

**EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS
OF UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, NIGERIA**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE
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**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE AWARD OF MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE
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MAY, 2026

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project titled “The Effects of Social Media on the Mental Health of Students of the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria was carried out by Oghasegbe UWAGUE with the Matriculation Number PG/SSC0905514 under my supervision in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.

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Date

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Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty, the source of wisdom, strength, and grace throughout this programme. It is also dedicated to my husband, Mr. Emmanuel Ugono, and my beloved children, Tejiri Ugono and Tega Ugono, whose love, patience, and inspiration gave me the strength to successfully complete this study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

											PAGE
Cover page	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	i
Title page	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	ii
Certification	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iii
Dedication	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iv
Acknowledgements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	v
Table of Contents	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	vi
 SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION											
1.1	Background of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1.2	Statement of the Problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
1.3	Objectives of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
1.4	Research Hypotheses	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
1.5	Significance of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
1.6	Scope of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
 SESSION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW											
2.1	Conceptual Clarification	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
2.1.1	Health	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
2.2	Mental Health	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
2.3	Social Media	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15
2.4	Frequencies and Patterns of Social Media Use among Students	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16
2.5	Common Health Challenges Experienced by Students Who Actively Use Social Media	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
2.5.1	Physical health problems	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20

2.5.2	Cyberbullying and online harassment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
2.5.3	Body image concerns and disordered eating	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21
2.5.4	Addictive and Problematic Use	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21
2.6	Awareness of mental-health risks associated with excessive	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22
2.7	Students' Awareness of Mental Health Risks Associated with Excessive or Unregulated Social Media Use	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25
2.8	Strategies to Reduce Adverse Psychological Effects of Social Media and Promote Healthy Usage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
2.8.1	Promoting digital mental health literacy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
2.8.2	Encouraging mindful and balanced use	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29
2.8.3	Setting healthy boundaries and screen-time management	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29
2.8.4	Leveraging social support systems	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
2.8.5	Policy and institutional interventions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
2.8.6	Encouraging offline alternatives and healthy lifestyle integration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
2.9	Gaps in Literature	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	31
2.10	Theoretical Framework	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35
2.10.1	Social comparison theory	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35
2.10.2	Application of social comparison theory to the study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	37
SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY									
3.1	Research Design	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40
3.2	Area of Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40
3.3	Population of Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41
3.4	Sample Size	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	42
3.5	Sampling Technique	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	43

3.6	Research Instrument	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	45
3.7	Method of Data Collection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	46
3.8	Method of Data Analysis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	46
3.9	Validity and Reliability of the Instrument	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
3.9.1	Validity of the Instrument	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
3.9.2	Reliability of the Instrument	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
3.10.	Limitations of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	48
3.11	Ethical Considerations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	48

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1	Section A : Background Characteristics of Respondents	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50
4.2	Test of Hypotheses	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	96
4.2.1	Hypothesis one	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	96
4.2.2	Hypothesis two	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	97
4.2.3	Hypothesis three	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	98
4.3	Summary of Correlation Findings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	99
4.4	T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	99
4.4.1	Independent-samples T-test: Gender differences in mental health outcomes Test Statistic: Independent-Samples T-test	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
4.4.2	One-way ANOVA: Differences across faculties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
4.4.3	One-way ANOVA: Differences by level of study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	101
4.5	Discussion of Findings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	102

**CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS
AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

5.1	Summary of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	109
5.2	Conclusion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	110
5.3	Recommendations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	111
5.4	Contribution to Knowledge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	112
	REFERENCES	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	114
	APPENDIX (Questionnaire)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	123

LIST OF TABLES

TABLES	TITLE	PAGE
4.1:	Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents - - - -	51
4.2:	Social media platforms most frequently used - - - -	54
4.3:	Daily time spent on social media - - - -	56
4.4:	Time of day social media is mostly used - - - -	57
4.5:	Primary purposes for social media use - - - -	59
4.6:	Number of social media accounts actively used - - - -	60
4.7:	Frequency of checking social media notifications while studying - -	61
4.8:	Proportion of daily free time spent on social media - - - -	62
4.9:	Mental health challenges experienced by respondents - - - -	64
4.10:	Frequency of anxiety or stress among students - - - -	65
4.11:	Self-rated emotional well-being in the last semester - - - -	66
4.12:	Perceived impact of social media on mental health - - - -	68
4.13:	Mental health challenges worsened by social media use - - - -	69
4.14:	Staying up past midnight due to social media use - - - -	70
4.15:	Frequency of checking social media immediately after waking up -	72
4.16:	Feeling nervous or anxious - - - -	73
4.17:	Difficulty relaxing when offline - - - -	74
4.18:	Reduced interest or pleasure in activities - - - -	75
4.19:	Depression feelings triggered by social media comparison - - - -	76
4.20:	Sleep difficulty related to social media use - - - -	77
4.21:	Social media and academic productivity - - - -	79

4.22: Self-rated emotional well-being considering social media use	-	-							80
4.23: Awareness of mental health risks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	82
4.24: Identified psychological risks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	82
4.25: Social comparison and self-esteem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	84
4.26: Late-night use and concentration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	85
4.27: Social media and emotional problems	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	86
4.28: Awareness of counseling and mental health support services	-	-							87
4.29: Use of counseling services among aware students	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	88
4.30: Students' views on education about the psychological risks of excessive social media use	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	89
Table 4.31: Strategies that could help students develop healthier social media habits									90
Table 4.32: Willingness to attend workshops or seminars on managing social media use	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	92
Table 4.33: Perceived role of the University of Benin in addressing social media-related mental health challenges	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	93
Table 4.34: Perceived effectiveness of peer support programs	-	-	-						94
Table 4.35: Willingness to contribute to initiatives that promote healthy social media use	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	95

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media use among young people has raised concerns about its potential impact on mental health. This study examined the effects of social media usage on the mental health of undergraduate students at the University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the frequency and patterns of social media use, the relationship between social media engagement and mental health outcomes, students' awareness of the psychological risks associated with excessive use, and strategies for promoting healthier digital engagement. The study was guided by Social Comparison Theory, which explains how individuals evaluate themselves through comparisons with others, particularly in digital environments.

A survey research design was adopted. Data were collected from 490 undergraduate students drawn from different faculties of the University of Benin using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyze patterns of social media usage and mental health experiences, while inferential statistical techniques including Pearson Product–Moment Correlation, independent-samples t-test, and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

The findings revealed that social media usage is highly prevalent among undergraduate students, with platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and X being the most frequently used. Many students reported spending several hours daily on these platforms, often during evening and late-night hours. The results further indicated that frequent and prolonged social media use is significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms among students. The study also found that greater awareness of the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use is linked to better mental health outcomes.

The study concludes that while social media provides important opportunities for communication and social interaction, excessive engagement may expose students to psychological challenges. It therefore recommends the promotion of digital mental health literacy programs, strengthened counseling services, and institutional strategies that encourage balanced and responsible social media use among students.

Keywords: Social media usage, Mental health, Anxiety, Depression, Social comparison, Undergraduate students.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Social media has become a defining feature of modern society, transforming how people connect, communicate, and access information. Since the launch of early platforms such as Six Degrees in 1997, online networking has expanded rapidly (Wikipedia, 2024a). By 2008, Facebook had reached 145 million monthly users, which grew to more than 2 billion in 2020, and by January 2024, over 3.05 billion people were actively using the platform (Wikipedia, 2024a). Currently, more than 4.95 billion people representing about 61% of the global population are active on social media (Data Reportal, 2024).

Young people remain the most engaged users of these platforms. Globally, approximately 75% of individuals aged 15–24 use the internet compared to 65% among older adults (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2022). In Africa, youth adoption is similarly high, with 55% of young people online compared to only 36% of the adult population (Wikipedia, 2024b). University students fall within this highly engaged demographic, using social media extensively for academic, social, and personal purposes (Eze, Eya, & Onwuagboke, 2021).

