panter-Brick, Spozhmay, and Ahmady (2023), describe it as a wellness condition wherein individuals demonstrate self-awareness, effective stress management, and positive engagement with their communities. Dragomirov (2025), highlights a troubling statistic: approximately 10–20% of children and adolescents worldwide are affected by some form of mental disorder. Considering that this age group constitutes about one-third of the global population, the implications are extensive. He also highlights the impact of personal traits, social environments, and community settings on individual mental health. Common psychological disorders include depression, anxiety, and psychosis, while other mental health issues manifest as loneliness, suicidal ideation, diminished empathy, and social anxiety (Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy, 2018). Among university students, particularly those in Mass Communication, anxiety and depression are frequently reported. These issues are often linked to high levels of social media usage (Twenge, 2019). Given the extensive online engagement characteristic of this academic discipline, there is a growing need to examine the mental health challenges experienced by this demographic.

### **Social Media and Mental Health: Global Perspective**

Research has explored the intricate relationship between social media usage and mental health. Findings by Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020), submit that excessive use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok is associated with increased levels of stress,

anxiety, and depression. These effects are often exacerbated by phenomena such as social comparison, cyber bullying, and the pressure to project a curated online persona (Verduyn et al., 2017). A systematic review by Primack et al. (2017) further establishes a strong correlation between high social media engagement and symptoms of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, disrupted sleep patterns, and social withdrawal. While acknowledging the communicative and entertainment benefits of social media, Hellard (2019) warns that frequent usage can contribute to feelings of unhappiness and isolation.

These emotional responses often stem from exposure to idealized representations of others' lives. Social platforms promote carefully curated content including advertisements and posts tailored to user preferences which can distort perceptions of reality. For example, on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, users are frequently exposed to filtered portrayals of successful careers, relationships, and lifestyles. While such content may inspire some viewers, it can lead others to experience envy, inadequacy, or even suicidal ideation when comparing these images to their own lives (Hellard, 2019).

This environment fosters a tendency to contrast one's authentic self with the idealized, edited versions of others. Such comparisons can negatively impact self-esteem and contribute to mental health disorders, including depression and social anxiety. Hellard (2019) concludes that chronic exposure to social media not only fosters dissatisfaction with one's life but also increases vulnerability to mental health issues. The constant need to measure up to unrealistic standards may lead to heightened self-consciousness and perfectionism, traits commonly associated with social anxiety disorder.

## **Positive Influence of Social Media on Mental Health**

Despite concerns about the impact of social media, several studies stress its positive contributions to students' mental well-being. Uwaifo et al. (2020) found that social media fosters social connectedness, thereby mitigating feelings of loneliness and isolation. In their study, 62% of Mass Communication students in Edo State reported that social media offered emotional support, particularly during periods of academic stress. Similarly, Omoregie (2019) observed that digital platforms enable students to develop coping mechanisms and gain access to mental health resources. Valkenburg and Peter (2019) also support this perspective, suggesting that social media can enhance self-esteem and peer support among university students globally. Beyond emotional well-being, social media serves as a valuable information hub, providing students with access to academic materials, industry news, and real-time updates (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) emphasize the role of professional platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter in creating networking opportunities and facilitating mentorship connections. Naslund, Aschbrenner, Marsch, and Bartels (2016) further highlight the role of online communities in offering emotional encouragement by enabling users to share personal experiences. Moreover, social media contributes to the development of practical skills, particularly in areas such as digital marketing, content creation, and public relations—thereby improving students' career readiness (Tess, 2013). Olise (2018), and Rampersad and Althiyabi (2020), note that individuals across age groups actively use social media to access and share news content. Clark (2018) identified that those aged 18 to 24 are the most likely demographic to engage with news via social platforms. In the Nigerian context, Olise (2021), identified Facebook and WhatsApp as the primary platforms youth rely on for news consumption.

## **Negative Influence of Social Media on Mental Health**

Conversely, a growing body of research has identified the negative implications of excessive social media usage on mental health. Obaseki and Aigbovo (2022) reported a significant association between prolonged social media engagement and increased levels of anxiety and depression among Mass Communication students in Edo State. Students who used social media for more than six hours daily were found to exhibit elevated stress levels, poor sleep quality, fatigue, and diminished cognitive performance. Additionally, exposure to cyber bullying and the pressure to maintain idealized online personas were cited as major psychological stressors. Similar findings were reported by Twenge et al. (2018), who found that high levels of social media use among American young adults correlated with increased depressive symptoms. Andreassen et al. (2012) also warn that excessive social media consumption can impair academic performance and reduce concentration. Likewise, Fardouly et al. (2015) found that viewing curated and idealized portrayals of others' lives on social media platforms may trigger feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem. Although Olise (2021) acknowledges that social media platforms serve as sources of news for youth, he concludes that this demographic remains particularly vulnerable to misinformation, owing to their relative inexperience in evaluating digital content critically.

## **The Impact of Social Media and Screen Time on Mental Health**

Dragomirov (2025) conducted a comprehensive study examining the relationship between social media, screen time, and mental health outcomes. He highlights screen time as an emerging global concern, primarily due to its association with sedentary behaviour. Sedentary behaviour is defined as any waking activity involving low energy expenditure, typically less than 1.5 metabolic equivalents (METs). It is often performed in sitting, reclining, or lying postures

with minimal physical movement (de Rezende et al 2014), (Nigg et al, 2021). This type of behaviour has been shown to negatively affect physical and psychological health across various age groups. Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in time spent engaging with screen-based technologies, particularly through computers and the internet. Bucksch et al. (2014) regard this trend as troubling, stress the need for balanced usage, and targeted interventions to mitigate its potentially harmful effects.

The constructs of screen time and social media usage are deeply interconnected (Barthorpe et al., 2020). Screen time is generally defined as the duration spent engaging with screen-based devices such as televisions, computers, smartphones, and tablets (Anderson, Economos, and Must, 2008). Studies by Starosta and Izydorczyk (2020), and Raza et al. (2021), have identified binge-watching, a relatively recent behavioural phenomenon closely tied to excessive screen time and sedentary habits as a prominent concern. Binge-watching refers to the practice of viewing multiple episodes of television or streaming content in a single sitting, and recent research has explored its implications for psychological well-being. sitting (Pittman and Steiner, 2021).

An essential component in research examining the relationship between screen time and mental health is physical activity, which has been found to mediate or moderate the effects of sedentary screen use (Hrafnkelsdottir et al., 2018; Nigg et al., 2021). Twenge, Martin, and Spitzberg (2018) observed that by 2016, individuals were spending an average of six hours daily on online activities such as texting and social media use, indicating the extent of screen exposure in contemporary life.

The growing body of literature increasingly links excessive screen time to adverse mental health outcomes. Barthorpe et al. (2020), for example, identify a correlation between high screen

time and self-harm behaviors among females, while Tang et al. (2021) highlight its connection to increased rates of depression. These findings underscore the urgency of further investigation, especially given the ubiquity of screen-enabled technologies. Smartphone usage plays a significant role in the discourse on screen time and mental health. As of 2019, more than five billion individuals globally owned mobile devices, with approximately half of those being smartphones (Silver, 2019). This widespread access has amplified concerns over the psychological effects of constant connectivity. Woo et al. (2021) emphasize the complexity of the relationship between smartphone screen time and mental health, noting that the nature of screen use significantly influences outcomes. For instance, screen time dedicated to social interactions may have different mental health implications than time spent on non-social activities. Factors such as age, gender, behavioural patterns, physical activity levels, and specific types of screen engagement must be considered when assessing the impact of screen time on psychological well-being (de Rezende et al., 2014).

## **2.2 How types of Social Media Platforms affect mental health**

The advent of social media has revolutionized how students communicate, access information, and express themselves. Different social media platforms serve various purposes and affect users differently. The following are types of social media and social networking sites as well as the psychological effects they could have on students.

### **Facebook: Connection and Comparison**

Facebook remains one of the most widely used platforms among university students for maintaining social connections and participating in academic groups. However, its open nature and emphasis on curated personal profiles often encourage social comparison, which can negatively affect mental health. According to Tandoc et al (2015), frequent Facebook use

correlates with higher levels of envy and depression, primarily due to perceived discrepancies between one's life and the seemingly perfect lives of others displayed on the platform.

### **Instagram: Visual Idealisation and Body Image Issues**

Instagram, a photo and video-sharing platform, is particularly popular among young adults. Its emphasis on visual content fosters the idealisation of beauty, lifestyle, and success, often leading users to compare themselves with influencers and peers. Fardouly et al (2015) found that Instagram use is strongly linked to body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety among university students, especially females. The filtered and edited nature of images shared on Instagram intensifies the pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards.

### **Twitter: Information Dissemination and Anxiety**

Twitter is widely used for information dissemination, news consumption, and public discourse. While it serves as a valuable tool for students in Mass Communication to stay updated, the fast-paced and often contentious nature of content can lead to information overload and heightened anxiety. As noted by Sharma and Sharma (2020), excessive exposure to trending topics, crises, or political debates on Twitter can result in emotional exhaustion and stress, particularly during sensitive periods such as elections or pandemics.

### **WhatsApp: Connectivity and Group Pressure**

WhatsApp is a messaging platform commonly used for academic coordination, group chats, and personal communication. While it promotes instant connectivity and collaboration, it also fosters a sense of constant availability and social pressure. Students often feel compelled to respond promptly to messages, leading to reduced concentration and productivity. Montag et al.

(2015) indicated that high WhatsApp usage is associated with compulsive behaviour and increased stress, as users experience difficulty in disengaging from conversations.

### **TikTok: Entertainment and Dopamine Dependency**

TikTok has gained popularity for its short-form video content and algorithm-driven entertainment. While it offers creativity and relaxation, it can also lead to psychological dependency. Smith and Short (2022) highlight that TikTok's design promotes binge-watching, which may impair attention span and increase the risk of addictive behaviour. The platform's reward-based algorithm, where users are continually shown preferred content, stimulates dopamine release, reinforcing repeated use and escapism.

### **Snapchat: Ephemerality and Social Anxiety**

Snapchat allows users to share temporary content that disappears after viewing. While this feature may promote spontaneous interaction, it also introduces issues such as performance anxiety and fear of missing out (FOMO). According to Bayer et al (2016), the ephemerality of content encourages users to check the app frequently, fostering compulsive usage patterns and social anxiety due to fear of being excluded from conversations or updates.

### **YouTube: Learning Tool and Passive Consumption**

YouTube is widely used by students for educational purposes, including tutorials, documentaries, and lectures. While it serves as a valuable resource for self-directed learning, it also encourages passive consumption and procrastination. According to Kuss and Griffiths (2017), prolonged use of YouTube for non-academic entertainment can contribute to time-wasting behaviours and reduced academic performance, which in turn may lead to feelings of guilt and stress.

### **2.3 Challenges Faced by Students in their use of social media**

The increasing integration of social media into students' academic and personal lives has introduced several challenges that impact their mental health and overall well-being. For Mass Communication undergraduates, whose academic training often necessitates engagement with digital and media platforms, these challenges can be more pronounced. The following are challenges faced by students in their use of social media.

#### **Social Media Addiction and Psychological Distress**

Andreassen, Pallesen, and Griffiths (2012) describe social media addiction as a form of compulsive engagement that significantly interferes with individuals' daily routines and responsibilities. This behavioural addiction, marked by a loss of control over social media usage, often mirrors patterns observed in other forms of addiction. Belay (2021) defines psychological distress as a condition of emotional suffering often accompanied by somatic symptoms, such as fatigue, headaches, and gastrointestinal disturbances. This state reflects an individual's inability to effectively manage emotional or psychological stressors.

