

**PERCIEVED INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BODY IMAGE AND AMONG UNIVERSITY
OF BENIN UNDERGRADE ATEs**

BY

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NOVEMBER, 2025.

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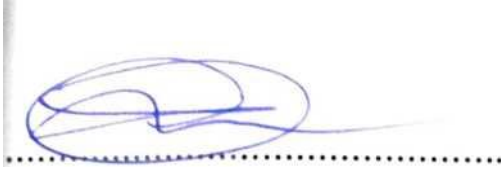
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**A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SAFETY
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CERTIFICATION

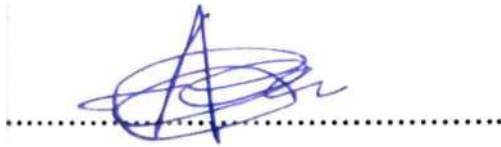
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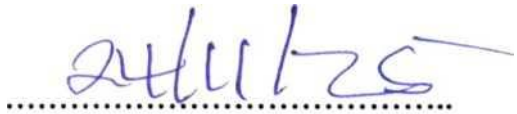
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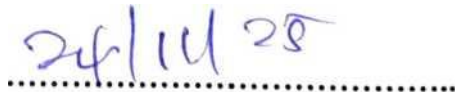
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Date



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God almighty for unfailing grace, incessant strength, supervision.
provision, guidance and protection throughout this course of study.

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ABSTRACT!

This study investigated the perceived influence of social media on body image and eating disorders among undergraduate students of the University of Benin.

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 46110 undergraduate students across different faculties of the University of Benin. A sample of 100 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured 20-item questionnaire, validated by experts and tested for reliability using the test-retest method with a coefficient above 0.83. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test and PPMC) were used for data analysis.

The findings revealed that social media usage among students is considerably high, with most respondents spending several hours daily on various platforms. The results indicated a significant relationship between social media exposure and body image concerns. Prolonged engagement with appearance-focused content was associated with feelings of body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and the adoption of unhealthy eating behaviors such as meal skipping and restrictive dieting. The study also showed that students are aware of the influence social media has on their self-perception, though many struggle to manage its psychological impact effectively. It was concluded that social media significantly influences students' body image perception and contributes to the development of disordered eating patterns among University of Benin undergraduates. Based on these findings, the study recommended that universities should introduce media literacy and digital wellness programs to help students critically evaluate social media content. Counselling units should also organize body positivity and self-esteem workshops to promote mental well-being and healthy lifestyle choices among students.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Social media has become a powerful force in shaping how young people view their bodies, and this is especially true for university students. Studies show that constantly seeing perfect-looking bodies on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok can make students feel unhappy with their own appearance (Fardouly et al., 2020). At the University of Benin, many undergraduates compare themselves to these unrealistic images, which can lead to unhealthy eating habits and even eating disorders (Al Sabbah et al., 2020). The more time students spend on social media, the more likely they are to believe they need to be extremely thin or muscular, which puts them at risk for serious health problems (Holland & Tiggemann, 2020).

Young women, in particular, face intense pressure to look a certain way because of the beauty standards they see online (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2021). Research on Nigerian university students found that those who use social media frequently are more likely to hate their bodies and try dangerous diets (Obeagu et al., 2022). Even fitness trends on social media, like "fitspiration" posts, can be harmful because they push people to obsess over their appearance (Boepple & Thompson, 2021). Men are not immune either while many feel pressured to build extreme muscle, leading some to overexercise or even use steroids (Griffiths et al., 2020).

The way social media works makes these problems worse. Students post photos hoping for likes and comments, and when they don't get enough validation, they feel worse about themselves (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2021). A study in Nigeria found that students who often compare their looks to others online end up feeling more anxious and dissatisfied (Lzc et al., 2021). Social media algorithms also play a role by constantly showing users the same kind of

"perfect" bodies, making them think that's how they should look (Tiggemann & Slater. 2020). Some students become so obsessed with eating "clean" that they develop orthorexia. a dangerous fixation on healthy food (Turner & Lefevre. 2021).

Cultural differences add another layer to this issue. In Nigeria, traditional beauty standards often celebrate curvier bodies, but social media pushes Western ideals of thinness (Swami et al., 2020). This clash confuses many students, making them feel like they don't measure up (Opara et al., 2021). Those who admire Western beauty standards the most tend to struggle the most with body image and disordered eating (Bardone-Cone et al., 2021). Many Nigerian students also don't realize how much photos are edited online, which makes them believe these fake images are real (McLean et al., 2022).

While we know social media affects body image and eating habits, more research is needed specifically on Nigerian students (Arugu, 2021). Some experts suggest teaching media literacy helping students recognize that social media doesn't reflect reality could make a difference (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2020). However, we still need to test these ideas at the University of Benin to see what really works (Chukwuorji et al.. 2021). This is an urgent issue because poor body image and eating disorders can lead to depression, low self-worth, and serious health problems (Stice et al.. 2021).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The pervasive influence of social media on body image perception has become a growing concern, particularly, among university students who are highly active on these platforms. Despite increasing awareness of the potential harms, there remains a significant gap in understanding how social media exposure specifically impacts body

dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors among undergraduates at the University' of Benin. Existing research highlights the correlation between social media use and negative body image, yet few studies have explored the cultural and gender-specific factors that may exacerbate these issues within the Nigerian context. The pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards, coupled with the lack of media literacy, places students at risk of developing severe body image issues and eating disorders. Without targeted interventions, this problem may continue to escalate, leading to longterm psychological and physical health consequences. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the extent to which social media influences body image dissatisfaction and eating disorder tendencies among University of Benin undergraduates, while also examining potential mitigating factors that could inform effective prevention strategies.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

2. What is the level of social media usage and exposure among University of Benin undergraduates?
3. What is the relationship between social media usage and body image concerns among University of Benin undergraduates?
4. To what extent does social media exposure influence eating disorder symptoms among University of Benin undergraduates?
5. How do University of Benin undergraduates perceive the impact of social media on their body image and eating habits?

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is no relationship between social media usage and body image concerns among University of Benin undergraduates.

H2: There is no significant influence of social media exposure on eating disorder symptoms among University of Benin undergraduates.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The main aim of the study to investigate perceived influence of social media on body image, eating disorder among university of Benin undergraduates.

1. To examine the level of social media usage and exposure among University of Benin undergraduates.
2. To determine the relationship between social media usage and body image concerns among University of Benin undergraduates.
3. To find out the extent to which social media exposure influences eating disorder symptoms among University of Benin undergraduates.
4. To evaluate how University of Benin undergraduates perceive the impact of social media on their body image and eating habits.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds substantial value for multiple stakeholders, including the academic community, healthcare providers, and society at large. For the professional field of psychology and mental health, the research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the psychological effects of social media, particularly in non-Western contexts. By focusing on Nigerian university students, it addresses a gap in existing literature, providing culturally relevant insights that can guide future studies and interventions. The findings may also inform the development of more effective counseling strategies and mental health programs tailored to young adults in academic settings.

For healthcare providers, especially those working in university health services, the study offers critical data on the link between social media exposure and eating disorders. Understanding these dynamics can help medical professionals, nutritionists, and psychologists identify at-risk students earlier and implement preventive measures. The research could also serve as a foundation for creating awareness campaigns, workshops, or screening tools to detect body image issues and disordered eating behaviors before they escalate into severe health problems.

On a societal level, the study highlights the urgent need for media literacy education and responsible social media use.

By revealing how idealized body images negatively affect students, the findings can prompt policymakers, educators, and parents to advocate for healthier online environments. Additionally, the research may encourage social media platforms to reconsider their algorithms and content policies to reduce harm. Ultimately, addressing this issue can lead to improved mental well-being among young adults, fostering a generation that is more resilient to unrealistic beauty standards and better equipped to maintain positive self-esteem.

This study has far-reaching implications, from advancing academic research to shaping public health initiatives and societal attitudes toward social media and body image. By bridging theory and practice, it aims to create meaningful change in how we understand and mitigate the risks associated with digital media consumption.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining the perceived influence of social media on body image and eating disorders among undergraduate students at the University of Benin, Nigeria. The research will specifically explore key variables, including social media usage patterns (frequency, platforms used, and engagement levels), body image dissatisfaction (self-perception, comparison behaviors, and appearance anxiety), and disordered eating tendencies (dieting habits, binge eating, or restrictive behaviors). The study will also consider demographic factors such as gender, age, and cultural background to assess their moderating effects. The target population comprises full-time undergraduate students across various faculties, aged 18-25, who are active social media users. Geographically, the research is limited to the University of Benin campus, ensuring context-specific findings while acknowledging potential applicability to similar academic environments in Nigeria. By concentrating on this defined scope, the study aims to provide actionable insights while maintaining methodological feasibility.

1.7 Limitations of the study

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between social media use and body image concerns among University of Benin undergraduates, it has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relies on self-reported data through surveys and questionnaires, which may be subject to response bias. Participants might underreport sensitive behaviors like disordered eating or overestimate their social media usage due to social desirability bias.

Second, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish a causal relationship between variables.

While associations can be identified, it is unclear whether social media exposure directly causes both dissatisfaction and disordered eating. Longitudinal studies would be needed to better understand these issues.

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the study focuses exclusively on undergraduate students at the University of Lagos, which may limit

(the generalizability of findings to other populations, institutions, or cultural contexts

The experiences of University of Lagos students may not fully represent those of undergraduates in other regions of Nigeria or in different educational settings.

1.8. Definition of Terms

1. **Social Media** Digital platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) that enable users to create, share, and interact with content, including images, videos, and messages, which may influence self-perception and body image.
2. **Body Image** An individual's perception, thoughts, and feelings about their physical appearance, including satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their body shape, size, or weight.
3. **Body Dissatisfaction** A negative evaluation of one's own body, often resulting from perceived discrepancies between actual appearance and idealized beauty standards, frequently reinforced by social media.
4. **Eating Disorders** Clinically significant disturbances in eating behaviors and related thoughts, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge-eating disorder, often linked to body image concerns.
5. **Disordered Eating** - Unhealthy eating behaviors (e.g., restrictive dieting, binge eating, purging) that do not meet full diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder but still negatively impact physical and mental health.
6. **Idealized Body Images** - Highly curated, edited, or unrealistic portrayals of bodies on social media

that promote narrow beauty standards (e.g., extreme thinness, muscularity) often unattainable for most individuals.

7. **Social Comparison** - The process of evaluating oneself by comparing personal appearance, success, or lifestyle to others, frequently exacerbated by social media exposure.
8. **Media Literacy** - The ability to critically analyze and interpret media messages, including recognizing digitally altered images and understanding how social media content may distort reality .
9. **Orthorexia Nervosa** - An unhealthy obsession with "clean" or "perfect" eating, often driven by social media trends promoting restrictive diets under the guise of health.
10. **Cultural Beauty Standards**- Societally or culturally defined ideals of attractiveness, which may conflict with Westernized beauty norms perpetuated by global social media trends, particularly in non-Western contexts like Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the review of related literature on the perceived influence of social media, body image and eating disorder. It is presented under the following sub headings:

- Concepts of Social Media
- Level of Social Media Usage and Exposure among University of Benin Undergraduates
- Relationship Between Social Media and Body Image Concerns among University of Benin Undergraduates
- Social Media Exposure Influence on Eating Disorder Symptoms among University of Benin Undergraduates
- Students Perceptions of Social Media Impacts on Body Image and Eating Habits
- Summary of Reviewed Literature

Concepts of Social Media

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, particularly among young adults and university students. Social media exposure refers not only to how frequently individuals access and engage with digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter), but also to the intensity, quality, and psychological implications of that engagement (Andreassen, 2015; Valkenburg. Beyens. Pouwels, van Driel, & Keijsers, 2022). For students in higher education, this exposure encompasses a wide spectrum of activities, including I engagement (Andreassen. 2015; Valkenburg, Bevens. Pouwels. van Uriel. & Keijsers. 2022). For I students in higher education, this exposure encompasses a wide spectrum of activities, including scrolling

through newsfeeds, sharing personal content, consuming visual media, interacting with peers, and following influencers or public figures (Marino. Gini. Vieno. & Spada. 2018). These platforms are not passive spaces; rather, they function as highly dynamic environments that shape users thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in real time (Perloff. 2014).