Nigeria mirrors these global and regional patterns. As of January 2024, the country recorded about 103 million internet users, accounting for 45.5% of its population (News.ng, 2024). Social media users increased from 31.6 million in early 2023 to 36.75 million in January 2024, marking a 16% rise within one year (News.ng, 2024). The most popular platforms include Facebook with 38.7 million users, TikTok with 37.4 million and YouTube with 27 million (Krestel Digital, 2025). Nigerians aged 18–34 constitute the most active group, a range that

aligns strongly with the university student population (Statista, 2024).

Within higher education, students increasingly rely on social media for communication, networking, research, and entertainment. While these platforms offer opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing, concerns about their mental health implications have grown. Evidence from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, revealed extensive internet use among students and staff, but also highlighted risks associated with poor cyber-hygiene and digital overexposure (Eze *et al.*, 2021). International findings have similarly demonstrated links between heavy social media use, increased anxiety, depression, and reduced academic performance (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011). These concerns are evident in Nigeria as well. Studies have linked excessive social media engagement among undergraduates to symptoms such as depression, anxiety, stress, insomnia, and recurrent headaches (Anosike, Nwachukwu, & Okoro, 2024). For example, a study of pharmacy students found that 40% showed signs of smartphone addiction, which was strongly associated with depression and anxiety (Nwambam, Eze, & Chukwu, 2024). Similarly, a systematic review established that higher levels of social media dependence predict poorer mental health outcomes among young adults (Aderinto, Ajayi, & Ogunyemi, 2023). Another study in Calabar reported that nearly one-third of undergraduates experienced psychological distress, while about one-fifth demonstrated moderate-to-severe internet addiction (Asibong, Okafor, & Owoidoho, 2020).

Despite these findings, limited research has explored the impact of social media on students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). Established in 1970, UNIBEN now enrolls more than 77,000 students, making it one of the largest universities in Nigeria (Wikipedia, 2024c). Yet no major study has directly examined the link between social media use and mental health within this student population. This constitutes a significant gap in literature, particularly in

the broader Nigerian context where 25–30% of the population lives with mental illness but fewer than 10% receive care due to stigma and inadequate health infrastructure (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

It is against this background that the present study examines the effects of social media use on the mental health of students at the University of Benin. By addressing this gap, the study provides empirical evidence that can guide strategies for promoting healthier online habits, strengthening mental health support services, and fostering a balanced digital culture within the university community.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Social media has increasingly become a central aspect of students' daily lives, providing avenues for communication, entertainment, and academic engagement. However, its excessive use has been consistently linked to adverse psychological outcomes, including heightened anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Keles *et al.*, 2020). Evidence further suggests that prolonged exposure to networking platforms reduces self-esteem, encourages compulsive comparison, and lowers overall life satisfaction among young people (Huang, 2017). University students, in particular, are vulnerable as they juggle multiple developmental and academic responsibilities, which may be negatively affected by patterns of digital overexposure (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011).

Recent research underscores that students' intense reliance on digital platforms exacerbates psychological stress. For instance, excessive social media engagement has been associated with disrupted sleep cycles and diminished concentration among undergraduates (Anosike *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, smartphone dependence has been identified as a predictor of heightened stress levels, poor academic performance, and increased vulnerability to depression

(Nwambam *et al.*, 2024). International studies also show that students who spend more than three hours daily on social networking sites are more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and emotional exhaustion compared to peers who limit their use (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). This evidence highlights the urgency of addressing the relationship between digital habits and students' mental health.

A central mechanism through which social media undermines mental health is social comparison. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook expose young people to curated content that often presents unrealistic lifestyles, creating pressures that intensify feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth (Fardouly *et al.*, 2015). Nigerian studies confirm that undergraduates frequently internalize such comparisons, leading to reduced self-esteem, strained peer relationships, and heightened psychological distress (Nwafor & Nnamani, 2023). Beyond self-image issues, the compulsive need to remain online fosters addictive patterns of use that compromise students' emotional balance and disrupt their academic priorities (Abubakar & Wambua, 2022).

The situation in Nigeria is further complicated by inadequate institutional support. Despite the rising prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among young people, universities continue to face limitations in providing adequate mental health services (Aderinto *et al.*, 2023). Campus counseling units, where they exist, are under-resourced, and cultural stigma discourages many students from seeking professional assistance (Otu, 2022). This gap results in many undergraduates suffering in silence, thereby compounding the negative impact of digital overexposure on their psychological well-being. The University of Benin, with its large and diverse student population, exemplifies this challenge as students increasingly turn to social media for social interaction, learning, and leisure, often without adequate guidance on

responsible use (Nwafor & Nnamani, 2023).

While international studies have extensively explored the impact of social media on mental health, there is a lack of context-specific research in Nigeria that addresses the experiences of students in specific universities (Asibong, Okafor, & Owoidoho, 2020). This gap is particularly troubling given that socio-cultural environments shape the way digital platforms influence psychological outcomes. Without reliable, localized evidence, policymakers and university administrators remain ill-equipped to design effective strategies such as digital literacy training, peer-support systems, and evidence-based counseling interventions tailored to the realities of Nigerian students (Abubakar & Wambua, 2022).

If these gaps remain unaddressed, the risks for students' mental health will likely escalate. Prolonged exposure to the pressures of social media without adequate coping mechanisms may lead to increased cases of depression, academic burnout, and maladaptive behaviours such as substance use (Nguyen & Schaffer, 2025). This, in turn, threatens not only students' academic performance but also their broader social and emotional development (World Health Organization, 2022).

Thus, the core problem this study seeks to address is the need to examine the effects of social media use on the mental health of undergraduate students at the University of Benin.

Research Questions

The following research question arises as follows:

1. What are the frequencies and patterns of social media usage among students of the University of Benin?
2. What are the common mental health challenges experienced by students who actively use social media?

3. What is the relationship between the intensity of social media use and indicators of mental well-being such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem?
4. To what extent are students at the University of Benin aware of the mental health risks associated with excessive or unregulated social media use?
5. What measures can be recommended for promoting healthier social media habits and strengthening mental health support within the university?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the effects of social media usage on the mental health of students at the University of Benin.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives are to

1. Assess the frequency and patterns of social media usage among students of the University of Benin.
2. Identify common mental health challenges experienced by students who actively use social media.
3. Determine the relationship between the intensity of social media use and indicators of mental well-being such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.
4. Examine students' awareness of the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use.
5. Recommend measures for promoting healthier social media habits and strengthening mental health support within the university.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between the frequency of social media usage and levels of anxiety among students of the University of Benin.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant correlation between time spent on social media and symptoms of depression among university students.

Hypothesis 3

Students' awareness of the psychological risks of social media use does not significantly affect their mental health outcomes.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it examines the effects of social media on the mental health of students in the University of Benin. With the growing dependence on social media for learning, networking, and entertainment, the findings provide increased awareness of its potential consequences on students' mental wellbeing, including anxiety, depression, stress, and reduced academic focus. The study also offers useful guidance for students to develop healthier patterns of social media use and effective strategies for coping with online pressures, thereby enhancing their academic success and overall wellbeing.

The study further benefits the University by providing insights that can assist the school's management in identifying students who may be at risk of mental health challenges. The findings support the development of more effective counselling services, peer-support systems, and institutional policies that encourage responsible social media use, ultimately contributing to a healthier learning environment.

