

**NEGATIVE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN STUDENTS**

BY

EZEFILI CHIWENDU RUTH

SSC2105923

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY

NIGERIA

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND
ANTHROPOLOGY, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY, NIGERIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **EZEFILI CHIWENDU RUTH** Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Science Degree in Sociology and Anthropology. University of Benin, Benin City.

DR. (MRS) AMEN ILEVARE

(Project Supervisor)

Date

ASS. PROF O.G IGBINOMWANHIA

(Head of Department)

Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for His Grace towards my life and academic pursuit and also to my family for their prayers and financial support.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the negative impact of social media usage on the mental health of students at the University of Benin. The research was driven by the growing integration of social media into students' daily lives and the potential psychological risks associated with excessive use. It aims to explore how patterns of social media engagement affect students' mental well-being, self-esteem, and body image, as well as to identify protective factors that can help mitigate these negative impacts. The study recognizes that while social media serves as a tool for communication, learning, and self-expression, it also exposes students to issues such as anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, and social comparison, which can contribute to poor mental health outcomes.

Existing literature reveals a complex relationship between social media and mental health, showing that prolonged exposure to curated online content can distort perceptions of reality, increase stress, and promote addictive behaviors. The research draws on the Cultivation Theory, which explains how continuous engagement with media shapes individuals' understanding of the world. In this context, students who spend excessive time on social media are more likely to internalize unrealistic standards and negative social comparisons, affecting their psychological well-being. The study also highlights how digital habits, such as late-night browsing and excessive screen time, can disrupt sleep patterns and overall mental stability.

An explanatory research design was adopted to analyze the relationship between social media usage and students' mental health. A sample of 150 University of Benin students was selected using Yamane's formula, and data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages and bar charts were employed for analysis.

The findings suggest that the current usage of social media platforms has accounted for mental health issues, ranging from the increased time spent on the different social media platforms daily, creating an unsterilized mental health for these students. In conclusion the findings revealed that the sample size has experienced one mental health issue to another from using social media. The findings provided recommendations to check and regulate the negative impacts of social media, time limits, social media detox, engagement in offline activities and actively choosing who to follow.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background Of The Study

The advent of social media has brought crucial changes to adolescents and young adults' lifestyles. The birth of social media has transformed the way people learn, interact and develop. Social media has created a role in the lives of students. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and many more have become an integral part of a student's life providing means of communication, self-expression and socialization. Over the years there has been increasing numbers of the use of social media by students with different purposes and the rate at which they spend on these platforms daily. Statistics have been able to draw out data showing the percentage of how they spend time using social media for various purposes. 41.5% of the students used social media for up to 3 hours per day. WhatsApp (98.25%) and YouTube(91.75%) were the most used social media applications. (Ajay , Arvind, Ramya, Kailesh, Ashwini ,2012). A large percentage of students both in high school and college (around 90%) use social media daily.

The utilization of these different platforms daily birth issues affecting our mental health ; Anxiety and depression, body image issues and self-esteem , fear of missing out (FOMO) , addiction and cyberbullying & harassment . Barrense-Dias, et al. (2019) shared that social media is the most exceedingly terrible stage for youth where the youngsters use it for cyber bullying and trolling which is a hazard for youngster's mental health. William & Teasdale (2018) studied that the individuals who utilize social media excessively long, may stick in mental health issues. Moreover, social media has become a vital tool for information dissemination, allowing users to stay updated on current events , trends and topics of interest (Pew Research Center ,2011). In 2019 , Merriam -Webster defined social media as “forms of electronic communication (such as

websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content. Defining the concept of social media, we get to see that social media is a networking platform that brings the diversity of the globe into a smartphone. Social media is full of unfiltered information that alters the minds of their user. Social media platforms have made it easier for the people of all ages to access a vast amount of information, including content that may not be suitable for younger audiences.

Mental health is an important aspect of a student's life, because it affects their mental health. WHO (2022) defined Mental health as the state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities , learn well and work well, and contribute to their community .It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions , build relationships and shape the world we live in.Exposure to unfavorable social media content - potential for cyberbullying, unrealistic beauty standards , violent , sexual and misinformation increases students risk of experiencing mental health conditions . Recent studies have shown that individuals with mental disorders are increasingly gaining access to and using mobile devices such as smartphones (Firth et al 2015; Glick,Druss,Pina,Lally,and Conde ,2016; Torous, Chan, et al ,2014., Torous, Friedman, and Keshavan, 2014). For adolescents and young adults ages 12 to 21 with psychotic disorders and mood disorders , over 97% reported using social media , with average use exceeding 2.5 hours per day (M.L. Birnbaum , 2017). The issue of cyberbullying is of greater concern among university students as they spend considerable time on the internet and social media services and are thus at higher risk of cybervictimization. Cyberbullying can significantly harm an individual's mental well-being, leading to issues such as heightened tension and worry, feelings

of sadness, increased aggressive behavior, and diminished self-esteem. The main feature of cyberbullying is the anonymity guaranteed by the internet, which makes victims feel weak and lonely (Cao, W.; Fang, Z.; Hou, G.; Han, M.; Xu, X.; Dong, J.; Zheng, 2020). It is clear that social media has more negative impact on the lives of students than good. If the use of social media among students is not regulated there is going to be a high chance of the mental disorders among students, the result of this would be detrimental to other aspects of their lives not just their mental health which will affect the society at large.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Investigation revealed that social media may be a significant issue in managing the mental health crisis among students in Nigeria. This is because the negative attitudes of other social media users may exacerbate the condition of students with mental health disorders or even produce mental health problems in students. Social media users under the age of majority may encounter harassment, humiliation, and unfavorable comments on their posts. Comparing their sense of self and level of enjoyment with others users may also cause discomfort for some people (Belluomini, 2015). The issue of cyberbullying is of greater concern among university students as they spend considerable time on the internet and social media services and are thus at higher risk of cybervictimization. Cyberbullying can significantly harm an individual's mental well-being, leading to issues such as heightened tension and worry, feelings of sadness, increased aggressive behavior, and diminished self-esteem. The main feature of cyberbullying is the anonymity guaranteed by the internet, which makes victims feel weak and lonely (Cao, W.; Fang, Z.; Hou, G.; Han, M.; Xu, X.; Dong, J.; Zheng, 2020). Unfortunately, cyberbullying and online harassment have been accepted among university students. Sufferers of cyber bullying were confirmed to more repeated suicide attempts and increased levels of symptoms of depression,

anxiety, as for those individuals who have not witnessed cyberbullying (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2013).

Additionally, the reach of the internet means that cyberbullying can be seen by a large number of people, which can be embarrassing and isolating for the victim (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). Negative social media habits can also lead to feelings of loneliness, melancholy, and mood swings because of the unfavorable things users come across when browsing through social media (belluomini,2015). Previous studies have examined social media usage among students, revealing concerning trends. These studies have shown varying rates of social media use and related mental health issues across different countries, highlighting the scope of the problem. Research has found that adolescents who used social media more intensively reported higher levels of anxiety and depression. Outlining the negative mental health outcomes linked to the excessive use of social media among university students; Anxiety and FOMO (Fear of missing out): FOMO is a diffuse anxiety that occurs when individuals fear missing out on the positive experiences of others (Chai H, Niu G, Chu X, Wei Q, Song Y, Sun X, 2018). For example, Fomo was positively correlated with depression and anxiety (Elhai JD, Gallinari Ef, Rozgonjuk D, Yang H, 2020.) and significantly predicted stress

This study seeks to analyze the Negative Impact of Social Media Usage on the Mental Health of students University of Benin.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the pattern and impact of social media on students' mental health?
2. How does exposure to curated online content affect students' self-esteem and body image?
3. What are the perceived impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment on student mental?

4. What are the protective factors that check the negative impacts of social media on students' mental health?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study has both general and specific objectives. The general objective of this study is to examine the negative impact of Social Media Usage on the Mental Health and of University of Benin students. The specific objectives are as follows:

- 1.To find out the pattern and impacts of social media usage of social media on students' mental health.
- 2.To ascertain how exposure to curated online content affects students' self-esteem, body image and mental health.
- 3.To examine the perceived impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment on student mental health.
- 4.To find out what are the protective factors that check the negative impacts of social media on students' mental health.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the existing body of research by shedding light on the negative impacts of social media on student's mental health, providing more insights into the relationship of social media and the prevalence of mental health disorders. The study's findings can inform students, educators and mental health professionals by providing a better understanding of the potential risks and benefits of social media use. Society will be able to mitigate the negative impacts of excessive use of social media use among students. In addition, this study's findings can inform strategies for promoting healthy social media use, such as developing guidelines for social media

use or creating interventions to mitigate negative impacts. Furthermore, this study results can provide insight for future research of the impacts of social media on mental health, including investigation into the role of social media in other mental health contexts.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the students in the University of Benin halls of residence, specifically hall 1, hall 2 and hall 3.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Mental health- It is a fundamental component of overall health, impacting one's quality of life and ability to enjoy daily life.

Social Media- Social media are websites and applications that allow users to create online communities and share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content like photos and videos.

Cyberbullying- It can include sharing harmful content, spreading lies, posting embarrassing photos or videos, or sending mean messages, and it can cause significant emotional and psychological harm.

Self-esteem- Self-esteem is your overall opinion of yourself, how much you value and respect yourself, and your confidence in your abilities.

Depression- Depression is a common mental health disorder characterized by a persistent feeling of sadness and a loss of interest or pleasure in activities.

Communication - Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, and feelings through speaking, writing, or body language.

Anxiety- Social media anxiety is the unease or stress people feel due to their social media use, driven by factors like Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), the pressure to present a perfect image, and the constant influx of notifications.

FOMO(Fear Of Missing Out)- is the anxiety that others are having more rewarding experiences, leading to a compulsive urge to stay constantly connected to social networks to avoid feeling excluded or inadequate.

Digital Detox- A social media digital detox is a period of time spent intentionally abstaining from social media and other digital devices to reduce stress, improve focus, and reconnect with the physical world.

Social Media platforms- Social media platforms are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content, participate in virtual communities, and network with others online.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of existing literature relevant to the negative impact of social media usage on the mental health of university students, specifically within the context of the University of Benin. It begins by defining key concepts such as social media and mental health, tracing their evolution and significance in contemporary society. The review then delves into the pervasive nature of social media usage among students, highlighting patterns and popular platforms. Subsequently, it explores the intricate relationship between social media exposure and various aspects of mental well-being, including anxiety, depression, body image, self-esteem, and the phenomenon of cyberbullying. Finally, it integrates findings from previous studies to establish a foundational understanding for the current research, identifying areas where further investigation is warranted.

2.2. Conceptualization

2.2.1 social media

The advent of social media has fundamentally reshaped human interaction, learning, and development, particularly for adolescents and young adults. Merriam-Webster (2019) defines social media as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content." Over the past two decades, social media has evolved from

simple online forums and chat rooms into multifaceted ecosystems that include platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, and Snapchat (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) . Social media has undoubtedly transformed the lives of students, offering platforms for information dissemination and facilitating communication across the globe. However, this accessibility comes with significant drawbacks. The ease with which individuals can express themselves without restriction or caution, often without considering the potential harm or disturbance to others, is a major concern. Furthermore, social media enables youngsters to communicate with strangers without truly knowing them, posing potential risks. The captivating nature of the content provided by these platforms often leads to addiction, regardless of the negative consequences it may have on students' academic performance, mental well-being, and personal safety.

A growing body of research has examined the impact of social media use on mental health and well-being. (Levenson, J. C., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. E., Colditz, J. B., & Primack, B. A.,) found that heavy social media use is associated with sleep disturbances, which in turn may contribute to higher levels of anxiety and depression. Woods & Scott (2016), found that higher social media use, especially at night and with higher emotional investment, was associated with poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of anxiety and depression in adolescents. All these downsides can lead to mental health issues among students, most students have a smartphone in their disposal.

The use of digital detox has been explored in response to the negative impacts of social media among students. Research by Hunt et al.(2018) suggests that reducing daily social media usage decreases feelings of loneliness and depression, highlighting the importance of moderating screen time to maintain both academic performance and overall mental health.

2.2.2. History of Social Media

The evolution of social media has been a captivating journey, showcasing how communication methods have transformed over the years to make connections quicker and more accessible. The evolution happened to meet the fundamental human needs of communication and connection.

Here is a breakdown of social media evolution;

1. The Early days of human communication

This period of human communication was not identified as social media, but the platforms of this period laid its foundation. ARPANET (1969): This birth of the internet through its use and functions. ARPANET allowed computer to computer base communication and connection, enabling the information exchange through networking. ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), created by the Advance Research Project Agency (ARPA) in 1963, was initially designed to provide a secure and reliable means of communication between military and academic institutions(Ishnoor K. Bakshi, 2023). It was said that ARPANET played a significant role in the creation of the internet. This technological advancement made way for increased user interactions on networks, The ARPANET was no longer limited to the military and academic use but now a user-friendly global platform.

II. Usenet (1979) and Bulletin Board Systems (BBS): Usenet is a system of special interest discussion groups, called newsgroups, to which readers can send, or “post”, messages which are then distributed to other computers in the network, Usenet started as a network linking University personnel who needed to discuss technical computer issues, but the talk rapidly expanded beyond work,(Judith Anderson: consumer guide, June 1995).

III. Early Chat and instant Messaging (e.g; Talkomatic 1973, IRC 1988, ICQ 1996): Instant messaging can be traced back to the 1960s with time-sharing systems allowing users to send

simple text messages. Talkomatic (1973), on the PLATO system, was one of the earliest examples of a public chat system.

2. The Age of Virtual community(1990s – early 2000s) :This period came with early social networking sites; Six Degrees (1997): often cited as the first recognized social networking site, allowing users to create profiles and connect with friends. Classmates.com (1995): Focused on reconnecting with old school friends. Friendster (2002) : Gained significant popularity, enabling users to create profiles, upload photos, and connect with friends.

MySpace (2003): Rose to prominence with customizable profiles and music integration briefly becoming the most visited websites globally. Blogging platforms: The emergence of personal websites and blogs e.g. Live Journal in 1999, Blogger in 2003 as platforms for individuals to share their thoughts and experiences with a wider audience.