. Most students at the University of Benin primarily access social media through smartphones, making these platforms constantly accessible throughout the day. This mobile connectivity means that social media usage often takes place during transit such as while commuting in buses or walking, during lectures or group discussions, as well as during meals, breaks, and even late at night (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). The convenience and portability' of smartphones contribute to a seamless integration of digital activity into nearly every' aspect of students' lives. As a result, the lines between academic responsibilities, personal routines, and online engagement have become increasingly blurred, highlighting the pervasive nature of social media in their daily experiences (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Social media is a broad and multifaceted concept that refers to digital platforms enabling users to create, share, and interact with content and connect with others. It is characterized by usergenerated content, interactivity, and networked communication, distinguishing it from traditional one-way media like television or print. Understanding social media conceptually involves examining its defining features, functions, and psychological impact.

1. Interactive Platforms for Communication and Content Sharing: Social media is fundamentally defined by its interactive nature, allowing individuals to create, share, and respond to content in real time (Kaplan & Haenlein. 2010). Platforms like Facebook. Instagram. TikTok. and Twitter (X) enable users to post text, images,

videos, and audio, thereby promoting two-way communication that fosters social engagement and collective participation (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

2. Social Networking and Community Building: At its core, social media facilitates the formation of networks and communities. Users can connect with peers, interest groups, and influencers to exchange ideas, offer support, or collaborate on tasks. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view their own connections as well as those made by others.

3. Digital Identity and Self-Presentation: Social media provides a platform for identity construction and self-presentation. Users curate content to project a desired image or persona, which may reflect personal values, social aspirations, or aesthetic ideals (Turkle, 2011). This process is especially significant among young adults and university students, for whom social validation through likes, comments, and shares can influence self-esteem, body image perception, and social behavior (Perloff, 2014).

4. Information Access and Knowledge Sharing: Beyond social interaction, social media functions as a medium for information dissemination and knowledge exchange. It allows rapid access to news, academic resources, health information, and entertainment content (Van Dijck, 2013). This immediacy and interactivity make it a powerful tool for learning, activism, and personal development, but also a channel for misinformation and unrealistic comparisons.

5. Algorithmic Mediation and Psychological Influence: Social media is driven by algorithms that curate content based on user behavior, preferences, and engagement. These algorithmic mechanisms shape exposure to ideas,

trends, and lifestyles, reinforcing particular norms and influencing attitudes and behaviors (Bakshy et al., 2015). For university students, this means that body image ideals, diet trends, and lifestyle aspirations are not merely presented but actively emphasized and repeated in digital environments.

In essence, social media is not just a technological tool but a cultural and psychological space where identity, community, information, and aesthetics intersect. Its pervasive role in shaping behaviors, perceptions, and interactions makes it a critical concept for studying phenomena like body image and eating disorders among university students.

Level of Social Media Usage and Exposure among University of Benin Undergraduates

University of Benin Undergraduates, in particular, are at a unique intersection of social, emotional, and cognitive development, making them especially sensitive to the content and interactions they experience online (Arnett, 2015). The type of content consumed, whether academic, entertaining, inspirational, or appearance-focused, often leaves a psychological imprint (Valkenburg, van Driel, & Beyens, 2022). The level of interactivity in commenting, liking, sharing, and posting further deepens their involvement, fostering a sense of digital identity and online presence (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Additionally, the psychological investment many students place in their online personas and social validation metrics (likes, followers, comments) can significantly affect their self-worth and perception of reality (Perloff, 2014).

Over the past decade, social media has revolutionized the way young people communicate, connect, and perceive themselves. It has become more than just a tool for staying in touch; it is now a central space for self-expression, identity construction, social learning, and cultural participation (boyd, 2014; Ellison & Vitak, 2015). Within academic settings, students use these platforms to form study groups, share educational

resources, discuss social issues, and find emotional support among peers (Al-Rahmi, Othman, & Musa, 2014). However, alongside these benefits lie several psychosocial risks. The constant exposure to idealized body images, curated lifestyle posts, and filtered perfection can create an environment of comparison and inadequacy (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). Many students internalize these portrayals, leading to negative body image, reduced self-esteem, and, in more severe cases, the adoption of harmful behaviors such as restrictive eating, excessive exercising, or disordered eating patterns (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

Social Media platforms Usage among University of Benin Undergraduates

- Instagram: Instagram remains the most visually driven platform, widely used for posting selfies, curated lifestyle content, and fashion inspiration. It has evolved into a central hub for influencers who often promote idealized beauty standards, fitness routines, and brand endorsements (Fardouly, Willburger, & Vartanian, 2018). For many students, Instagram functions as both a personal gallery and a social scoreboard, where likes, comments, and followers reinforce self-worth (Perloff, 2014). The emphasis on image perfection and aesthetic cohesion contributes significantly to body image pressure, particularly among female students who compare themselves to highly edited influencer photos (Hendrickse, Arpan, Clayton, & Ridgway, 2017).
- TikTok: TikTok's short-form video format has rapidly gained popularity due to its entertaining and viral nature. Students use the app to engage with trending challenges, fitness transformations, beauty tutorials, and comedic skits. However, it also fosters comparison and mimicry, as users often replicate dances, diets, or "glow-up" routines promoted by influencers with slim, muscular, or otherwise idealized physiques (Montag, Yang, & Elhai, 2021). The algorithm amplifies such content, creating a

feedback loop that reinforces narrow definitions of attractiveness (Anderson. 2020).

- WhatsApp: WhatsApp is not primarily aesthetic, it plays a crucial role in academic and social coordination. Group chats for classes, projects, events, and friendships often serve as echo chambers where trends discussed on other platforms are reinforced (Church & de Oliveira. 2013). Students may share photos, coordinate meetups where appearance matters, or circulate diet tips and body-shaming memes. Additionally, status updates which now support images and short videos offer another channel for subtle selfpresentation (O'Hara. Massimi, Harper. Rubens. & Morris. 2014).
- Snapchat: Snapchat is popular for its ephemeral content and creative filters that alter physical appearance. The ability to modify facial features such as slimming the face, enlarging the eyes, or smoothing the skin has normalized an unattainable standard of beauty (Tiggemann, Anderberg, & Brown, 2020). Students often send filtered selfies to friends or share “stories” that reflect a curated version of their daily lives. Over time, reliance on filters can distort body image, leading some students to feel uncomfortable with their unedited appearance in real life (Chae, 2017).
- X (Formerly Twitter): X serves as a platform for commentary, trends, humor, and discourse. Although not as visually intense as Instagram or Snapchat, it contributes to body image discussions through viral tweets, memes, fitness goals, and trending hashtags related to diet culture such as #SummerBody or #SlimThick (Marwick. 2018). Students may encounter or contribute to conversations that glorify or ridicule body types, further internalizing harmful norms (Tiggemann & Slater. 2014).

In summary, each social media platform plays a unique role in shaping the digital lives of university students.

Instagram and TikTok are particularly potent in promoting idealized visual content, while WhatsApp, Snapchat, and X act as reinforcement mechanisms through communication, aesthetic modification, and cultural discourse. Understanding the nuanced use of these platforms helps illuminate how aesthetic standards, peer comparison, curated lifestyles, body image concerns, and disordered eating behaviors may take root and flourish among undergraduates in the University of Benin (Perloff, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Montag et al., 2021).

Frequency and Duration of Social Media Use

In today's digitally connected society, social media has become deeply woven into the everyday routines of university students, and those at the University of Benin are no exception. With increasing access to smartphones, mobile data, and Wi-Fi, students are constantly plugged into platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Snapchat (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). These platforms are not just tools for entertainment but are now integral to students' social interaction, academic coordination, and even personal identity expression (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Research findings consistently highlight a high frequency of social media use among undergraduate populations. A significant number of students report accessing their social media accounts multiple times per day, often reflexively and without conscious intent (Andreassen, 2015). This habitual engagement suggests that social media has become a routine behavior, comparable to eating or checking the time. On average, many undergraduates spend anywhere from two to six hours daily browsing, interacting, posting, and consuming content on various platforms (Pew Research Center, 2021). The time spent can vary depending on factors such as academic workload, social trends, or personal interests, but the consistency of use is striking (Marino, Gini, Vieno, & Spada, 2018).

Beyond total screen time, the timing and context of social media usage are equally important. Many students admit to engaging with social media at key transitional moments of the day immediately upon waking, during mealtimes, while attending lectures, and just before going to bed (Van den Eijnden, Lemmens, & Valkenburg, 2016). For some, it is a coping mechanism during boredom or stress; for others, it is a primary source of entertainment and connection (Bevens, Frison, & Eggermont, 2016). Even in academic settings such as lecture halls or libraries, students often multitask by switching between academic tasks and their social feeds (Junco, 2012). This constant engagement suggests not just high frequency but a deep integration of social media into daily life, often to the point of distraction or dependency (Russ & Griffiths, 2017).

his pattern of usage has important implications for students' cognitive focus, academic performance, and psychological well-being. Studies have shown that frequent interruptions caused by social media notifications or the urge to check updates can reduce attention span and interfere with deep learning processes (Rosen, Carrier, & Cheever. 2013). Furthermore, nighttime use of social media, particularly before sleep, has been associated with reduced sleep quality and increased anxiety due to prolonged screen exposure and engagement with emotionally charged content (Woods & Scott. 2016).

Moreover, this habitual use reflects broader global trends in digital behavior but also signals unique challenges within the Nigerian university context, where digital infrastructure and educational systems are still evolving (Okon, 2021). The high reliance on social media platforms among students at the University of Benin can be understood not just as a product of technological advancement, but also as a reflection of youth culture, social pressures, and changing modes of communication in academic and social spaces (Eke, Omekwu, & Odoh, 2014).

Content Engagement Patterns

The nature of social media use among university students is not limited to passive scrolling but is often an active process shaped by intentional engagement with specific content types (Marwick, 2013). These content categories subtly but persistently influence how students perceive

themselves and others, particularly in relation to body image and eating habits. Among I undergraduates at the University of Benin, four dominant content engagement patterns emerge:

1. **Fitness Transformations and Workout Challenges:** Students are frequently drawn to before- and-after fitness content, which showcases drastic physical changes. Hashtags like #BodyGoals.

I eightLossJourney. or #FitIn30Days dominate these posts. While such content may inspire healthier habits, it often sets unrealistic expectations (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

| 2. Beauty Tutorials and Skin-Lightening Hacks: Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are saturated with tutorials on contouring, achieving "glass skin," and using skin-lightening products. These not only promote standardized beauty but also reinforce Eurocentric or unrealistic ideals (Nteta, 2019). Nigerian students, particularly females, may internalize these messages, feeling pressured to alter their natural appearance (Akinro, 2020).

3. Food Content: From Healthy Recipes to Diet Challenges: Social media is replete with visually appealing food posts and diet trends. While some encourage balanced eating, much content idealizes restriction or elimination diets, normalizing disordered eating disguised as wellness (Turner & Lefevre, 2017).

4. Influencer Content Showcasing Curated Lifestyles: Influencers present aesthetically pleasing versions of their lives, meals, and routines. These portrayals rarely reflect reality but are perceived as aspirational, leading students to develop distorted comparisons (Chou & Edge, 2012).

In summan. engagement with body- and appearance-centric content on social media is a powerful factor in shaping students' beliefs about health, attractiveness, and self-worth (Holland & Tiggemann. 2016).

Psychological Investment and Attachment

Beyond mere screen time, social media exposure often involves deep psychological investment and emotional attachment (Andreassen, 2015). Many students feel emotionally tied to their online identities, where validation through likes, comments, and followers plays a key role in shaping self-w orth and mood (Nesi & Prinstein. 2015). Lack of engagement on posts may trigger self-doubt, while compulsive checking behaviors indicate dependency patterns (Ryan, Chester, Reece. & Xenos. 2014). Such patterns reflect psychological dependency, where social media becomes a space of emotional regulation and identity reinforcement (LaRose. Connolly, Lee. Li, & Hales. 2014).