Beyond the University, the results are valuable to mental health practitioners, policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders concerned with youth development. By offering evidence-based knowledge, the study contributes to the design of interventions and policies aimed at protecting and promoting the mental health of students and young people in Nigeria.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study investigated the effects of social media on the mental health of students of the University of Benin, Nigeria. The research was conducted within the University and focused on the frequency and patterns of social media use among undergraduate students across all faculties. The study identified common mental health challenges experienced by active social media users and examined the relationship between the intensity of social media use and key indicators of mental wellbeing such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

The study also assessed students' awareness of the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use and highlighted measures that can promote healthier online habits and strengthen mental health support within the University. The research covered students from ten faculties in the University of Benin.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Health

Health is widely recognized as a fundamental resource for human development and productivity, making it essential for both individual well-being and national progress (Patel *et al.*, 2018). Traditionally, health was defined mainly in biomedical terms, where being healthy meant the absence of disease or infirmity (Saracci, 2017). This narrow approach dominated medical practice but failed to account for the broader dimensions of human well-being (Huber *et al.*, 2011).

The World Health Organization defined health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, thereby shifting the focus from illness alone to overall well-being (WHO, 1948). Although this definition was groundbreaking, it has been criticized for being unrealistic, since the idea of “complete” well-being is rarely attainable (Huber *et al.*, 2016). To address this limitation, scholars proposed that health should instead be viewed as the ability to adapt and self-manage in the face of social, physical, and psychological challenges (Huber *et al.*, 2016).

Today, health is widely accepted as a multidimensional concept, encompassing physical, mental, and social well-being (Keyes, 2018). Physical health relates to the proper functioning of the body, adequate nutrition, rest, and physical activity (Khan *et al.*, 2020). Mental health involves emotional stability, resilience, and the ability to manage stress (WHO, 2020). Social health refers to meaningful relationships and integration into supportive communities (Adewale & Oladipo, 2022). These dimensions are interconnected; for instance, poor mental

health may result in physical illness, while lack of social support can intensify psychological distress (Hou *et al.*, 2021).

The determinants of health further shape well-being. The World Health Organization identifies biological, socio-economic, environmental, and lifestyle factors as key determinants (WHO, 2019). Biological determinants include genetics and age, while socio-economic determinants involve income, education, and employment (Patel *et al.*, 2018). Environmental determinants such as housing, sanitation, and pollution also play critical roles (Okafor & Ede, 2021). Lifestyle choices including diet, exercise, sleep, and substance use are increasingly central to maintaining health (Al-Kandari & Al-Sejari, 2020). For university students, these determinants interact in complex ways, as financial challenges, stress, and lifestyle habits frequently coexist (Eweje & Akinlolu, 2021).

In developed nations, health concerns often center on lifestyle diseases such as cardiovascular illness, obesity, and mental health conditions (Hou *et al.*, 2021). In contrast, countries like Nigeria face a double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases due to weak health infrastructure and socio-economic inequalities (Okafor & Ede, 2021). Nigerian university students, in particular, experience overcrowded hostels, limited access to health services, and high academic stress (Eweje & Akinlolu, 2021). Many neglect proper nutrition and physical activity while adopting sedentary habits associated with digital lifestyles (Abubakar & Wambua, 2022).

Health plays a decisive role in academic performance and future productivity. Poor health among students often results in reduced academic success, long-term career setbacks, and diminished quality of life (Okafor & Ede, 2021). Stress-related illnesses, substance misuse, and sleep deprivation are commonly reported among students, highlighting the importance of

maintaining good health for personal and academic development (Keles *et al.*, 2020).

In the digital era, technology has further reshaped the discourse on health. On one hand, digital platforms provide access to health information, peer support, and counseling services (Naslund *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, excessive digital engagement, particularly on social media, has been linked to poor sleep, sedentary lifestyles, and heightened stress (Hou *et al.*, 2021). This dual impact positions digital technology as both a resource and a risk factor for health among students (Keles *et al.*, 2020).

In summary, health has evolved from a narrow biomedical model to a multidimensional concept shaped by biological, social, economic, and lifestyle determinants. For university students, especially in Nigeria, health is not only the foundation of academic performance but also a critical factor influencing resilience and future potential. Understanding this broad conceptualization provides a basis for examining how social media use affects mental health outcomes among undergraduates.

2.2 Mental Health

Mental health has increasingly become a global concern, particularly in the 21st century where social, economic, and technological pressures continue to intensify (Patel *et al.*, 2018). The World Health Organization (2020) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. This definition emphasizes not merely the absence of mental illness, but the presence of positive psychological functioning and resilience (Keyes, 2018).

Historically, mental health was often understood in narrow clinical terms, focusing largely on the presence or absence of psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, or schizophrenia

(Patel *et al.*, 2018). However, contemporary perspectives broaden the scope by including positive attributes such as emotional regulation, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, and coping capacity (Ryff, 2019). This shift reflects a recognition that mental health exists on a continuum, ranging from optimal psychological well-being to severe mental disorders (Hou *et al.*, 2021). Thus, even individuals without diagnosable conditions may still experience poor mental health if they struggle with stress, loneliness, or low life satisfaction (Keles *et al.*, 2020).

Mental health is multidimensional, consisting of emotional, psychological, and social components (Keyes, 2018). Emotional well-being relates to the ability to manage emotions such as sadness, anger, or anxiety in a constructive manner (Hou *et al.*, 2021). Psychological well-being encompasses self-acceptance, purpose in life, autonomy, and personal growth (Ryff, 2019). Social well-being emphasizes meaningful relationships, community belonging, and supportive social networks (Abubakar & Wambua, 2022). These dimensions interact with one another and are deeply intertwined with physical health. For example, prolonged stress or anxiety can weaken the immune system, while chronic physical illnesses often increase vulnerability to depression (Adewale & Oladipo, 2022).

Globally, mental health challenges are rising among young people, particularly students (Patel *et al.*, 2018). According to Keles *et al.* (2020), university students are highly vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and stress due to academic pressures, financial difficulties, and identity transitions. The prevalence of mental health problems in this population is higher compared to the general population, often because students are in a developmental stage characterized by increased independence, peer influence, and exposure to new stressors (Hou *et al.*, 2021). Poor mental health not only reduces academic performance but also affects interpersonal

relationships and long-term career outcomes (Okafor & Ede, 2021).

In the African context, mental health remains under-recognized and underfunded despite its growing importance (Patel *et al.*, 2018). Cultural perceptions often stigmatize psychological distress, leading students to suffer in silence rather than seek professional help (Abubakar & Wambua, 2022). In Nigeria, reports suggest that many undergraduates experience stress, anxiety, and depression but lack access to adequate counseling and mental health services (Okafor & Ede, 2021). Such challenges are worsened by socio-economic hardships, inadequate campus health facilities, and societal stigma around mental illness (Eweje & Akinlolu, 2021). Consequently, mental health is increasingly viewed as a public health priority, especially within academic institutions where students represent the next generation of leaders (Naslund *et al.*, 2020).

Several factors influence the mental health of students. Academic workload and examination pressures are among the most commonly reported stressors (Keles *et al.*, 2020). Financial difficulties, unstable family backgrounds, and relationship challenges also contribute significantly to psychological distress (Adewale & Oladipo, 2022). Additionally, unhealthy lifestyle habits such as poor sleep, substance abuse, and sedentary behavior are known to exacerbate mental health problems (Hou *et al.*, 2021). More recently, digital technology and social media have emerged as key determinants of students' mental well-being. While online platforms can foster connectedness and provide academic support, excessive or maladaptive use has been linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and cyberbullying (Hou *et al.*, 2021).

A critical dimension of mental health among students is resilience; the ability to adapt positively to stress and adversity (Ungar, 2019). Resilience is strongly associated with better

mental health outcomes, as students who develop effective coping strategies are less likely to succumb to depression or anxiety during stressful situations (Ungar, 2019). Interventions that build resilience, such as peer mentoring, counseling services, and mental health literacy programs, have been shown to improve student well-being (Naslund *et al.*, 2020).