3. The Mainstream Revolution (Early 2000s – Present): The Age of Social Media

Facebook (2004): Detail its origin as a university network and its subsequent expansion, becoming a global phenomenon and defining the modern era of social networking. Professional Networking (LinkedIn, 2002): Highlight the development of platforms catering to professional connections and career development. Microblogging (Twitter(X), 2006): the rise of the short-form content sharing and its impact on real-time news dissemination and public discourse Visual Content Dominance (YouTube 2005, Instagram 2010, Pinterest 2011, Snapchat 2011): The shift towards image and video-centric platforms and their influence on content creation, marketing, and personal expression. Short-form Video and Beyond (TikTok, 2016): The rapid ascent of platforms like TikTok, emphasizing the impact of algorithms and highly engaging, short-form video content the widespread adoption of smartphones has been instrumental in the persuasive nature of social media, making it accessible anytime, anywhere.

2.2.3. Mental Health

Mental health is a crucial and foundational aspect of an individual's overall well-being, particularly for students navigating academic and personal challenges. WHO 2022 defined mental health as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realizing their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. This definition focuses on the sanity of a person in their approach to their daily activities. Mental Health is the state of mental well-being of a person. Mental health is an integral part of the whole health, it has to do with the way we think, act and feel and this has a direct impact on how we approach the other part of life, like making decisions, handling stress, lifestyle or habits, and being productive. This shows that mental health is a crucial health branch that can disrupt the other areas of our life, there are several key components of mental health in a person's life such as emotional health, social well-being, adaptation, cognitive health and purpose, these are what makes up the essence of a student life especially the cognitive health, which is mostly affected sensitive contents of which social media usage provides.

The major health challenges identified among students in tertiary institutions are mental health, psychological problems, infectious diseases and emotional disorders (Ma, Zhao, Li, Chen, Wang, Zhang, & Liu, 2020). However, mental health has been more associated with adolescents. It accounted for 11.5% of the global disease burden (WHO, 2022) . Tertiary institution Students represent higher percentages of adolescents, which is the period that marks transition from youthful age to adulthood (World Youth Report (WYR) , 2003). In Nigeria, the prevalence of mental illness is reported at 20% (Shekihar, 2006). Although Mental Health policy was formulated in Nigeria but was not implemented. Mental Health is a crucial challenge in students' lives because of its effect on academic performance. Mental health conditions include mental

disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm.

People with mental health conditions are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being, but this is not always or necessarily the case. (WHO, 2022). The constrained sleep schedules frequently experienced by first-year university students can detrimentally impact their mental health and psychological well-being. Chronic poor quality and quantity of sleep led to the development of mental health issues, including increased agitation, depressive symptoms, feelings of fatigue, as well as negatively affecting their abilities to function academically and socially (Lund, et al., 2010). Research have shown that low quality of sleep can result to mental conditions, what will they be doing if they are not asleep, most times, students spend most of their time on social media platforms getting interesting content they grow addicted to. Excessive and uncontrollable social media use, often bordering on addiction, has been strongly linked to sleep problems, poor sleep quality, and even insomnia.

Students may feel a compulsive need to check their phones for messages and updates, even during the night, leading to fragmented sleep (ResearchGate, 2024; Frontiers in Public Health, 2021; MDPI, n.d. Social media platforms are designed to be engaging, with notifications and endless scrolling activating dopamine reward pathways. This can make it difficult to "switch off" mentally before sleep, leading to cognitive and affective arousal. The blue light emitted from screens also suppresses melatonin production, further disrupting the body's natural sleep cycle (Harvest International School, 2025; Frontiers in Public Health, 2021; Social Harms Utah, 2024).

2.3. The Interplay Between Social Media and Mental Health of University Students

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) reports an annual increase of 13% in the incidence of mental health issues. Anxiety and depression stand out as the prevalent concerns,

impacting 264 million and 280 million individuals globally, respectively. Notably, the utilization of technologies, particularly social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, has been identified as a contributing factor to the mounting challenges in mental health (Elhai JD, Levine JC, Alghraibeh AM, 2018). Numerous studies have analysed strong correlation between heavy social media use and an increased risk of developing or exacerbating symptoms of anxiety and depression (Helpguide.org, n.d.; Research Inventions Journals, 2025; ResearchGate, 2025a; Stanford Law, 2024). The importance of Mental Health has led to several research into what factors influence and impact it. Moreover, studies have highlighted that individuals with existing mental disorders are increasingly using mobile devices and social media (Firth et al., 2015; Glick, Druss, Pina, Lally, and Conde, 2016; Torous, Chan, et al., 2014; Torous, Friedman, and Keshavan, 2014). For instance, M.L. Birnbaum (2017) found that over 97% of adolescents and young adults aged 12 to 21 with psychotic or mood disorders reported using social media, with average daily use exceeding 2.5 hours.

Studies highlighted the impact of increasing usage of social media and its possible impact on mental health such as ; Social Media Addiction, Sleep Disturbances, Social Isolation and Loneliness, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Cyberbullying and Harassment and Increased Anxiety and Depression. Users frequently compare their own lives, appearances, and achievements to the often-idealized and curated realities presented by others online. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, jealousy, and dissatisfaction with one's own life (Helpguide.org, n.d.; Research Inventions Journals, 2025; Capital University, n.d.; ResearchGate, 2025b). Social media platforms can be fertile ground for cyberbullying, harassment, and exposure to negative or harmful content. This online abuse can severely impact self-esteem and contribute to anxiety and depression (Research Inventions Journals, 2025; Capital University, n.d.).

The constant stream of updates about others' activities and social events can trigger FOMO, leading to feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and a compulsive need to stay connected, even at the expense of sleep or in-person interactions (Helpguide.org, n.d.; Capital University, n.d.; *Frontiers in Public Health*, 2021). Poor sleep, in turn, is a significant contributor to mental health issues like depression and anxiety (Harvest International School, 2025; Capital University, n.d.; Johns Hopkins Medicine, n.d.; ResearchGate, 2025c; ResearchGate, 2025d). Addiction is strongly correlated with increased stress, anxiety, and depression (NTU IRep, 2023; RSIS International, 2025). Problematic or excessive social media use can develop into an addiction, characterized by an uncontrollable urge to browse and engage with platforms, often at the expense of other important life areas, including academic performance, social relationships, and mental well-being (Stanford Law, 2024; ResearchGate, 2024; *Frontiers in Public Health*, 2021).

Social Media has played both a positive role and negative role, taking out the positive impact will not give enough accuracy for this study. There are positive impacts of social media to a student life not just the negative impacts. Social support and connection is one of social media's positive impacts, building relationships helps in dealing with loneliness, connecting with distant relatives and friends It can provide a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation by fostering supportive online communities (ResearchGate, 2025a; MDPI, n.d. (b); ResearchGate, 2025e). Access mental health information, social media provides information on relevant mental health information. This can help reduce stigma, raise awareness, and provide accessible avenues for help, particularly for those who might find in-person support challenging (ResearchGate, 2025a; Johns Hopkins Medicine, n.d.), Another one is self- expression. Social media platforms can offer a space for self-expression, creativity, and identity exploration, which can be particularly beneficial for adolescents and young adults (Research Inventions Journals, 2025).

Community building is also essential for students, they get to link up with people in line with their interests and goals. For individuals with specific interests, conditions, or identities, social media can provide a platform to find and connect with like-minded communities, fostering a sense of shared experience and mutual support (ResearchGate, 2025a).

2.4. The Pattern of social media Usage among university students

University students have shown an exceptionally high rate of social media engagement. Understanding their engagement and the nature of social media use is crucial for comprehension of its impacts on their mental health. University students are the most active social media users, spending so much time daily on these social platforms. A study by Roberts (2025) suggests that roughly 98% of current college and university students use some form of social media daily. The time spent on these platforms is also substantial, with many students dedicating 2-3 hours daily to social media activities (Subair,2017). Other sources reported higher figures, with some students averaging around 4.5 hours per day and a significant percentage spending more than 3 hours daily (Roberts, 2025; PMC, 2025). Social Media use is now more prevalent than ever, having seamlessly integrated into personal routines. This normalized presence demands a considerable portion of an individual's time, which can in turn manifest in numerous affects. Specific platforms commonly used by university students include WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok, and Twitter (x), with engagement varying across these platforms (Subair, 2017; Agorapulse, 2025).

2.5. Social media use and associated mental health indicators among university students

Many university students today are familiar with and often addicted to social media, using it for educational and leisure purposes (Dhume, S. M., Pattanshetti, M. Y., Kamble, S. S. and Prasad,

T., 2012). 68% of college students use social media for six or more hours daily, with those aged 18 to 29 being the most active users (Wang, Q, Chen, W, Liang, Wang, Q and Chen. W, 2011). In Africa, most students use social media to connect with friends and academics. 88% are on Facebook, using it primarily to communicate (82%), seek job and bursary ads (9%), and stay updated on global news (20%). Only 8% use it for academic purposes like study group discussions. (Ogbonnaya, U. Miji, A. 2014). However, there are concerns about the potential impacts of social media use on mental health. Social media impact on mental well-being is a growing concern for parents, researchers and society. It presents substantial risks to mental health. As a result, individuals are more likely to experience negative effects like anxiety, stress, bullying, and loneliness.

Studies have categorized the relationship between social media use and its negative outcomes, such as increased levels of depression, body image concerns, eating disorders, and external problems in young people. Scientists theorize that social media might be a significant factor contributing to youth suicide. The relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes, such as depression and anxiety, has been a subject of intense scrutiny in recent years (Brand, M., Young, K. S. and Laier, C., 2014). Research has found that adolescents who used social media more intensively reported higher levels of anxiety and depression. Outlining the negative mental health outcomes linked to the excessive use of social media among university students; Anxiety and FOMO (Fear of missing out): FOMO is a diffuse anxiety that occurs when individuals fear missing out on the positive experiences of others (Chai H, Niu G, Chu X, Wei Q, Song Y, Sun X, 2018). For example, Fomo was positively correlated with depression and anxiety (Elhai JD, Gallinari Ef, Rozgonjuk D, Yang H, 2020.) and significantly predicted stress. Constant exposure to curated 'highlight reels' of others' lives, the pressure to maintain an

idealized online persona, and the fear of missing out (fomo) can significantly contribute to anxiety.

Depression: According to the American Psychiatric Association, depression is a serious medical condition that can have a negative impact on how you feel, think, and act. High engagement on social media content can lead to cyberbullying, social comparison, negative comments and perceived lack of social approval online, all these can cause depressive symptoms. They threaten the mental well-being of students. **Sleep Disruption and stress:** Excessive use of social media, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns among students. Inadequate sleep can lead to increased stress and a decline in overall mental health. **Body Image concerns, low self-esteem and eating disorders:** Social media platforms create unrealistic beauty standards, leading to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and potentially contributing to eating disorders.

2.6. The Negative Impact of Social Media on Body Image and Self-Esteem

Social networking sites and electronic platforms have spread significantly in recent times, becoming the largest and most extensive websites on the web. They continue to spread rapidly, and the desired services from these networks have expanded, granting users extensive capabilities to exchange information in various fields such as education, culture, sports, and more. These social websites, through their participants, provide a vast amount of information, research, and study materials (Al-Zbon, M, & Abu Saalik, D. 2014). They are electronic social networking sites that allow individuals to establish social networks by introducing themselves, their interests, and orientations, and selecting their friends from open, closed, or secret groups. They also facilitate the exchange and dissemination of written materials, photos, videos, and a range of tools that facilitate communication and interaction (Al-Zbon, M, & Abu Saalik, D. (2014).

Body image is the way a person perceives, thinks and feels about their body's appearance and functionality. A person's body image is subjective, and most times doesn't entirely have to do with how the person's body actually looks. Rather, it involves the mental image the person holds of their body (size, shape, and attractiveness), and the emotions that accompany it. This mental image is in turn influenced by the societal standards of beauty, media representations of 'what beauty should look like', and personal experiences of the individual. Body image is a multidimensional construct encompassing self-perceptions and attitudes regarding one's physical appearance (Oshana, 2021). Body image is shaped by the cognitive, emotional, perceptual and behavioural domains which affect a person's mood, physical experience and environment (Toselli, S., Zaccagni, L., Rinaldo, N., Mauro, M., Grigoletto, A., Maietta Latessa, P., & Marini, S. 2023). This explains how body image goes beyond physical appearances; it covers how an individual perceives themselves and their attitudes towards their physical appearance.

These feelings can be satisfaction and acceptance of one's body or insecurity and dissatisfaction with his or her appearance. This can cause them to experience a decline in their level of self-esteem, viewing themselves as either totally unworthy or not worthy enough. Self-esteem is the personalized evaluation and perception that a person has of their worth, potentials, and value. This covers the beliefs and feelings that a person has about themselves, and the extent to which they consider themselves capable, valuable and worthy of being loved and respected by others. It can also explain how much regard an individual has for themselves. According to Kendra (2023), self-esteem is defined as an individual's appraisal of his or her value. It also refers to a person's subjective judgement of his or her worth as a human being (Isserow, 2023).

According to Singh (2018), since the terms are frequently used interchangeably, it is crucial to distinguish between self-esteem and the more generic term self-concept. Baumeister (2018)

opined that self-esteem is the emotional reaction people feel when they consider and assess various aspects of themselves, whereas self-concept is the entirety of cognitive beliefs people have about themselves; it is everything that is known about the self and includes things like name, race, likes, dislikes, beliefs, values, appearance descriptions, such as height and weight. Many researchers have studied the relationship between social media use, especially Facebook, and self-esteem, and they have found that low self-esteem is related to intense social media usage and people who have low self-esteem tend to use social media sites to increase their self-image and self-esteem. (Taylor-Jackson & Moustafa, 2020; Zhang, 2023).

Many researchers have studied the relationship between social media use, especially Facebook, and self-esteem, and they have found that low self-esteem is related to intense social media usage and people who have low self-esteem tend to use social media sites to increase their self-image and self-esteem (Taylor-Jackson & Moustafa, 2020). It is essential to understand the striking relationship that exists between social media use, body image, and self-esteem among undergraduates and how it plays out in their mental health.

2.7. Perceived impacts of cyberbullying and online harassment on student mental health

Cyberbullying, defined as bullying via electronic means (Taylor & Francis, 2006). Cyberbullying refers to humiliation, threats, sexual harassment, or social exclusion using information and communication technology (Cook, C.R, William, K.R, Guerra, N.G, Kim, T.E, S, 2010). For example, posting pictures or embarrassing comments about someone, or posing as someone dangerous. Cyberbullies attack victims by sending demeaning or threatening messages, and delivering images using websites, instant messages, blogs, chat rooms, cell phones, e-mails, and personal online profiles (Shariff, S, Gouin, R, and Mitchell, C, Leech, F, 2006). Several

studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between cybervictimization and depression among adolescents and university students.