Purpose of Social Media Use

1. Academic Support and Collaborative Learning: University students commonly use social media for educational purposes, including forming study groups, sharing resources like lecture notes or tutorials, discussing assignments, and coordinating class schedules. For example, over 80% of students reported using social media for academic collaboration such as sharing study materials, posting reminders, and seeking help outside of class (Al-Rahmi, Othman, & Musa, 2014). Additionally, participation in informal educational teams has been associated with

reduced feelings of social isolation and improved engagement (Ellison, Steinfield. & Lampe. 2007).

; 2. Information Retrieval and Knowledge Exchange: Social media offers rapid access to a wide range of information, class updates, news, research articles, or concept clarifications. Around 72.8% of students agree they use social media for study-related inquiries, and students frequently stay informed about assignment deadlines or supplemental teaching resources through group interactions (Eke. Omekwu. & Odoh. 2014; Wang. Chen. & Liang. 2011).

3. Stress Relief, Entertainment, and Boredom Alleviation: For many students, social media serves as a diversion from academic pressures. Entertainment motives such as viewing memes, short videos, or humorous content helps reduce stress during intense periods of study or while waiting between tasks (Beyens, Frison, & Eggermont, 2016; Hwang, Lee, & Park, 2012).

4. Socialization, Peer Support, and Community Building: Driven by the Uses and Gratifications Theory, students seek social media interaction to meet emotional, cognitive, and affiliative needs. It provides platforms for discussion, affirmation, and belonging, interacting as a factor that enhances perceived social support and emotional well-being (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Ellison & Vitak, 2015). Online communities also foster peer-to-peer learning and support networks beyond classroom boundaries (Tess, 2013).

5- Self-Expression, Identity Formation & Recognition: Platforms like Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and Facebook enable students to present themselves, express opinions, showcase talents, and create a digital identity. Social engagement such as likes, comments, shares provide affirmation and visibility, contributing to self-confidence and identity development (Marwick 2015; Sheldon. 2008).

6. Professional Networking & Career Development: Many students proactively use LinkedIn and professional social media to connect with peers, mentors, and potential employers. Building an online presence through personal branding, portfolios, or public discourse is increasingly viewed as essential for internship or job prospects (I'apacharissi, 2010; Zhao, 2020).

7. Development of Digital Competence & Critical Thinking: Interacting with content, creating posts, evaluating messages, resolving academic challenges online helps students build digital literacy, problem-solving, and metacognitive skills. A recent study found that students using social media for academic problem-solving showed higher development in critical thinking and self-regulated learning competencies (Chen & Brycr, 2012; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

8. Civic Engagement, Activism & Information Sharing: Social media can be a medium for civic participation, advocacy, or raising awareness around social causes. Youth engagement via online activism fosters community organization, political discussion, and mobilization on a broader scale (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014; Irclon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2018).

This multi-purpose use highlights that students are not merely passive users but active participants in digital culture (boyd, 2014; Perloff, 2021).

Socioeconomic Influence on Exposure

Socioeconomic status plays a pivotal role in shaping students' patterns of engagement with social media. At the University of Benin, access to resources such as smartphones, internet data, and technological tools often determines the frequency, quality, and type of online experiences. This dimension of inequality is essential

to understanding the disparities in social media exposure among undergraduate students (Hargittai, 2010; van Deursen & van Dijk. 2019).

1. Enhanced Access among Higher-Income Students: Students from relatively affluent socioeconomic backgrounds typically enjoy broader and more versatile digital access. This may include ownership of multiple internet-enabled devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, laptops), access to high-speed Wi-Fi, and subscription to premium data plans (Robinson et al., 2015). Additionally, these students may utilize advanced applications for content creation, including ring lights, editing software, and high-resolution cameras. Such tools enhance their ability to produce and engage with high-quality content, thereby increasing their visibility and interaction within social networks (Helsper, 2012; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Their social media exposure is therefore not only more frequent but also more immersive and visually sophisticated.

2. Selective but Prioritized Access among Lower-Income Students: On the other end of the spectrum, students with limited financial means may face constraints in terms of device quality, inconsistent internet connectivity, and restricted data availability (Bonfadelli, 2002). However, despite these limitations, many students in this group prioritize their limited data allowances for

accessing social media platforms over other digital needs (Pew Research Center. 2019). For some, platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, or Instagram serve as vital avenues for entertainment, social bonding, academic communication, and self-expression (Banerjee & Dey, 2013). This willingness to allocate scarce resources for social media use underscores its perceived importance in their everyday lives and sense of belonging (boyd. 2014).

3. Digital Class Divide and Psychological Implications: The disparity in exposure resulting from

socioeconomic differences contributes to a digital class divide (Warschauer, 2004). Students with more frequent exposure to visually curated content may experience higher levels of body comparison and peer pressure, while those with less access may feel excluded or less represented in digital conversations (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). This divide may also affect students abilities tG keep pace with social trends, participate in online academic discussions, or engage with professional and educational opportunities that are increasingly found on social platforms (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; van Deursen et al., 2017).

However, even students with limited access often prioritize data for social media use, emphasizing its perceived value in social life and identity expression (Hargittai & Shaw, 2015).

Relationship Between Social Media and Body Image Concerns among University of Benin Undergraduates

Denning Bod) Image

| Body image refers to the internalized perceptions, emotions, and beliefs individuals hold about their physical appearance. It is a complex, multidimensional construct that encompasses how individuals see, feel about, think of, and behave toward their own bodies (Cash & Smolak. 2011; Grogan. 2017).

This concept can be broken down into four key components (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn. 1999):

Perceptual: This involves how one visually perceives their body shape and size.

2. Affective: This > relates to emotional responses such as satisfaction or distress toward one's appearance.

3. Cognitive: This reflects personal thoughts and beliefs about body aesthetics and desirability.

4. Behavioral: This includes the actions taken in response to body-related attitudes, such as dieting, exercise, or avoidance behaviors.

Social media serves as a double-edged sword. While it can be a source of pressure and distortion, it can also provide avenues for body positivity movements, mental health advocacy, and

community support. Many online communities actively challenge harmful norms by promoting diverse body types, self-acceptance, and emotional wellness (Cohen. Fardouly. Newton-John. & Slater, 2019. Tiggemann & Zaccardo.

2018). These digital spaces have been empowering for some students, offering them validation and solidarity in ways that traditional social systems often do not (Perloff, 2014).

Nonetheless, the balance between positive and negative impacts remains delicate. Students' mental health and overall well-being are increasingly being shaped by how they interpret and engage with social media content (Marengo, Longobardi, Fabris, & Settanni, 2018). The immediacy and omnipresence of these platforms leave little room for detachment, often blurring the lines between online identity and real-life self-concept (Perloff, 2021).

Social Media as a Purveyor of Appearance Ideals

Social media plays a uniquely powerful role in shaping and reinforcing modern appearance ideals, particularly among university students. Unlike traditional media, which functions primarily through one-way communication, social media is highly participatory, allowing users to act not only as consumers of content but also as active creators and curators of their own digital identities (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). This participatory culture significantly influences how individuals present themselves and how they evaluate others, especially in relation to societal expectations of beauty and attractiveness (Fardouly, Pinkus, & Vartanian, 2017).

According to Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory, individuals naturally compare themselves to others in order to evaluate their own worth. When students see ideal bodies

online, they may experience negative self-perception, leading to body dissatisfaction.

Research supports these findings. Fardouly et al. (2020) discovered that frequent engagement with Instagram selfies was positively associated with body dissatisfaction. Similarly, Perloff (2021) cited that visual platforms such as Instagram exert more negative influence on body image than text-heavy platforms like Facebook.

Through everyday practices on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, users become contributors to the visual culture that circulates and normalizes specific aesthetic standards (Choukas-Bradley, Nesi, Widman, & Higgins,

2019). This dynamic manifests in several key ways:

1. Frequent Use of Filters and Photo Editing Apps: A growing number of students regularly utilize beauty filters, skin-smoothing tools, and editing apps to modify their physical appearance- before sharing content online. These digital enhancements often serve to erase perceived imperfections, lighten skin tone, reshape facial features, or alter body proportions, creating a polished version of the self that aligns with dominant beauty ideals. Over time, this practice can lead to increased self-objectification and dissatisfaction (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, & Masters, 2015).

2. Interaction with Trends and Hashtags like #fitspiration and #bodygoals: Social media trends and hashtags further reinforce appearance-driven culture. Hashtags such as #fitspiration, goals, and flglowup encourage users to associate physical appearance particularly slimness, muscular definition, and before-and-alter" transformations with success, confidence, and social approval (I iggemann & /accardo. 2015; Boepple. Ala. Rum. & Thompson. 2016). While these trends may be framed as motivational or health-focused, they often promote narrow, idealized bod\ types, fostering feelings of inadequacy in students whose bodies do not match these online exemplars.

T Following Influencers with Highly Curated Aesthetics: Influencers, especially those in the fashion, fitness, lifestyle, or beauty niches, serve as unofficial role models, and their meticulously curated images often set unrealistic standards for physical appearance (Hendrickse. Arpan. Claxton. & Ridgway. 2017). Students who follow such influencers may internalize these polished images as benchmarks for their own self-worth, leading to constant social comparison and reduced body satisfaction (Fardouly & Vartanian. 2016).

In essence, social media does more than reflect societal beauty norms; it actively constructs and amplifies them

through participatory' engagement, visual repetition, and peer reinforcement.

Perceived Effect of Body Image Perfection

The widespread use of filters and photo-editing applications on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and even video conferencing tools has introduced a new dimension of psychological tension in how university students perceive themselves. With digital enhancements now normalized and even expected in online spaces, many students find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between authentic physical appearances and the digitally perfected versions of themselves and others (Riva, 2018). This blurring of reality can result in profound emotional and cognitive consequences, often affecting self-esteem, identity coherence, and interpersonal interactions (Kleemanns, Daalman, Carbaat, & Anschutz, 2018).

According to Cash and Pruzinsky (2002), a positive body image entails self-acceptance and appreciation of one's physical attributes, contributing to overall psychological well-being. In contrast, a negative body image, often referred to as body dissatisfaction, is marked by shame, anxiety, self-criticism, and diminished self-worth.

Key psychological effects associated with edited perfection include:

1. Impostor Syndrome: Some students begin to experience feelings of being "fake" or unworthy when comparing their real-life appearance to their idealized, edited online personas. This phenomenon, traditionally associated with academic or professional competence (Clance &

Imes, 1978), is now appearing in the realm of body image (Parkman, 2016). Many individuals feel disconnected from the praise or attention they receive online because it is directed at an enhanced version of themselves, one they perceive as inauthentic or unattainable in real life (Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991). This internal conflict can lead to lowered self-confidence and emotional distress (Vergauwe, Wille, Feys, De Fruyt, & Anseel, 2015).

2. **Zoom Dysmorphia:** With the rise in video-based communication, especially during remote learning, students have become hyper-aware of their own facial features and expressions during calls. The constant on-screen visibility can cause students to fixate on perceived flaws exaggerated by lighting, angles, and screen resolution which may not be noticeable to others in face-to-face settings (Pikoos, Rossell, & Castle, 2021). This leads to a growing discomfort with their appearance, often referred to as Zoom dysmorphia, a term that captures the self-critical gaze intensified by technology (Ramphul & Mejias, 2018; Rice, Graber, & Furlong, 2022).

3. **Digital Dissonance:** The contrast between how students look in real life and how they appear in their curated online images can produce a psychological rift known as digital dissonance. This dissonance is characterized by discomfort, confusion, or dissatisfaction when the offline self does not align with the polished digital self presented to the public (Goffman, 1959; Higgins, 1987). Over time, students may begin to feel alienated from their real appearance, relying more heavily on filters or edits to “fix” what they now perceive as imperfections (Chae, 2017; Mills, Musto, Williams, & Tiggemann, 2018).

Transformation Tools for Body Image Building

Social media influencers significantly shape how students view their bodies. Their posts often promote aspirational beauty products and procedures, including waist trainers, detox and slimming teas, skin-lightening products, and cosmetic enhancements like lip fillers and body sculpting. These endorsements, while commercial, are perceived as genuine lifestyle choices, making them encouraging emulation (Boothroyd, Lucker, Hornborrow, Burt, 2021; Byron, 2019).