Bottaro, Colledani, Pellegrini, and Gori (2024), in their study on internet addiction and psychological distress, emphasize that the internet, despite offering vast access to information, innovative learning tools, and global communication poses significant risks to users' mental health. Their research concludes that addiction to Social Networking Sites (SNS) is strongly associated with negative psychological outcomes, including heightened levels of anxiety, stress, and depression.

Similarly, Hilliard (2019), in her article on social media addiction, explains that the compulsive use of social networking platforms is largely driven by dopamine-producing social feedback mechanisms. She notes that the same neurological reward circuits triggered by

recreational drug use and gambling are also activated by interactions on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest, and TikTok, X (twitter), Pinterest and LinkedIn. Hilliard further explains that the intentional design of these social media platforms to maximize user engagement, brand and product loyalty through shares, retweet, notifications likes shares and retweet, notifications has contributed to rising cases of behavioural addiction to social media.

According to Hilliard (2019), social media platforms are both physically and psychologically addictive due to their influence on the brain's reward system. They offer an almost infinite stream of immediate gratification, often in the form of social recognition, with minimal effort. Over time, users may develop psychological dependence on these platforms, particularly when they use social media to alleviate negative emotions. This cyclical behaviour leads to increased usage and reinforces dependency. When users receive a notifications, comments, reactions, likes their brains release dopamine for a sense of pleasure This repeated process fosters addictive tendencies. Supporting these findings, Primack et al. (2017) found that students who exhibit signs of social media addiction are more likely to experience increased levels of anxiety and depression. Similarly, Eze and Chidiebere (2021) highlight the specific case of Nigerian university students, many of whom report that social media addiction correlates with diminished academic performance and emotional instability. Persistent behaviours such as endless scrolling, compulsive checking for updates, and prolonged engagement in online discourse contribute not only to psychological distress but also to sleep disruption and reduced overall productivity.

## **Cyber bullying and Emotional Well-being**

Cyber bullying has emerged as a pressing concern linked to the widespread use of social media platforms. Hinduja and Patchin (2018) found that victims of cyber bullying often report heightened levels of stress and depression, which adversely affect their self-esteem and academic engagement. Similar patterns were observed in Nigerian university contexts by Akpan and James (2020), where cyberbullying has been shown to contribute to social withdrawal and increased psychological distress. Cyber bullies do not have to be strong or

Fast; they merely need access to a digital device and an intent to inflict harm. Cyberbullying is broadly defined as the "wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja and Patchin, 2015.). This includes behaviours such as online harassment, threats, spreading false rumours, and digital Impersonation. Charles, Whitaker, and Reyes (2013) noted that the term "cyber bullying" was largely absent from public discourse just a decade ago, yet it has become a pervasive social problem in recent years. What differentiates cyber bullying from its face-to-face counterpart is its persistent and invasive nature, which can affect victims even within the supposed safety of their homes. Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, and Tippett (2008) assert that cyber bullying transcends physical boundaries, occurring through various channels such as social networking sites, messaging applications, and online forums. Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner (2014) emphasise that the anonymity afforded by digital platforms intensifies the psychological impact of cyber bullying, often resulting in long-term emotional disturbances.

Bauman, Toomey, and Walker (2013) reported that victims often experience depression, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and suicidal ideation. Slonje and Smith (2008) argue that individuals subjected to cyber bullying may suffer greater emotional distress than those exposed

to traditional bullying due to the potential for prolonged exposure and the viral nature of online content. Fahy et al (2016) found that adolescents who experienced cyberbullying exhibited increased depressive symptoms and emotional difficulties even six months post-incident. Additionally, the reluctance to seek help, often fueled by fear of retaliation, social stigma, or concerns about not being believed, further aggravates the victim's emotional burden (Wright, 2017). Poland (2010) noted that the anonymity associated with online communication may embolden individuals who would not typically engage in traditional bullying to participate in cyberbullying behaviours. 2025 report by HelpGuide, approximately 10 percent of teenagers report having been bullied on social media platforms, while many more are subjected to offensive and emotionally harmful comments.

### **Information Overload and Cognitive Stress**

One of the most pressing challenges faced by students in the digital era is information overload. This term refers to a cognitive state in which an individual is exposed to more information than they can effectively process, often resulting in confusion, indecision, and mental exhaustion. Bawden and Robinson (2009) define information overload as the excessive exposure to digital content that leads to cognitive fatigue and diminished mental efficiency. Similarly, Eppler and Mengis (2004) describe it as a condition that arises when the volume and complexity of information exceed an individual's capacity for cognitive processing.

The concept of information overload was first introduced by Alvin Toffler in 1970 who warned that modern societies would eventually be overwhelmed by an unmanageable volume of data, surpassing the limits of human comprehension. In the present digital age characterized by constant connectivity, algorithmic personalization, and the ubiquity of social media this prediction has become increasingly relevant. University students, particularly those studying

Mass Communication, are regularly inundated with large volumes of data. These include academic materials, global news, social media updates, peer interactions, and industry trends, all of which they are expected to process, interpret, and apply on a daily basis. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) argue that students in media-intensive disciplines are especially vulnerable to digital saturation, which may heighten their risk of experiencing psychological stress and burnout.

Cognitive stress occurs when the brain's capacity to process information is overwhelmed, leading to symptoms such as mental fatigue, anxiety, and impaired decision-making. For students, especially those in highly connected environments, the pressure to remain constantly informed, academically competitive, and socially engaged online contributes significantly to this cognitive burden. These pressures frequently manifest in stress-related symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, and depressive episodes.

Social media platforms further exacerbate information overload by delivering a constant stream of content through real-time notifications, algorithm-driven feeds, and the perpetual expectation to respond and engage. Bawden and Robinson (2009) describe this current state of digital saturation as “infoglut,” a condition in which individuals are overwhelmed by fragmented, excessive, and often contradictory information. This diminishes analytical capacity and fosters emotional fatigue. Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever (2013) found that high levels of multitasking, especially those involving social media use were correlated with poorer memory retention and elevated stress levels among students. This phenomenon is particularly relevant for Mass Communication undergraduates, whose academic and career pathways require them to interact frequently with digital and media content.

A growing body of empirical research has linked information overload to negative mental health outcomes. Misra and Stokols (2012) found that high levels of communication through digital platforms contributed to increased stress and emotional exhaustion, particularly in academic settings. Similarly, Becker, Alzahabi, and Hopwood (2013) observed that university students who reported experiencing significant information overload also exhibited higher levels of anxiety, sleep disturbances, and academic underperformance. Among social media users, Matthes, Karsay, Schmuck, and Stevic (2020) identified a clear correlation between exposure to conflicting news content and increased psychological distress, reinforcing the association between information overload and mental health deterioration.

### **Social Comparison and Self-Esteem**

Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory explains that people evaluate themselves by comparing their achievements to others. Social comparison is a major contributing factor to the negative impact of social media on self-esteem. Banjanin et al. (2015) explained how users often compare their lives to the curated and idealized content they see on social media, which can foster feelings of inadequacy. These unfavourable comparisons can damage self-esteem, particularly among young undergraduates who are more vulnerable to body image concerns and societal pressures. Shrestha and Adhikari (2024), who found that the majority of students experienced self-esteem issues due to the unrealistic portrayals of success and beauty on platforms like Instagram, support this view. Similarly, Chou and Edge, (2012) stress that curated content on social media can lead to unrealistic self-expectations and negative self-perceptions. In addition, Huang (2017) argues that constant exposure to idealized portrayals fosters anxiety and low self-worth. Mass Communication undergraduates who aspire to build careers in media may

feel pressured to present themselves in a certain way online, leading to increased self-doubt and mental exhaustion.

Furthermore, Shrestha and Adhikari (2024) note that many college students reported mood changes and increased anxiety related to their engagement on social media platforms. Their study found that 80.2% of participants experienced negative mood swings due to content they encountered online, reinforcing the connection between social media consumption and deteriorating mental health. Another study by Alam et al. (2024) found that prolonged exposure to social media's highly edited representations of others' lives led to heightened levels of anxiety and low self-esteem, particularly among female students. The constant comparison to these idealized images resulted in feelings of inferiority and body dissatisfaction, contributing to the onset of depressive symptoms. Research by Adeyemi and Ehigie (2021) indicates that female Mass Communication students in Edo State are more likely to experience anxiety and depression due to social comparison on social media, whereas male students report higher tendencies toward compulsive social media use. Similarly, studies by Fardouly et al. (2018), confirm that women are more susceptible to the negative effects of social comparison on social media, leading to higher levels of body dissatisfaction and anxiety. Vogel et al (2014) found that greater Facebook use was associated with lower self-esteem and higher depressive symptoms due to frequent social comparisons.

### **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)**

The fear of missing out (FOMO) is another psychological challenge associated with social media use among students. FOMO is characterised by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing. Przybylski, et al (2013) found that FOMO is linked to negative mood, reduced life satisfaction, and increased social media engagement, which can

disrupt sleep and academic schedules. For Mass Communication students, who are often required to remain digitally connected, this can intensify stress and anxiety levels.

Hellard (2019) in her journal confirms that fear of missing out (FOMO), or the intense fear of being left out or missing a social event, is another facet of social anxiety brought on by using online media. When users see images of parties they were not invited to or snippets of enjoyable events they could not go to due to job or school commitments, they may feel anxious that no one will notice them or afraid that they will be forgotten because they are not there. FOMO can negatively impact one's self-esteem and may result in obsessive social media checking to make sure one is missing anything, which can lead to issues at work and in the classroom.

### **Addiction and Time Management Problems**

Addiction to social media is a growing concern among university students. Andreassen, C.S, Torsheim, T., Brunborg, G.S., andPallesen, S (2012) define social media addiction as being overly concerned with social media, driven by a strong motivation to use them, and devoting so much time and effort that it impairs other important life areas. This often results in procrastination, disrupted academic routines, and deteriorating mental health. For Mass Communication students, who may justify their excessive use of social media for academic purposes, distinguishing between productive and addictive use becomes particularly challenging.

### **Privacy Concerns and Identity Issues**

Students also face concerns about their online privacy and digital identity. The pressure to maintain a certain persona online can lead to stress and identity confusion. According to Marwick andboyd (2011), young people often struggle with context collapse, the challenge of

maintaining different identities for different audiences on the same platform. This can lead to anxiety, especially when personal and academic identities conflict.

### **Sleep Disruption, Fatigue and Poor Physical Health**

Studies have shown a significant correlation between social media use and disrupted sleep patterns among students. Excessive use, especially before bedtime, leads to reduced sleep quality and quantity. Levenson et al (2016) found that social media use is associated with poor sleep due to increased cognitive arousal and screen time. Inadequate sleep can impair memory, attention, and emotional regulation, which are essential for academic performance and mental health. Another significant mental health concern is the disruption of sleep due to nighttime social media use. Late-night screen exposure has been reported to interfere with melatonin production and increase alertness, delaying sleep onset and resulting in fatigue and irritability during the day.

### **Disconnection from Reality and Reduced Social Skills**

Constant engagement with virtual platforms may reduce meaningful offline interactions and social skill development. Students may experience emotional disconnection, loneliness, and difficulty maintaining real-life relationships. According to Twenge et al. (2018), excessive screen time is associated with decreased face-to-face interactions and increased reports of loneliness and suicidal thoughts among teenagers and young adults.