Another important issue in understanding mental health is the interplay between social support and psychological well-being. Studies show that students who have strong family ties, positive peer relationships, and access to supportive mentor's report better mental health outcomes compared to those who feel isolated (Abubakar & Wambua, 2022). This indicates that social connections act as protective factors against mental distress, highlighting the significance of social well-being in the broader conceptualization of mental health (Keyes, 2018).

In summary, mental health is a multidimensional concept that encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being (WHO, 2020). It is not merely the absence of mental illness but also the presence of positive qualities such as resilience, purpose, and interpersonal connectedness (Ungar, 2019). For university students, mental health is particularly critical given their exposure to unique stressors such as academic pressure, financial challenges, and the pervasive influence of social media (Keles *et al.*, 2020). In the Nigerian context, these challenges are intensified by limited access to professional mental health care and cultural stigma surrounding psychological distress (Okafor & Ede, 2021). Understanding mental health in this light is essential for exploring how social media use influences the psychological well-being of students, which forms the focus of this research.

2.3 Social Media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a collection of Internet-based applications built on the foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Similarly, Carr and Hayes (2015) describe it as Internet-based, persistent channels of personal communication that derive value primarily from user participation and interaction. In general, social media refers to platforms that enable individuals to create, share, and exchange information, ideas, and multimedia content in online communities. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have become central to contemporary communication, particularly among young people and students.

The global adoption of social media has been rapid. Datareportal (2024) reports that over 5.04 billion people worldwide representing more than 62% of the global population are active users. Nigeria reflects this trend with more than 36 million active users, a significant proportion of whom are undergraduates. This demonstrates the central role of these platforms in how students connect, learn, and socialize.

Social media differs from traditional media because of its interactivity, immediacy, and reliance on user-generated content (Odetola & Fakunle, 2021). Among Nigerian students, platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram are widely used for academic purposes, including sharing lecture notes and assignments, while Instagram and TikTok are often used for leisure and self-expression (Omoyemiju & Popoola, 2022).

On the positive side, social media can promote peer support and mental health awareness. Naslund *et al.* (2017) found that digital platforms can reduce stigma and foster supportive communities. For students, this means that constructive use of social media encourages collaboration, belonging, and resilience.

However, concerns remain about its negative implications. Lin *et al.* (2016) reported a strong association between heavy use and depressive symptoms, while Twenge *et al.* (2018) linked it to increased anxiety and sleep disturbances. Nesi and Prinstein (2015) observed that online interactions often heighten social comparison, envy, and loneliness, and Primack *et al.* (2017) found that excessive use can lead to feelings of isolation despite digital connectivity.

2.4 Frequencies and Patterns of Social Media Use among Students

The frequency of social media use among students has increased significantly in the last decade, with most studies reporting that students spend several hours online daily. In a recent study, Sabo and Audu (2025) revealed that 65% of tertiary students reported using social media for 1–5 hours per day, 26% spent 6–10 hours, and about 9% used social media for more than 11 hours daily. Similarly, the International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (2024) documented that students in Nigerian tertiary institutions spent 2–4 hours per day on average, with the intensity of use higher on Thursdays and Fridays, reaching up to 4–6 hours daily. This consistent high frequency demonstrates that social media use is deeply embedded in students' daily routines (Sabo & Audu, 2025).

Patterns of platform preference highlight that students are not confined to a single social media site but rather engage across multiple platforms for diverse purposes. Adeosun and Akinwalere (2016) found that 59.5% of students preferred using multiple platforms, while 20% identified Facebook as their main choice, 13.5% preferred Instagram, and 7% used WhatsApp most frequently. Nduka and Popoola (2024) also observed that postgraduate students regularly used Instagram, Facebook, and Zoom, assigning these platforms high-frequency ratings (mean scores above 3.5 on a 5-point scale). Additionally, Lawal and Ifegbesan (2020) reported that Nigerian pre-service teachers used platforms such as

WhatsApp and Facebook daily for both academic and social purposes. These findings confirm that students' usage patterns are spread across several platforms depending on need and context (Nduka & Popoola, 2024).

Another notable pattern is the distinction between active and passive usage. Research has consistently shown that while students sometimes create content actively (posting, commenting, sharing), a majority of their time is spent passively consuming content (scrolling, watching videos, reading posts). Godard and Holtzman (2024) emphasized in their systematic review that passive use is far more prevalent among students than active use and that passive patterns are strongly linked to poor mental health outcomes. Lin *et al.* (2023) provided further evidence from Taiwan, noting that active social network usage was only beneficial when combined with limited passive browsing; students who paired high passive use with active posting saw negative effects on their academic performance. Similarly, Chen *et al.* (2022) concluded that passive browsing dominates students' online activity, often outpacing active contributions. These studies demonstrate that the quality of use active versus passive is as important as frequency (Chen *et al.*, 2022).

Temporal patterns in social media use are also significant. Students frequently check their platforms multiple times a day in short bursts, creating fragmented usage sessions. Sabo and Audu (2025) observed that usage is highest in the evening and late at night, often just before sleep. Similarly, Shiraly *et al.* (2024) reported among Iranian medical students that nighttime social media use was common, with many students engaging in browsing sessions immediately before bed. Khalaf *et al.* (2023) confirmed these findings in their systematic review, noting that students typically combine study sessions with quick social media checks, increasing distraction. This temporal concentration of use, particularly late at night, raises

concerns about disrupted sleep cycles and next-day fatigue (Shiraly *et al.*, 2024).

Demographic and contextual factors also influence frequencies and patterns of social media use. Adeosun and Akinwalere (2016) found gender differences in platform preference among Nigerian students, with females preferring visual apps like Instagram and males leaning toward Facebook. Nduka and Popoola (2024) showed that postgraduate students' patterns differed by academic purpose, as those focused on research leaned more heavily on academic platforms such as Zoom, LinkedIn, and Google Scholar. Similarly, Shiraly *et al.* (2024) observed variations across disciplines, with medical students reporting heavier use of academic platforms alongside social ones. These findings suggest that patterns are not uniform but shaped by demographic and academic context (Adeosun & Akinwalere, 2016).

External events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have further shaped usage patterns. Lin *et al.* (2021) found that during lockdown periods, students' daily time on social media rose significantly as they sought connection and information online. In Palestine, Abu-Omar *et al.* (2025) documented an increase in average daily use from 4.55 hours before quarantine to 7.55 hours during quarantine, demonstrating how isolation heightened frequency and altered patterns. Ansari (2024) also noted that the pandemic shifted patterns from social interaction toward more passive scrolling and entertainment as coping mechanisms. These studies confirm that social media use is sensitive to external environmental factors such as public health crises (Abu-Omar *et al.*, 2025).

2.5 Common Health Challenges Experienced by Students Who Actively Use Social Media

Active social media use among students has been consistently linked to mental health challenges, particularly symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. Constant engagement in posting, commenting, and seeking validation online increases emotional reactivity and

susceptibility to negative feedback (Verduyn, 2022). Prolonged exposure to social comparison on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok intensifies feelings of inadequacy, which are associated with depressive symptoms and reduced self-esteem (Aubry, 2024). Continuous interaction with idealized content also heightens emotional pressure and may trigger performance-related anxiety among young users (Ahmed, 2024). Active users often report preoccupation with online presence and approval, which contributes to increased stress and emotional instability (Fardouly, 2020). Evidence further shows that these effects manifest in academic environments, where students who are highly engaged online report greater difficulty focusing and managing workload (Luo, 2025). These findings suggest that the mental health burden of active social media use is both profound and widespread (Kituyi, 2024).