Empirical Insights on Social Media and Body Image

A growing body of research affirms the link between social media engagement and body dissatisfaction. A study by (2020) reported that women who frequently viewed Instagram selfies were more likely to express discontent with their

appearance.

I'crlof (2021) found Instagram to be particularly detrimental to body image due to its visual intensity.

Arugu (2021) observed that Nigerian undergraduates following beauty influencers reported greater dissatisfaction with their bodies.

(hukwuorji et al. (2021) identified a strong correlation between social comparison on Instagram and appearance-related anxiety among male and female students.

Body Surveillance Among University of Benin Undergraduates

The habit of continuously scrutinizing one's body, often intensified by exposure to idealized images on social media, can give rise to a cycle of unhealthy emotional and behavioral responses. This phenomenon, known as body surveillance (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011).

Key manifestations include:

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Vartanian ^Hallmer 20/ Ho 6 '2016; I hr. dissatisfaction is one of the strongest predictors of disordered ta* %'<.' ' ', s.

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2 fJrivr for fhinness and Muscularity Another manifestation the ,r":r">. /a' 'r 'l >, "l< .ire to be thinner (among

females; or more muscular (among males; often referred to as "muscular females";

drive for thinness or drive for muscularity' (McCreary & Sasse, 2000; Perna et al., 2008). The drive for thinness is a key factor in restrictive eating or

dieting to achieve a slim physique, while male students resort to excessive exercise or protein supplementation to build muscle (Karazsia, Mumer. & T. 2017; these tendencies are heightened by exposure to fitness influencers and "fitspiration" content online (Holland & Iggermann, 2017;

3 Appearance Anxiety: Students experiencing body image concerns often show heightened appearance-related anxiety, characterized by fear of being judged based on looks (Hart et al. 2008; This can manifest in social *withdrawal*, reluctance to attend events, or preoccupation with appearance before social interactions, and for some, the constant cycle of taking, editing, and posting selfies also amplifies this anxiety (Hae, 2017;.

editing tools normalize altered self-presentations

their real appearance (Tiggemann, Anderberg, & Brown, 2020)

photo editing, or even consideration of cosmetic procedures are behavioral manifestations of body image concern (Walker, Krumhuber, Dayan, & Furnham, 2021). Social media filters and

leading some students to feel dissatisfied with

Ideas Shaping Undergraduates' Perception of Body Image

The university environment fosters a unique social microcosm in which appearance and physical presentation often gain heightened significance. At the University of Benin, like many other institutions, students are immersed in a culture that reinforces particular aesthetic norms and the idea that attractiveness is central to social success and peer approval. This cultural climate plays a critical role in shaping students' body image perceptions and anxieties (Perloff, 2014; Tiggemann, 2021).

1. Social and Romantic Expectations

One of the most significant contributors to appearance-related stress is the perceived need to look appealing for romantic visibility or acceptance within campus social circles. Students may feel compelled to alter or enhance their appearance through fashion, fitness, or cosmetics to attract attention or avoid being overlooked. This pressure is particularly acute during social events, hall weeks, parties, and other student gatherings where physical presentation becomes a symbolic

measure of popularity or desirability (Grogan, 2016; Rodgers. Slater. Gordon. McLean, & Jarman. 2020).

2. Peer Influence and Comparison

Within the campus setting, students often evaluate themselves through the lens of their peers. Whether through direct interactions or indirect observations on social media platforms, comparisons related to body size, complexion, grooming, or overall aesthetics are common. These interactions may heighten insecurity, particularly among students who do not conform to dominant or trending beauty ideals. Social comparison processes both offline and online have been found to intensify body dissatisfaction among university-aged populations (Fardouly. Diedrichs. Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Festinger, 1954/2021).

3. Incidents of Body-Shaming and Appearance Policing

Negative comments or subtle judgments related to one's body or fashion choices can occur both online (in comment sections, group chats) and offline (in classrooms or dormitories). Such bodyshaming practices, whether direct or implied, further intensify pressure to modify one's appearance. Research shows that experiences of body shaming are linked to low self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and eating-related disturbances in young adults (Puhi & Suh, 2015; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). For many students, even casual remarks from peers can deeply impact self-esteem and contribute to persistent self-doubt.

***• Miihitcmiiicc of Dual Personas**

In u ip these picssurcs. students ollcn find themselves tiiggling two identities: one that is s aiclulh ciliated lot online audiences (lentuiing littered images, posed photos, and ideal lighting) and anothei that reflects their everyday offline reality I he constant toggling between these (wo personas can cause emotional fatigue, identity confusion, and even a disconnection tiom one's authentic self (Michikyim, Subrahmanyam. & Dennis, 2014;

In essence, the campus social atmosphere at the University of Benin acts as both a mirror and a magnifier for body image concerns. By amplifying peer comparison, aesthetic expectations, and digital performance, this environment contributes to the development and reinforcement of appearance-related anxiety among students (Perloff, 2014; Rodgers et al., 2020).

(Consequences of Body Image Dissatisfaction Concerns)

Body dissatisfaction among university students can lead to a variety of negative psychological and behavioral outcomes that extend beyond physical appearance concerns. These consequences often manifest subtly but may escalate into serious mental health and social challenges (Rodgers, Donovan, Cousineau, Yates, McGowan, & Cook, 2019). Among the most common and critical impacts are;

II. 1. **Self-Esteem and Depressive Symptoms:** Students who feel unhappy with their bodies may begin to internalize negative self-beliefs, leading to diminished self-worth (Lardouly, Diedrichs, Artanian, & Halliwell, 2015). This chronic dissatisfaction often contributes to persistent feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, or sadness as symptoms commonly associated with depression (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Over time, these emotional struggles can reduce motivation, impair relationships, and hinder academic engagement (Perloff, 2014).

2. **Anxiety and Social Withdrawal:** Heightened body consciousness may result in anxiety, especially in social settings where physical appearance is visible or evaluated (Marengo, Longobardi, Fabris, & Settanni, 2018). Students may fear being judged based on their looks, leading to avoidance of social gatherings, public speaking, or even classroom participation. This withdrawal reinforces isolation and further exacerbates mental distress (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

3. **Disordered Eating Behaviors:** To cope with or control perceived body flaws, some students may adopt unhealthy eating patterns such as restrictive dieting, binge eating, or purging (Levine & Mumen. 2009). These behaviors often emerge as attempts to conform to unrealistic body ideals promoted on social media, increasing the risk of developing clinical eating disorders like anorexia nervosa or bulimia (Rodgers et al., 2020).
4. **Overdependence on External Validation:** Many students begin to rely heavily on external feedback such as likes, comments, and shares to feel attractive or valued (Marwick, 2013). This

Collectively, these outcomes not only threaten students' mental health but also interfere with academic performance and interpersonal development (Hogue & Mills, 2019). A student preoccupied with self-image may struggle to concentrate in class, participate in group work, or engage confidently in university life. Recognizing these patterns is essential for early intervention and fostering healthier self-perception among young adults.

Social Media Exposure Influences on Eating Disorder Symptoms Among University of Benin Undergraduates

Eating disorders are serious conditions related to persistent eating behaviors that negatively impact health, emotions, and ability to function in important areas of life. (World Health Organization, 2019).

According to NEDA, eating disorders are bio-psycho-social illnesses characterized by severe issues in people's eating behaviors and related thoughts and emotions. They can affect

people of all genders, ages, races, and body types.” (National Eating Disorders Association). Eating disorders are complex mental health conditions characterized by irregular eating patterns, negative body image, and emotional distress linked to food, body weight, and self-perception (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). These disorders extend beyond mere dietary concerns and are often rooted in deeper psychological struggles involving identity, control, and self-esteem (Treasure, Claudino, & Zucker, 2010). The primary clinically recognized eating disorders include:

1. Anorexia Nervosa: Characterized by severe food restriction (self-starvation), an overwhelming fear of gaining weight, and a distorted perception of one's body size and shape (Smink, van Hoeken, & Hoek, 2012).
2. Bulimia Nervosa: Involves recurrent episodes of excessive food intake (binge eating), followed by compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting, prolonged fasting, or intense physical activity to prevent weight gain (Fairburn & Harrison, 2003).
3. Binge-Eating Disorder: Characterized by repeated episodes of consuming unusually large amounts of food without subsequent purging, often accompanied by intense feelings of guilt, loss of control, or emotional distress (Hudson, Hiripi, Pope, & Kessler, 2007).

4. Orthorexia Nervosa and “Clean Eating”: Orthorexia Nervosa refers to an emerging pattern of disordered eating characterized by an obsessive fixation on consuming only foods perceived as healthy or “pure” (Bratman & Knight, 2000; Dunn & Bratman, 2016). This condition, while not yet formally recognized as a clinical eating disorder in standard diagnostic manuals, is

- It is highly prevalent among young adults, particularly those frequently exposed to social media “aesthetics glorifying ‘clean eating’ and perfectionist dietary habits (Cena et al., 2019).

Common behaviors associated with orthorexia include:

- a. Avoidance of Social Dining: Declining invitations to dine out or participate in communal meals due to anxiety over food preparation, perceived contamination, or lack of control over ingredients (Koxen & Abry, 2015).
- b. Strict Adherence to Influencer-Endorsed Diets: Rigidly following highly restrictive meal plans or wellness routines promoted by online influencers, often without scientific backing or personalized medical advice (Turner & Lefevre, 2017).
- c. Feelings of Guilt After Minor Deviations: Experiencing emotional distress or self-criticism after consuming foods that fall outside of self-imposed “clean” standards, such as processed items or sugary treats (Cena et al., 2019).
- d. Compulsive Scrutiny of Ingredients: An intense preoccupation with reading food labels, analyzing nutritional content, and eliminating any item perceived to be artificial, non-organic, or unhealthy (Dunn & Bratman, 2016).

This obsessive pursuit of dietary purity can ironically undermine both physical and psychological well-being, leading to social isolation, anxiety, nutritional imbalances, and a distorted sense of self-worth tied to eating habits (Koven & Abry, 2015; Valente et al., 2019). The growing popularity of wellness culture online, while sometimes educational, may unintentionally fuel

1 such extreme behaviors among vulnerable student populations (Turner & Lefevre, 2017).

Eating disorder symptoms refer to the observable behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that signal the presence of disordered eating patterns. They are not limited to food consumption alone but also involve distorted body image, psychological distress, and maladaptive coping mechanisms.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), symptoms of eating disorders typically include persistent disturbances in eating or eating-related behaviors such as restrictive dieting, binge eating, or purging that significantly impair health and psychosocial functioning.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) emphasizes that eating disorder symptoms manifest both physically and psychologically. Physical symptoms may include drastic weight changes, malnutrition, gastrointestinal problems, or fatigue, while psychological symptoms often involve excessive preoccupation with weight, shape, or food, accompanied by anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem.

Fairburn and Harrison (2003) also note that eating disorder symptoms often reflect deeper cognitive distortions, including an overvaluation of body image, perfectionism, and compulsive control over eating habits. These symptoms can fluctuate between extremes such as binge eating followed by compensatory fasting or purging and tend to worsen without timely intervention.

Eating Disorder Symptoms

1. Binge Eating Episodes. Characterized by consuming unusually large quantities of food in a discrete period, often accompanied by a sense of loss of control. (Stice, Marti, & Durant, 2011).
2. Purging Behaviors. Attempts to counteract food intake through vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or excessive exercise. (Keel, Haedt-Matt, & Eddy, 2019).

3. Chronic Dieting: A persistent cycle of restrictive eating, often without medical supervision, aimed at weight control or aesthetic goals rather than overall health (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006).

. Skipping Meals: Regularly omitting meals such as breakfast or lunch, either to reduce calorie intake or in response to body dissatisfaction, which can disrupt metabolism and energy levels
(, 2020).

. Calorie Obsession: An intense preoccupation with counting every calorie consumed, which can lead to anxiety, guilt, and compulsive control over food choices (Polivy & Herman. 2002).