The issue of cyberbullying is of greater concern among university students as they spend considerable time on the internet and social media services and are thus at higher risk of cybervictimization. Cyberbullying can significantly harm an individual's mental well-being, leading to issues such as heightened tension and worry, feelings of sadness, increased aggressive behavior, and diminished self-esteem. The main feature of cyberbullying is the anonymity guaranteed by the internet, which makes victims feel weak and lonely (Cao, W.; Fang, Z.; Hou, G.; Han, M.; Xu, X.; Dong, J.; Zheng, 2020). Unfortunately, cyberbullying and online harassment have been accepted among university students. Sufferers of cyber bullying were confirmed to more repeated suicide attempts and increased levels of symptoms of depression, anxiety, as for those individuals who have not witnessed cyberbullying (Gómez-Guadix et al., 2013).

Additionally, the reach of the internet means that cyberbullying can be seen by a large number of people, which can be embarrassing and isolating for the victim (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). Research has shown that cyberbullying can have serious emotional and psychological effects on victims, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Toheed Q, Hina .H, Muhammad J., Muhammad N. I, Muhammad. S.Z, Sidra. A, 2023). Since the internet lets people stay anonymous and is always available, cyberbullying can happen all the time. This makes it really tough for victims to get away from the constant harassment. It's incredibly difficult for victims to escape the relentless harassment.

There are several types of electronic bullying used by individuals to harm others, as reported by Al-Otaibi,H. 2019 & Al-Barashidiyya,H. (2020), including: - Harassment: This involves sending

disrespectful, insulting, and offensive messages or writing comments of this nature. - Reputation damage: This entails sending untrue someone picture intention mocking them. - Electronic bullying involves speaking in an insulting manner, with the purpose of enjoying seeing them feel sad. - Identity theft: This involves identity matters. - Deception: When the bully deceives someone to reveal their secrets and then publishes and sends them to others. Given the widespread availability of the internet and the increasing amount of time students spend online, it's a stretch to say that cyberbullying isn't inevitable.

2.8. Protective factors that check the negative impacts of social media on students' mental health

The University of Pennsylvania in 2018, study found that reducing social media use to 30 minutes a day resulted in a significant reduction in the levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep problems, and FOMO. But you don't need to cut back on your social media use drastically to improve your mental health. The same study concluded that just being more mindful of your social media use can have beneficial results on your mood and focus. When using social media in an unhealthy way there are signs that would be experienced by such students; FOMO- (Fear of missing out) which causes mental stress and creates space for anxiety. Youths using social media should be enlightened about turning to the function of social media for creating opportunities, building meaningful connections for social support, for learning and healthy socialization Regular enlightenment on the dangers of extreme use of social media, encouraging routine social media detox. Creating a timer for each social media platform, to reduce the use of social media to improve students' mental health.

2.8.1 Digital Detox

Digital detox is defined as a “period of time during which a person refrains from using their electronic devices, such as smartphones, regarded as an opportunity to reduce stress or focus on social interaction in the physical world” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). The concept of digital detox arises from the recognition that these negative impacts on mental health necessitate intentional breaks from digital engagement. Digital detox involves strategies such as setting designated periods without screen use, limiting social media consumption, and practicing mindful technology use (Radtke T, Apel T, Schenkel K, et al. 2022). The term was introduced for the first time around 2012 (Felix & Dean, 2012). Excessive digital or social media use has been associated with several adverse effects on mental health, such as depression and anxiety. (Elhai JD, Levine JC, Alghraibeh AM & Thomée S., 2018).

The need for a solution for these mental issues caused by excessive usage of social media, introduced the use of detox methods to reduce the mental issues, limiting usage such as setting time limits on apps to alert you of how many minutes or hours, disable notifications to reduce constant checking of phones, deleting some social media apps(having just one or two), spend time with friends and families, find hobbies like reading, playing board games that helps promote brain health these are some method of social media detoxifying. There is an assumption that these social media detox could reduce the negative impacts of social media use, such as anxiety, depression, stress, even their overall mental well-being. By implementing these detox methods, individuals aim to regain control over their digital habits, alleviate the mental strain associated with constant connectivity, and foster a healthier relationship with technology (Turel O, Cavagnaro DR, Meshi D. 2018).

Digital detox is one way of checking the negative impacts of social media on mental health. Implementing these methods can help reduce the issues around mental health issues caused by the impact of extreme use of social media.

2.9 Theoretical framework

2.9.1 Cultivation Theory

The Cultivation Theory, originally developed by George Gerbner and his colleagues to explain the long-term effects of television on perceptions of reality. Cultivation theory is a sociological and communications framework designed to unravel the enduring impacts of media consumption, with a primary focus on television. At its core, the theory posits a compelling hypothesis: individuals who invest more time in watching television are prone to perceive the real world through a lens aligning with the prevalent depictions in television messages, in contrast to their counterparts with lower television viewership but comparable demographic profiles. In 1968, Gerbner conducted a survey to demonstrate this theory. Following his previous results, he placed television viewers into three categories: light viewers (less than 2 hours a day), medium viewers (2–4 hours a day), and heavy viewers (more than 4 hours a day). He found that heavy viewers held beliefs and opinions like those portrayed on television, which demonstrated the compound effect of media influence.

Heavy viewers experienced shyness, loneliness, and depression much more than those who watched less often. The long use impact of social media on students have changed and affected their bedtime, the way they interact with friends and their self-esteem. Cultivation theory suggests that the more time people spend watching TV, the more their understanding of the world starts to match what they see on TV, even if what's on TV isn't always accurate. This isn't just about being entertained; it's about TV subtly influencing what we all believe about society

and how things work. This study adapted this theoretical framework to explore the impact of social media on students' mental health. This framework utilizes cultivation theory to understand how prolonged and consistent exposure to social media content can shape students' perceptions of reality, ultimately influencing their mental health outcomes. The main point of this framework is that the more time a student spends engaging with social media, the more likely their perceptions of social norms, personal success, body image, and interpersonal relationships will be cultivated to align with the often curated, idealized, or dramatized realities presented on these platforms.

This theory is important to this research due to the detailed explanation it provides concerning the impact of long use of social media. According to this theory, when social media usage is on the high level, it's negative impact than positive impact on individuals

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an explanatory research design to comprehensively examine the relationship between social media usage and the mental health of students at the University of Benin. This design was suitable because its main objective was to establish and explain a cause-and-effect relationship between the two variables. It allowed the researcher to go beyond simply describing a correlation by investigating how specific aspects of social media use might have influenced, and potentially predicted, changes in students' mental well-being. This approach provided a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the intricate dynamics at play and enabled the confirmation or rejection of hypotheses about their relationship.

3.2 Population of the Study

The total population of this study, according to the university's record, was approximately 77,000 students in total (Uniben, Students Affairs Division (2024), spread across various faculties and departments. The targeted population of this study was 5,040 students. For effective representation and convenience, the questionnaires were distributed among students residing in the three major halls of residence within the University of Benin. Out of the total 150 questionnaires administered, 26 were distributed to students in Hall 1, 20 to students in Hall 2, and 104 to students in Hall 3. This distribution reflected the population density and accessibility of students within each hall, ensuring that the responses captured diverse experiences and patterns of social media usage.

3.3 Sample Size

A sample of 150 respondents was selected for this study. Using Taro Yamane's Formula:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error

$$n = 5040 / 1 + 5040(0.08)^2 = 5040 / 33.256 = 151.55$$

Approximately, 150 respondents were chosen. The margin of error used was 0.08.

3.4 Sampling Techniques/ Procedures

The sampling technique used for this study was the non-probability sampling technique, specifically simple random and convenience sampling. This method was adopted because it allowed the researcher to select respondents who were readily available and willing to participate

in the study, especially within the limited timeframe and accessibility constraints of the university environment. The non-probability approach was also appropriate since not every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected, but the focus was on obtaining data from participants who could provide relevant and insightful information on the subject matter. Using both simple random and convenience sampling helped ensure that the data collected represented diverse perspectives of students while maintaining practicality and efficiency during data collection.

3.5 Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used in collecting the respondents' data was the semi-structured questionnaire, which included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. This was used because the researcher wanted respondents to freely express their ideas about the topic while also providing measurable responses. By refining questionnaires from existing studies, the researcher was able to select options relevant to this study, guiding the responses of the participants effectively.

3.6 Method for Data Collection

The method used for this study was a face-to-face process in administering the questionnaire and collecting the data. Both a one-time survey and a two-time survey approach were used. A one-time survey involved administering the questionnaire to respondents and collecting their responses immediately upon completion. In contrast, a two-time survey entailed distributing the questionnaire to respondents who requested that the researcher return later to retrieve the completed responses.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

For the analyses of this study, data collected from the responses of the questionnaire would be analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and other methods such as frequency, percentage, tables and bar charts were used as the descriptive statistical tools.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to examine and explain the results obtained from the surveys conducted during the research. Significant findings are revealed in this chapter. By the end of the chapter, these findings would allow for drawing conclusions and making recommendations. The responses from the surveys would be analysed using counts and simple percentages to make data

representation easy. Additionally, the first section, labelled A, deals with demographic information such as gender, age, year of study, halls of residence. The other sections which would be labelled in alphabetic order, are dedicated to addressing the research questions.

4.2 Research Question Analysis

In this section, the information obtained through the questionnaire is showcased, scrutinized, and elucidated using tables.

4.2.1 Demographic Data

The respondents' gender, age, year of study, and halls of residence is examined.

Section A: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Table 1: Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	Respondents	Percentage %
Male	71	47%
Female	79	53%
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025

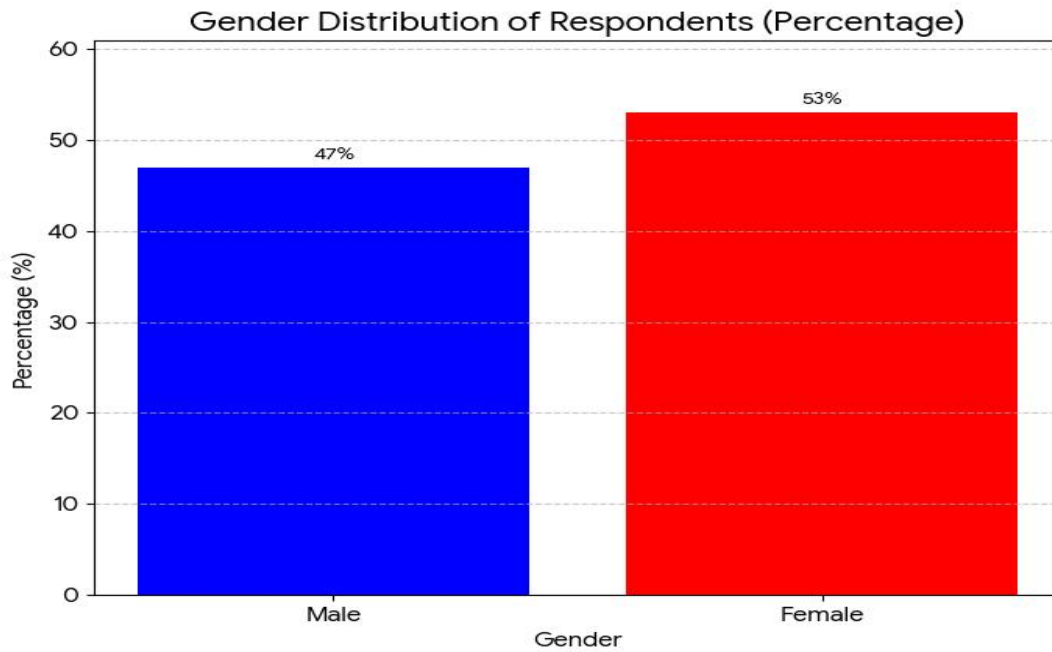


Chart 1

Table 1: The data reveals a slightly higher representation of female participants compared to male participants. Specifically, 71 respondents were male, constituting 47% of the total sample size. Conversely, 79 respondents were female, constituting 53% of the total sample size.

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents

Age	Respondents	Percentage %
16-18	29	19
19-21	60	40
22-24	47	31
25 and above	14	9
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025

Chart 2

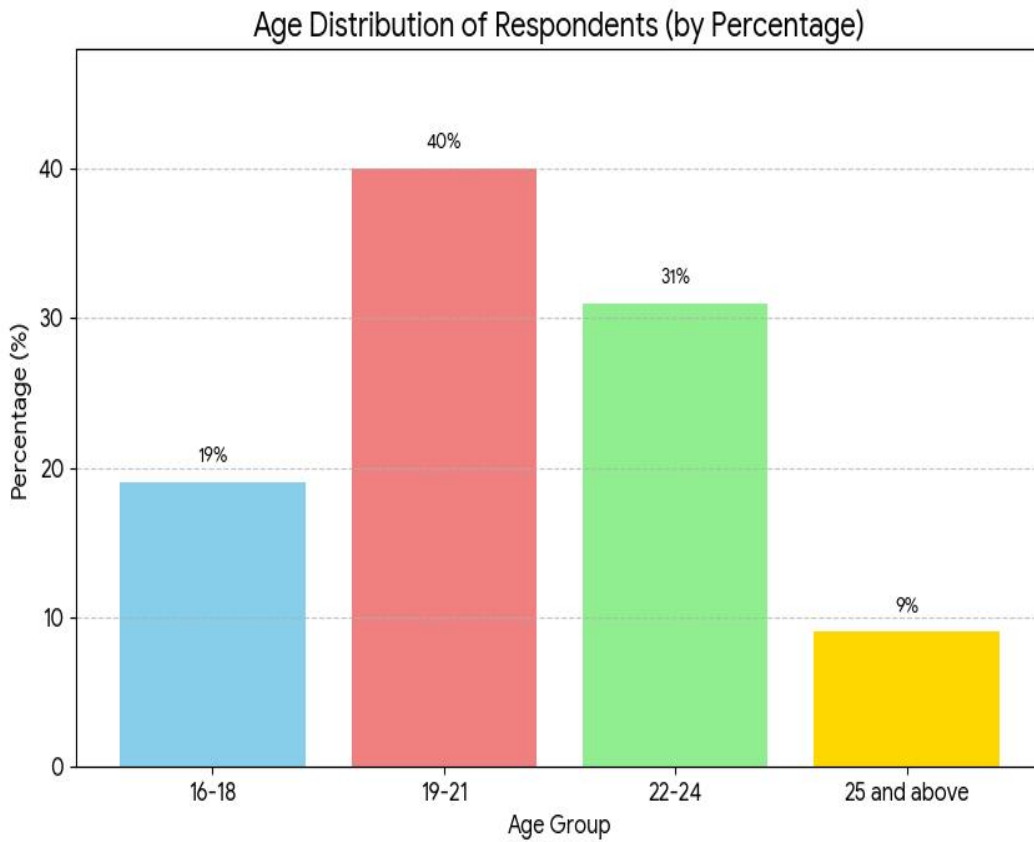


Table 2: The age respondents data reveal that the largest proportion of respondents falls within the 19-21 age category, which account for 60 participants and 40% of the total sample size. This group represents the highest participants in this study. The second high group is the 22-24 age category, with 47 respondents contributing 31% of the total sample. Respondents age 16-18 comprise 19% with 29 participants. The smallest group is the 25 and above category, contributing 9% with 14 respondents. Overall, the majority of the participants are in the 19-21 range.