Sleep Disturbance

Another recurrent health challenge associated with active social media use is poor sleep quality. Students who actively post or interact online, especially during nighttime, are more likely to experience delayed sleep onset, shorter sleep duration, and sleep disruption (Danny, 2024). The stimulating nature of interactive use, combined with blue-light exposure, prolongs wakefulness and increases pre-sleep cognitive arousal (Xie, 2025). Research shows that late-night social media activities contribute to chronic fatigue and daytime sleepiness among students, which in turn affects academic performance and concentration (Shiraly, 2024). Frequent engagement in online interactions before bed is also linked with irregular sleep patterns and increased risk of insomnia (Ahmed, 2024). Continuous night-time engagement often leads to reduced overall rest and lower productivity the following day (Fadele, 2024). Sleep disturbance thus emerges as a critical health risk of social media engagement among

young adults (Oduguwa, 2023).

2.5.1 Physical health problems

Beyond psychological outcomes, active social media use also affects students' physical health. Digital eye strain, characterized by blurred vision, dryness, and irritation, has been increasingly reported among university students who spend extended hours engaging with screens (Kaur, 2022). Musculoskeletal issues such as neck, shoulder, and wrist pain commonly described as "tech-neck" and "text-thumb" are prevalent among students with high levels of interactive smartphone use (Al-Naami, 2023). These physical symptoms are exacerbated by poor posture and long, uninterrupted scrolling sessions typical of active users (Banadaki, 2024). Continuous engagement without adequate breaks contributes to tension, discomfort, and reduced physical activity, further affecting overall well-being (Alghadir, 2025). Prolonged use of mobile devices for chatting and online interactions has also been shown to increase complaints of musculoskeletal discomfort and vision-related problems among students (Mabweazara, 2022).

2.5.2 Cyberbullying and online harassment

Active social media use also increases exposure to cyberbullying and online harassment, which are well-documented contributors to poor mental health. Frequent posters are more visible and thus more likely to experience hostile comments, harassment, or exclusion in digital spaces (Bansal, 2024). Such negative interactions are associated with depressive symptoms, social withdrawal, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation among students (Purba, 2023). Regular exposure to online criticism and toxic interactions lowers self-esteem and intensifies emotional distress (Young, 2024). Evidence shows that students who frequently engage in online discussions or public posts are particularly vulnerable to targeted harassment

(Kituyi, 2024). These experiences often lead to psychological exhaustion and avoidance of both academic and social activities (Fadele, 2024). Cyberbullying thus remains a critical health risk for students immersed in online social environments (Oduguwa, 2023).

2.5.3 Body image concerns and disordered eating

Students who actively use social media are also vulnerable to body image issues and disordered eating behaviors, particularly on image-focused platforms. Active posting and exposure to idealized images create pressure to conform to unrealistic appearance standards, leading to body dissatisfaction and unhealthy eating habits (Fardouly, 2020). Upward social comparison on platforms like Instagram significantly increases negative body-related mood and self-objectification (Aubry, 2024). Continuous exposure to highly curated visual content contributes to unrealistic body expectations and internalization of beauty ideals (Luo, 2025). Students who engage frequently in sharing and viewing appearance-focused content are more likely to experience preoccupation with physical appearance and emotional distress (Alwuqaysi, 2025). This often leads to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and harmful eating behaviors such as restrictive dieting (Purba, 2023). Social media related body image pressure thus constitutes an important mental health concern among young adults (Ejtas, 2024).

2.5.4 Addictive and problematic use

Addictive and problematic use of social media has become one of the most prominent mental health concerns among students who actively engage online. Constant connectivity and habitual checking of notifications create compulsive behaviors that resemble addiction, leading to emotional dependence and withdrawal symptoms when disconnected (Ahmed, 2024). Students who spend excessive time online often report difficulties controlling their use,

feeling compelled to check updates even during lectures or study time, which disrupts concentration and productivity (Xie, 2025). Continuous exposure to digital feedback loops such as likes, comments, and shares triggers dopamine release, reinforcing repetitive engagement and creating a cycle of craving and gratification (Luo, 2025).

Prolonged and uncontrolled social media use has also been associated with mood instability and anxiety, as users develop an excessive need for validation and experience distress when engagement levels drop (Aubry, 2024). Over time, this dependence can lead to symptoms such as restlessness, irritability, and emotional exhaustion, reflecting a pattern similar to behavioral addiction (Purba, 2023). Students who display addictive social media tendencies are more prone to depressive symptoms and social isolation, as online interactions begin to substitute for real-life connections (Danny, 2024). Sleep deprivation and fatigue are additional outcomes of problematic use, with many staying up late to interact online, leading to disrupted rest and reduced cognitive performance (Shiraly, 2024). In severe cases, addictive use contributes to poor self-regulation, heightened stress, and diminished academic performance, as students struggle to balance online activities with personal responsibilities (Fadele, 2024). Social media addiction thus manifests as a psychological dependence characterized by compulsive checking, loss of control, and emotional distress, underscoring its significant impact on students' mental health and well-being (Oduguwa, 2023).

2.6 Awareness of Mental-health Risks Associated with Excessive

Public awareness that social media can pose mental-health risks has grown in recent years. According to Murthy (2025), the U.S. Surgeon General's advisory highlights increasing recognition among policymakers and health professionals that intensive social media use is linked to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, and other harms in young people (Murthy,

2025). Similarly, the World Health Organization and regional offices have drawn attention to problematic use and its links to emotional distress and sleep problems in adolescents (World Health Organization, 2024). These high-level statements reflect an accelerating public discourse about harms that began in earnest in the late 2010s and intensified with new longitudinal evidence in the early 2020s (Murthy, 2025; World Health Organization, 2024).

Levels of awareness vary by group: parents and policymakers generally report higher concern than young people themselves. Pew Research Center data indicate that many parents and a growing share of adolescents report that social media harms people their age, even when fewer adolescents report being personally affected (Pew Research Center, 2025). Parents tend to overestimate the direct personal impact on their own children while still expressing clear worry about population-level harms (Pew Research Center, 2025). School administrators and health authorities have also reported growing concern in official statements and policy proposals, illustrating that awareness among gatekeepers is relatively high (Murthy, 2025; American Academy of Family Physicians, 2024).

Despite growing general awareness, detailed knowledge about specific risks and mechanisms (for example, the role of sleep displacement, social comparison, or algorithmic amplification) is uneven in the public and among students. Systematic reviews note that while research has identified mechanisms such as upward social comparison and sleep disruption that plausibly link heavy use with depression and anxiety, many members of the public are unaware of these distinct pathways and instead describe vague concerns about “too much screen time” (Naslund *et al.*, 2020). In other words, broad awareness of a problem exists, but nuanced understanding of how particular platform features or patterns of use produce mental-health effects are limited (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

Research among tertiary students and adolescents suggests moderate awareness of risk but low perceived personal vulnerability. Cross-sectional studies of university and college samples show that many students acknowledge links between excessive social media use and poor sleep, anxiety, or lowered self-esteem, but most students report that negative effects are more of a problem for “others” than for themselves (Osman *et al.*, 2025). This pattern acknowledging population risk while underestimating personal risk has implications for prevention, because low perceived vulnerability reduces uptake of self-protective behaviors such as limiting late-night use or installing screen-time controls (Nazari *et al.*, 2023; Osman *et al.*, 2025).