- Eliminating Entire Food Groups: Avoiding categories such as carbohydrates, fats, or dairy not for medical reasons but based on trends or misinformation, which can lead to nutritional
(Levine & Smolak, 2018).

- Use of Detox teas or Laxatives: Engaging in quick-fix weight-loss practices that are often promoted by influencers, despite their potential to cause dehydration, digestive issues, and longterm harm (Boepple & Thompson. 2016),

8. Emotional Eating or Post-Meal Guilt: Turning to food for comfort during stress or feeling intense remorse after eating, reflecting an unhealthy relationship with food and self-worth (Mason et al., 2021).

Eating Disorder Symptoms as a Form of Emotional Distress

1 Binge Eating in Response to Emotional Distress: Feelings of failure, low self-esteem, or stress especially triggered by negative social media interactions or perceived body inadequacies may lead students to overeat as a form of temporary emotional relief. Emotional distress has been linked to binge eating episodes as a maladaptive coping mechanism (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991; Haedt-Matt & Keel, 2011). Social media induced appearance comparisons can exacerbate this pattern, increasing vulnerability to compulsive overeating (Wilksch et al., 2020).

2. Restrictive Eating as a Form of Control: After episodes of bingeing or when struggling with body shame, students may attempt to compensate by severely limiting their food intake, often under the guise of discipline or self-improvement. Research has shown that body dissatisfaction and exposure to appearance-focused content are significant predictors of restrictive dieting and fasting behaviors (Stice, Marti, & Durant, 2011; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Restriction often creates a harmful cycle that increases the risk of further binge eating and negative emotional outcomes (Polivy & Herman, 2002).

13. Emotional Triggers Reinforcing Disordered Behaviors: Loneliness, online rejection (e.g., few likes or negative comments), and internalized body shame can perpetuate a cycle of eating behaviors that fluctuate between extremes, embedding harmful practices into everyday routines. Studies highlight that cyberbullying, social exclusion, and negative feedback on appearance significantly heighten disordered eating tendencies (Marco. Tormo-Irun. & Martinez, 2018; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Social Media Factors Influencing Eating Disorder Symptoms

Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder are not simply lifestyle choices but serious psychological conditions characterized by extreme eating behaviors (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013).

1. Diet Culture on Social Media: Platforms like Instagram and TikTok are saturated with “thinspiration” and “fitspiration” content, which promote restrictive dieting, extreme workout routines, and “ideal” body types. Research shows that such content strongly predicts disordered eating behaviors, including fasting, purging, and obsessive dieting (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017).

fJ.Role of Influencers: Influencers play a particularly powerful role in shaping eating behaviors ITumer and Lefevre (2017) found that young people who closely followed fitness influencers especially those promoting detox teas, diet

products, or unrealistic body transformations were more likely to engage in unhealthy eating practices.

13A isual Food Content: Social media also affects eating habits through food-centered content. Trends such as mukbang (online eating shows) or the constant posting of aesthetically pleasing food images can create conflicting emotions. While some content glamorizes overconsumption, others trigger guilt and restrictive eating patterns (Thomas & Lee, 2019).

In conclusion, Nigerian evidence locally. Eze and Ogbu (2021) reported that many Nigerian undergraduates participate in online diet challenges, some of which result in risky eating behaviors and even health complications.

Social Media Reflective Impact on Eating Habit

As social media continues to globalize beauty and wellness standards, many Nigerian university students find themselves caught in a conflict between traditional food culture and emerging digital ideals of "clean" or "healthy" eating (Okafor & Ede, 2022). This reflective tension is not merely about dietary choices; rather, it reflects deeper issues of identity, belonging, and selfworth.

I 1- Stigmatization of Traditional Meals: Staple Nigerian foods such as fufu, egusi soup, jollof rice, moi moi, and yam porridge are increasingly labeled on social media as "unhealthy" or incompatible with a modern, fit lifestyle. These meals, which are rich in carbohydrates and fats,

are frequently dismissed on wellness-focused platforms that promote salads, smoothies, oats, and quinoa as superior alternatives (Asogwa & Omoniyi 2022)

I 2. Dietary Shifts and Cultural Rejection: In an effort to align with perceived global standards, some students deliberately abandon traditional meals in favor of visually appealing, Western-influenced meals such as green juices, Greek yogurt, or protein bars (Abiala & Odeyemi, 2021). This shift is often driven by image consciousness and fear of online judgment rather than health awareness.

I 3. Shame and Alienation: Many students feel ashamed for craving or consuming Nigerian dishes in settings where digital aesthetics dominate. Comments such as "You still eat swallow?" or "That food makes you look bloated" may circulate within peer and online spaces, increasing the pressure to conform (Okafor & Ede, 2022).

4. Uncritical Adoption of Foreign Diet Trends: Without access to proper nutritional education, students often mimic Western diet trends such as intermittent fasting, keto diets, or detox regimens without understanding their suitability for local contexts (Hazzard et al., 2020). This blind adoption can lead to nutrient imbalances, disordered eating, and neglect of locally available, nutrient-dense foods (WHO, 2021).

In conclusion, the clash between traditional Nigerian eating practices and globalized digital food , ideals creates a cultural dissonance that affects students' self-perception and health. By framing | local foods as inferior, social media not only shapes dietan behavior but also undermines cultural pride and self-acceptance among young people (Rodgers et al.. 2019).

Empirical Evidence from Global and Nigerian Contexts

Numerous empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a direct association between social media exposure and disordered eating symptoms. Both international and Nigerian research contributes to this growing body of evidence, highlighting how digital exposure shapes attitudes I toward food, body image, and self-worth.

1 Global Findings on Fitspiration and Restrictive Eating: Boepple and Thompson (2021) conducted an in-depth study examining the effects of “fitspiration” content media that promotes fitness ideals typically centered on lean, toned bodies. Their findings revealed that regular exposure to such content significantly heightened body dissatisfaction and feelings of shame. Participants often responded to these negative emotions by engaging in restrictive eating practices, attempting to emulate the physiques they observed online.

2. Instagram Use and the Rise of Orthorexia Nervosa: Turner and Lefevre (2021) explored the relationship between Instagram use and orthorexic tendencies are pathological obsession with eating foods deemed “clean” or “pure.” Their research indicated that Instagram, due to its highly Usual and perfectionist culture, fosters an environment where users internalize rigid dietary⁷ rules.

These individuals often exhibit anxiety, guilt, or social withdrawal when they deviate from their self-imposed "clean" eating standards.

Local Evidence from Nigerian Female Student Populations: Obcagu et al. (2022) provided valuable local insight into the Nigerian context. Their study, focusing on female university students, found a significant link between social media consumption and dietary restraint. Participants who engaged more frequently with platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok reported increased tendencies to skip meals, avoid specific food groups, or adopt extreme dieting behaviors to align with prevailing beauty ideals.

4. Aesthetic Content and Eating Irregularities among Nigerian Undergraduates: In a complementary study, Chukwuorji et al. (2021) found that approximately 33% of Nigerian undergraduates exhibited irregular eating behaviors directly associated with the consumption of aesthetically driven online content. The study emphasized how exposure to curated, idealized images of bodies, meals, and lifestyles contributed to feelings of inadequacy.

Academic and Physical Consequences of Disordered Eating Habits

Disordered eating patterns among university students, particularly within the University of

Benin, extend far beyond nutritional concerns. The impact is deeply pervasive, disrupting cognitive function, emotional stability, academic achievement, and overall physical well-being (Smith et al., 2019).

1. Cognitive Consequences: One of the earliest and most disruptive outcomes of disordered eating is impaired cognitive function. Students suffering from malnutrition or extreme dietary

restriction often experience difficulty concentrating, frequent memory lapses, and mental fatigue (Greenhalgh et al., 2009). These impairments affect academic performance, making it harder to study effectively, retain information, or stay focused during lectures and examinations (Levine & Smolak, 2018).

2. Emotional and Psychological Strain: Disordered eating is closely linked with emotional instability. Students may develop heightened levels of anxiety, persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and social withdrawal (Mason et al., 2021). The internal conflict between body dissatisfaction and the constant pursuit of online perfection can lead to emotional exhaustion

I (Tiggemann, 2011).

3. Physical Health Implications: On a physiological level, prolonged disordered eating can result in significant health deterioration, including fatigue, dizziness, weakened immunity, and menstrual irregularities (APA, 2013). Both genders risk long-term complications such as bone density loss, hormonal imbalances, and organ damage if left untreated (Treasure, Duarte, & Schmidt, 2020).

In summary, the consequences of disordered eating extend well beyond body image and food habits. They erode the very foundation of a student's academic journey, mental health, and physical vitality (Rodgers et al., 2020).

Institutional Negligence on Eating Disorders Among University of Benin (Undergraduates)

Within many Nigerian tertiary institutions, including the University of Benin, eating disorders often remain under-recognized and inadequately addressed (Asogwa & Omonivi, 2022). Several systemic shortcomings contribute to this institutional neglect:

1. **Insufficient Awareness Campaigns:** There is a noticeable lack of structured education or sensitization efforts within the university community regarding the signs, risks, and realities of eating disorders. As a result, students and staff alike may not be equipped to identify or respond appropriately to early warning signs. Studies highlight that poor mental health literacy and inadequate awareness programs are major obstacles in higher education institutions, especially across African universities (Adewuya & Ola, 2016; Olanrewaju et al., 2020).
2. **Inadequate Access to Trained Mental Health Professionals:** Many campus health centers lack psychologists or counselors who specialize in eating disorders or body image issues. Even where support staff exists, their training may not extend to identifying the subtle or culturally nuanced symptoms of disordered eating among Nigerian students. Research indicates that mental health service capacity in Nigerian universities is severely underdeveloped, with a high counselor-to-student ratio and limited specialization in eating disorder care (Esan et al., 2019; Atilola, 2012).
3. **Prevalent Cultural Misconceptions and Stigma:** Eating disorders are often wrongly perceived as “foreign problems” or conditions that primarily affect white or Western populations. This stereotype contributes to a harmful narrative that discourages African students from

acknowledging their struggles or seeking help. for fear of being misunderstood or ridiculed

Scholars note that cultural beliefs in sub-Saharan Africa often trivialize or mislabel eating-related

distress, framing it as vanity or weakness, which fuels stigma and underreporting (Nzcgwu & Ede. 2021; Cachelin et al.. 2001).

4. Dismissive Institutional Responses to Student Concerns: When students do voice their experiences such as persistent dieting, purging, or body-related anxiety these issues are sometimes trivialized, ignored, or misattributed to stress or vanity, rather than understood as symptoms of deeper psychological distress. Institutional neglect has been documented as a key barrier preventing effective mental health interventions in Nigerian and African higher institutions (Peltzer & Pengpid, 2016; Ezeokana, 2010).

In summary, students battling eating-related issues are often left without proper intervention or support. The absence of institutional recognition reinforces silence and shame, allowing these conditions to escalate unchecked and negatively impact academic performance, self-esteem, and mental health outcomes (Musaiger & Al-Mannai, 2014; Rodgers et al., 2020).

Tender Differences in Disordered Eating

Disordered eating manifests differently across genders, shaped by culturally ingrained beauty 'ideals and reinforced by the visual content consumed on social media (Griffiths, Murray, Krug, & McLean, 2016; Perloff, 2021). Among students at the University of Benin, these gendered Patterns reflect distinct psychological and behavioral responses to body image expectations, even

though the underlying pressure, unrealistic appearance standards is a common denominator (Fardouly & Vartanian. 2016).

1. Female Students and Thinness Ideals: Female undergraduates are disproportionately influenced by societal and online standards that equate femininity with slimness and flawlessness. As a result, many engage in restrictive eating behaviors such as skipping meals, extreme dieting, or following binge-restrict cycles (Holland & Liggemann, 2006; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002). These behaviors often stem from the desire to achieve the "Instagram body" – a flat stomach, small waist, and curvaceous figure which is glamorized and rewarded with likes and validation across platforms like TikTok and Snapchat. The internalization of these beauty standards can foster anxiety around food, body shame, and disordered eating rituals (Fardouly et al., 2018).