Table 3: Year of study distribution of respondents

Year of study	Respondent	Percentage %
100 level	28	19
200 level	24	16
300 level	44	29
400 level	36	24
500 level	15	10
600 level	3	2
Total	150	100

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Chart 3

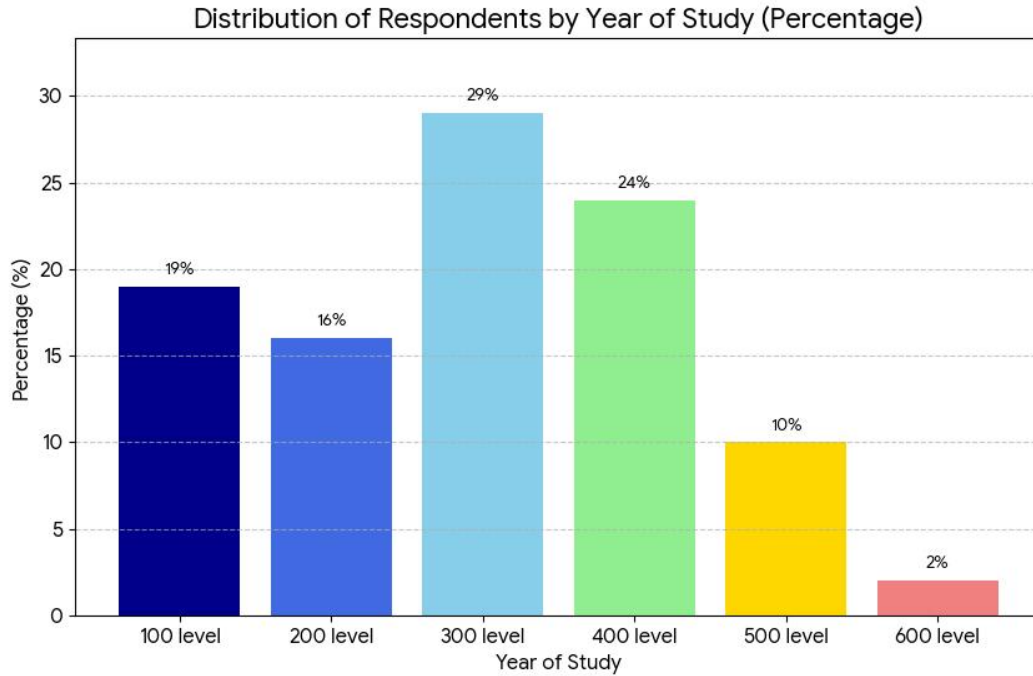


Table 3: The year of study data reveals high participants in the mid-year of study. The largest group is the 300 level students, comprising 44 respondents and 29% of the total. Followed by the

400 level students, comprising 36 respondents and 24% of the total. The 100 level students made up 19% with 28 respondents and 200 level students contributed 16% with 24 respondents.

The lowest number of respondents were found in advanced levels. The 500 level students comprised 10% with 15 respondents, and the 600 level students were the smallest group with only 3 respondents, representing 2% of the total.

Table 4: Halls of residence distribution of respondents

Halls of residence	Respondents	Percentage %
Hall 1	26	17
Hall 2	20	13
Hall 3	104	69
Total	150	100

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Chart 4

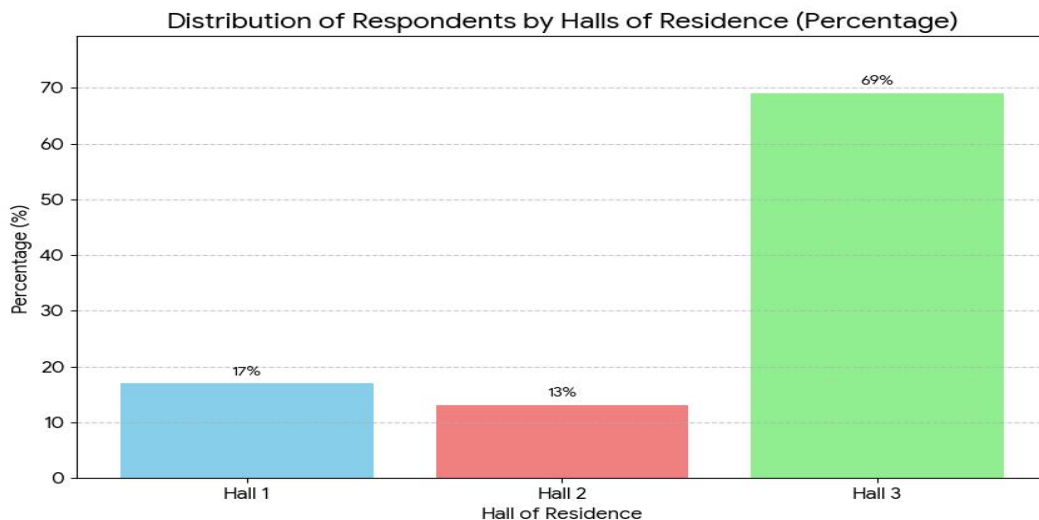


Table 4: The hall of residence reveals a highly unequal distribution across the halls. Majority of participants were in hall 3, 104 respondents resided in hall 3 with 69% of the total sample. While

the remaining halls had lower representation. Hall 1 contributed 26 respondents with 17% of the sample. Hall 2 was the least represented, with only 20 respondents making up 13% of the total.

4.2.2 Analysis of Research Questions

To find out the student’s perceptions of social media usage, and its impact on their mental health.

Section B: Patterns and impacts of social media usage and impacts on students' mental health

Table 5: Do you use social media?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	149	99
No	1	1
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 5

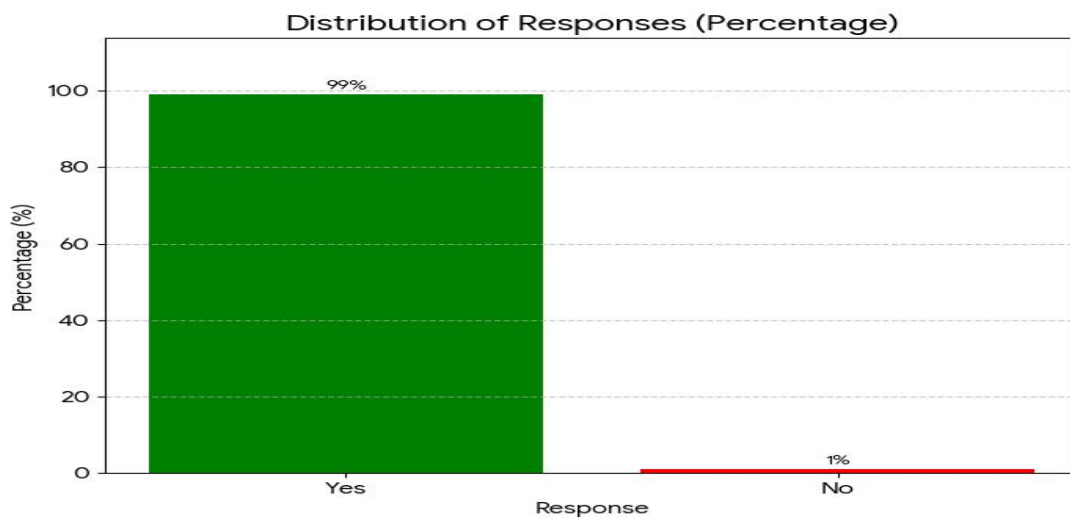


Table 5: This data reveals that the majority of the students use social media with 149 respondents accounting for 99% of the total sample. While only 1 respondent, representing 1%, reported that they do not use social media. This finding showcased that the sample size is highly engaged with social media.

Table 6: Which social media platforms do you use regularly?

Response	Frequency/ 150	Percentage
WhatsApp	123	82
Instagram	72	48
Facebook	49	33
Twitter (X)	37	25
YouTube	56	37
Snapchat	50	33
TikTok	64	43
LinkedIn	17	11
Telegram	31	21
Others	2	1

Source: Field work, 2025.

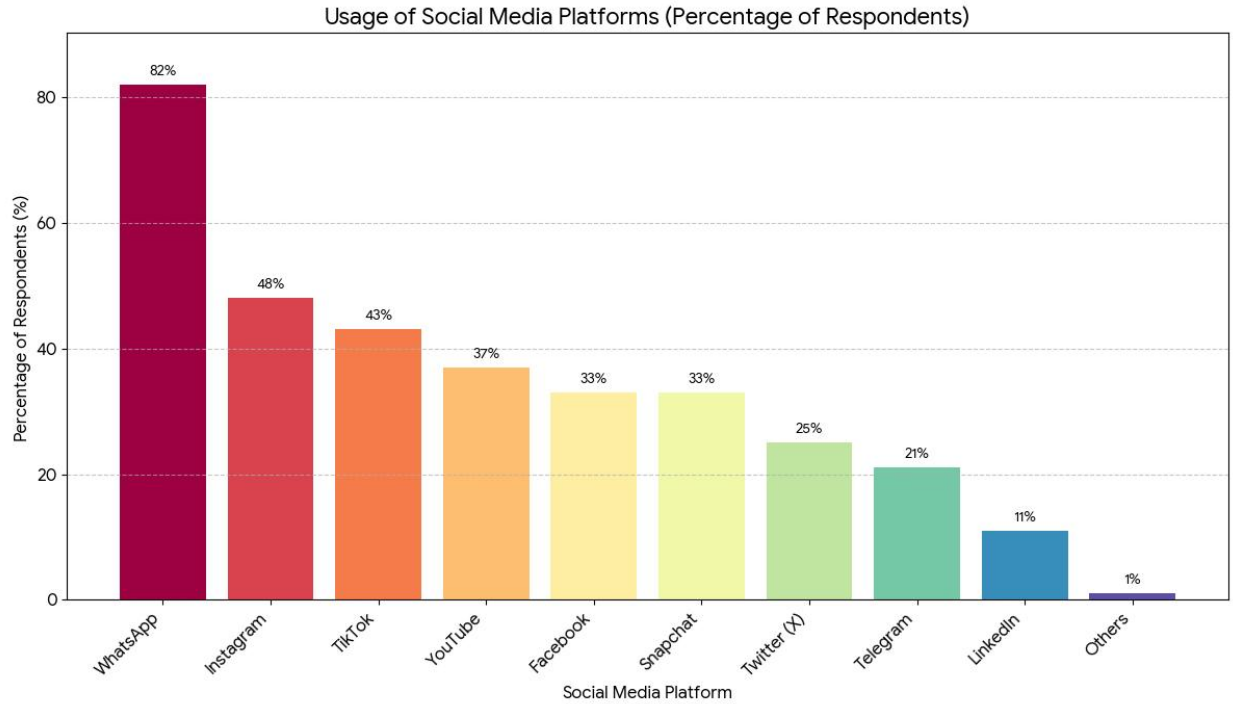


Chart 6

Table 6 details the regular use of the specific social media platforms among 150 respondents. Since this was a multiple-response question, the percentage indicates the proportion of the total sample that uses each platform at least once a week. Based on the data presented in table 6, WhatsApp usage dominates other platforms, which is used by 123 students, representing 82% of the total sample. The second highly used platform is Instagram accounting 72 respondents with 48%, TikTok 43% with 64 respondents, YouTube 37% of 56 respondents. Other platforms such as Facebook 33% with 49 respondents, Snapchat 33% of 50 respondents, Twitter (X) 25% of 37 respondents and Telegram used by 21% with 31 respondents which showcase moderate use, while LinkedIn is the least used platform among the listed options with only 11% accounting for 17 respondents. The other option category accounted for only 1% with 2 respondents, indicating that the options comprehensively cover the platforms used by the student population. The table was computed this way because the responses revealed that these students use more than one

social media platform daily accounting for a more prevalent mental health issue. It also showcases their reliability on these platforms and how they cannot do without these platforms daily.

Table 7: On average, how many hours do you spend on social media per day?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Less than an hour	4	3
1-2 hours	18	12
2-3 hours	19	13
3-4 hours	35	23
More than 4 hours	74	49
Total	150	100

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Chart 7

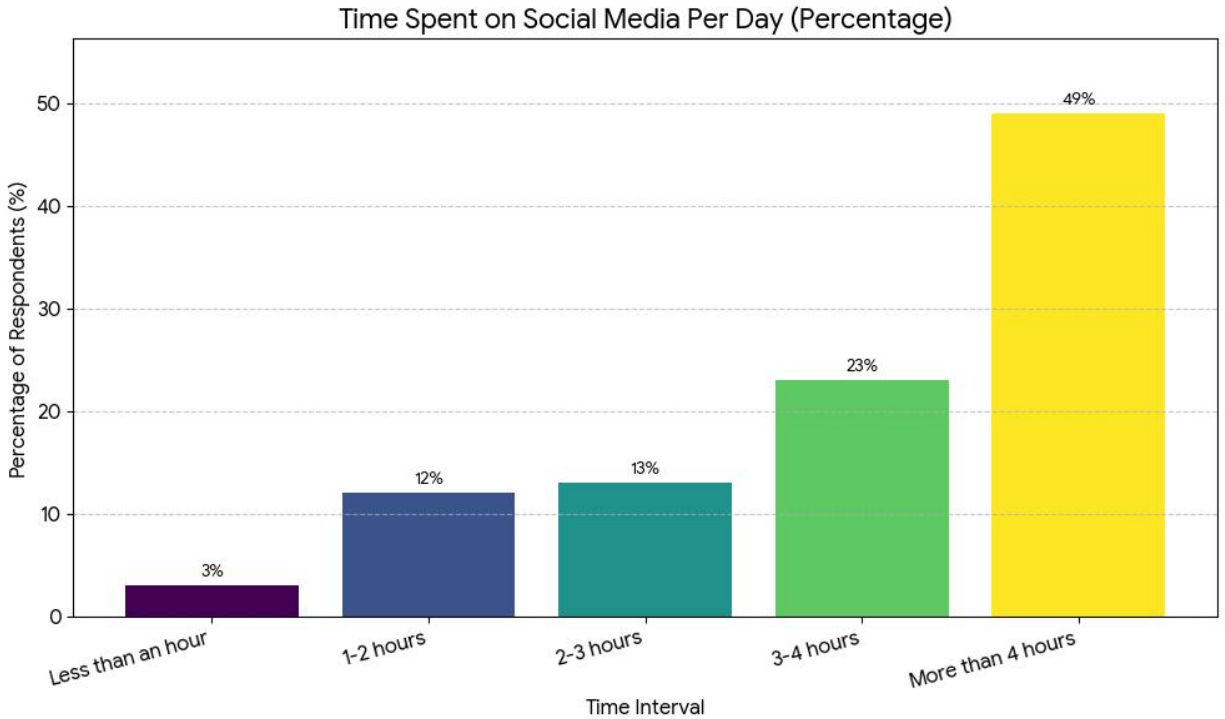


Table 7, which addresses the average time students spend on social media daily, highlighting a pattern of heavy usage among the respondents. The majority of the students spend a significant amount of time on these platforms. Specifically, almost half the respondents (49%) indicated that they spend more than 4 hours per day on social media, accounting for 74 respondents. The category of 3-4 hours accounts for (23%) with 35 respondents. While only a small minority reported low usage, just 13% with 19 respondents fell into the 2-3 hours bracket, 12% with 18 respondents used it for 1-2 hours. A small number of 4 respondents, 3% spend less than an hour on the platforms. This data established that the student uses social media heavily every day.