### **Exposure to Distressing Content**

Students who frequently engage with distressing content such as violent news, trauma-related videos, or crisis reports, may develop symptoms of secondary trauma, fear, or desensitization. Mass Communication students, due to their academic requirements, often engage with heavy media content, increasing their risk of emotional overload (Brom et al., 2017).

Repeated exposure to negative stimuli on social platforms can lead to chronic stress and pessimism.

## **2.4 Review of Empirical Studies**

This session outlines the review of empirical studies. Nineteen (19) empirical studies relevant to the current study have been reviewed. They are: Maduka (2025); Karim et al (2025); Dragomirov (2025); Crispus et al (2025); Adindu et-al (2025); Oluwasegun and Oluwaseun (2024), Ngonso, et al (2024); Talukdar, (2024,); Iskajyan,(2024); Ismail (2024); Zhang and Wang (2024); Awoye et al (2023); Chukwu and Okoro (2022), Yusuf (2021); Bello and Hassan (2020); Keles, McCrae, and Grealish(2020); Subair et al (2019); Olise (2018); Olise, et al (2013).

Maduka (2025) conducted research on the Impact of social media on Mental Health in Nigerian Young Adults. The study aimed to examine the impact of social media on mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and sleep disruption among Nigerian young adults. The study used the library research method by conducting a review of prior empirical literature. At the end of the study, the author found that excessive social media use contributes to mental health issues like social comparison, cyberbullying, addiction, and sleep disturbances, while also offering platforms for social connection and mental health awareness. The study recommended that mental health education be implemented. It also recommended digital detox strategies, and expansion of mental health resources to address these challenges. This study relates to the current study as it reviewed the impact of social media on mental health in young adults, which is similar to the current study, which also considers influence of social media on mental health amongst Mass Communication undergraduates. The divergence between the two studies is that the study under review is not specific to a discipline or region while the other is specific to a university as well as a particular group. (undergraduates) and a region (Edo State).

Also, Karim et al (2025) in their research examined the impact of social media on mental health of young adults In Pakistan. The study was designed to assess the impact of social media usage on the mental health of young adults in Pakistan. The researchers used a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional study for over four months and 150 young adults were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. Participants aged above 20 years and willing to participate were included, while those under 20 or unwilling to cooperate were excluded. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire assessing demographic characteristics, Social Media usage patterns, and mental health indicators. Their findings indicated that excessive social media usage negatively affects the mental health of young adults in Pakistan, contributing to anxiety, sleep disturbances, and self-perception issues. The studies converge because they examined the impact/influence of social media on mental health of young adults. The studies diverge in discipline and geographical location.

Furthermore, Dragomirov (2025) in his review titled “What are the effects of social media and Screen Time on Mental Health? A discussion of relevant literature” concluded that growing prevalence of social media usage and increasing screen time, particularly among adolescents and young adults, coincides with a global rise in mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, self-harm, and adverse social effects such as fear of missing out and low self-esteem. The review emphasized the diverse and complex relationship between social media, screen time, and mental health, mediated by factors such as sleep, physical activity, stress, cyberbullying, self-presentation, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher also acknowledged Positive aspects of social media, including its potential as a tool for mental health prevention and enhancement.

In another study carried out by Crispus et al (2025) on the topic “The Influence of Social Media on University Students’ Mental Health: A Case Study of Kyambogo University Metropolitan” The study examined the relationship between Social Media usage patterns and mental health outcomes among students at Kyambogo University in Uganda. The researchers used a mixed-methods research design, and collected data from 384 undergraduate students through structured questionnaires incorporating validated psychological assessment tools, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. The research found that 77.1% of students engaged with Social Media platforms for three or more hours daily, with WhatsApp (97.1%), Facebook (82.3%), and TikTok (70.6%) being the most widely used platforms. Mental health indicators were also observed, including moderate to severe anxiety symptoms in 39.9% of respondents, depressive symptoms in 33.6%, and poor sleep quality in 62.2% of the student population. The researchers also found that Significant correlations were established between daily Social Media usage time and all measured mental health variables, with particularly strong relationships observed with sleep disturbances and Social Media addiction tendencies. The nature of engagement significantly influenced psychological outcomes, with passive consumption consistently associated with poorer mental health compared to active content creation and meaningful interaction. The study also identified social comparison tendencies and fear of missing out as critical mediating variables explaining how platform engagement translated into psychological distress. The relationship between the study under review and the current study is that they both examined the influence of social media on mental health of university students. The studies differ in specificity of discipline and the geographical location.

Furthermore, Adindu et-al (2025) conducted a study on the influence of social media on adolescent mental health and substance abuse patterns. The aim of the review was to examine the complex relationship between the use of social media, mental health issues, and the rise in substance abuse among teenagers. The review also explored the patterns of substance abuse among adolescents, with particular attention to the use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal narcotics. Peer pressure, family dynamics, early substance exposure, and other factors have been identified as contributing factors to substance misuse. The study concluded that Adolescents' widespread use of social media has become a serious public health issue, especially considering its effects. The empirical study is relevant to the current study as it discussed influence of social media on mental health. The difference between the two studies is that the current study is focused on undergraduates while the study under review is on adolescent and if further examined the concept of substance abuse.

Similarly, a study conducted by Oluwasegun and Oluwaseun (2024), the researchers examined the influence of social media usage on the self-esteem of youths in South-Western Nigeria. The study employed a survey research design and gathered data from 384 youths across Osun, Ondo, and Lagos states. The findings revealed that a significant number of the respondents had high self-esteem. However, some expressed dissatisfaction with themselves and a desire for greater respect from others. The study further revealed that various factors, such as gender, duration of social media engagement, frequency of use, sources of content, and types of content accessed, influenced self-esteem. Specifically, frequent engagement and exposure to certain content types were positively correlated with self-esteem levels. The authors recommended the implementation of media campaigns and intervention programmes to guide youths on optimal social media usage to enhance their self-worth. The study relates to the current study as they both

examined the influence of social media on, mental health. Although the study under review focused on self-esteem which could also affect the mental health. In both studies Mass Communication Undergraduates can be regarded as youths. The difference between the two research studies is the geographical location. The study under review investigates youths in south west (Lagos, Osun, Ondo) while the current study looks at undergraduates in selected universities in Edo State.

Another study by Ngonso, et al (2024) on the Impact of social media on secondary schools' youths within Edo North, Edo State, Nigeria: A psychological perspective, examined the psychological impact of social media on Nigerian teenagers. The study looked at how social media posts and tweets (messages) influence their perceptions towards migrating abroad. A survey research method was adapted to investigate the problem in its natural setting. Four secondary schools (SSs) within Edo North, Edo State, Nigeria were randomly selected from 56 government-owned SSs for the study. The findings of the study revealed that Nigerian teenagers of school age have access to social media, prefer text, video and audio kinds of information and mostly prefer Facebook to other social media networking sites. The researcher concluded that there is a significant relationship between social media messages and Nigerian teenagers' desire to travel abroad adding that social media messages or information affect their mental construct negatively which could be compared to mental slavery.

Another empirical review on the impact of social media on Adolescent Mental Health: A Comprehensive Review by Talukdar, (2024), the researcher explored the complex relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health. The study utilized mixed methods including structured interviews and surveys. Findings showed that factors such as cyberbullying, social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and excessive screen time

negatively affect adolescents' psychological well-being. The researcher in recommendation, encouraged healthy online behaviours among youth. This study is similar because it addressed the impact of social media use on mental health. It differs in terms of the geographical location which is Slovakia while the current study is in Edo State, Nigeria. Also, no specific focus on communication undergraduates.

In addition, Iskajyan, (2024) carried out research on the Influence of social media addiction on mental health and Academic Performance. The aim of the research was to examine the impact of Social Media addiction on an adolescent's mental health and academic performance. The research found out that the addiction to social networks significantly affects teenagers' mental health. It showed specifically that 82% of teachers and parents reported negative effects such as anxiety and depression. The study further showed that 64% of the respondents noted that social media interferes with the educational process. The study found that high levels of Social Media addiction could lead to serious issues such as irritability, academic decline, and poor mental health.

Similarly, Ismail (2024) in his research on the Impact of social media, Familial Issues, and Academic Performance on Students' mental health pointed out that Various factors, including social media use, family problems, and academic achievement, significantly impact the mental health of university students. The study examined the intricate relationships among these factors and how they collectively affect third-year Faculty of Business and Communication students' mental health results. It was found that there was a strong favourable relationship between social media use and mental health difficulties among students. Cyberbullying, fear of missing out, addiction, and exposure to disturbing content were cited as negative effects of social media. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the study, the researcher used Social Cognition

Theory as a theoretical framework to support the findings. The study under review is similar to the current study as they both considered the impact or influence social media has on undergraduates in a communication related discipline. However, they both differ in location. The study under review also examined other concepts like family issues and academic performance.

Furthermore, Zhang and Wang (2024) did a study on the Impact of social media on Children's Mental Health: A Systematic Scoping Review to the impact of social media on children's mental health. The researchers used the systematic scoping method. They found that social media use is associated with poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression, and a decline in subjective well-being among children. Their recommendations were to consider the emotional connections to social media use, and differentiate between types of social networking site use in future research. The empirical study is relevant to the current study as it discussed psychological effects linked to social media. The difference between the two studies is that the current study is focused on undergraduates while the study under review is on children.

In addition to the above empirical review, Awoye et al (2023) did research on the influence of social media on the emotional well-being of in-School Adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis. The aim was to assess how social media affects the emotional well-being of adolescents in Ilorin; the researchers used survey method and cross-examined 400 secondary school students using structured questionnaires. The researchers found that adolescents experienced anxiety when posts received few likes or comments, felt pressured to present a perfect image, and often felt isolated after viewing others' posts. Significant differences were observed based on gender, age, and school type. The researchers recommended the introduction of comprehensive digital literacy curricula in schools to educate students on the potential negative impacts of social media and promote responsible use. This study relates with the current

study because it focuses on social media influence on emotional well-being (mental health). The study differs in terms of geographical location (Ilorin). Also, the study emphasized generally on adolescents and not university undergraduates.

Likewise, Chukwu and Okoro (2022) did a study on social media use and psychological well-being of Nigerian University Students. The aim of the Study was to seek the effects of social media platforms on Nigerian undergraduates' well-being. The study found that Instagram and Snapchat contributed to anxiety while WhatsApp promoted peer support. The researchers utilized uses and gratification Theory for their study while the method of data collection was survey through structured questionnaires analysed via SPSS. Their recommendations were Platform-specific awareness and social media education in universities. This study is relevant to the current study because it understudied Nigerian undergraduates' use of social media. The divergence in this study is that it was not specific to Mass Communication undergraduates but rather on Nigerian undergraduate. Also, the geographic location is a different region (South East Nigeria) and not Edo State.

Similarly, Yusuf (2021) in his study on Facebook use and Emotional health among undergraduates in Lagos state, Investigated Facebook use and emotional health in Lagos undergraduates. His findings showed that Poor sleep quality and emotional instability correlated with heavy Facebook use. The study utilized Social Comparison Theory and used descriptive survey as data collection method with questionnaires. The study got 300 respondents from two universities in Lagos State. At the end of the study, it was recommended that responsible night-time usage should be encouraged as well as and peer mental support. The relationship between this study and the current study is that they both researched university undergraduates, social

media and mental health. The difference in the studies is that the study under review focused on Facebook and the geographical location is Lagos State.