Digital mental-health literacy interventions can increase awareness and change some behaviors, but evidence of long-term impact is mixed. Meta-analyses of digital mental-health literacy and educational programs indicate these interventions improve knowledge and short-term attitudes about mental health and safe digital behaviours (Yeo *et al.*, 2024). However, systematic reviews of media campaigns find variable effectiveness at changing deep-seated habits like nocturnal use or compulsive checking unless interventions are comprehensive and repeated (Tam *et al.*, 2024). Thus, while awareness-raising is feasible and can shift knowledge quickly, sustainable behavior change typically requires multi-component strategies that combine education, environment design (e.g., app settings), and social supports (Yeo *et al.*, 2024). Socio demographic and cultural factors shape awareness and responses to messaging about social-media risks. International comparisons and regional reports show higher reported problematic use and greater concern among girls and female adolescents in many settings (WHO Europe, 2024), and socioeconomic factors, digital access, and local norms influence both exposure to risk and receptivity to awareness campaigns (WHO Europe, 2024; Khalaf,

2023). In lower-resource university settings, awareness campaigns are less common and may not be tailored to local language or cultural contexts, reducing their effectiveness (Khalaf, 2023; Tam *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, blanket awareness messaging developed in high-income countries may not transfer directly to Nigerian university contexts without cultural adaptation (Khalaf, 2023; WHO Europe, 2024). Policy and civil-society actions (for example, proposals for warning labels and litigation) have further raised public visibility of the risks and created new focal points for awareness campaigns. High-profile policy interventions such as calls for warning labels from health authorities and lawsuits by municipal governments alleging that platforms contribute to a youth mental-health crisis have increased media coverage and public debate, which in turn elevates baseline awareness among parents, educators, and policymakers (Reuters, 2024; AP News, 2024). These developments shift attention from individual responsibility to platform accountability in public discourse, and they create opportunities for coordinated awareness and regulatory responses (Reuters, 2024; AP News, 2024).

2.7 Students' Awareness of Mental Health Risks Associated with Excessive or Unregulated Social Media Use

In recent years, growing attention has been directed toward how well students understand the mental health risks linked to excessive or poorly regulated social media use. Young people, especially university students, are among the most active users of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter). While these platforms provide opportunities for learning, networking, and entertainment, their overuse has been associated with depression, anxiety, sleep problems, and poor academic outcomes (Keles *et al.*, 2019; Murthy, 2025).

Awareness of these risks is critical, because informed students are more likely to take preventive steps and use social media in ways that protect their mental well-being (Yeo *et al.*,

2024).

Several studies reveal that students generally acknowledge that social media can affect mental health but vary in their understanding of the specific risks. According to Nazari *et al.* (2023), Iranian university students reported that excessive use was linked to anxiety, stress, and disrupted sleep. However, many participants believed the risks were greater for “other students” rather than themselves, showing a gap between general awareness and personal vulnerability. A similar pattern was observed by Osman *et al.* (2025) in Nigerian universities, where students agreed that excessive or unregulated use of social media was associated with low self-esteem and emotional stress but tended to underestimate their own susceptibility. This highlights that awareness alone may not translate into protective action unless students perceive personal risk.

Evidence also suggests that students often have only a superficial understanding of how social media affects their mental health. Ahmed *et al.* (2024) observed that while many adolescents and university students recognized “too much screen time” as harmful, they were less aware of underlying mechanisms such as upward social comparison, exposure to cyberbullying, or sleep displacement. Without awareness of these mechanisms, students may oversimplify the issue and rely on ineffective strategies like reducing screen time without addressing the quality of their engagement. This limited depth of awareness indicates the need for educational interventions that move beyond generic warnings to highlight specific risk pathways. Awareness of risks is also shaped by gender and cultural context. Studies show that female students are more likely to express concern about the mental health impacts of excessive social media use than males (World Health Organization – Europe, 2024). This may be due to higher exposure to appearance-related content and stronger pressures related to body

image, which heighten awareness of risks such as low self-esteem and anxiety (Yeo *et al.*, 2024). In Nigeria, Osman *et al.* (2025) noted that while both male and female students recognized the dangers of unregulated social media use, female students reported greater awareness of risks such as cyberbullying and appearance-based comparisons. These findings suggest that awareness campaigns may need to be tailored to gender-specific experiences.

Educational and awareness programs have been shown to improve students' understanding of mental health risks associated with social media. Yeo *et al.* (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of interventions designed to promote digital mental health literacy and found that such programs significantly improved knowledge and short-term protective behaviors among students. Similarly, Tam *et al.* (2024) reported that awareness campaigns increased recognition of risks such as compulsive use and poor sleep hygiene. However, they also found that the long-term effectiveness of these campaigns was limited if not supported by structural measures such as app-based time restrictions or institutional policies. This shows that while students' awareness can be raised quickly, sustaining knowledge and translating it into healthier behavior requires continuous reinforcement. Despite growing awareness, research highlights important gaps. Naslund *et al.* (2020) stressed that students' knowledge is often general and fails to capture the nuanced ways that social media affects mental health. For instance, many students may recognize that late-night scrolling affects sleep but fail to understand how sleep deprivation contributes to anxiety and depression. Moreover, most awareness studies in Africa, including Nigeria, remain cross-sectional, limiting insight into whether awareness actually leads to behavioral change over time (Osman *et al.*, 2025). This indicates the need for longitudinal and context-specific research in Nigerian universities to better understand how awareness influences actual usage patterns and mental health outcomes.

Policy developments have also played a role in shaping students' awareness. Public debates and lawsuits against social media companies for their role in the youth mental health crisis have received widespread media coverage, increasing students' exposure to information about potential harms (Reuters, 2024; Associated Press, 2024). Such developments help raise baseline awareness, but without localized educational programs within universities, students may struggle to connect these global narratives to their own daily experiences.

2.8 Strategies to Reduce Adverse Psychological Effects of Social Media and Promote Healthy Usage

The widespread use of social media among students has raised concerns about its negative psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and sleep disturbance. To address these challenges, scholars and policymakers have proposed a variety of strategies aimed at reducing risks and encouraging healthy engagement with social media. These strategies range from individual self-regulation practices to institutional interventions and policy-level responses (Murthy, 2025; World Health Organization, 2024).

2.8.1 Promoting digital mental health literacy

Improving students' understanding of how social media affects their mental health is one of the most effective strategies for prevention. According to Yeo, Tan, and Lim (2024), digital mental health literacy programs significantly increased students' awareness of online risks and improved their ability to adopt protective behaviors such as limiting late-night scrolling or recognizing harmful content. Similarly, Tam, Wong, and Leung (2024) found that awareness campaigns and workshops enhanced students' recognition of psychological risks associated with excessive use, though they emphasized that reinforcement was necessary to sustain long-term behavior change. By equipping students with knowledge, digital literacy initiatives empower them to make informed choices about their social media habits.

2.8.2 Encouraging mindful and balanced use

Another strategy involves encouraging students to engage with social media in intentional and balanced ways. Research shows that mindful usage, where individuals consciously monitor the time spent and the type of content consumed, reduces stress and promotes well-being (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). Interventions that promote “active use” (such as engaging in meaningful conversations and supportive exchanges) rather than “passive scrolling” have been shown to protect self-esteem and mitigate negative effects like social comparison (Meier *et al.*, 2021). Students who replace passive browsing with purposeful engagement report lower levels of depressive symptoms and greater satisfaction with online experiences (Nazari *et al.*, 2023).

2.8.3 Setting healthy boundaries and screen-time management

Practical self-regulation strategies such as setting boundaries on social media use are widely recommended. Osman, Bello, and Adeyemi (2025) observed that Nigerian university students who adopted structured usage patterns, such as limiting late-night use or setting app timers, reported better sleep quality and reduced anxiety. This aligns with findings from the World Health Organization (2024), which emphasized that restricting device use during bedtime significantly lowers the risk of sleep-related mental health problems. Tools such as screen-time trackers and app usage reminders have been found effective in helping students monitor their behavior and reduce compulsive checking (Keles *et al.*, 2019).