Table 8: Does social media affect your mental health?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	92	61
No	58	39

Total	150	100
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Source: Field work, 2025.

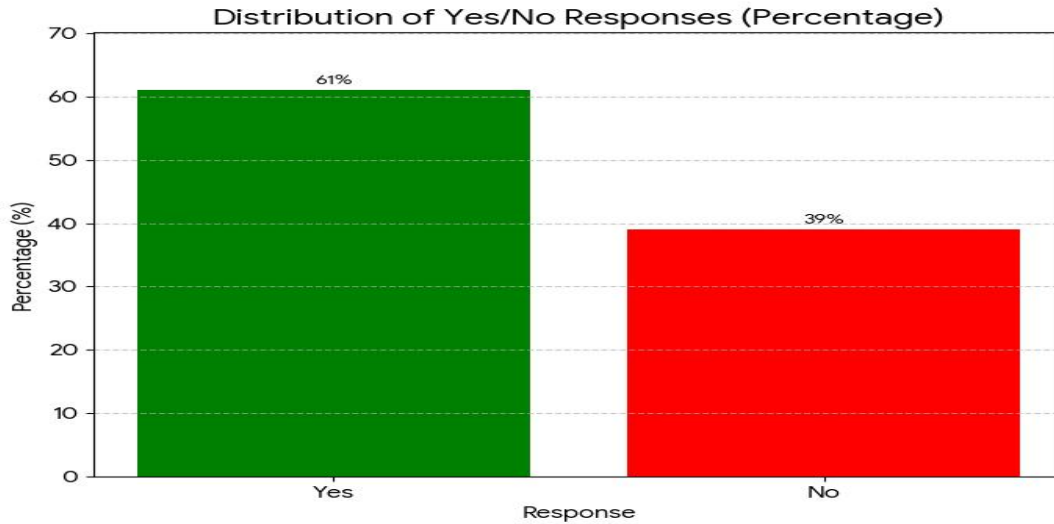


Chart 8

Table 8 indicates that most respondents feel social media does impact their mental health. The data showcase that 92 participants reported “Yes”, representing 61% of the total, stating that social media affects their mental health. This reveals that there's a widespread knowledge of social media influence on well-being. While the response “No” accounts for 58 individuals with 39%, reported that social media does not affect their mental health.

Table 9: Which of the following mental health aspects do you feel social media affects most?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Only Self-esteem or body image	15	10
Only loneliness or isolation	9	6
Only anxiety or stress	26	17

Only Fear of missing out	20	13
Only connections to others	21	14
Only depression	3	2
Multiple options	56	37
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 9

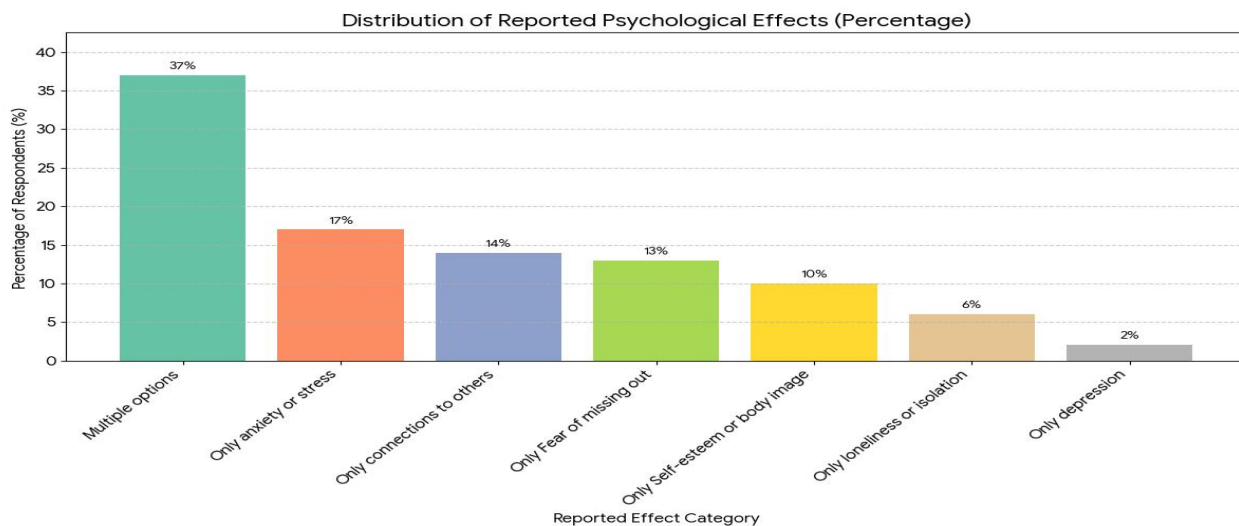


Table 9 reveals that the impact of social media on mental health is highly varied among the 150 respondents, 37% of the respondents indicated they experience multiple effects from social

media usage. This indicates that the impact of social media on mental health is often complex and varies,

rather than a single issue. Only stress or anxiety has a high account of 17% of the total. This showcases a link between social media use and increased stress and worry. Only loneliness/isolation accounts for 6% and critical issues like depression contribute just 2%, these two were reported to impact on mental health by a small percentage of the total sample, compared to only fear of missing out which contribute 13% or 20 respondents and only connections to others, accounting for 14% or 21 respondents.

SECTION C: Impact of social media on self-esteem, body image, and students' mental health.

Table 10: Spending too much time on social media makes me feel anxious and depressed (Yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	63	42
No	87	58
Total	150	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Chart 10

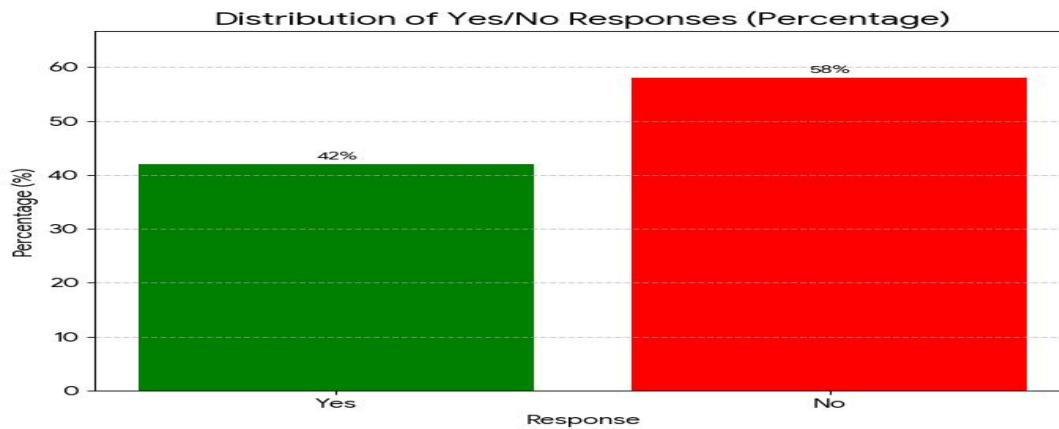


Table 10 presents the results for the statements, “spending too much time on social media makes me feel anxious and depressed. Out of 150 respondents, many accounting for 87 participants or 58%, disagreed with the statement, choosing the No response. While 63 respondents answered ‘Yes’, which represented 42% of the total sample. The “No” response outweighed the “Yes” response.

Table 11: Social media usage contributes to my stress levels? (Yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	75	50
No	75	50
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 11

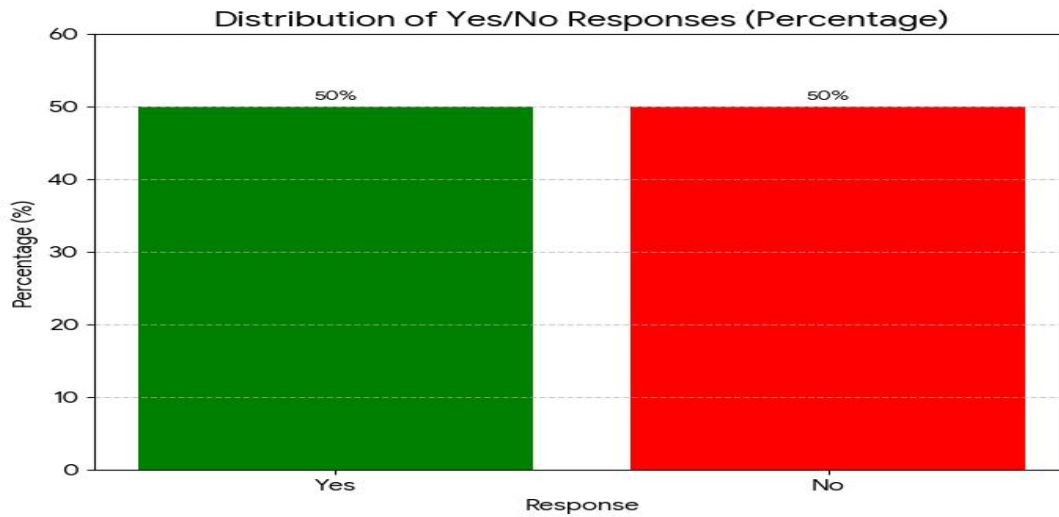


Table 11 presents the respondents' results to whether “social media usage contributes to my stress levels”. The data reveals that 50% of the respondents agreed with the statement, with a frequency of 75 participants. The other 50% of the respondents also accounted for 75 participants who disagreed with the statement. This equal distribution of response indicates that the experience of social media as a stress factor is perfectly prevalent within the sample population, with none holding a majority.

Table 12: Seeing “perfect lives” on social media and experiencing FOMO (fear of missing Out) negatively affects my self-esteem? (Yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	90	60
No	60	40
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025

Chart 12

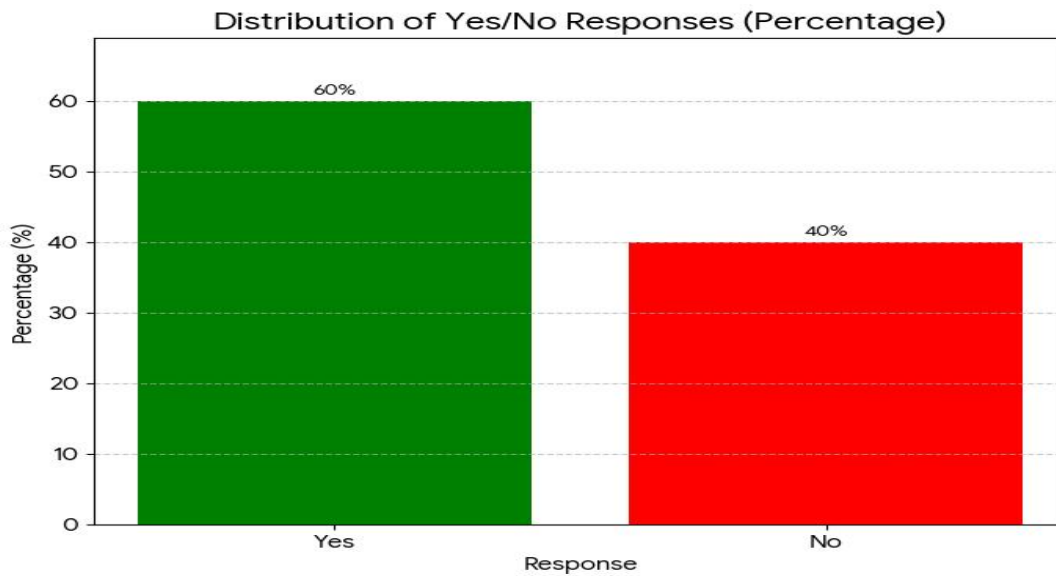


Table 12 presents the findings on whether “seeing ‘perfect lives’ on social media and experiencing FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) negatively affects my self-esteem”. The results show that a clear majority replied Yes to the statement. Specifically, 90 individuals, representing 60% of the total sample, reported that seeing idealized lives and experiencing Fear of Missing Out negatively affects their mental health. While 60 respondents or 40% indicated that this factor does not negatively affect their self-esteem. This finding suggests that for most of the sample population that FOMO is a major factor that affects their self-esteem.