In addition, Bello and Hassan (2020) did a study on social media addiction and academic stress amongst Nigerian Universities. The aim of the study was to explore social media addiction and academic stress. At the end of the study, it was discovered that students addicted to TikTok and twitter reported higher academic and emotional stress. The theory used was addiction Theory and Stress-Coping Model. The study also used Mixed methods including questionnaires and focus groups for data collection. At the end of the study, the researchers recommended digital detox programs and stress relief workshops. The study shares similarity because they both focused on Nigerian students' population, mental health and media-related behaviour. However, the divergence is that this current study focused on stress and addiction and the population is not specific to Mass Communication undergraduates.

In the same vein, a study by Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) on influence of social media use on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents found a strong correlation between social media use and depression, particularly among young adults. The objectives of the study were to examine the association between social media use and depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. In addition, the study aimed to determine the impact of social media use on mental health outcomes in adolescents. The method used in the study was the quantitative research design through the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews. The Studies were classified into four categories of exposure to social media: time spent; activity; investment; and addiction. The authors found the categories as correlated with depression, anxiety and psychological distress, with an acknowledgement for the complexity of these relationships. The study found a general correlation between social media

use and mental health problems. It found that particular attitudes or behaviours (e.g. social comparison, active or passive use of social media, motives for social media use) may have a greater influence on the symptoms of depression, anxiety and psychological distress than the frequency of social media use or the number of online friends.

Additionally, Subair et al (2019) in their study examined social media usage among undergraduates vis-à-vis its influence on their studies. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised all undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Nigeria. The researchers randomly selected five faculties from which 850 students were selected using random and convenience sampling techniques. From the study, the researchers found that the social media platforms mostly used by the undergraduate students are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Also, findings from the study indicated that undergraduate students spend an average of 2 to 3 hours daily on social media platforms. This may explain the extent of Internet addiction among undergraduates. Another finding from the study as noted by the authors showed that undergraduates used social media platforms mainly for socialisation, information, and academic purposes. The researchers also stated that the result showed that undergraduate students use social media platforms for socialization more than they do for academic purposes. More findings from the study revealed that Internet addiction and distraction are the major influences of social media on undergraduate studies. This study is similar to the current study because they both investigate the concept of social media and university undergraduates. The studies differ in geographical location and specificity of degree. While the study under review examined university undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University in Osun State. The current study considers three universities in Edo State and it is specific to Mass Communication undergraduates.

Furthermore, Olise (2018) did a study titled *Mass Communication Undergraduate Students' Demographic Variables and the Use of Facebook in University of Benin*. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between demographic variables (age, gender, and religion) and the use of Facebook among Mass Communication undergraduate students at the University of Benin. The research adopted a descriptive survey design. A total of 406 respondents (203 males and 203 females) were selected from a population of 813 Mass Communication undergraduates who had Facebook accounts. The sampling method used was proportionate stratified sampling across all levels (100 to 400 levels). Data were collected using an 11-item questionnaire and analysed using mean scores, simple percentages, frequency tables, and Chi-square tests. From findings, 83% of the students used Facebook on a daily basis. Age and gender had significant relationships with Facebook usage, while religion did not. Male students within the age range of 18–25 years (88%) used Facebook more frequently than female students (57%). The study concluded that demographic variables—particularly age and gender—play a significant role in the frequency of Facebook usage among undergraduate students. The study recommended that higher institutions, parents, and stakeholders should encourage students to maintain their Facebook accounts to help bridge communication gaps. The similarities between both studies is the focus on Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State, Nigeria, and investigated their social media usage. The divergence is that while the study under review focused on students' demographic variables and the use of Facebook, this study investigates the influence of social media on mental health.

Lastly, Olise, et al (2013) carried out an investigation on uses and gratification of the Internet among students in the Department of Mass Communication, Delta State University (DELSU) Abraka. The study became necessary following the influx of an increase in the use of

the Internet in education, which portends functional as well as dysfunctional roles on students if not properly handled. Hence, the need to empirically evaluate uses and gratification of the Internet by students. Findings from the study showed that students in the Department of Mass Communication, DELSU Abraka, are heavy users of the Internet despite their low level of technological knowledge in the use of the Internet. In addition, it was found that the students use the Internet to send e-mails, gather information for educational purposes and to chat despite being occasionally hampered by network failure. The study concluded that students are not affected by dysfunctional roles of the Internet. They recommended that the programme curriculum of the Department of Mass Communication, DELSU, Abraka, be reviewed to incorporate a broader study of the Internet in order to boost the technical knowledge of the students. The study also recommended that Nigerian government should work out a workable framework that would ensure that Internet Service Providers in Nigeria tackle the incessant network failure so that users of the Internet get value for the subscription of Internet services. The study is similar to the current study as it investigated Mass Communication students of a university which relates to the current study investigating Mass Communication undergraduates in three selected universities. However, it differs because the study under review is on uses and gratifications of the Internet. The current study investigates the influence of social media on mental health.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on two relevant theories: social comparison and uses and gratifications theories.

## **Social Comparison Theory**

The Social Comparison Theory (SCT) was proposed by Leon Festinger in 1954. The theory posits that individuals determine their own self-worth by comparing themselves to others. It says people have an innate drive to evaluate their abilities and opinions and when objective standards are unavailable, they compare themselves with others to assess their own value and standing. These comparisons are often directed toward individuals who are perceived to be similar in age, social status, or life stage. Festinger distinguished between upward social comparison (comparing oneself to someone better off) and downward social comparison (comparing to someone worse off). Both types influence motivation, self-perception, and emotional states. Over the years, the theory has evolved. For instance, Wills (1981) extended the theory by suggesting that downward comparisons help protect self-esteem during times of stress. Meanwhile, Buunk and Gibbons (2007) highlighted that frequent comparisons may become habitual and potentially harmful, especially in media-saturated environments.

In today's digital era, social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter serve as fertile grounds for comparison. Unlike traditional comparison methods, social media provides an unending stream of curated content, highlight reels of people's lives which can fuel intense upward social comparisons. These comparisons are often based on physical appearance, lifestyle, academic achievements, social popularity, and material possessions. Several studies have linked social media use with increased levels of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, particularly among young adults and university students (Vogel et al., 2014; Appel, Gerlach and Crusius, 2016). This is because individuals often compare themselves with idealized, filtered versions of their peers or influencers, leading to unrealistic self-evaluations and emotional distress. Moreover, platforms like Instagram and TikTok are visually driven,

increasing the salience and frequency of appearance-based comparisons. Such frequent exposure can cause dissatisfaction with one's own life and appearance, feeding into negative self-concept and even mental health issues such as body dysmorphia and social anxiety (Fardouly et al., 2015). Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how individuals think, feel, and act. Social comparison plays a pivotal role in shaping these domains.

Meanwhile, The Social comparison theory has been appreciated for its ability to relate everyday human behaviour and explains why individuals constantly evaluate themselves against others. Also, the theory extends to digital context making it relevant in studies involving social media. Additionally, the theory provides a useful framework for understanding emotional responses such as envy, pride, self-enhancement, or self-doubt. The understanding of how comparisons affect mental health, psychologists and educators can enhance creation of design interventions aimed at reducing harmful comparisons. Despite its wide applicability, SCT has several limitations. The theory assumes that individuals make comparisons consciously and rationally, whereas many comparisons especially on social media are automatic and emotional. Also, SCT was developed in a Western context and may not fully account for collectivist societies where comparisons serve different social functions. Another criticism of the theory is that it does not sufficiently consider how factors like social class, race, or gender affect comparison outcomes. The principles of social comparison theory are particularly relevant to Mass Communication undergraduates who are inherently more vulnerable to the psychological effects of social media use. This vulnerability is attributed to their dual role as both consumers and creators of media content as mandated by their academic training. Their educational background often requires them to engage with social media actively both as a source of

information and as a platform for self-expression. This makes them more susceptible to the effects of social comparison.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) originated in the 1940s and 1950s through the work of researchers such as Herta Herzog (1944) and Harold Lasswell (1948). However, it was Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 that formalized the theory as a key paradigm in media studies. The theory moved away from the traditional "media effects" model that viewed audiences as passive consumers and instead emphasized the active role of the audience in selecting and interpreting media. The uses and gratification theory explains that individuals actively choose media platforms based on their psychological and social needs. These include information-seeking, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. The theory emphasizes user agency, suggesting that media consumers are not passive but actively seek content that gratifies specific needs. UGT is based on the premise that individuals use media consciously and purposefully to fulfil specific needs and desires. These needs are generally categorized into five major types:

1. **Cognitive needs** – acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding.
2. **Affective needs** – emotional or aesthetic experiences.
3. **Personal integrative needs** – strengthening credibility, confidence, and status.
4. **Social integrative needs** – enhancing connections with family, friends, and society.
5. **Tension release needs** – escapism and entertainment.

These needs influence how individuals choose media platforms and content, and their gratification (or lack thereof) can significantly affect their psychological state.

The Uses and gratification theory is appreciated as it views media users as active participants who have control over their media consumption. Also, the theory is seen as flexible and adaptable since it applies to both traditional and modern media, including social media, making it highly relevant in contemporary research. The theory has also been widely tested and used in audience studies and media psychology. Additionally, the theory is esteemed for helping researchers understand why people use media and the psychological gratifications they seek.

Despite its strengths, UGT has faced several criticisms. The theory is flawed because it often relies on user self-reports, which may be inaccurate or biased. In addition, UGT describes media use patterns but does not strongly predict outcomes or behaviours. The theory also overemphasize on rationality because it assumes users are always aware of their motives and media choices, which is not always the case especially with compulsive or addictive media use. Another criticism is that while the theory focuses on what people do with media, it underplays what media does to people, which is vital when exploring mental health effects. The theory is also faulted because it has Western origins and may not fully account for socialist cultures or societies with different media access patterns.

Importantly, Social media platforms represent an evolution of media where the user is both the consumer and the producer of content. Unlike traditional media, social media is interactive, real-time, and user-generated, which has led to new gratifications and usage patterns. People use social media for varying purposes including information seeking, entertainment, self-presentation, social connection, Identity exploration -especially among youth and validation through likes, comments, and followers. The relationship between media usage and mental health can be directly interpreted through the UGT lens. When media use is driven by unmet psychological or emotional needs, it may lead to problematic usage patterns and negative mental

health outcomes. Therefore, while social media can gratify certain psychological needs, excessive or unmet gratifications can negatively affect mental health, especially among vulnerable populations like university students.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Preamble**

This chapter presents the methodology used in conducting the study. The subheadings under the methodology are as follows:

- 3.1 Research design
- 3.2 Population of study
- 3.3 Sample size
- 3.4 Sampling techniques
- 3.5 Instrument for data collection
- 3.6 Validity of instrument
- 3.7 Reliability of the instrument
- 3.8 Method of data collection
- 3.9 Method of Analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopted a mixed method research, combining descriptive survey and interview schedule. The survey design is considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to systematically collect, analyse, and interpret data from a sample population to generalize findings to a larger population. This design is suitable for investigating the patterns, relationships, and influence of social media usage on the mental health of undergraduates. The descriptive survey research design was adopted because the study was conducted among a cross-section of a group of people where data were collected at a point in time, with the use of the questionnaire. The descriptive survey research design allows the collection of data from sub-set

(sample) of a population. Thus, another reason for its adoption in this study was that it ensured that important and relevant facts were collected from the sampled population whose analysis aided the generalization of inferences on the larger population.

On the other hand, interview schedule was infused into the study to garner in-depth qualitative data. This method offers the flexibility to explore topics in wider details enabling open-ended questions that can give deeper insights. Interview help build relationship and trust with respondents or participants that can encourage more accurate feedback. Furthermore, this approach captures real time, contextual information and allow for the exploration of unexpected themes that may come up during discussions.