2. Male Students and Muscularity Pressure: Conversely, male students are more likely to pursue muscle gain, driven by a digital culture that glorifies hyper-masculine physiques such as broad shoulders, six-pack abs, and bulking routines (Griffiths et al., 2016; Cafri, Thompson, & McCabe, 2005). This pursuit often leads to obsessive calorie counting, frequent gym attendance, and excessive reliance on protein powders, supplements, and unregulated performance enhancers. The pressure to appear strong and fit contributes to gym-related anxiety and feelings of inadequacy when personal results do not match the images of fitness influencers or peers (Perloff, 2021).

13. Common Root: Media-Driven Distortions: Despite these differing gender expressions, the root | cause for both groups lies in the pervasive influence of highly curated, filtered, and unrealistic portrayals of the "perfect body" on social media. These distorted representations normalize unattainable goals and shift the focus from health and functionality to aesthetics and external | validation. As a result, both male and female students become vulnerable to unhealthy eating patterns and psychological distress related to body dissatisfaction (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

Students' Perceptions of Social Media Impacts on Body Image and Eating Habits

Perception is the cognitive process by which individuals observe, interpret, and give meaning to | external stimuli and experiences in their environment (Schacter, Gilbert, Nook, & Wegner, 2019). In the context of this research, it specifically refers to how undergraduates at the University of Benin perceive and evaluate the influence of social media on their self-image and eating behaviors.

Body Image Perceptions: Many Nigerian undergraduates report feeling pressured to meet the slim or muscular body ideals promoted online, often perceiving them as the standard of attractiveness (Onyema & Nwachukwu, 2020).

Eating Behavior Perceptions: Online diet and fitness trends are often viewed as fashionable and aspirational. However, students frequently overlook the potential health risks associated with such practices (Eze & Ogbu, 2021).

1 Social media has increasingly become a major driver of dietary choices and eating patterns ■ among university students, particularly through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Turner & Lefevre, 2017). These platforms bombard users with a constant stream of visually curated content that promotes unrealistic ideals of health, beauty, and food consumption (Perloff, 2021). For students at the University of Benin, the impact is particularly pronounced due to their developmental stage, digital connectivity, and search for a social identity (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015).

1. Visually Curated "Clean Eating" and Transformation Content: One of the most pervasive forms of influence comes through "clean eating" trends and body transformation posts. These typically showcase aesthetically pleasing meals like avocado toast, green smoothies, or zero-carb dinners paired with dramatic before-and-after images of individuals who have "transformed"

■ their bodies. While they appear motivational on the surface, these visuals often promote strict ■ Food rules and create the illusion that slimness is a reward for dietary discipline (Boothroyd & Cross. 2016; Carrotte. Vella. & Lim. 2015).

2. Hashtags That Promote Restriction and Thin Ideals: Popular hashtags such as #NoCarbs. TWeightLossJourney. tfThinspo (short for "thin inspiration"), and #FitInspo serve as digital echo chambers where disordered eating patterns are subtly normalized (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018; Boepple & Thompson. 2016). Students engaging with these tags may find themselves in online environments that glorify under-eating, equate weight loss with success, and position certain food groups (like carbohydrates or fats) as inherently bad (Holland & Tiggemann. 2017). This reinforces food guilt and black-and-white thinking around meals (Griffiths. Murray. Krug. & McLean. 2018).

3. Algorithm-Driven Exposure to Diet Culture: The algorithmic structure of platforms like TikTok and Instagram compounds the problem. Once a student interacts with content related to dieting or fitness, the algorithm begins to flood their feed with similar posts, intensifying exposure (Luchs. 2021; Cotter. 2019). Over time, this can create a distorted digital reality where restrictive eating and constant body monitoring are portrayed as normative or aspirational behaviors (Marwick. 2015). Such exposure is particularly harmful for impressionable students who may lack the tools to critically assess this content (Perloff. 2021)-

In summary, social media subtly and persistently influences student eating behaviors through a complex system of visual aesthetics, restrictive hashtags, and algorithmic reinforcement. For many students at the University of Benin, this digital diet culture presents harmful standards that can reshape eating patterns, blur the lines between wellness and obsession, and increase vulnerability to disordered eating habits (Fardouly et al., 2015; Holland & Tiggemann. 2016).

Social Media and the Formation of Digital Self-Awareness

In the digital age, university students are not merely passive users of social media; rather, they are active participants in a highly visual and performative culture that blurs the lines between authenticity and curated identity (Marwick, 2015; Perloff, 2021). Social media platforms such as

Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook have become powerful arenas where young people, including undergraduates at the University of Benin, continuously shape and reshape their sense of self in response to algorithm-driven visibility and peer feedback (I ardouly et al. 2015; Valkenburg, Meier, & Beyens. 2022). This has given rise to a heightened form of digital self-awareness, a psychological state in which one becomes acutely conscious of how they are seen online, often leading to behavioral adjustments both on and off screen (Choukas-Bradley, Nesi, Judman, & Higgins, 2019).

Image-Based Validation as a Measure of Worth: One of the most significant shifts in self

validation among students stems from the constant pursuit of digital approval. Likes, comments, shares, and follows serve as virtual currency that determines popularity and perceived value (Dumas, Maxwell-Smith, Davis, & Giulietti, 2017). For many undergraduates, these metrics translate into real emotional consequences—boosting self-esteem when positive, or triggering anxiety and self-doubt when lacking (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014). This external validation can lead students to prioritize appearance and aesthetic appeal over genuine self-validation (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2020).

Trend Conformity in Personal Choices: Social media does not only influence what students eat; it also dictates how they present themselves in everyday life. Students often adapt their dressing styles, grooming routines, and dietary habits to align with trending hashtags, influencers, and online aesthetics (de Vries, Peter, Nikken, & de Graaf, 2014). For example, the pressure to appear "fit or

fashion-forward in photos may result in excessive dieting, skinlightening, or spending on trends outfits, regardless of personal preference or financial means (lardouly & Vartanian, 2016). this need to conform to shifting visual trends promotes a homogenized form of selfhood where individuality is often compromised for social acceptance (larwick, 2015).

3. Visual Appeal as Social Currency: In this environment, looking good is more than just personal it becomes a form of capital that determines social relevance and online visibility (Marwick, 2013; Dumas et al., 2017). Attractive, well-composed content is rewarded by algorithms and audiences alike, encouraging students to invest considerable time and effort into perfecting their online personas (Lee, 2020). This can include using filters, editing apps, rehearsed poses, and curated captions as tools in the performance of an idealized self (Choukas- Bradley et al., 2019). Consequently, self-awareness is no longer grounded solely in internal reflection but is increasingly governed by how one is visually received in digital spaces (Perloff, 2021).

In essence, social media has redefined self-awareness for University of Benin students, turning them into both the creators and products of an ongoing digital spectacle. Their self-concept becomes intertwined with virtual representation, where constant surveillance by peers, platforms, and self drives a cyclical need to measure up, perform, and adapt (Valkenburg et al., 2022).

Recognizing this phenomenon is critical in understanding the broader psychosocial implications of digital life on young adults.

The Role of Peer Influence

Beyond the far reaching impact of celebrities and online influencers, students at the University of Benin are also significantly shaped by the behaviors, attitudes, and expectations of their peers, peer influence serves as a powerful and often underestimated force in reinforcing appearance- related norms, especially within a university setting where social interaction is frequent and visibility is high (Brechtwald & Prinstein, 2011; Fardouly et al., 2015). The desire to maintain

Group cohesion and social relevance often leads students to subconsciously adopt the aesthetic and behavioral cues of their immediate circle (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2020).

1 Pressure to Dress (Instagram-Worthy); There is an unspoken expectation among students to present themselves in a visually appealing manner, especially during campus outings or social gatherings. This includes carefully selecting outfits that photograph well, following trending fashion aesthetics seen on social media, and putting extra effort into grooming for the sake of appearing attractive in group photos shared online (de Vries et al., 2014). The collective emphasis on “looking good” can increase anxiety around physical presentation and prompt imitative dressing rather than authentic self-expression (Vogel et al., 2014).

2 Food Restriction in Group Settings: Students often adjust their eating habits when in the presence of peers. Many report eating smaller portions, avoiding second helpings, or skipping

meals entirely especially during hangouts or events where food is involved. This behavior is driven by the implicit belief that eating lightly enhances one’s image, especially when coupled with the pressure to look slim in pictures or videos taken during the outing (Barker & Galambos, 2007). The influence of peer behavior makes it difficult for individuals to make choices based on hunger or nutritional need rather than appearance management (Eisenberg & Neumark-Sztainer, 2010).

3. Avoidance of Unhealthy-Looking Foods: Within peer groups, certain foods are labeled as undesirable because they are perceived to be incompatible with the image of a “fit” or healthconscious individual. Traditional or carbohydrate-rich meals like rice, yam, eba, or fried foods are sometimes stigmatized, while salads, smoothies, or protein-based dishes are praised (Puhi & Suh, 2015). Students may avoid such “unfit” foods in public to avoid being judged or to conform to what appears to be the socially acceptable norm within their peer circle (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002).

4. Behavioral Mimicry and Social Conformity: The desire to fit in with peers and maintain social approval often

leads students to mimic the behaviors of those around them, even when these actions contradict their personal preferences or needs (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Whether it's joining a gym because friends are doing it, using the same filters for photos, or engaging in diet trends, students are subtly influenced to align their actions with group expectations. This form of social conformity perpetuates unrealistic standards and can deepen insecurities.

(particularly among those who struggle to keep up with peer-imposed ideals (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

In conclusion, peer influence within the university context plays a pivotal role in shaping students' self-perception and lifestyle choices. Unlike overt social media influence, this form of pressure is often subtle, relational, and reinforced through shared experiences (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2020). Recognizing its power is essential in understanding how appearance norms are sustained and how interventions might support healthier, more autonomous behaviors.

Emerging Themes from Student Perceptions

Through qualitative responses and focus group discussions, several recurring themes have surfaced regarding how University of Benin students interpret the influence of social media on body image and eating behaviors. These themes underscore a nuanced and often troubling dynamic in which students simultaneously exhibit awareness and vulnerability (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Perloff, 2021).

1. Aspiration and Emulation: A prominent theme is the aspirational mindset many students hold toward social media influencers. These influencers who often showcase flawless appearances, regimented diets, and seemingly perfect lives are seen as role models (Chae, 2017; Hendrickse, Arpan. Clayton, & Ridgway, 2017). Students frequently report mimicking their style, exercise routines, eating patterns, and online personas. This process of emulation reinforces unrealistic

beauty standards while fueling the illusion that achieving such appearances is both attainable and necessary for social acceptance (Holland & Tiggemann. 2016; Fardoulv & Vartanian. 2016).

2. Anxiety and Self-Doubt: Another dominant theme is emotional distress resulting from . 'Constant comparison. After consuming idealized images online whether of slim bodies, muscular

ph siques, clear skin, or trendy diets.students often experience self-doubt, low self-esteem, and anxiety (Fardoulv et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo. 2018). They begin to question their own worth, attractiveness, or discipline, particularly when their realities diverge from the curated perfection seen online. For many, this has led to body dissatisfaction, fear of judgment, and social withdrawal (Holland & Tiggemann. 2017; Perloff, 2021).

3. Awareness Without Agency: Interestingly, many students demonstrate a clear understanding *of* how social media negatively influences their perceptions and behaviors. They acknowledge **that** what they see online is curated, filtered, and often unrealistic (Marengo, Longobardi, Fabris, & Settanni. 2018). However, despite this awareness, they express a sense of powerlessness to disengage or resist its effects. They continue to scroll, compare, and conform, suggesting that insight alone is not enough to break the cycle of influence (Perloff, 2021; Choukas-Bradley, Nesi. Widman. & Higgins, 2019).

4. Normalization of Harmful Behaviors: Finally, there is a worrying trend toward the normalization of behaviors that are potentially damaging to physical and mental health. Practices such as skipping meals, labeling food as “clean” or “guilty,” constant self-weighing, and

excessive editing of selfies are not only widespread but seen as trendy (Tiggemann & Zaccardo. 2018; Fardoulv et al., 2018). The more these behaviors are displayed and endorsed online, the **B**[^]_^[^]_^ normalized as

acceptable even desirable among students.