Table 13: Social media makes me feel more conscious or insecure about my body? (Yes/ NO)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	57	38
No	93	62
Total	150	100

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Chart 13

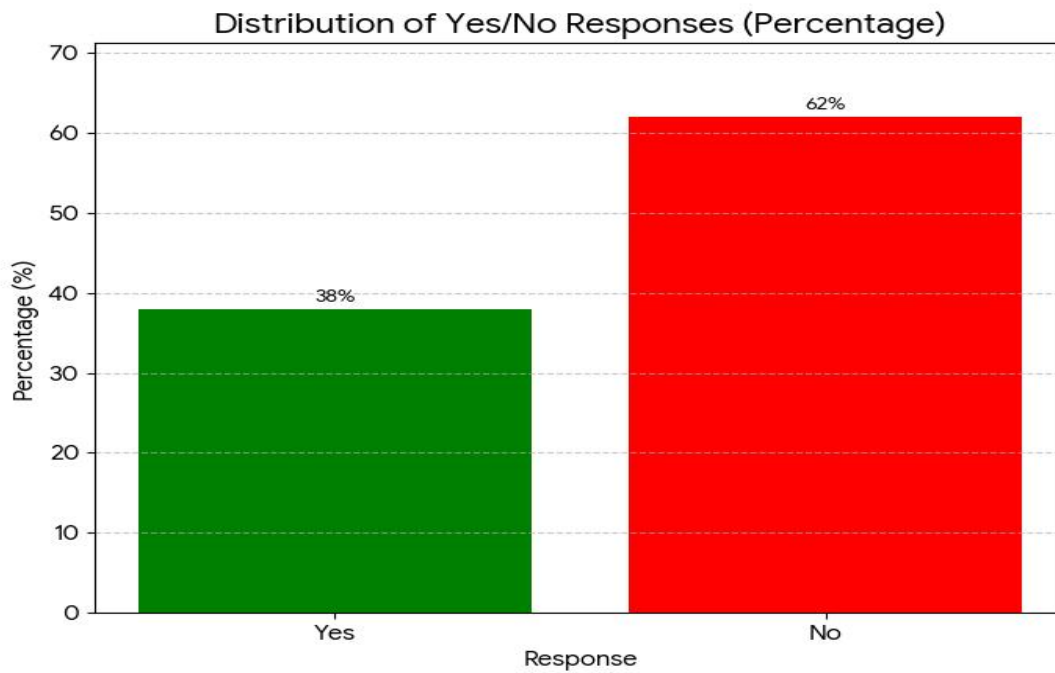


Table 13 reveals the extent to which “social media makes me feel more conscious or insecure about my body”. Based on the responses from the 150 participants, a majority of 93 respondents representing 62% of the total sample, replied No to the statement. While a minority of 57 respondents or 38% replied ‘Yes’ that social media does make them feel more conscious or insecure about their bodies. This suggests that while body image issues linked to social media are a concern to the minority of the sample population, linked to social media are a concern to the minority of the sample population, the majority are not experiencing this specific negative effect.

Table 14: Social media exposes me to a lot of unfiltered or inappropriate content. (YES/NO)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	116	77
No	34	23

Total	150	100
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Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 14

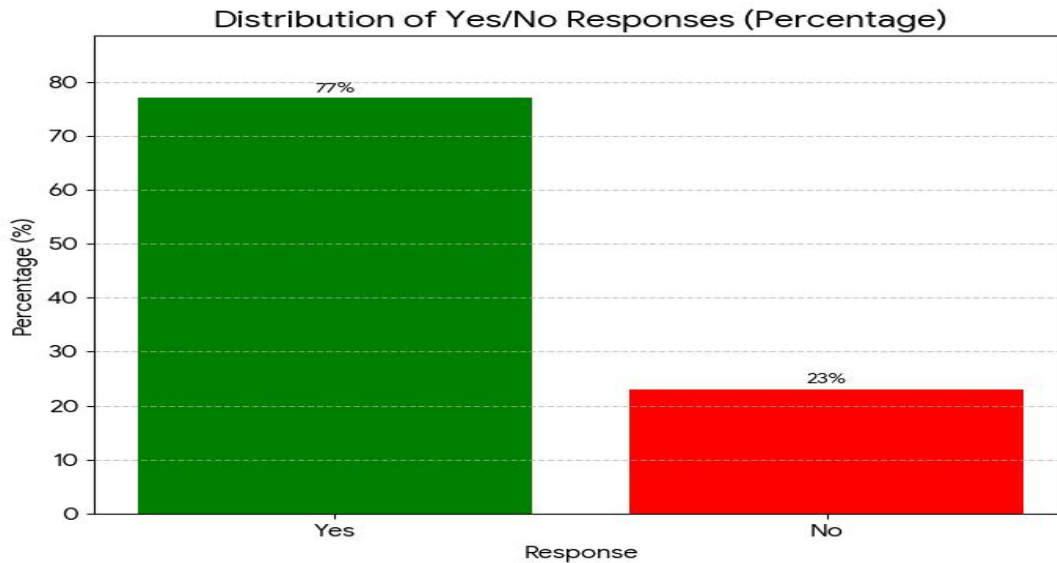


Table 14 examines the statement: “social media exposes me to unfiltered or inappropriate content”. The data reveals that this statement is an issue. A majority of 116 respondents accounting for 77% of the total sample, replied ‘Yes’ with the statement. In contrast, only 34 respondents or 23% replied ‘No’ with the statement. This finding indicates a widespread experience among the sample population encountering unfiltered or inappropriate content while using social media platforms.

Section D: Perceived Impacts of Cyberbullying and Online Harassment on Students’ Mental Health

Table 15: Have you ever been a target of cyberbullying or online harassment? (Yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
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Yes	50	33
No	100	67
Total	150	100

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Chart 15

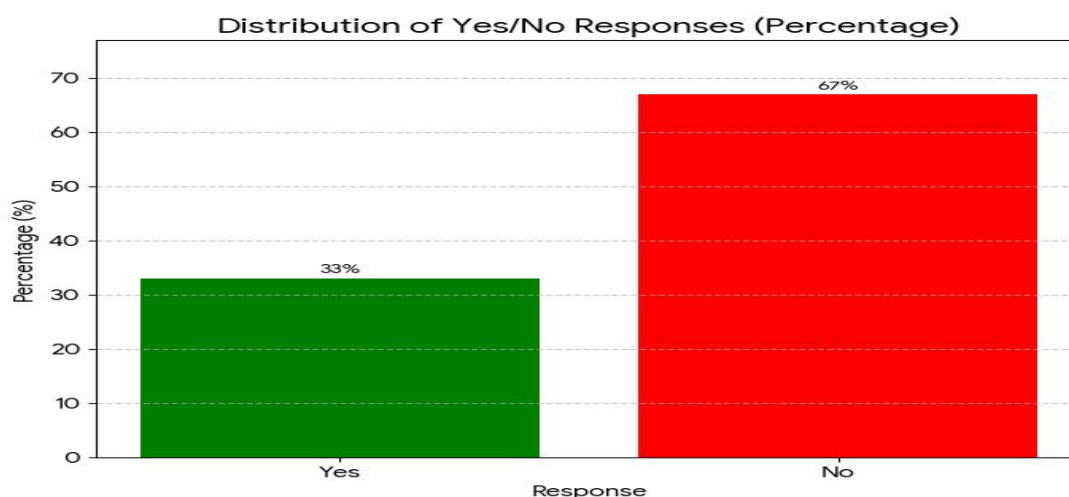


Table 15 this data reveals that 50 respondents, representing 33% of the total sample answered ‘Yes’, indicating they have been a target of cyberbullying or online harassment. While many respondents answered NO which accounts for 100 participants representing 67% of the sample. The findings suggest that while a significant proportion of the sample 33% has experienced cyberbullying or online harassment, the majority of 67% has not.

Table 16: If you answered yes, what is the nature of cyberbullying or harassment?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Only insults	11	22
Only spreading of rumours	7	14

Only sharing embarrassing pictures and videos	8	16
Only threats	5	10
Multiple Options	19	38
Total	50	100

Source: Field work,2025.

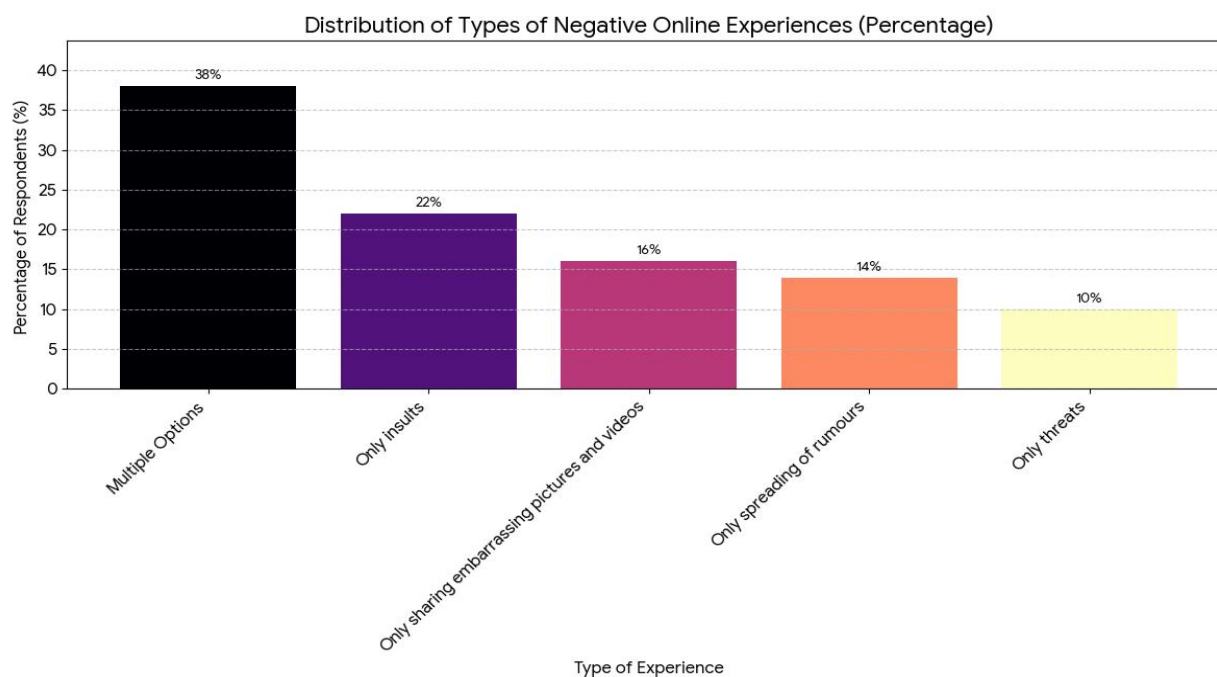


Chart 16

Table 16 showcases that a total of 50 respondents who experienced cyberbullying and online harassment were asked to identify the nature of what they faced. Many of the respondents reported that they were experiencing multiple options accounting for 38% representing 19 respondents. Only insults accounting for 22% representing 11 respondents, only sharing of embarrassing pictures and videos reported 16% with 8 respondents. Only spreading rumours experienced 14% with 7 respondents, only threat which is the least common accounting for 10%

with 5 respondents. This table shows that cyberbullying is a combination of harmful actions. It showcases that 38% of the respondents experienced more than one cyberbullying action. The second highest on the chart is only insults.

Table 17: If you have ever been cyberbullied or harassed, did it affect your mental health?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	34	68
No	16	32
Total	50	100

Source: Field work, 2025

Chart 17

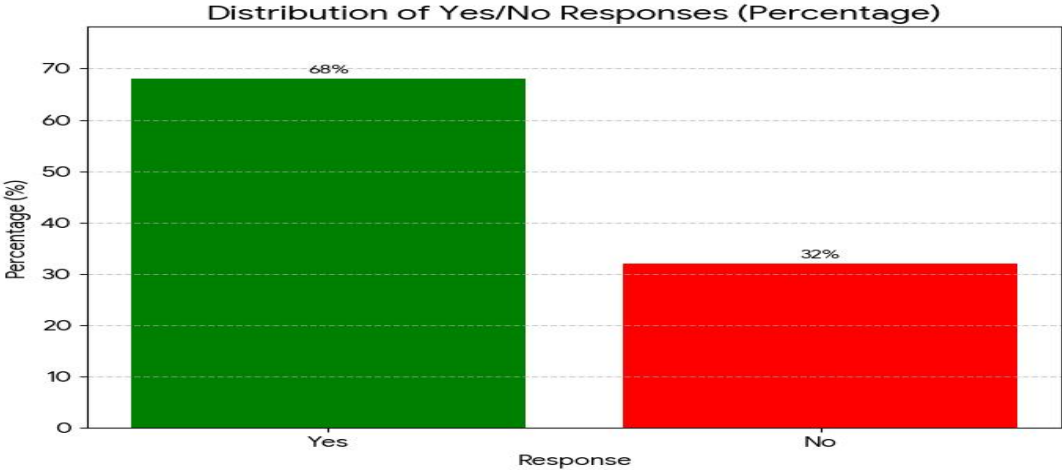


Table 17 reveals that there is a significant impact on mental health of those who have been harassed and cyberbullied. The report shows that 68% of respondents that 34 out of 50 answered Yes. Indicating that their, while 32% of respondents 16 out of 50 answered No, meaning the experience did not affect their mental health.

Table 18: What mental health aspect has cyberbullying or harassment affected?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Self-esteem	10	20
Loneliness or isolation	9	18
Anxiety or stress	7	14
Fear of social interaction	8	16
Connection to others	9	18
Depression	7	14
Total	50	100

Source: field work, 2025.

Chart 18

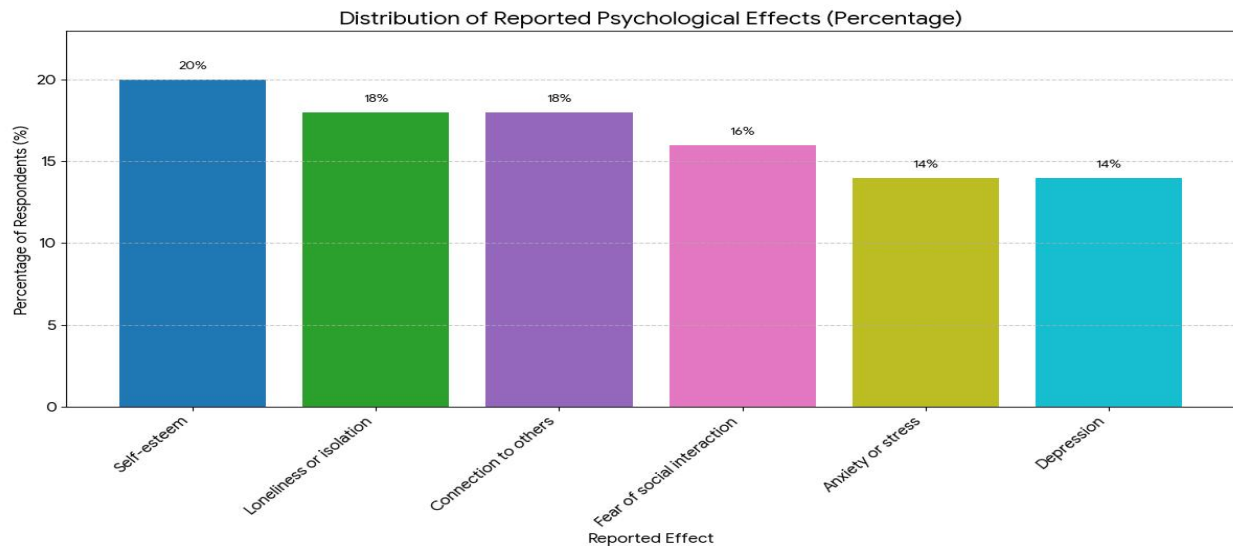


Table 18, reveals the distribution of 50 responses across six mental health aspects, highlighting how cyberbullying impacts victims in various ways. Self-esteem was mostly frequently affected by mental health reported by 10 respondents, which accounts for 20% of the total. Loneliness or isolation and connections are second most reported issues each with a frequency of 9 responses,

representing 18% each. Fear of social interactions was reported by 8 respondents making up to 16% of the total. While anxiety or stress and depression were the least reported, 7 responses with 14% of the total. The findings indicate that cyberbullying impacts the victim's self-esteem and social interactions.