### **3.2 Population of the Study**

The population of the study was 1,151. The population of the study comprised all male and female undergraduates of Mass Communication. The distribution of the population is as follows:

#### **University of Benin (UNIBEN)**

100- level students: 225

200 level students: 236

300 level students: 238

400 level students: 191

**Total = 890 students**

#### **Edo University, Iyamho (EUI)**

100 level students 64

200level students 50

300 level students 57

400 level students 40

**Total=211 students**

### **Samuel Adegboyega University {Glorious Vision University (GVU)}**

100 level students 13

200level students 11

300 level students 15

400 level students 11

**Total= 50 students**

These figures were derived from the respective universities' student affairs division and serve as the basis for determining the sample size for this study.

### **3.3 Sample Size**

The sample size for this study was four hundred and ninety (490) Mass Communication undergraduates across the three selected universities in Edo State. To determine the appropriate sample size for this study, the rule of thumb for sample size determination proposed by Nwana (1980), as cited in Okoro (2003), was adopted. According to this guideline, if the target population is in the few hundreds, a sample size of 40% or more is considered adequate; for populations in the many hundreds, a 20% sample is sufficient; for populations in the few thousands, a 10% sample is appropriate; and for populations in the several thousands, a 5% or smaller sample is recommended. Given that the population for this study falls within the range of a few hundred, a sample size representing 43% of the total population of Mass Communication undergraduates from three selected universities in Edo State was calculated and rounded up to 490.

Furthermore, the choice of 490 students as the sample size is supported by the sample size adequacy guidelines provided by Lee and Camrey (1992), as referenced in Wimmer and Dominick (2011). According to their scale for evaluating sample sizes, a sample of 50 is rated as very poor, 100 as poor, 200 as fair, 300 as good, 500 as very good, and 1000 as excellent. Based

on this classification, the sample size of 490 students falls within the 'good' to 'very good' range, thus reinforcing its appropriateness and adequacy for the purposes of this study.

### 3.4 Sampling Techniques

This study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure representativeness and adequate coverage of the target population. In addition, the multistage sampling technique is operative in primary data collection from geographically dispersed population when face-to-face contact is required. The sampling procedure involved the following stages:

- **Purposive Sampling:** Three universities in Edo State offering Mass Communication as a programme were purposively selected for the study. The purposive sampling technique enabled the researcher to focus only on the subjects that meet the criteria for this study leaving out others. These institutions were chosen based on their geographical representation, accessibility, population size, and relevance to the research focus.
- **Stratified Sampling:** The total sample size of 490 was proportionally distributed across the three selected universities based on their respective student populations in the Mass Communication department. This was done to ensure that each university was fairly represented in the study. To determine the number of participants to sample from each university, this formula was used:

$(\text{University population} / \text{Total population}) \times \text{Desired sample size (490)}$

University of Benin:  $(890/1151) \times 490=379$

Edo University:  $(211/1151) \times 490=90$

Glorious Vision University:  $(50/1151) \times 490=21$

- **Simple Random Sampling:** Within each stratum (i.e., each university), simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents. This technique gave every student an

equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing selection bias and enhancing the validity of the findings.

The combination of purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling techniques ensured that the study sample was representative, unbiased, and adequate for generalizing the findings to the larger population of Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State.

### **3.5 Instruments for Data Collection**

The instruments used for data collection in this study were the questionnaire and the interview guide.

#### **The Questionnaire:**

The researcher used multi-choice items. The question contained 28 items designed with multi-choice items. The questionnaire consisted of six (6) sections: Section A: Demographic information - Section B: Examine the extent of the use of social media by Mass Communication undergraduates in select universities in Edo State.- Section C: Ascertain how the preferred type of social media affects the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State.- Section D Find out the Influence of the use of social media on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State.-Section E: factors contributing to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates -Section F: challenges faced by Mass Communication Undergraduates in their use of Social Media. The items included Likert -scale close-ended items.

#### **The interview guide/Schedule**

The interview contains five (5) sections presented to the interviewee. Section one (1) :Examine the extent of the use of social media by Mass Communication undergraduates in select

universities in Edo State. - Section Two (2): Ascertain how the preferred type of social media affects the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State. - Section three (3) Find out the Influence of the use of social media on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State.-Section four (4): factors contributing to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates because of social media engagement - Section five (5) :Challenges faced by Mass Communication Undergraduates in their use of Social Media.The questions included open-ended responses for deeper insight. The interview allowed the researcher to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences in more detail.

### **3.6 Validity of Research Instrument**

To ensure content and face validity, two experts in Mass Communication reviewed the questionnaire. Face validity requires cross-checking the content of the study especially the objectives and research questions to ascertain that the questionnaire items reflect the context projected in the study's objectives and research questions. Their feedback led to modifications in the phrasing and clarity of some items to suit the research objectives and respondents' level of understanding. In addition, content validity was carried out to ascertain the degree to which the designed instrument is different and/or similar to existing literature.

### **3.7 Reliability of Research Instrument**

The test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A pilot test was conducted on 30(commonly used in pilot studies) Mass Communication students from Benson Idahosa University which is not included in the main study. The responses were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha, and a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained, indicating a high level of internal consistency of the questionnaire to be administered. Reliability of research instrument is necessary since it shows the degree to which an instrument will continually

produce the same result if administered in similar context among similar respondents. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002) scores with modest reliability coefficient in the range of 0.50 - 0.99 may be used as a yardstick for making a decision about a group or for research purposes. Therefore, the figures gotten indicates that the instrument was reliable and consistent with the problem of the study (see Appendix II– Reliability of Instrument Test).

### **3.8 Method of Data Collection**

Data were collected through Google forms, distributed as links to Mass Communication undergraduates in their WhatsApp chatrooms and emails with the help of research assistants. Google Forms was used as an efficient alternative to the physical distribution of printed questionnaires due to its cost-effectiveness, ease of distribution, and wider reach. It allows researchers to collect data in real-time without incurring printing or transportation costs, making it particularly useful for studies involving large and geographically dispersed populations. Also, responses are automatically organized and stored, reducing the risk of data loss and minimizing human error associated with manual data entry while also providing a greater sense of anonymity and confidentiality, encouraging more honest and candid responses.

Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and all ethical standards, including informed consent, were observed. The research assistants were instructed in best strategies to follow to enhance Maximum Corporation. Precisely, persuasion, motivation and effective communication skills with respondents were the styles and method that the research assistants were taught in order to facilitate the retrieval of the instruments. The researcher used three weeks in research instrument administration and collection. In effect, all the 490 copies of the questionnaire administered were retrieved with ease in accordance with research ethics.

### **3.9 Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected in this study were analysed using descriptive statistics, including simple percentages, frequency tables, standard deviations, and mean score, with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. To test the formulated hypotheses, Pearson Chi-square was employed to determine relationships between variables. The statistical method was deemed appropriate due to the descriptive nature of the study, which required a simplified and clear presentation of results. Descriptive methods made it easier to present complex data in an understandable format. Frequency tables, for example, provide straightforward summaries, using a 100% baseline to show response percentages. This makes interpretation easier for readers. Likert Scale was used in the questionnaire to measure respondents' levels of agreement.

The scale was arranged as follows: 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree. The interpretation of mean scores was guided by the following decision rule: 4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly Agree, 3.50 – 4.49 = Agree, 2.50 – 3.49 = Neutral, 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree, 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree. All analyses were presented in a way that even individuals without a strong background in mathematics or statistics could easily understand and interpret the findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents analysis of the data generated for this study. The first part focused on the questionnaire. The second on the interview. The third on the testing of the hypothesis. The last part is on discussion of findings.

#### 4.1 Presentation and Analysis of Data Based on Bio-data

**Table 1: Gender of Respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	114	23.3%
Female	376	76.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Field Survey 2025**

Table 1 shows the gender of respondents. Male respondents had 114 representing 23.3% while female respondents were heavily dominated with 376, which represents 76.7%. The sample was female-dominated, which may influence findings related to emotional and psychological responses to social media.

**Table 2: Age of Respondents**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
16-20 years	413	84.3%
21-25 years	76	15.5%
26-30 years	1	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Field Survey 2025**

Table 2 presents the age distribution of respondents. The data indicate that the majority of participants are relatively young, with only a small number in the older age ranges. This suggests that the study primarily reflects the perspectives of younger students, which may influence

patterns of social media use and engagement. Overall, the findings show that the respondent pool is predominantly youthful, providing insight into how social media impacts this age group.

**Table 3: Name of University**

<b>Name of University</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
University of Benin (UNIBEN)	379	77.35%
Edo University	90	18.37%
Glorious Vision University	21	4.29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Field Survey 2025**

Data in table three show the three selected universities and the questionnaire distributed to respondents in each of the universities. From the table, it shows that University of Benin Mass Communication undergraduates responded to highest number of questionnaires, aligning with the school's larger population.

**Table 4: Academic Level**

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
100 level	124	25.31%
200 level	80	16.33%
300 level	123	25.1%
400 level	163	33.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Field Survey 2025**

Table 4 presents the academic levels of the respondents. The distribution shows a fairly balanced representation across the various stages of study, with a slightly higher concentration of respondents at the final year level. This suggests that a significant portion of the participants

have attained considerable academic exposure, which may contribute to greater familiarity and experience with social media. Overall, the findings indicate that the study population includes students with a range of academic maturity, providing diverse perspectives on social media use.

#### 4.2 Presentation and Analysis of Data Based on Other Items in the Questionnaire

**Table 5: Respondents Views on the Extent of social media use on a scale of 1-5 with 5 as the highest**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Decision</b>
1	3	0.6%	4.3	Accepted
2	14	2.9%		
3	84	17.1%		
4	169	34.5%		
5	220	44.9%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 5 presents respondents' extent of social media use on a 5-point scale. The data indicate that most respondents rated their usage toward the higher end of the scale, suggesting that social media occupies a significant part of their daily routines. Very few participants reported minimal engagement, highlighting that intensive use is common among the study population.

**Table 6: How many hours do you spend on social media daily?**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Decision</b>
less than 1 hour	2	0.41%		
1-3 hours	181	37%		
4-6 hours	280	57%		
More than 6 hours	27	5%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 6 shows that respondents generally spend a considerable amount of time on social media each day, with most indicating several hours of daily usage. Only a small proportion reported extremely prolonged use. The mean usage score of 3.70 indicates a high level of engagement, suggesting that social media use is a regular and significant part of the respondents' daily routines. This level of engagement implies a tendency toward dependency, which may have implications for both mental well-being and academic concentration.

**Table7: Respondents Views on How They Check Social Media Accounts daily**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Decision</b>
1-5 times	109	22.2%	2.9	Rejected
6-10 times	313	63.9%		
11-15 times	28	5.7%		
More than 15 times	40	8.2%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2.9</b>	

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 7 presents respondents' frequency of checking social media daily. The data indicate that most respondents access their accounts multiple times throughout the day, with only a small portion checking very frequently. The mean score of 2.9 reflects a moderate level of habitual checking, suggesting that social media is a constant presence in students' daily routines and plays a significant role in their day-to-day activities. Overall, these patterns highlight the routine nature of social media engagement among the respondents.