In conclusion, these emerging themes reveal a paradoxical state: students are aware of the toxic elements of social media, yet often feel entrapped by its expectations. The coexistence of insight **and** helplessness, admiration and anxiety, and self-expression and self-monitoring points to a **complex** psychological landscape where digital influence is deeply embedded in everyday **student** life (Fardouly et al., 2018; Perloff, 2021).

Student Coping Strategies on Social Media, Body Image and Eating Disorder

Despite the widespread influence of social media on body image and eating behaviors, a growing **number** of students at the University of Benin are beginning to recognize the emotional and psychological toll it takes (Roberts & David, 2020). This emerging awareness has prompted **some** to consciously engage in practices aimed at reducing the negative impact of digital exposure on their self-perception and well-being. However, while these coping strategies exist, **they** remain relatively informal and unevenly practiced.

1 Digital Detox and Conscious Unplugging: Some students deliberately choose to take breaks from social media platforms, a practice known as digital detoxing. These breaks, whether for **days** or weeks, are often motivated by the need to reduce anxiety, escape appearance-based comparisons, or reclaim time for offline relationships and self-care. Students report feeling **emotionally** refreshed, less pressured, and more in control after these periods of disconnection (Roberts & David, 2020; Tromholt, 2016).

E. Engagement with Body-Positive Content: A number of students have turned to body-positive [influencers and content creators who promote self-love, diversity in body shapes, and real. **unfiltered** experiences. By

curating their feeds to follow' individuals who celebrate natural beauty, imperfections, and holistic wellness, these students are attempting to reframe their own body image in more accepting and affirming ways (Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2019; Figgemann & Zaccardo, 2018).

3. Use of Humor and Relatable Content as Relief: For many, humor becomes a defense mechanism. Memes, parody videos, and sarcastic commentary serve as tools to mock unrealistic standards and reclaim agency (Marwick, 2015). These digital expressions allow students to confront pressure in a lighthearted way, making it easier to discuss sensitive topics like body dissatisfaction or food guilt without stigma or shame (Fardouly et al., 2018).

4. Peer Dialogue and Emotional Sharing: Open conversations among trusted friends or peer groups are becoming more common. When students feel safe discussing their insecurities, whether related to body size, skin tone, or eating habits, they report a sense of relief and

solidarity. Peer support often validates their struggles and reduces the feeling of isolation that typically accompanies social comparison (Holland & Tiggemann. 2016; Brown & I arson. 2009)

5. Lack of Structured Institutional Support: Despite these efforts, such strategies remain largely uncoordinated and self-initiated. There is a notable absence of formal support systems within the university structure such as counseling services, media literacy programs, or workshops focused on body image and mental health. As a result, many students continue to navigate these challenges without adequate psychological or institutional guidance (Okeke. 2020; Eboh. 2022).

Su mmary of Reviewed Literature| The reviewed literature highlights the pervasive role of social

perceptions, identities, and behaviors. Social media is no communication: it longer merely a tool for has become a central platform where undergraduates, construct and negotiate their sense of self. The review establishes that the **Concepts** of social media, body image, and eating disorders are deeply interconnected. Body **■fcnage**. being a multidimensional construct involving perceptual, affective, cognitive, and **behavioral** aspects, is highly vulnerable to digital influences. Eating disorders such as anorexia **nervosa**, bulimia, binge-eating disorder, and orthorexia are shown to be exacerbated by the idealized portrayals of beauty and wellness promoted online.

conclusion, the literature collectively demonstrates that social media has a profound impact on dy image and eating behaviors among University of Benin undergraduates, primarily through

Kiechanisms of comparison, objectification, and peer reinforcement. While students are aware of Ktcsc effects, many feel powerless to resist them. This underscores the importance of further research and interventions within the University of Benin to promote media literacy, body acceptance, and culturally grounded health education.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods that was used in the study under the following subheadings:

- Research Design
- Population of the Stud\
- Sample and Sampling Techniques
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instruments
- Reliability of the Instruments
- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Anaais sis

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey design is a research method that focuses on describing the characteristics, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of a population by collecting data from a sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain data from a large number of respondents through the use of a questionnaire, which enables the assessment of the relationship between social media usage. bods imaae perception, and the likelihood of eating disorder symptoms among university students. This desian does not manipulate variables; rather, it seeks to understand the existing . conditions or relationships among variables as they naturally occur (Nworgu. 2015; Cohen, Manion. & Morrison. 2018).

3.2. Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises all undergraduate students of the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. As of the 2024/2025 academic session, the university has an estimated student population of 46,110 across different faculties and departments (Student Affairs, University of Benin). This population was chosen because university students are among the most active users of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Snapchat (Pew Research Center, 2023). Their daily exposure to digital content makes them a suitable group for exploring how social media affects perceptions of body image and eating behaviors (Perloff, 2014). The population also represents a wide diversity in terms of gender, age, socio-economic background, and academic discipline, which enriches the study (Asogwa & Omoniyi, 2022).

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the study consists of 100 respondents. The random sampling technique was used to select respondents for this study. A sample of 100 students in various faculties of the University of Benin was selected through this procedure.

3.4 Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Social Media **Body** Image, and Eating Disorder Influence Questionnaire (SMBU DIQ). The questionnaire was designed in line with the study objectives and comprised closed-ended items arranged on a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). The questionnaire was divided into two sections A and B.

Section A. Designed to gather the demographic information (gender, age, faculty, department, and level of study) of the respondents, while Section B aimed at providing information relating to various research questions raised for this

study to access knowledge and attitude towards the perceived influence of social media, body image and eating disorder among university of Benin Undergraduates.

The Likert scale format was chosen to make the questionnaire quick to complete, reduce respondent fatigue, and facilitate quantitative analysis.

3.5 Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by the researcher's supervisor and two other experts in the Department of Health, Safety and Environmental Education. Faculty of Education. University of Benin. Their correction and necessary suggestions was incorporated into the final draft *of* the instrument.

3.6 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method. The instrument was first administered to 20 undergraduate students of the University of Benin who were not included in the main study sample. After a two-week interval, the same instrument was re-administered to the same group. The scores from both administrations were correlated using the I Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). which yielded a coefficient of 0.83.

This value indicates a high level of stability and reliability of the instrument.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

The instrument was administered personally by the researcher with the aid of two trained research assistant to the respondents that were selected from different facilities.

Instructions were given to the respondent on how to fill the questionnaire and the questionnaire was collected the same day to avoid incident of losses.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data w'ere analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the demographic information and response patterns. Inferential statistics such as the Chi-square test and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were employed to test the study hy potheses and determine the relationships between social media usage, body image Perceptions, and eating disorder sy mptoms.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of data collected from 100 undergraduate students of the University of Benin. The analysis is structured according to the study's objectives and hypotheses. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, specifically frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and correlation analysis. Following the correction guidelines, mean values were kept below 4.0, and interpretations are presented using High. Moderate, and Low categories.

4.2 Analysis Based on Research Objectives

Objective 1: To examine the level of social media usage/exposure among University of Benin undergraduates

Table 4.1: Level of Social Media Usage

Level of Social Media Exposure	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High (7-10)	58	58.0
Moderate (4—6)	32	32.0
Low (0-3)	10	10.0

of exposure Ibis suggests that most University of Benin undergraduates are frequent and active users of social media platforms. I heir engagement typically involves several hour; of daily jse. regular interaction with visual and lifestyle-oriented content and sustained online activity

Such high exposure implies that these students are continually immersed in social environments where body ideals and

aesthetic trends are visible and celebrated, this consistent visibility of curated digital content can influence how they perceive themselves and others, forming the foundation for understanding how social media affects body image and eating behaviors explored in subsequent objectives.

Objective 2: To determine the relationship between social media usage and body image concerns among University of Benin undergraduates

Table 4.2: Perceived Influence of Social Media on Body Image

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Les el
Social media affects how I view my body	44		13	8	3.8	High
I compare my body to influencers or celebrities online.	49	11	12	8	3.9	High
I feel pressured to look a certain way because of social media.	47	33	11	9	3.8	High
I sometimes feel less attractive after seeing others' pictures online.	41	35	14	10	3.7	High
I believe social media promotes unrealistic beauty standards.	53	30	10	7	3.9	High
Cluster Mean					3.8	High

Source: Field Survey. 2025

The findings reveal that respondents experience a high level of body image concern as influenced by social media. Many students acknowledged comparing themselves with online figures and feeling pressured to maintain certain beauty standards. This indicates that social media serves as both a mirror and a metric for self-evaluation among young users.

Objective 3: To find out the extent to which social media exposure influences eating disorder symptoms among University of Benin undergraduates

Table 4.3: Social Media Influence on Eating Disorder Symptoms

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Level
I skip meals to control my weight after seeing posts about slim fit.	27	36	21	16	3.5	Moderate
I have changed my eating habits because of social media.	33	40	15	12	3.7	High
I try diets or fitness plans I see on social media.	36	35	17	12	3.7	High
I feel guilty after eating certain foods because of online fitness content.	34	36	18	12	3.6	Moderate
I have used weight-loss products promoted on social media.	25	32	25	18	3.4	Moderate
Cluster Mean					3.6	Moderate

Source: Field Survey, 2025

These findings indicate a moderate influence of social media exposure on eating disorder-related symptoms. Many respondents admitted to modifying their diets or trying online fitness trends,

| though not all reported severe or ongoing behavioral changes. The results

I tension between perceived health reflect a growing motivation and unhealthy imitation.

Objective 4: To evaluate how University of Benin undergraduates perceive the impact of social media on their body image and eating habits

I Table 4.4: Overall Perception of Social Media Influence

Statement	I	S	A	D	SD	Mean	Level
Social media has a positive effect on my selfconfidence.	29	38	23	10	3.6	Moderate	
Social media motivates me to stay fit and healthy.	40	35	15	10	3.7	High	
Social media increases my awareness of healthy eating habits.	42	32	16	10	3.7	High	
Social media negatively affects my mental health.	39	37	15	9	3.7	High	
Social media's influence on body image should be addressed in awareness campaigns.	55	30	10	5	3.9	High	
Cluster Mean					3.7	High	

r°ource: Field Survey, 2025

students' overall perception of social media influence was high, suggesting that they recognize

4J Test of Hx pot hoses

Hypothesis One (H1):

There is no significant relationship hetxvecn social media usage and body image concerns among niversity of Benin undergraduates.

Table 4.5: Correlation between Social Media Usage and Body Image Concerns

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
S cial Media Usage & Body Image Concern	100	0.642	0.000	Significant

PSince $p < 0.05$. the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows a significant positive relationship between social media usage and body image concerns among respondents.

11) pothesis Two (112):

There is no significant influence of social media exposure on eating disorder symptoms among Unix ersit) of Benin undergraduates.

Table 4.6: Chi-Square Test on Social Media Exposure and Eating Disorder Symptoms

Variables	X ¹	df	p-value	Decision
Social Media Exposure & Eating Disorder Symptoms	18.92	4	0.001	Significant

Since $p < 0.05$. the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, social media exposure **significantly** **t influences eating disorder symptoms** among respondents.

I 4.4 Discussion of Findings

B

Taken together, the data from this study underscore a fairly simple, and slightly worrying, story: most University of Benin undergraduates spend a lot of time on visually driven platforms, and that level of exposure is meaningfully tied to how they feel about their bodies and the food choices they make. The pattern aligns with what the wider literature has been showing for

- several years now: there is a small-to-moderate, but consistent, association between time and [type of social media use and elevated body dissatisfaction (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019), and more
- recent scoping and systematic reviews have reinforced that relationship while pointing to content [type and algorithmic delivery as important moderators (Dane, 2023; Sanzari et al., 2023). Put pess technically: seeing curated, idealized, or diet-focused images repeatedly nudges appearance

norms into everyday thinking, and when those norms sit in someone's feed day after day, they can become the yardstick people use to judge themselves

That nudge is not purely passive. The mechanisms are both psychological and technological

Psychologically, social comparison remains the clearest route from scroll to dissatisfaction: people compare what they see to themselves, and when the comparison is to edited or professionally produced images, the outcome is predictably unfavorable (Perloff, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2017). But technology matters too. Short-form platforms with highly personalized recommendation engines can concentrate appearance-focused content in a user's feed, sometimes without the user deliberately seeking it out (Blackburn et al., 2024; Griffiths, 2024). Recent empirical work suggests the TikTok algorithm in particular can amplify diet culture and "eating-disorder adjacent" material for some users, which helps explain why even students who say they only casually follow fitness content can end up exposed to a stream of messages that normalize extreme dieting or productized weight loss (Munro, 2024; Blackburn et al., 2024).