Table 19: To what extent have these experiences affected your mental health?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Not at all	0	0
Slightly	13	26
Moderately	26	52
Significantly	11	22
Total	50	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 19

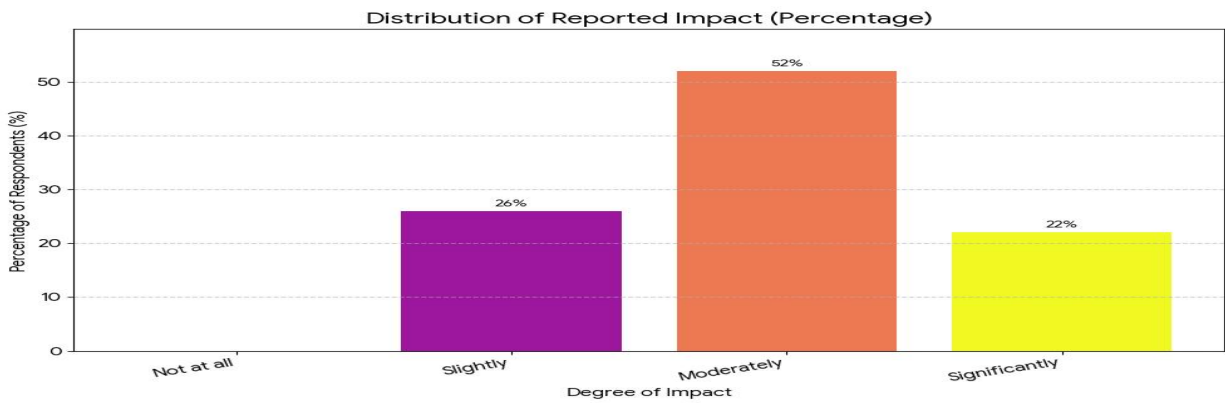


Table 19 clearly shows the degree of impact on their mental health. The most common response with 26 respondents representing a majority of 52% of the total, indicates a moderate level of mental health impact. 11 respondents or 22% reported that their mental health was significantly

affected. ‘Slightly’ making up 26% of the total with 13 respondents, have a slight impact on their mental health. ‘Not at all’ reported 0% that their mental health was not affected at all.

Section E: Protective Factors and Perceptions

Table 20: Limiting my time on social media helps improve my mental health? (Yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	114	76
No	36	24
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 20

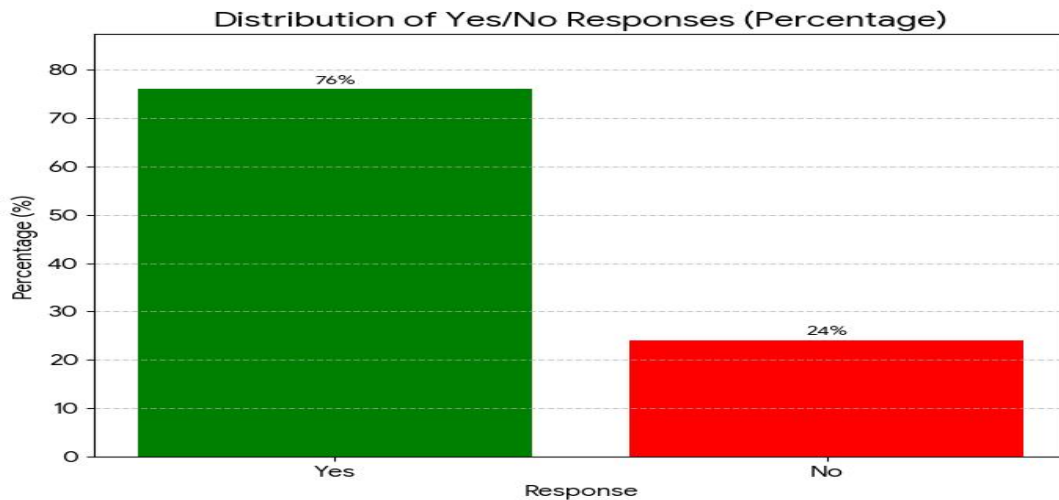


Table 20 reveals a strong agreement among respondents regarding the positive impact of reducing social media use on mental health. Majority of the respondents 114 answered ‘Yes’ indicating their belief that limiting social media time helps improve Mental health, accounting for 76% of the total sample. While 36 respondents answered ‘No’, meaning they do not believe

that limiting social media time helps improve their mental health. This data shows that there is a strong belief about limiting time on social media to improve mental health.

Table 21: Actively choosing who I follow on social media (e.g. positive accounts) protects my mental health? (Yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	122	81
No	28	19
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 21

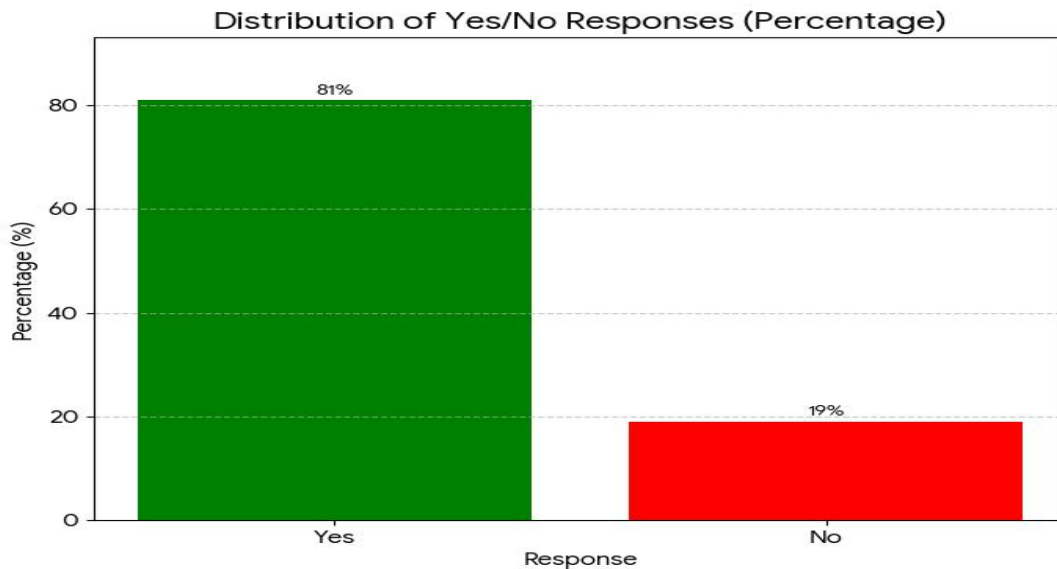


Table 21 the data shows an extremely high level of agreement on actively choosing who to follow is beneficial for mental health. 122 respondents or 81% of the total answered ‘Yes’. This indicates that the majority are aware of actively choosing who to follow is a protective factor for

mental well-being. Only 28 respondents or 19% answered ‘No’, suggesting they do not perceive this active choice of who to follow as a significant protective factor for their mental health.

Table 22: Engaging in offline activities (e.g., hobbies, sports, face-to-face interactions) helps mitigate negative social media impacts? (Yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	122	81
No	28	19
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 22

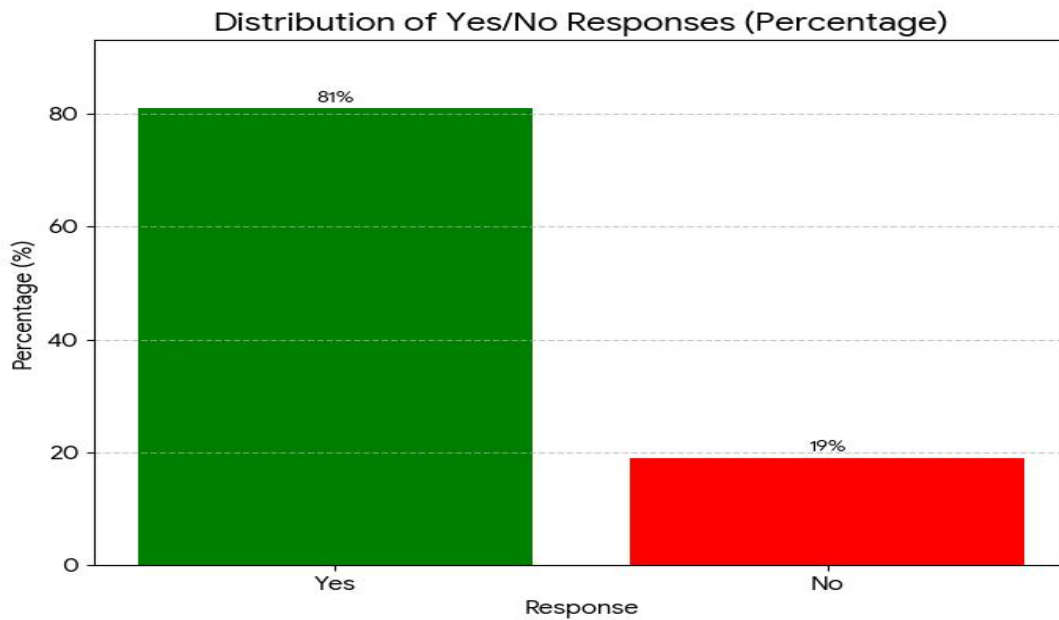


Table 22 shows an extremely high majority of 122 respondents, representing 81% of the total, answered ‘Yes’. This indicates a strong belief that participating in offline activities serves as a vital protective and mitigating factor against potential harm caused by social media. Only 28

respondents with 19% of the total answered ‘No’ suggesting they do not perceive engagement in offline activities have a significant factor in mitigating the negative impacts of social media.

Table 23: overall, I believe social media has more negative impacts than positive on my mental health. (yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	70	47
No	80	53
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 23

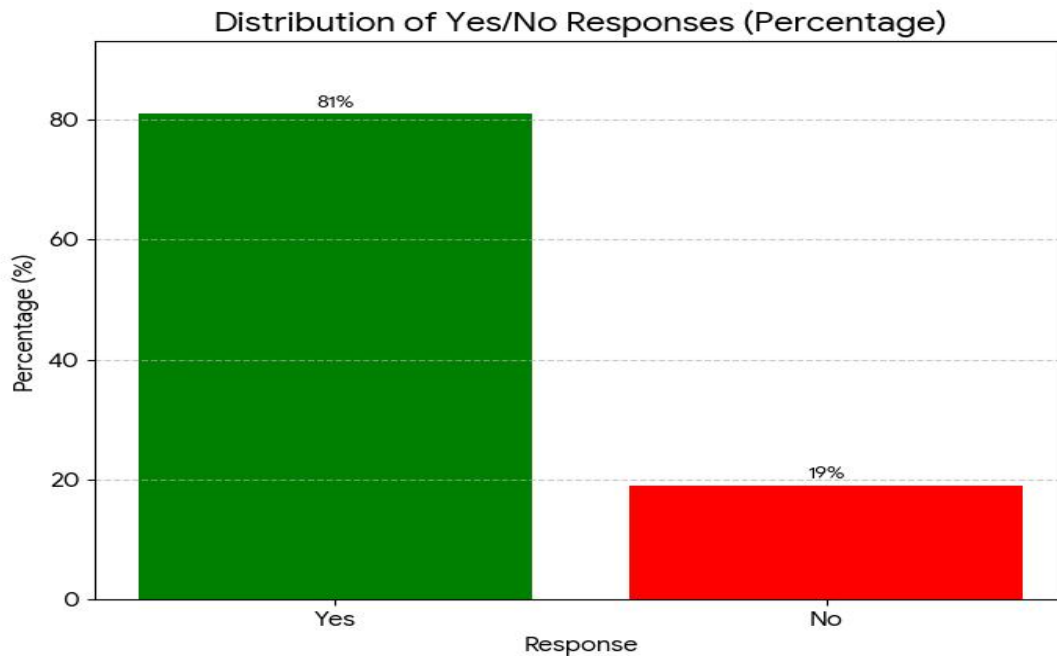


Table 23 data shows a slight tendency for respondents to believe that social media’s impacts on their mental health are not predominately negative. 80 respondents or 53 of the totals answered “No”, this indicates that they do not believe social media has more negative impacts than

positive on their mental health. 70 respondents or 47% of the total answered “Yes”. The data reveals that students believe that social media’s impact on their mental health is not negatively dominant.

Table 24: Have you ever taken a break from social media specifically to improve your mental health? (Yes/No)

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	113	75
No	37	25
Total	150	100

Source: Field work, 2025.