**Table: 8 Respondents' Views on how the use of preferred Type of social media Affect their Mental Health**

Preferred social media	Anxiety	Depression	Loneliness	Boost in Happiness	Reduced stress	Increased Motivation	No effect	Total	X	Decision
WhatsApp	– –	– –	– –	12%	489 99.8%	– –	– –	490	5.0	Accepted
Facebook	115 23.5	2 .4%	5 1.0%	94 19.2%	115 23.5%	148 30.2%	11 2.2%	490	4.1	Accepted
Instagram	135 27.6%	1 .2%	4 .8%	3 .6%	62 12.7%	150 30.6%	135 27.6%	490	5.0	Accepted
Twitter	135 27.6%	2 .4%	3 .6%	3 0.6%	107 21.8%	227 46.3%	13 2.7%	490	4.3	Accepted
Tiktok	4 .8%	2 .4%	22 4.5%	28 5.7%	9 1.8%	417 85.1%	6 1.6%	490	5.0	Accepted
Snapchat	18 3.7%	– –	– –	– –	1 .2%	470 95.9%	1 .2%	490	5.0	Accepted
YouTube	18 3.7%	– –	– –	– –	1 .2%	470 95.9%	1 .2%	490	5.0	Accepted
Pinterest	– –	– –	18 3.7%	1 .2	– –	470 95.9%	1 0.2%	490	5.0	Accepted
LinkedIn	1 0.2%	18 3.7%	– –	– –	– –	470% 95.5%	– –	490	5.0	Accepted

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 8 reveals that WhatsApp and Instagram were perceived most favourably, each receiving the highest rating from a majority of students. Despite growing concerns about Instagram-induced comparison, students viewed it as motivational. Facebook and Twitter attracted more mixed reviews, with some students citing anxiety and others reporting no significant emotional effect. This variation suggests that the psychological influence of platforms is closely tied to their mode of interaction both in private versus public, visual versus textual. WhatsApp and Instagram showed highest mental health benefits with a mean of 5.0. Also, TikTok, YouTube, Pinterest had 5.0 mean score. WhatsApp and Instagram were associated with positive emotional outcomes, while Facebook and Twitter showed mixed effects, including anxiety and no effect. TikTok was mostly viewed as motivational.

**Table 9: Respondents views on Influence of social media use on mental health**

<b>Influence of social media use on mental health</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Using social media has made me feel anxious /worried	31 6.3%	255 52.0%	54 11.0%	5 1.0%	- -	3.0	Accepted
I have experienced low self-esteem after using social media.	95 19.4%	252 51.4%	15 3.1%	115 23.5%	13 2.7%	4.0	Accepted
Social media contributes to my feelings of depression.	7 1.4%	149 30.4%	36 7.3%	146 29.8%	152 31.0%	2.4	Rejected
I feel mentally drained after long periods on social media	4 8%	231 47.1%	3 0.6	101 20.6%	151 30.8%	3.0	Rejected
Positive interactions on S/M improve my mental well-being.	171 34.9%	298 60.8%	- -	- -	21 4.3%	4.2	Accepted

Table 9 reveals mixed perceptions among respondents regarding the psychological effects of social media. While many respondents acknowledged experiencing feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem associated with social media use, these feelings were not universally shared, as a notable number of respondents expressed disagreement or uncertainty. Perceptions of depression showed a weaker association with social media use, with most respondents indicating that it did not significantly contribute to depressive feelings. At the same time, respondents

overwhelmingly recognized the positive impact of supportive and constructive social media interactions on their mental well-being. Overall, the findings suggest that although social media may contribute to certain negative emotional experiences, students are able to distinguish these effects from the broader psychological benefits derived from positive online engagement.

**Table 10 Respondents Views on Factors Contributing to Mental Health Issues Due to Social Media Usage**

Factors Contributing to Mental Health Issues Due to Social Media usage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Total	X	Decision
Cyberbullying/Harassment	192 39.2%	188 38.4%	42 8.6%	68 13.9%	– –	490	4.0	Accepted
Negative comparison with others	191 39.0%	205 41.8%	1 .2	93 19.0%	– –	490	4.0	Accepted
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)		102 20.8%	6 1.2%	18 3.7%		490	4.6	Accepted
Exposure to disturbing content	136 27.8%	336 68.6%	4 .8	14 2.9%		490	4.2	Accepted
Unrealistic beauty/lifestyle standards	96 19.6%	359 73.3%	4 .8%	31 6.3		490	4.1	Accepted
Academic distractions due to excessive use	115 31.6%	326 66.5%	3 .3	6 1.2		490	4.2	Accepted

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 10 highlights the key factors contributing to mental health issues associated with social media use. Respondents indicated agreement with all the factors presented, reflecting a broad recognition of potential psychological risks. Unrealistic beauty and lifestyle standards emerged as the most influential trigger, while cyberbullying and negative social comparison were also seen as significant concerns, supported by relatively high mean scores. Academic distraction and exposure to disturbing content were similarly prominent, indicating that social media’s impact extends beyond emotional well-being to affect academic focus. Overall, the

findings suggest a complex interplay of psychological, social, and academic factors that contribute to mental health challenges among students.

**Table 11: Respondents Views on Challenges faced while using social media**

<b>Challenges faced while using social media</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Decision</b>
It distracts me from studying /completing assignments.	81 16.6%	396 80.8%	3 .6%	10 2.0%	– –	490	4.1	Accepted
Online bullying	68 13.9%	398 81.2%	6 1.2%	8 1.6%	10 2.0%	490	4.0	Accepted
It affects my sleep pattern and leads to fatigue	37 7.6%	365 74.5%	– –	87 17.8%	1 .2	490	4.0	Accepted
It reduces my concentration and attention span.	44 9.6%	437 69.2%	4 .8%	3 .6%	2 .4%	490	4.1	Accepted
It increases my stress/ anxiety levels.	9 1.8%	391 79.8%	7 1.4%	82 16.7%	– –	490	4.0	Accepted
It affects my self-esteem/ body image.		38 7.8%	452 92.2%	– –	– –	490	2.2	Rejected
It causes procrastination/poor time management.		38 7.8%		452 92.2%		490	2.2	Rejected
It makes me addicted to social media		38 7.8%		452 92.2%		490	2.2	Rejected
Exposure to fake news		452 92.2%		38 7.8%		490	2.2	Rejected
Privacy concerns	52 10.6%	354 72.2%		38 7.8%		490	2.2	Rejected
It leads to mental health deterioration	52 10.6%	354 72.2%	28 5.7%	18 3.7%	38 7.8%	490	4.0	Accepted

**Source: Field survey 2025**

Table 11 presents the challenges faced by Mass Communication undergraduates in using social media. The findings indicate that respondents generally recognized a range of difficulties associated with these platforms. Distraction from academic work and online bullying were identified as the most prominent challenges, while other issues such as sleep disruption, reduced attention span, and anxiety were also widely acknowledged. The consistently high mean scores across all categories reflect a strong awareness of the mental and cognitive strain linked to social media use. Despite this awareness, the continued high engagement with social media suggests that undergraduates remain reliant on these platforms, balancing the benefits and challenges in their daily routines.

#### 4.3 Correlations

		SMMH	PTSM
<b>Sm</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	0.392**
<b>mh</b>	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	490	490
<b>Ptsm</b>	Pearson Correlation	.392**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	490	490

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Table 4.3, shows the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.392 and the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05, the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, indicating that there is a significant relationship between social media use and the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates.

#### 4.4 Presentation of Data Analysis Based on the Interview Schedule/Guide

Out of the three universities selected as highlighted in table 3, Two lecturers in the department of Mass Communication were interviewed from two universities, namely; the University of Benin and Glorious Vision University. This was due to time constraints. The interviews from the two lecturers yielded a rich data on influence of social media on mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates. The interview schedule/guide which contained five questions served as a guide. It was recorded with a mobile device and answers were also documented. Below is the summary of the interview done based on the questions.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Interviewer 1</b>	<b>Interviewer 2</b>	<b>Key Insights</b>
Extent/Frequency	Extremely frequent, habitual, almost constant	Disturbingly frequent, more than 10 checks/hour	Students are highly engaged and habitual users, confirming Objective 1
Platforms Used	WhatsApp (messaging), TikTok (entertainment)	WhatsApp (communication), Instagram (self-expression), TikTok	Platform choice varies by purpose; social vs entertainment, aligning with Objective 2
Mental Health Influence	Emotional withdrawal, anxiety, reduced empathy	Overstimulation, distraction, digital dependence	Social media affects emotional stability, supporting Objective 3
Contributing Factors	Over-reliance, escapism, blurred real/virtual boundaries	Social comparison, desire for validation, unrealistic lifestyles	Both behavioral and psychological factors contribute, addressing Objective 4
Challenges	Academic distraction, bullying, sleep issues, data/electricity problems	Negative lifestyle influence, addiction, poor time management	Social, behavioral, and practical challenges coexist, supporting Objective 5

### **Respondents' View on extent of use of social media by Mass Communication undergraduates**

Both participants consistently highlighted that Mass Communication undergraduates use social media extensively on a daily basis. While the first participant described usage as “extremely frequent—almost constant,” noting that students are habitually on social media in lectures, hallways, and even while walking Interviewee 2 Characterized the usage as “disturbingly frequent,” estimating that students check their phones more than ten times an hour, even during academic activities.

### **Respondents' View on Types of Social Media Platforms Used**

Both interviewees identified WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram as the primary platforms used by students. This can be seen as the first respondent distinguished WhatsApp for messaging and group chats, and TikTok for entertainment and trends. The second respondent highlighted WhatsApp as a communication lifeline (including academic group chats), and Instagram as a platform for self-expression and stress relief, though potentially contributing to time mismanagement and addiction. The responses suggest that different platforms serve distinct purposes—WhatsApp supports communication and academic collaboration, while TikTok and Instagram contribute more to entertainment, self-expression, and sometimes addictive behaviour. This differentiation helps understand why platform type may influence mental well-being in different ways.

### **Respondents' View on Influence of Social Media on Mental Health**

Both respondents emphasized the psychological impact of social media. The first participant Highlighted emotional and mental withdrawal, reduced empathy, and increased anxiety when offline. The second respondent noted overstimulation, emotional withdrawal, and

distraction, affecting self-awareness and emotional stability. Social media also provides spaces for creativity and connection but can create digital dependence.

Both participants confirmed that extensive social media use affects emotional well-being, causing distraction, withdrawal, and anxiety, even as it offers opportunities for social engagement and creativity. This dual impact underscores the complex nature of social media's influence on mental health.

### **Respondents' View on Factors Contributing to Mental Health Issues**

Both participants identified several contributing factors including over-reliance on social media as escapism, blurring virtual and real-life boundaries as well as Pressure from online comparisons, exposure to curated and unrealistic content, desire for validation, and changes in behavior and reasoning patterns. Both respondents highlighted that behavioural and psychological factors intersect, showing how social media shapes students' mental health through both digital habits and social expectations.

### **Respondents' View on Challenges Faced by Students**

The participants pointed out both psychological and practical challenges. While participant one listed distraction from academic work, online bullying, sleep disruption, reduced attention span, low self-esteem, high cost of data, and poor electricity, participant two mentioned Negative influence on behavior (dressing, lifestyle choices), addictive nature causing poor time management, and academic underperformance.

## **4.5 Testing of Hypothesis**

The result in the correlation table in 4.3 shows a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.392$ ) between social media use and students' mental health outcomes. The correlation is marked with

a double asterisk (\*\*). This indicated that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ( $p < 0.01$ ). As students' time spent on social media increases, there is a corresponding increase in mental health-related effects as explored in the study. The alternate hypothesis was therefore accepted indicating that there is a statistically significant relationship between social media use and the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates.