2.8.4 Leveraging social support systems

Social support plays a key role in promoting healthy social media use. According to Naslund

et al. (2020), peer support programs where students discuss online experiences and coping strategies help reduce feelings of isolation and prevent harmful comparisons. Moreover, positive reinforcement from family and peers encourages young people to disengage from toxic content and focus on supportive communities. In university settings, counseling centers that integrate digital well-being education with mental health services have proven effective in assisting students struggling with compulsive use (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

2.8.5 Policy and institutional interventions

Beyond individual efforts, institutional and policy-level strategies are essential to fostering healthier digital environments. Murthy (2025) recommended stronger regulations on social media platforms, including transparency about algorithms and safeguards against harmful content targeting adolescents. In addition, Reuters (2024) reported that several U.S. states have sued social media companies over their role in worsening youth mental health, a move that has increased accountability and awareness. At the institutional level, universities can incorporate digital wellness training into orientation programs, promote offline extracurricular activities, and provide guidelines for responsible digital engagement (Osman *et al.*, 2025). Such measures complement individual awareness and help create an environment that prioritizes students' mental health.

2.8.6 Encouraging offline alternatives and healthy lifestyle integration

Substituting excessive social media use with healthier offline activities has also been highlighted as a protective strategy. According to World Health Organization – Europe (2024), encouraging students to participate in sports, cultural activities, and face-to-face interactions helps counterbalance the isolating effects of online overuse. Research shows that students who maintain active offline hobbies are less likely to experience anxiety and depressive

symptoms linked to social media (Nazari *et al.*, 2023). Sleep hygiene education, regular exercise, and time management training have also been found effective in reducing the psychological harms of excessive use (Tam *et al.*, 2024).

2.9 Gaps in Literature

Although a growing body of research has explored the relationship between social media and mental health among young people, a number of critical gaps remain in the literature. These gaps are particularly evident in studies focusing on the experiences of university students in Nigeria, such as those at the University of Benin. The study reviewed intensity of social media usage and mental well-being, awareness of mental health risks associated with excessive or unregulated use, frequency and patterns of usage, common mental health challenges, and strategies for promoting healthy use provide important insights but also reveal areas that remain underexplored.

One notable gap concerns the intensity of social media usage and its relationship with indicators of mental well-being such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2019) found strong associations between heavy social media use and increased psychological distress among adolescents. Ahmed, Seger, and McCafferty (2024) also observed that students who engage in prolonged and unstructured use of platforms are more likely to report depressive symptoms and reduced self-worth. Tam, Wong, and Leung (2024) further explained that prolonged engagement with online platforms predicts lower self-esteem among young adults in Hong Kong. However, while such studies provide valuable insights, they are largely situated in Western and Asian contexts. Limited Nigerian-based research, such as Osman, Bello, and Adeyemi (2025), has begun to explore these issues, but the findings are not sufficient to generalize to the diverse student population in the University of

Benin. This gap leaves uncertainty about how intensity of use specifically affects Nigerian students' mental health.

Another gap lies in the area of awareness of mental health risks associated with excessive or unregulated social media usage. Yeo, Tan, and Lim (2024) reported that while many students acknowledge risks such as disrupted sleep and social comparison, they often continue the same harmful behaviors. Nazari, Alavi, and Ghaderi (2023) also emphasized that awareness does not always translate into healthier online practices among university students. Khalaf (2023) highlighted that stigma around mental health reduces students' willingness to act on the knowledge they already possess. Despite these observations, little empirical work has examined why Nigerian students may ignore or overlook risks even when they are aware of them. This lack of evidence creates a significant gap in understanding how awareness can be effectively translated into behavioral change.

The literature also shows limitations in studies addressing frequency and patterns of social media usage among students. The Pew Research Center (2025) documented that students globally spend several hours daily on social networking platforms, often at the expense of study or sleep. The World Health Organization (2024) similarly highlighted that frequent late-night social media use contributes to poor academic performance and emotional exhaustion among young people. Meier, Johnson, and Reinecke (2021) observed gender differences in usage patterns, noting that female students are more vulnerable to social comparison pressures, while male students are more engaged in compulsive online gaming. Despite these global insights, Nigerian-focused studies remain limited and do not provide sufficient evidence about how frequency and patterns of usage differ across student demographics such as gender, socioeconomic status, or academic discipline.

Another significant gap relates to common mental health challenges experienced by students in connection with social media use. Naslund, Aschbrenner, and Bartels (2020) reported that anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem are the most common psychological outcomes of heavy engagement with online platforms. The World Health Organization (2024) also highlighted sleep disturbance as one of the most widespread consequences of excessive late-night digital use among students. However, most of these studies employ cross-sectional designs, capturing only short-term associations without considering long-term effects. This leaves unanswered questions about how prolonged exposure to social media impacts the mental health trajectories of Nigerian students across their years of study. Additionally, while cyberbullying and fear of missing out (FOMO) have been highlighted as major stressors in Western contexts (Przybylski *et al.*, 2021), little is known about the prevalence and impact of these issues in Nigerian universities.

Research on strategies to reduce adverse psychological effects and promote healthy usage also reveals important limitations. Ahmed, Seger, and McCafferty (2024) emphasized the importance of self-regulation strategies such as digital detox, time management, and mindfulness. Yeo, Tan, and Lim (2024) further suggested that increasing digital literacy among students helps them critically evaluate content and avoid harmful patterns of use. Murthy (2025), writing from a U.S. context, stressed the importance of platform accountability and government regulation to safeguard youth mental health. Reuters (2024) also reported ongoing debates on regulating social media companies to reduce exposure to harmful content. Despite these international insights, there is little evidence on institutional or policy-driven interventions in Nigeria. Universities such as the University of Benin rarely have structured digital wellness programs or campus-wide mental health initiatives that target

the specific challenges of social media use. This gap highlights the need for strategies that go beyond individual behavior and involve systemic support at institutional and policy levels.

Finally, a cross-cutting gap throughout the literature is the lack of culturally sensitive and context-specific approaches. Tam, Wong, and Leung (2024) developed interventions that worked in Hong Kong by addressing cultural attitudes towards mental health, while WHO–Europe (2024) designed region-specific campaigns tailored to European youth. However, these strategies cannot be applied wholesale to Nigerian students, who operate within different cultural, social, and economic realities. For instance, Nigerian students may rely more heavily on peer networks and communal support systems when dealing with psychological distress, yet such dynamics are often ignored in global research. Economic constraints and limited access to professional mental health services further differentiate Nigerian students from their peers in high-income countries. This lack of cultural adaptation underscores the importance of localized research that reflects the lived experiences of Nigerian university students.

In summary, despite the significant contributions of existing research, several gaps remain. These include the underrepresentation of African and Nigerian contexts in studies on intensity of social media usage and mental health outcomes, limited examination of the gap between awareness and behavioral change, insufficient analysis of usage patterns across student demographics, the absence of longitudinal research on long-term mental health outcomes, and the neglect of institutional and policy-driven interventions. Furthermore, existing strategies often fail to incorporate culturally sensitive approaches that reflect the unique experiences of Nigerian students. Addressing these gaps will not only enrich global scholarship but also provide evidence-based strategies to safeguard the mental health of students at the University

of Benin and beyond.

2.10 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Social Comparison Theory as its theoretical framework because it provides a comprehensive explanation of the major variables under investigation. The theory explains how the nature and intensity of social media engagement relate to key indicators of mental health such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem among students of the University of Benin. It offers a robust framework for understanding the processes through which individuals evaluate themselves in comparison to others on social media platforms, and how such comparisons influence their emotional and psychological well-being (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016). Consequently, only the Social Comparison Theory is utilized in this study, as it sufficiently accounts for the relationship between social media usage and the mental health outcomes being examined.