Chart 24

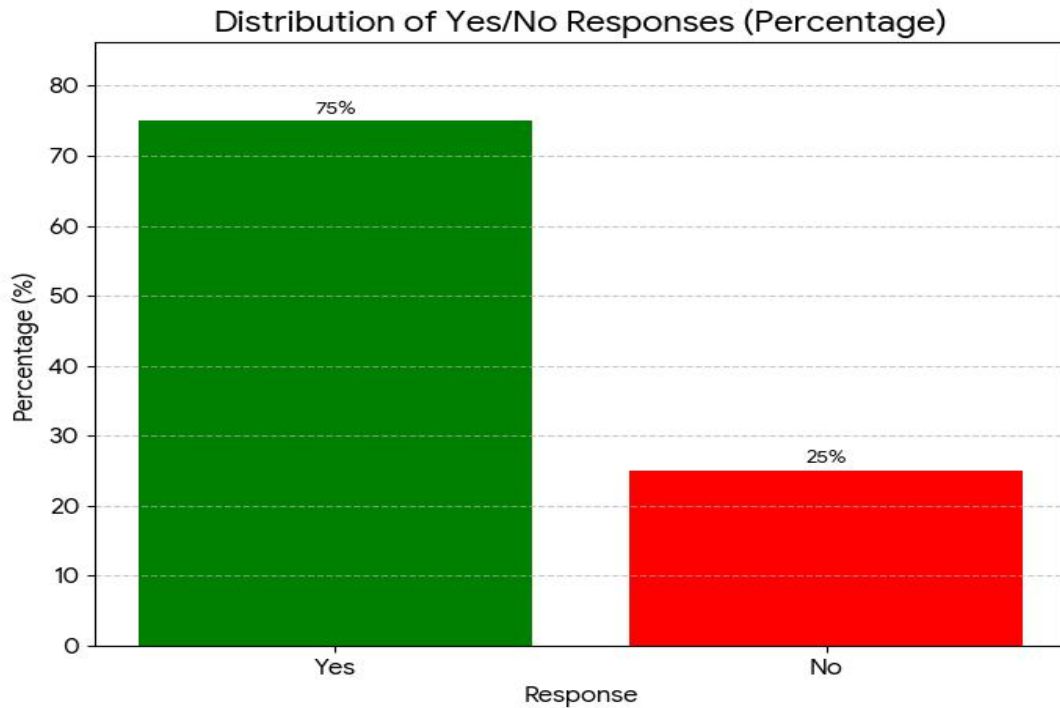


Table 24 the findings reveal that many of the respondents have consciously used a social media break as a strategy to manage or improve their mental health. 113 respondents, representing 75% of the total answered “Yes”. This indicates that participants have recognized the connection between their social media use and mental health and have taken deliberate actions to address it. While 37 respondents or 25% of the total answered ‘No”, indicating that they have not taken a social media break for the specific purpose of improving their mental health.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

This study examined the negative impact of social media on students’ mental health among students at the University of Benin with a sample size of 150 respondents, with specific attention to its negative impacts of social media, interplay of social media and mental health, and the impacts of extreme use of social media. The findings provide important insights into patterns of social media usage and the impacts it had on the student's mental health. The results reveal that the majority of the students use social media with 99% of the total sample. This finding showcased that the sample size is highly engaged with social media. In addition to this finding which accounts for the apps mostly used by those who actively use social media, WhatsApp usage dominates other platforms., which is used by 82% of the total sample. The second highly used platform is Instagram accounting 48%, TikTok 43% with, YouTube 37%. Other platforms such as Facebook 33%, Snapchat 33%, Twitter (X) 25% and Telegram used by 21% which showcase moderate use, while LinkedIn is the least used platform among the listed options with only 11%. The others option category accounted for only 1%, indicating that the options comprehensively cover the platforms used by the student population.

There is a need to find out the rate at which they spend on these social platforms. The majority of the students spend a significant amount of time on these platforms. Specifically, almost half the

respondents 49% indicated that they spend more than 4 hours per day on social media. The category of 3-4 hours accounts for 23%. While only a small minority reported low usage, just 13% falls into the 2-3 hours bracket, 12% use it for 1-2 hours. A small amount of 3% spend less than an hour on the platforms. This finding reveals the respondent's answers to if they are conscious of social media affecting their mental health, representing 61% of the total, stating that social media affects their mental health. This reveals that there's a widespread knowledge of social media influence on well-being. While 39%, reported that social media does not affect their mental health. Accompanied with their knowledge of whether social media affects their mental health are several aspects of mental health outlined, impact of social media on mental health is highly varied among the 150 respondents, 37% of the respondents indicated they experience multiple effects from social media usage. This indicates that the impact of social media on mental health is often complex and varies, rather than a single issue. These findings reveal that there are specific areas social media affects, on self-esteem and body image, 42% of the sample population agreed to social media making them feel anxious and depressed. Additionally, this study finds out that social media contributes to the stress levels of students. The equal distribution of response indicates that the experience of social media as a stress factor is perfectly prevalent within the sample population, with none holding a majority.

Perfect lives and FOMO (fear of missing out) is also a prevalent issue caused using social media platforms among students. the findings on whether "seeing 'perfect lives' on social media and experiencing FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) negatively affects my self-esteem". The results show that a clear majority agreed to the statement. Specifically, 60% of the total sample, reported that seeing idealized lives and experiencing Fear of Missing Out negatively affects their mental health. The survey also reveals that there is a link between body images and social media,

although minorities might be experiencing an impact on their body image, it still reveals the connection of social media and body image. Respondents were able to report that social media exposes them to unfiltered or inappropriate content. This finding indicates a widespread experience among the sample population encountering unfiltered or inappropriate content while using social media platforms.

These findings reveal the perceived impacts of cyberbullying or online harassment from the 150 respondents. The research reveals that 33% of the total indicate they have been a target of cyberbullying or online harassment. While 67% of the sample indicated they have not experienced it. The findings suggest that while a significant proportion of the sample 33% has experienced cyberbullying or online harassment, the majority of 67% has not. The research showcases that a total of 50 respondents who experienced cyberbullying and online harassment were asked to identify the nature of what they faced. Many of the respondents reported that they were experiencing multiple options accounting for 38%. Only insults accounting for 22%.

This research reveals that cyberbullying is a combination of harmful actions, multiple option was most prevalent, this indicates that they faced more than one cyberbullying actions, some of the students experienced 2 to 3 cyberbullying actions. Additionally, there is a significant impact on mental health of those who have been harassed and cyberbullied. highlighting how cyberbullying impacts victims in various ways. Self-esteem was mostly frequently affected mental health reported by 20% of the total. The findings indicate that cyberbullying impacts victims' self-esteem and social interactions.

As we reflect on the findings of this research project, it becomes clear that the daily intake of social media content and even the communications we make sums up to negatively impact our mental health. The mental health of a student is very important and not to be affected because it

leads to so many disadvantages for their study and their productive engagement. If they don't regulate its use there will be many mental health issues flying around among students which in turn will lead to a drain in the educational system. There was an addiction of social media seen in the tables and in the charts, the high rate of time spent on a daily basis, there was also a report that shows they just use one platform but many platforms, this is a detrimental factor to their mental health. The findings reveal that there is a strong belief about limiting time on social media to improve mental health, active choice of who to follow as a significant protective factor for their mental health, and engagement in offline activities have a significant factor in mitigating the negative impacts of social media. Dominantly, respondents believe that social media on their health is not completely negative with 53% agreeing to this. The findings reveal that many of the respondents have consciously used a social media break as a strategy to manage or improve their mental health.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This chapter serves as an exhaustive summary and conclusion of the research project titled “Negative Impact of Social Media Usage on the Mental Health of students” at the University of Benin.” As the general objective, there were also specific objectives that gave us deeper insights into areas of social media and mental health. The patterns and impacts of how curated online content affects students body image and self-esteem, cyberbullying and online harassment and protective factors that check the negative impacts of social media on mental health. These were specific areas of focus.

Throughout the study, the intricate relationship between social media usage and mental health was examined using an explanatory research design to comprehensively examine the relationship between social media usage and the mental health of students at the University of Benin. This design is suitable because its main objective is to establish and explain a cause-and-effect relationship between the two variables. It allows us to go beyond simply describing a correlation by investigating how specific aspects of social media use might influence, and potentially predict, changes in students' mental well-being. The use of Taro Yamane’s formula was adopted to get the sample size for the study. The research design incorporated the use of a semi-structured questionnaire. Using this method of data collection, findings of the study indicate that social media accounts for prevalent mental health issues faced by University of Benin students, which influences their social interaction and their holistic dispositions.

As we reflect on the findings of this research project, it becomes clear that the daily intake of social media content and even the communications we make sums up to negatively impact our

mental health. The mental health of a student is very important and not to be affected because it leads to so many disadvantages for their study and their productive engagement. If they don't regulate its use there will be many mental health issues flying around among students which in turn will lead to a drain in the educational system. There was an addiction of social media seen in the tables and in the charts, the high rate of time spent on a daily basis, there was also a report that shows they just use one platform but many platforms, this is a detrimental factor to their mental health.

Chapter 1 of this study was able to introduce the work by looking at the background study, stating the problem of the research, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, and the definition of terms. Chapter 2 of this study did a critical review of the literature by examining the various concepts and contributions of previous projects. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used for this project and the primary method of collection, 150 respondents were employed to participate in this study. Chapter 4 did the data percentage and analysis derived from both primary and secondary sources of data. The findings were examined, analysed and constructed into readable data with the use of simple descriptive methods such as frequency, percentages, tables and bar charts. The data presentation and analysis were done to draw out statistical findings about the study.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forth to regulate the use of social media, advocating for students to adopt a strict time limit on social media usage, they should be taught about the benefits of social media detox, a productive disposition, and engaging in more productive and brain development offline activities like reading hard copy, creating something creative and even journaling. Furthermore, this study serves as a baseline for further studies to better understand social media and mental health of students.

5.2 Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to provide explanatory research on how social media usage contributes to the prevalence of mental health issues among university students. Through the adoption of robust research methods, the findings confirm the ubiquitous presence of social media, with 99% of students being users, and establish a clear link between its usage patterns and mental well-being. The research highlights a pattern of heavy usage, with almost half the respondents 49% spending more than four hours daily on these platforms, increasing their exposure to detrimental effects. The majority of students 61% acknowledged that social media affects their mental health, primarily through social comparison—specifically, 60% reported that seeing 'perfect lives' and experiencing FOMO negatively impacted their self-esteem.

Crucially, the study identified cyberbullying as a significant, high-impact risk. While 33% of the total sample reported being victims of online harassment, a staggering 68% of those victims reported that the experience negatively affected their mental health, with the impact being felt most acutely in self-esteem and social connections. While the majority of students (53%) do not believe the overall impact is net-negative, the severity of the risks for the affected population necessitates proactive strategies. The study found strong support for key protective measures, with 75% of students having already taken a social media break for mental health reasons. Furthermore, an overwhelming 81% believe that engaging in offline activities is a vital mitigator. Therefore, the project concludes that while social media offers undeniable benefits, its heavy use and associated risks, particularly cyberbullying and body image and self-esteem, are clear contributors to mental health issues like stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. It is strongly recommended that tertiary institutions introduce and formalize awareness programs focusing on digital literacy, content curation, and the promotion of 'digital detox' and offline engagement to mitigate these evidenced impacts."

5.3 Recommendations

Time Limit

Students should establish strict daily limits on social media time to prevent passive scrolling and heavy use, which are linked to negative mental health outcomes. Encourage setting specific "social media free" zones and times, especially during studying, mealtimes, and the hour before sleep.

Actively Choosing Who to Follow

Advise students to intentionally curate their online environment. They should unfollow accounts that trigger negative social comparison, promote unrealistic lifestyles (like "perfect lives" that cause FOMO), or contribute to feelings of low self-esteem. The focus should be on following accounts that are positive, supportive, educational, or genuinely reflective of personal interests.

Engaging in Offline Activities

Promote the substitution of screen time with meaningful face-to-face interactions, hobbies, and physical activities. The university should facilitate and highlight access to clubs, sports, and social events, reinforcing the understanding that real-world engagement is a crucial buffer against the negative psychological effects of online exposure.

Social Media Detox

Encourage students to practice scheduled, periodic breaks from all social media platforms (a "digital detox"). These breaks, whether for a weekend or a week, serve as a reset button to manage stress, improve focus, and consciously assess the overall impact of technology on their well-being.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

I'm a final year student of the department of Sociology and Anthropology. This questionnaire is a part of a research project investigating the negative impact of social media usage on the mental health of students at the University of Benin. Your honest responses are highly valuable and will contribute significantly to understanding this important issue. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

SECTION A : DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please tick the appropriate box or fill in the blank.

1. **Gender:** Male () Female ()
2. **Age :** 16-18() 19-21() 22-24() 25 and above()
3. **Year of Study:** 100 Level () 200 Level () 300 Level() 400 Level() 500 Level ()
4. **Hall of Residence:** Hall 1 () Hall 2 () Hall 3 ()

SECTION B: PATTERNS AND IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND IMPACTS ON STUDENTS MENTAL HEALTH

5. Do you use social media? Yes () No () (If No, please skip to Section E)
6. Which social media platforms do you use regularly (at least once a week)? (Select all that apply)

WhatsApp () Instagram () Facebook () Twitter (X) () YouTube () Snapchat

()

TikTok () LinkedIn () Telegram () Other (Please specify):

7. On average, how many hours do you spend on social media per day?

Less than an hour () 1-2 hour () 2-3 hours () 3-4 hours () More than 4 hours ()

8. Does social media affect your mental health? Yes () No ()

9. Which of the following mental health aspects do you feel social media affect most?

Self-esteem or body image () Loneliness or isolation () Anxiety or stress () Fear of missing out () connections to others () Depression ()

SECTION C: IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SELF ESTEEM , BODY IMAGE AND STUDENTS MENTAL HEALTH

10. Spending too much time on social media makes me feel anxious and depressed: Yes () No ()

()

11. Social media usage contributes to my stress levels? Yes () No ()

12. Seeing “perfect lives” on social media and experiencing FOMO(Fear of missing out) negatively affects my self esteem Yes () No ()

13. Does social media make me feel more conscious or insecure about my body image? Yes () No()

14. Social media exposes me to a lot of unfiltered or inappropriate content. Yes () No ()

SECTION D: PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF CYBERBULLYING AND ONLINE HARASSMENT ON STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

15. Have you ever been a target of cyberbullying or online harassment? Yes() No ()

16. If you answered yes, what was the nature of the cyberbullying or harassment? Insults() Spreading rumors() Sharing embarrassing photos or videos() Threats()

17. If you have been cyberbullied or harassed, did it affect your mental health? Yes() No()

18. What mental health aspect has cyberbully or harassment affected? Self-esteem or body image () Loneliness or isolation () Anxiety or stress () Fear of social interaction online and offline() connections to others () Depression ()

19. To what extent have these experiences affected your mental health? Not at all () Slightly() Moderately() Significantly()

SECTION E: PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND PERCEPTIONS

20. Limiting my time on social media helps improve my mental health. Yes () No ()

21. Actively choosing who I follow on social media (e.g., positive accounts) protects my mental health. Yes () No ()

22. Engaging in offline activities (e.g., hobbies, sports, face-to-face interactions) helps mitigate negative social media impacts. Yes () No ()

23. Overall, I believe social media has a more negative impact than positive on my mental health. Yes () No ()

24. Have you ever taken a break from social media specifically to improve your mental health? Yes() No ()