#### **4.6 Discussion of Findings**

To ensure that the aim and objectives of this study were fully addressed, the research questions were systematically answered using data generated from both the questionnaire, interviews and hypothesis. While Section A of the questionnaire focused on the demographic characteristics of respondents, Sections B through F were specifically designed to elicit responses relevant to the core research questions. The discussion that follows is anchored on the analysis of these responses, drawing insights from the statistical data presented in Chapter Four as well as qualitative input obtained through interviews. This integrated approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social media on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in the selected universities.

#### **Research Question One: To what extent do Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State use social media**

Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State are heavy consumers of social media. Findings indicate a high level of engagement with social media among students. Over 57% use social media for 4–6 hours daily and nearly 64% check it 6–10 times per day, showing a behavioural pattern of frequent, habitual engagement, possibly linked to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which emerged as the highest-ranking psychological factor in this study. The above is

consistent with the claims made by the interviewees who noted that students are always on their phones even in class.

Furthermore, the mean score for extent of use (Table 8) was 4.37, suggesting frequent and extensive engagement. This pattern aligns with findings by Keles et al. (2020), who emphasized that the frequency and intensity of social media use among university students is a major risk factor for psychological distress. This high usage is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, where students use social media not just for communication, but also for validation, entertainment, and identity-building.

**Research Question Two: How does the use of your preferred type of social media affect the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates?**

The use of preferred type of social media greatly affects the mental health of Mass Communication. This was disclosed in the findings from Table 9 highlighting platform-specific influences. WhatsApp and Instagram recorded mean scores of 5.0, indicating that these platforms had the strongest positive impact on mood and well-being. Conversely, Facebook and Twitter had mixed outcomes, with users reporting both motivation and anxiety. Similarly, Interview insights supported this, with lecturers identifying WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok as the students' most used platforms. This supports the view by Bayer et al. (2016) and Fardouly et al. (2015) that visual and ephemeral platforms like Instagram may improve self-expression but can also lead to negative body image comparisons. Meanwhile, platforms like WhatsApp that promote close interpersonal communication tend to enhance emotional support. While some use them for social bonding and motivation, others encounter toxicity, comparison stress, or emotional overload. The fact that TikTok was viewed as motivational by over 85% of users emphasizes the role of content format and tone including short, humorous, and relatable clips appear more psychologically soothing than polarizing text-heavy platforms.

**Research Question Three: What is the influence of social media use on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in three selected universities in Edo State?**

Social media use has a significant impact on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in three selected universities in Edo State. Findings revealed that a significant portion of respondents agreed that social media usage led to low self-esteem (mean = 4.0) and positively influenced their emotional well-being through positive interactions (mean = 4.2). These results suggest that social media presents a dual effect: while it can enhance users' mental wellness through social support, it also contributes to emotional vulnerability such as self-esteem issues. This mirrors the Social Comparison Theory, where the way users interpret online interactions (comparison or connection) determines the emotional outcome. Interestingly, respondents remained neutral on whether social media caused anxiety or mental drain (mean = 3.0), and disagreed on whether it contributes to depression (mean = 2.4). This partially contradicts studies such as Primack et al. (2017), which identified strong links between high social media use and symptoms of depression among young adults. However, the finding supports Valkenburg and Peter (2019), who noted that the context and nature of interactions matter more than time spent online.

These findings were echoed in interviews with lecturers who described students as often detached from reality and emotionally withdrawn due to excessive phone use, highlighting the mental and behavioural disengagement that comes with overuse.

**Research Question Four: What factors contribute to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates because of social media engagement?**

There are significant factors that contribute to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates. Majority of the respondents agreed that Unrealistic beauty/lifestyle standards, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) are the most significant factor affecting

mental health (mean = 5.0), followed closely by cyber bullying (4.0), negative comparisons (4.0), academic distractions (4.2), and exposure to disturbing content (4.2). These results are consistent with literature (Przybylski et al., 2013; Keles et al., 2020) which establishes FOMO and comparison as powerful mediators of stress and anxiety in the digital age. The Uses and Gratifications Theory also applies here as students seek gratification through connection and validation, which in turn exposes them to emotional strain. Findings from the interviews also revealed that social media has succeeded in bringing about modifications in reasoning and characters as well as over reliance on social media. This reinforced the idea that excessive exposure to online content shapes students' worldview.

**Research Question Five: What are the challenges, if any, faced by Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State in their use of social media?**

There are varying degrees of challenges faced by Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State in their use of social media. From Table 11, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that social media use leads to challenges such as academic distraction (mean = 4.1), online bullying (mean = 4.0), sleep disruption (4.0), reduced concentration (4.1), increased anxiety (4.0), and addictive tendencies (4.0). These findings echo those by Andreassen et al. (2012) and Twenge (2019), who linked compulsive usage to reduced academic performance and emotional instability. The data suggests that while social media is a valuable tool for engagement, it presents notable risks to students' focus, psychological health, and daily functionality. Likewise, findings from the Interviews highlighted similar concerns such as unrealistic lifestyle, fear of missing out. These findings align with both the Social Comparison Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory, providing a balanced view of both the benefits and challenges of social media use among Mass Communication undergraduates.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Preamble**

This chapter summarizes the research findings, draws conclusions based on the findings, and makes necessary recommendations.

#### **5.1 Summary**

This dissertation examined the influence of social media on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in select universities in Edo State, Nigeria. The demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate that the study population was predominantly young and largely female, reflecting the typical composition of undergraduate cohorts within the discipline. This demographic profile provides important context for understanding patterns of social media use and its psychological implications among the respondents.

Findings from the study reveal that social media use among Mass Communication undergraduates is both frequent and habitual. Most respondents reported spending several hours on social media daily and accessing their accounts repeatedly throughout the day. Social media engagement was observed to occur across various settings, including during academic activities and personal time, suggesting that these platforms have become deeply embedded in students' daily routines. This level of engagement indicates that social media is not merely a recreational tool but an integral component of students' social and communicative lives.

The study further revealed that social media use exerts both positive and negative influences on students' mental health. On the positive side, many students perceived supportive and engaging online interactions as beneficial to their emotional well-being, fostering feelings of connection, motivation, and happiness. However, these positive experiences were often

accompanied by negative emotional outcomes. A notable number of students reported experiencing low self-esteem, mental exhaustion, and anxiety, particularly when engaging in social comparison or consuming idealized online content. Despite these challenges, social media was not widely perceived as a direct cause of clinical depression, suggesting a nuanced emotional relationship in which psychological vulnerability coexists with perceived benefits.

Platform-specific analysis showed that WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok were the most commonly used social media platforms and were generally associated with more positive emotional experiences. These platforms were viewed as avenues for communication, entertainment, and social connection. In contrast, Facebook and Twitter elicited more varied emotional responses, with some students reporting increased anxiety or scepticism, while others remained largely unaffected. These findings suggest that the psychological impact of social media may be influenced more by the nature of the platform and the type of content consumed than by social media use in general.

Several factors were identified as contributing to mental health challenges among the students. Prominent among these were the fear of missing out, exposure to disturbing or harmful content, academic distraction, cyber bullying, and unrealistic lifestyle comparisons. These factors highlight that students' emotional responses are shaped not only by the amount of time spent on social media but also by the social dynamics and content they encounter online. In addition, students reported challenges such as addiction, procrastination, and emotional fatigue as recurring issues associated with social media use. These challenges were perceived to negatively affect academic performance and overall mental well-being.

## 5.2. Summary of Findings

The following are findings of this study:

- (i) The study found that Mass Communication undergraduates use social media frequently and consistently, spending considerable time on these platforms daily and accessing them repeatedly. This pattern indicates that social media use has become a routine and habitual part of students' everyday lives.
- (ii) The extent of social media use among the respondents was observed to be high, reflecting intense engagement and a strong emotional attachment to social media platforms. This level of involvement suggests a dependence that goes beyond casual or occasional use.
- (iii) Findings revealed that social media has both positive and negative implications for students' mental health. While supportive online interactions were perceived to enhance emotional well-being, social media use was also linked to reduced self-esteem, increased distraction, anxiety, and exposure to cyber bullying.
- (iv) The study identified unrealistic beauty and lifestyle portrayals and the fear of missing out as major contributors to mental health challenges among students. Other influential factors included exposure to disturbing content, academic distractions, and persistent social comparison, all of which were perceived to negatively affect emotional stability.
- (v) Platform-specific analysis showed that WhatsApp and Instagram were generally associated with more positive emotional experiences, largely due to their communicative and interactive nature. In contrast, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter produced mixed emotional responses, with some students experiencing anxiety or scepticism while others reported minimal psychological impact.

### **5.3. Conclusion**

Social media plays a dual role in the lives of Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State. It acts as both a source of connection and a trigger for emotional and psychological strain. The data reveal that while students use these platforms to fulfil their social and academic needs, the intensity of use often exposes them to mental health challenges such as low self-worth, distraction from studies, Fear of missing out (FOMO), and anxiety. Hence, social media cannot be entirely labelled as harmful, its impact largely depends on how, why, and how often it is used.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

**i. Promotion of Responsible Social Media Use:**

Universities should implement awareness programmes and workshops that educate students on responsible and balanced social media use. Such initiatives should emphasize time management, healthy online habits, and the importance of moderating screen time to reduce distraction and emotional fatigue.

**ii. Integration of Mental Health Support Services:**

Higher institutions should strengthen on-campus counselling and mental health support systems to address issues related to social media use, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional exhaustion. Professional guidance can help students develop coping strategies for managing online pressure and negative social comparisons.

### **iii. Digital Literacy and Media Awareness Education:**

Students should be educated on digital literacy, particularly in understanding unrealistic online portrayals and curated content. Teaching students to critically evaluate social media content can reduce the psychological impact of fear of missing out, unrealistic beauty standards, and lifestyle comparisons.

### **iv. Encouragement of Academic–Social Media Balance:**

Lecturers and academic administrators should encourage policies and practices that minimize social media distractions during lectures and study periods. Structured academic engagement and clear classroom guidelines can help students maintain focus and improve academic performance.

### **v. Promotion of Positive Online Engagement:**

Students should be encouraged to engage more in positive, supportive, and educational online communities. Emphasis should be placed on using social media platforms for academic collaboration, skill development, and constructive interaction rather than excessive entertainment or validation-seeking behaviors.

## **5.5 Contributions to Knowledge**

### **i. Context-Specific Evidence on Social Media and Mental Health:**

This study contributes empirical evidence on the relationship between social media use and mental health among Mass Communication undergraduates in Edo State, Nigeria. By focusing on a specific academic discipline and geographical context, the study fills a gap in existing literature that is largely dominated by studies from Western societies or broader student populations.

ii. **Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Insights:**

The study advances knowledge by combining survey data with interview findings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social media use and its mental health implications. This mixed-methods approach offers richer insights into students' experiences and validates quantitative findings through qualitative narratives.

iii. **Identification of Platform-Specific Psychological Effects:**

The research contributes to existing knowledge by demonstrating that different social media platforms exert varying psychological effects on students. By highlighting the distinct emotional impacts of platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter, the study shows that mental health outcomes are influenced not only by usage intensity but also by platform type and content nature.

iv. **Highlighting Key Psychological Triggers Beyond Usage Duration:**

Beyond time spent online, the study identifies specific psychological and social factors such as fear of missing out, unrealistic lifestyle portrayals, social comparison, and exposure to disturbing content—as significant contributors to mental health challenges. This shifts the focus of discussion from mere screen time to the quality and dynamics of online engagement.

vi. **Contribution to Policy and Educational Discourse:**

The findings provide evidence-based insights that can inform university policies, mental health interventions, and digital literacy programmes. By linking social media usage patterns to academic distraction, emotional well-being, and behavioural changes, the study contributes practical knowledge relevant to educators, counsellors, and policymakers concerned with student welfare.