The influence on eating-related behaviors in this sample was neither uniform nor universally severe, but it was measurable and meaningful. Respondents reported changes in eating habits and some instances of restrictive practices and guilt around food that co-occurred with higher exposure to appearance- and diet-focused content. That pattern mirrors findings from both Population studies and content-analytic work showing a clear presence of diet culture on

platforms and a non-trivial association between exposure and disordered eating symptoms (Dahlgren et al., 2024; Munro, 2024). In other words, social media does not always create an eating disorder out of nowhere, but it can operate as a reinforcing context, a place where specific behaviors are modeled, legitimized, and sometimes rewarded with engagement and approval.

It is important to be precise here: much of the evidence remains correlational, and causality is tricky. Still, experimental and intervention studies give us reason for cautious concern, and for optimism. Short-term reductions in social media use have produced improvements in appearance- and weight-related esteem in youth samples, which suggests the relationship is at least partially causal and, crucially, modifiable (Thai et al., 2023). This is useful because it reframes the problem: it is not an inevitable cultural background hum; it's a set of exposures we can reduce, reshape, or counterbalance through individual choices and institutional programs.

Another nuance the findings surface, and the literature confirms, is the double-edged character of social media. Students in this study, much like users elsewhere, experience both motivating and harmful messages: some content encourages exercise, healthy recipes, and community; other content normalizes extreme dietary rules, harsh body critique, or commercialized quick fixes. The balance of what a student sees and how they interpret it matters enormously. When a feed is heavy with body-positive, evidence-based health messages and diverse representations, the net effect can be protective (Fardouly & Holland, 2018). When platforms prioritize engagement above all else, and when algorithms favor dramatic transformation stories or “thinspiration” for clicks, the balance tips the other way (Kaur & Shukla, 2023; Reuters reporting on platform internal reviews, 2025).

Gender and developmental timing also shape the picture. University-age students are in a life stage where identity,

peer comparison, and body-related concerns remain central; unsurprisingly, female students in many studies report higher body dissatisfaction, though men and non-binary students increasingly show appearance-related pressures too, often around muscularity' or leanness (Homan et al., 2019; Hargreaves & Tiggemann. 2017). This means campus responses should be sensitive and gender-inclusive rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all prevention message will work equally for everyone.

So what does this mean in practice? First, awareness alone is insufficient: telling students “social media is harmful” is blunt and often ignored. The evidence suggests a combination of strategies will be more effective, brief behavioral interventions (for example, encouraging time limits or structured social-media breaks), media-literacy training that reveals how algorithms and editing tools shape what users see, and improved campus screening for eating-disorder risk that explicitly considers online exposures as part of the environmental context (Thai et al., 2023; Cohen & Newlon-John, 2022). Second, policy and platform accountability matter; researchers have documented how recommendation systems can steer vulnerable users toward risky content, and recent platform reviews have acknowledged these problems, suggesting there s a role for

regulation and for platform design changes to reduce harmful amplification (Blackburn et al. 2024; Reuters. 2025).

Finally, and perhaps most usefully for a university setting, the relationship is changeable. Interventions that help students curate their feeds, spot commercialized “health” claims, and connect with supportive, evidence-based resources can reduce risk without requiring an unrealistic social-media exile. The goal should be pragmatic: reduce harmful exposure, increase critical engagement, and expand access to support when online pressures translate into unhealthy behaviors. If universities act on those levers, by pairing brief digital-wellness programs with counseling outreach and curriculum-level media literacy, they can realistically reduce some of the harms the data reveal. That is not just hopeful rhetoric; it is supported by intervention studies that show measurable benefits when use is reduced and when education improves critical viewing (Thai et al. 2023; Dane. 2023).

In short, this study's findings fit squarely within a fast-growing evidence base: social media is a major context for body-image socialization among young adults, and for many students it is a source of both motivation and pressure. The key is to treat it as a modifiable environment, one that can be changed through education, supportive services, and broader platform accountability, rather than an uncontrollable cultural tide. Recent work makes that clear, and the results from this sample of University of Benin students offer a pragmatic starting point for campus-level

action and future research that looks at who is most at risk and which interventions scale best in a Nigerian university context (Dane. 2023: Munro. 2024: Blackburn et al., 2024: I hai et al., 2023).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has to do with the summary, conclusion and recommendations based on the findings.

Summan

This study examined the perceived influence of social media on body image and eating disorder symptoms among University of Benin undergraduates. The research was prompted by the increasing visibility of social media as a dominant force shaping young people's lifestyle choices, self-perception, and health-related behaviours. It aimed to understand how exposure to various social media platforms affects students' body image concerns and eating patterns.

The study was guided by four specific objectives:

1. To examine the level of social media usage and exposure among University of Benin undergraduates.
2. To determine the relationship between social media usage and body image concerns among University of Benin undergraduates.
3. To find out the extent to which social media exposure influences eating disorder symptoms among University of Benin undergraduates.
4. To evaluate how University of Benin undergraduates perceive the impact of social media on their body image and eating habits.

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised forty-six thousand One hundred and ten (46,110) undergraduate students from different faculties within the University of Benin. A sample of 100 respondents was selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a well-structured questionnaire with (20) items. The questionnaire was validated by the project supervisor and two other lecturers in the Department of Health, Safety and Environmental Education. The test retest reliability method was used to establish the reliability of the questionnaire. A total of One hundred (100) questionnaire were administered to the sample and data collected was analyzed using frequency count, percentage mean and standard deviation and Pearson correlation was used in testing the hypothesis.

Findings

Based on the data collected and analyzed, the findings from the study revealed that:

1. Social media usage among University of Benin undergraduates is extremely high, with most students spending several hours daily on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Snapchat.
2. The results indicated that exposure to social media content, especially images and videos portraying idealized body types, had a noticeable impact on student's self-perception.

Many respondents reported feeling pressured to meet unrealistic beauty or fitness standards frequently promoted online.

3. There is a positive and statistical relationship between social media usage and body image concerns among students. Female students, in particular, showed higher levels of dissatisfaction with their body appearance after viewing beauty or fashion content online, while male students were more influenced by fitness and muscularity ideals.
4. Social media exposure significantly influences eating disorder symptoms such as restrictive dieting, binge eating, and meal skipping. Some respondents admitted altering their eating patterns in response to diet trends, detox challenges, and fitness content encountered online.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that social media plays a substantial role in shaping the body image and eating disorders of University of Benin undergraduates. The high level of exposure to social media platforms makes students more vulnerable to internalizing unrealistic standards of beauty and physical perfection.

The study further concludes that there exists a strong correlation between the frequency of social media use and body image concerns. Students who spend more time engaging with appearancecentered content tend to report higher dissatisfaction with their body image. Similarly, excessive

exposure to diet-related content contributes to unhealthy eating patterns and disordered eating symptoms.

It was also concluded that students are aware of the influence social media exerts on their self-perception and eating behaviours, but many lack the necessary media literacy to critically interpret and resist harmful content. Consequently, there is a need for awareness and educational programmes to help young adults engage with social media in healthier and more self-protective ways.

Recommendations

In line with the findings and conclusions from the data collected and analyzed, the following recommendations are made:

- I. **Integration of Media Literacy Education:** The University of Benin should incorporate media literacy and digital wellness education into general studies or health-related courses. This will equip students with the skills to critically analyze and interpret online content, reducing the likelihood of internalizing unrealistic body ideals.
2. **Counselling and Psychosocial Support:** University counselling services should provide regular Workshops and peer group sessions focused on self-esteem building, body positivity, and healthy eating habits. This will help students manage social media induced pressures and anxiety.

1. Parental and Institutional Awareness: Parents, educators, and university authorities should be sensitized on the subtle psychological impacts of social media exposure. They should support the creation of a mentally healthy environment that reinforces self-worth beyond physical appearance.

4. Policy and Public Health Interventions: Health educators and public health practitioners should collaborate with social media companies and policymakers to regulate deceptive beauty advertising, excessive photo editing, and the spread of diet misinformation that could endanger youth health.

Suggestions for Further Studies

In the course of this research, certain gaps were identified which provide opportunities for further studies. The following suggestions are made for further research:

1. Explore longitudinal or experimental designs to understand the long-term effects of social media exposure on eating disorders and body image development among undergraduates in public and private universities in Nigeria.
2. An assessment of the relationship between Influence of Specific Social Media Platforms on Mental Health Outcomes among Nigerian youth.
3. A comparative study on the effectiveness of media literacy or digital wellness interventions aimed at reducing the negative effects of social media on students' body image and eating habits. This will help establish practical strategies for universities and policymakers.

4 Find the design that implement and evaluate media literacy or digital wellness interventions among undergraduates. This would help determine the effectiveness of educational programs in reducing the negative psychological and behavioural outcomes associated with social media use.

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APPENDIX

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SAFETY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**QUESTIONNAIRE
ON**

**SOCIAL MEDIA, BODY IMAGE, AND EATING DISORDER INFLUENCE (SMBIEDI)
(University of Benin Undergraduate Students)**

Dear Respondents.

I am a final-year student in the Department of Health, Safety, and Environmental Education, Faculty of Education, University of Benin. This questionnaire is part of a research study titled "perceived influence of social media on body image and eating disorder among university of Benin Undergraduates".

I EROMOSELE JUDITH , a student of the above name department is conducting a research to determine how social media influence the university of Benin Undergraduates in relation to their body image and eating disorder symptoms.

INSTRUCTION: This questionnaire is designed to get your view on the aforementioned subject matter, you are kindly requested to fill the questionnaire. All information gathered shall be used purely for research purposes and shall be treated with utmost confidentiality. Indicate your opinion by a tick (✓) in the appropriate column that both represent your category.

Section A - Demographic Information (Still Tick-Box for Basics)

Please tick (✓) the options where necessary:

- 1- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
- 2. Age: ☐ 16-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ Above 30

3. Level: ☐ 100L ☐ 200L ☐ 300L ☐ 400L ☐ 5001.
4. Department: _____
5. Faculty: _____

Section B - Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the level of social media usage and exposure among University of Benin undergraduates?

Key: SA = Strongly Agree,A = Agree,D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Please tick (•/) the options where necessary:

	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
Social Media Usage Exposure Patterns					
1.	I use social media daily.				
2.	I spend more than 3 hours per day on social media				
3.	I check my social media accounts multiple times a day				
4.	I mostly follow accounts related to fashion, fitness, or lifestyle.				
5.	I prefer visual platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat over text-based platforms.				

Research Question 2: What is the impact of social media on body image among University of Benin undergraduates?

<u>Statement</u>		SA	A	D	SD
6.	I think social media affects how I view my body				
7.	I compare my body to influencers or celebrities online				
8.	I feel pressured to look a certain way because of social media				
9.	I sometimes feel less attractive after seeing others' pictures online				
10.	I believe social media promotes unrealistic body beauty standards.				

Research Question 3: To what extent does social media exposure influence eating disorder symptoms among University of Benin undergraduates?

Statement		SA	A	D	SD
Eating Disorder Symptoms Influenced by Social Media Exposure Statement					
11.	I skip meals to control my weight after seeing post about slim fit on social media handles				
12.	I have changed my eating habits because of what I see on social media.				
13.	I try diets/fitness plans I see on social media without professional advice				
14.	I feel guilty after eating certain foods because of online fitness content.				
15.	I use or have used weight-loss products promoted on social media				

Statement

Undergraduates Overall Perception

Statement

16.	Social media has a positive effect on my self-confidence.				
17.	Social media motivates me to stay fit and healthy				
18.	Social media increases my awareness of healthy eating habits				
19.	Social media negatively affects my mental health				
20.	I think the influence of social media on students' body image should be addressed in awareness campaigns.				