## 5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

1. **Gender Differences in Social Media Impact:** Future research should explore the role of gender in how social media affects mental health. This is essential because gender may influence emotional expression, platform preference, and vulnerability to online pressures. The study should explore Emotional resilience, body image concerns, online harassment experiences, and engagement motivations across male and female students.
2. **Longitudinal Study on Long-Term Effects:** A longitudinal study could assess the long-term psychological effects of continuous social media use. Short-term studies like this one offer a snapshot, but trends over time are crucial to understanding chronic impacts. The study should explore Changes in anxiety levels, sleep patterns, academic performance, and social relationships over semesters or academic years.
3. **Content-Specific Impact on Mental Health:** Future studies may focus on how specific content types such as influencer posts, memes, news, and peer achievements affect students' emotions and cognition. Different content triggers different psychological responses. The study should explore Emotional reactions to body-positive vs. idealized posts, responses to political news, and impact of academic-related content on motivation.
4. **Comparative Study Across Disciplines:** A cross-disciplinary study can examine whether students from other faculties (e.g., Law, Engineering, Medical Sciences) experience different mental health effects from social media compared to Mass Communication students, who are more media-exposed. The study should explore Media literacy levels, academic pressure, digital usage patterns, and coping mechanisms across faculties.

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## APPENDIX 1

Department of Mass Communication  
Faculty of Arts,  
University of Benin,  
Benin City, Edo State,  
Nigeria.

Dear Respondent,

### REQUEST FOR THE COMPLETION OF ITEMS IN QUESTIONNAIRE

I **Brenda Izu**, a post-graduate student of the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Edo State. Conducting research (study) on: "**Influence of Social Media on the Mental Health of Mass Communication Undergraduates in Select Universities in Edo State.**" Wish to solicit your time and cooperation in attending to this questionnaire. The research is my dissertation work required for the successful completion of Master of Arts (M.A) degree in Mass Communication

You have been carefully selected to provide a reliable data/information necessary for the completion of this study, which is designed to contribute and advance knowledge. The information you provide would be used purely for academic purpose. Your anonymity is also protected in accordance with research ethics.

Thank you in anticipation of your time, understanding and cooperation.

Sincerely,

**Brenda Ifeoma Izu**  
Researcher

## QUESTIONNAIRE

Instruction on how to attend to the items in this questionnaire. Please tick [✓] the option(s) in the box that best explain(s) your disposition.

### Section A: Demographic Information

(Please tick [✓] as appropriate)

#### 1. Gender

Male ( )

Female ( )

#### 2. Age

16–20 years ( )

21–25 years ( )

26–30 years ( )

Above 30 years ( )

#### 3. Name of University

University of Benin (UNIBEN) ( )

Edo University (EUI) ( )

Glorious Vision University (GVU) ( )

Academic Level:

100 Level ( )

200 Level ( )

300 Level ( )

400 Level ( )

**Section B:** Extent to which Mass Communication Undergraduates in Edo State use social media

**4. How many hours do you spend on social media daily?**

Less than 1 hour ( )

1–3 hours ( )

4–6 hours ( )

More than 6 hours ( )

**5. How often do you check your social media accounts in a day?**

1–5 times ( )

6–10 times ( )

11–15 times ( )

More than 15 times ( )

**6. Rate the extent of your use of social media on a scale of one (1) to five(5) with 5 as the highest.**

1 ( )

2 ( )

3 ( )

4 ( )

5( )

**Section C:** How the use of preferred type of social media affects the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates

Indicate how your preferred type of social media affects your specific mental health (Tick [✓] as many as applicable)

Preferred social media	Specific Mental Health						
	Anxiety	Depression	Loneliness	Boost in Happiness	Reduced stress	Increased Motivation	No effect
WhatsApp							
Facebook							
Instagram							
Twitter							
Tiktok							
Snapchat							
YouTube							
Pinterest							

**Section D:** Influence of Social Media use on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates in three selected universities in Edo State

**Instruction:** Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on Influence of social media use on your mental health as a Mass Communication undergraduate in Edo State (Key: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

S/N	Influence of social media use on mental health	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7.	Using social media has made me feel anxious /worried					
8.	I have experienced low self-esteem after using social media.					
9.	Social media contributes to my feelings of depression.					
10.	I feel mentally drained after long periods on social media					
11.	Positive interactions on social media improve my mental well-being.					

**Section E:** Factors contributing to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates due to social media engagement

**Instruction:** Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements as factors contributing to your mental health due to Social Media engagement

**(Key: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)**

S/N	Factors Contributing to Mental Health Issues Due to Social Media	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Agree
12.	Cyberbullying/Harassment					
13.	Negative comparison with others					
14.	Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)					
15.	Exposure to disturbing content					
16.	Unrealistic beauty/lifestyle standards					
17.	Academic distractions due to excessive use					

**Section F:** Challenges faced by Mass Communication undergraduates while using social media  
Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on the challenges faced by Mass Communication undergraduates while using social media

**(Key: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree )**

S/N	Challenges faced while using social media	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Agree
18.	It distracts me from studying /completing assignments.					
19.	Online bullying					
20.	It affects my sleep pattern and leads to fatigue					
21.	It reduces my concentration and attention span.					
22.	It increases my stress/ anxiety levels.					
23.	It affects my self-esteem/ body image.					
24.	It causes procrastination/poor time management.					
25.	It makes me addicted to social media					
26.	Exposure to fake news					
27.	Privacy concerns					
28.	It leads to mental health deterioration					

## APPENDIX II

### Interview Schedule/Guide

1. From your observation, how regular do you think Mass Communication undergraduates use social media on a daily basis?
2. From your assessment, what actual type of social media do you think the students use on a regular basis
3. From your interaction with Mass Communication undergraduates in the University, what would you consider as the influence of social media on their mental health.
4. Based on your teaching experience, what you would adduce are the factors contributing to mental health issues of your students
5. Do you think there are challenges students encounter in their use of social media? If yes, kindly outline the challenges.

### Interview Response one

#### **Section One: Extent of the use of social media by Mass Communication undergraduates**

**Interviewer:** From your observation, how regular do you think Mass Communication undergraduates use social media on a daily basis?

**Response:** “Their usage is extremely frequent, almost constant. It’s not unusual to see students browsing or chatting on their phones during lectures, in hallways, or even while walking. Their connection to social media is habitual, almost reflexive. It’s like second nature to them now.”

#### **Section Two: Ascertain how the preferred type of social media affects the mental health**

**Interviewer:** From your assessment, what actual type of social media do you think the students use on a regular basis?

**Response:** “Based on what I see and hear them talk about, WhatsApp and TikTok appear to be the most widely used platforms. WhatsApp is mostly for messaging, group chats, and sharing updates, while TikTok seems to cater more to entertainment, trends, and short videos that captivate their attention.”

### **Section Three: Find out the Influence of the use of social media on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates**

**Interviewer:** From your interaction with Mass Communication undergraduates in the University, what would you consider as the influence of social media on their mental health?

**Response:** “From my interactions with Mass Communication students, I’ve noticed that social media significantly influences their mental health by creating a sense of disconnection from the real world. Many of them appear emotionally and mentally withdrawn, even when physically present. They are frequently engrossed in their devices, which diminishes their ability to engage meaningfully with their environment and peers. This detachment, in my view, has psychological implications, ranging from reduced empathy to increased anxiety when offline.”

### **Section Four: Determine the factors contributing to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates due to social media engagement**

**Interviewer:** Based on your teaching experience, what would you adduce are the factors contributing to mental health issues of your students?

**Response:** “One key factor I’ve observed is their over-reliance on social media. Many students use it as a form of escapism, which leads them to be detached from real-life responsibilities. This constant virtual presence blurs the line between digital interactions and real-life engagement, which can increase their vulnerability to stress and emotional fatigue.”

## **Section Five: challenges faced by Mass Communication Undergraduates in their use of Social Media**

**Interviewer:** Do you think there are challenges the students encounter in their use of social media? If yes, kindly outline the challenges.

**Response:**“Yes, students do encounter several challenges in their use of social media. One major challenge is distraction from academic work, as frequent social media use can take time away from studies and reduce focus. Another significant issue is online bullying or harassment, which can negatively affect students’ mental well-being. Many students also experience sleep disruption due to late-night use, as well as reduced attention span and difficulty concentrating on tasks. Additionally, feelings of anxiety or low self-esteem can arise, often linked to social comparison. Students often face logistical challenges such as the high cost of data subscriptions, lack of consistent electricity supply, and the difficulty of charging their devices. These issues cause frustration and may lead to irritability, especially for students who are heavily dependent on social media for communication, entertainment, or validation.”

### **Interview Response 2**

#### **Section One: Extent of the use of social media by Mass Communication undergraduates**

**Interviewer:** From your observation, how regular do you think Mass Communication undergraduates use social media on a daily basis?

**Response:** “Their usage is disturbingly frequent. I would estimate that most students check their phones more than ten times an hour. They’re constantly online—be it replying messages, checking notifications, or scrolling through content. Even during academic activities, it's a struggle for many to stay off social media.”

## **Section Two: Ascertain how the preferred type of social media affects the mental health**

**Interviewer:** From your assessment, what actual type of social media do you think the students use on a regular basis?

**Response:** “The most popular platforms among them seem to be WhatsApp and Instagram. WhatsApp serves as their communication lifeline, be it academic group chats, course updates, or social interactions. Instagram, on the other hand, gives an opportunity for self-expression and stress relief, but it also contributes to time mismanagement and content addiction.”

## **Section Three: Find out the Influence of the use of social media on the mental health of Mass Communication undergraduates**

**Interviewer:** From your interaction with Mass Communication undergraduates in the University, what would you consider as the influence of social media on their mental health?

**Response:** “In my professional and personal engagement with students, I’ve come to recognize that social media exerts both subtle and direct influence on their mental health. On one hand, it offers them a space for creativity and connection. On the other hand, it often leads to overstimulation and emotional withdrawal. Some students seem distracted, unable to focus or maintain conversations without reverting to their phones. This kind of digital dependence, I believe, affects their self-awareness and emotional stability.”

## **Section Four: Determine the factors contributing to mental health issues among Mass Communication undergraduates due to social media engagement**

**Interviewer:** Based on your teaching experience, what would you adduce are the factors contributing to mental health issues of your students?

**Response:** “Several factors contribute. Aside from the overuse of social media, I’d say pressure from online comparisons plays a big role. Students are constantly exposed to curated content that portrays unrealistic lifestyles. This can cause self-doubt, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy. The

need for likes, validation, and attention online also creates mental stress, especially for those who tie their self-worth to their online visibility. Social media has succeeded in Bringing about modifications in reasoning and characters, their behavioural patterns. Social media has contributed to their mental health issues based on the proceeds from the internet”

### **Section Five: challenges faced by Mass Communication Undergraduates in their use of Social Media**

**Interviewer:** Do you think there are challenges the students encounter in their use of social media? If yes, kindly outline the challenges.

**Response:** “Yes, definitely. I believe there are challenges. Social media lay hold on their behavioural patterns on a negative note. It cuts across so many spheres of their life experience. Their dressing, the kind of food they eat, the way they eat. When you see someone dressing anyhow, most of them are gotten from the internet. When you see someone desiring to make money, wear gold and drive big cars. Most of them are influenced by what they see on social media. There are so many of them. I cannot be able to talk about all of them “Additionally, the addictive nature of social media makes it difficult for them to prioritize tasks, contributing to poor time management and academic underperformance.”