2.10.1 Social comparison theory

The Social Comparison Theory, originally introduced by Leon Festinger in 1954, is one of the most influential psychological theories explaining how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others. Festinger argued that human beings have an inherent drive to assess their opinions, abilities, and social standing, and in the absence of objective standards, they rely on comparisons with others to make such evaluations (Festinger, 1954). This evaluative process is not neutral; rather, it deeply shapes self-perceptions, emotions, and social behaviors, thereby influencing overall wellbeing (Gerber, Wheeler, & Suls, 2018).

The core assumption of Social Comparison Theory is that individuals seek to reduce uncertainty about themselves and enhance their self-concept by evaluating their positions against those of others (Wills & Suls, 2019). Comparisons typically occur in two major forms:

upward comparisons and downward comparisons. Upward comparisons involve evaluating oneself against individuals perceived to be better off or more successful. While such comparisons may sometimes serve as motivation, they often generate feelings of inadequacy, envy, and lowered self-esteem (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2020). Conversely, downward comparisons occur when individuals evaluate themselves against those perceived to be worse off. These may provide temporary relief or boost self-confidence, but they do not necessarily lead to long-term improvements in wellbeing (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2020).

The rise of digital technology and social media has amplified the relevance of this theory. In today's digital environment, social media platforms constantly expose individuals to curated portrayals of lifestyles, beauty standards, achievements, and possessions. These selective self-presentations serve as powerful triggers for comparison, often in upward directions (Marques, Paez, & Serra, 2021). Unlike traditional face-to-face settings, social networking sites offer unlimited access to peers, celebrities, and strangers, multiplying opportunities for comparison and intensifying psychological effects (Schønning, Hjetland, Aaro, & Skogen, 2020). This dynamic makes social media a fertile ground for both upward and downward comparisons, with significant consequences for users' mental health.

Over the years, refinements of Social Comparison Theory have acknowledged that the outcomes of comparison processes are not universal but mediated by individual factors such as personality, resilience, social support, and pre-existing self-esteem levels (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2022). For example, individuals with low self-esteem tend to be more vulnerable to the negative effects of upward comparisons, while those with higher resilience may interpret similar comparisons as motivational challenges rather than threats (Wills & Suls, 2019). These nuances highlight the complexity of comparison processes in modern digital

environments, making the theory highly relevant for explaining the mental health effects of social media on young populations, particularly university students.

2.10.2 Application of social comparison theory to the study

The Social Comparison Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how social media influences the mental health of students at the University of Benin. The theory specifically sheds light on how the intensity and type of social media engagement relate to indicators such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

1. Social Media Usage and Anxiety

According to Social Comparison Theory, upward comparisons often result in feelings of inadequacy, which can increase anxiety levels (Gerber *et al.*, 2018). University students, who are at a developmental stage where social acceptance and self-definition are crucial, are particularly susceptible to these effects. Constant exposure to peers' academic successes, material possessions, or attractive appearances online may create pressure to measure up, leading to heightened social anxiety (Schonning *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the demand to maintain a positive online presence, through curated posts and self-presentation, exacerbates performance-related anxieties (Marques *et al.*, 2021). This suggests that the intensity of social media use can be directly linked to heightened levels of anxiety among students.

2. Social Media Usage and Depression

The theory also helps explain the association between social media use and depressive symptoms. Continuous upward comparisons foster chronic dissatisfaction when individuals consistently perceive themselves as inferior to their peers (Appel *et al.*, 2020). This dissatisfaction, when prolonged, can spiral into hopelessness, a core feature of depression (Yang *et al.*, 2022). Even downward comparisons are not always protective, as they may

evoke guilt or reinforce feelings of social isolation (Vogel *et al.*, 2020). University students who engage heavily with social media are thus at risk of developing depressive tendencies as a result of persistent negative self-evaluations.

3. Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem

Among the three variables in this study, self-esteem is perhaps the most directly influenced by the comparison processes described by Festinger. Social networking sites allow students to evaluate their worth through metrics such as likes, comments, and follower counts. Research indicates that exposure to idealized portrayals of beauty, wealth, and lifestyle often diminishes users' self-esteem, especially when they engage in upward comparisons (Vogel *et al.*, 2020). Although favorable downward comparisons or positive feedback online can temporarily elevate self-esteem, these effects are typically short-lived and unstable (Gerber *et al.*, 2018). For many students, this cyclical fluctuation undermines long-term self-worth, leaving them vulnerable to broader mental health challenges.

In summary, Social Comparison Theory provides a strong explanatory foundation for this study by linking the psychological processes of comparison with the mental health outcomes of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. The theory illustrates how social media intensifies comparison opportunities, and why students given their developmental stage and social environment are particularly vulnerable. By grounding the study in this theory, it becomes possible to explain not just whether social media affects mental health, but also the psychological mechanisms through which such effects occur. Social Comparison Theory, introduced by Festinger (1954) in his classic work "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes", posits that individuals evaluate their abilities and self-worth by comparing themselves to others. In the context of social media, this process is intensified by the constant

exposure to curated images and achievements of peers.

Nesi and Prinstein (2015), in “Using Social Media for Social Comparison and Feedback-Seeking”, demonstrated that such online comparisons can increase feelings of envy, loneliness, and depressive symptoms among young people. For Nigerian students, where peer influence is particularly strong, constant upward comparison on social media platforms can erode self-esteem and worsen stress levels.

SECTION THREE

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methods and procedures that were used in this research. These include the research design, area of study, the population of study, sample size, sampling techniques, and instrument of data collection, method of data collection, method of data analysis, validity and reliability of instrument and. Ethical consideration.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The design is suitable for obtaining factual information from a large number of respondents, enabling the researcher to assess current trends and the relationship between social media use and mental health among undergraduates. It facilitates the collection of standardized data from diverse participants in a natural environment, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The study utilized a questionnaire guide to elicit quantitative data. The study's used a quantitative data. This technique is premised on the fact that the target population (that is students) are very large and was accurately measured using quantitative technique.

3.2 Area of Study

This study is carried out at the University of Benin, a federal university located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The institution was established in 1970 and has since grown into one of the foremost universities in the country, offering a wide range of academic programs across various faculties and disciplines. The university operates two main campuses: the Ugbowo campus, which houses the majority of the faculties, administrative buildings, halls of residence, and student support services; and the Ekenwan campus, which is primarily dedicated to creative arts and related disciplines.

The University of Benin has a diverse student population drawn from different parts of Nigeria and beyond, reflecting a mixture of cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. As of recent estimates, the institution has an enrollment of over 50,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students across its 15 faculties and multiple institutes. The student population is characterized by a high level of digital engagement, as social media platforms have become central to communication, academic interaction, entertainment, and social networking.

The choice of the University of Benin as the area of study is informed by its size, diversity, and the increasing reliance of students on social media for daily interactions. The institution provides an appropriate context for examining the effects of social media use on the mental health of undergraduates, as the population reflects a broad spectrum of Nigerian youths who are highly active online. Furthermore, the university's relatively large student community allows for a robust sample size that can provide meaningful insights into patterns of social media usage and related psychological outcomes.

3.3 Population of Study

The population for this study comprises all full-time undergraduate students of the University of Benin, located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. According to data obtained from the University's Directorate of Academic Planning and the institution's Disclosure of Key Institutional Data report, the number of full-time undergraduate students stands at 43,446 (University of Benin, 2023). The University of Benin consists of 15 faculties, one college, and three institutes, offering various full-time undergraduate programmes across disciplines such as Arts, Social Sciences, Education, Management Sciences, Engineering, Life Sciences, and others.

3.4 Sample Size

The sample size for this study was determined using Yamane's (1976) formula, which is a widely accepted method for calculating sample size for a known population.

The formula is expressed as:

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

Where:

n = sample size

N = population of the study

e = margin of error (level of precision)

1 = constant

Given that:

$$N = 43,446$$

$$e = 0.05$$

Substituting into the formula:

$$n = 43,446 / [1 + 43,446(0.05)^2]$$

$$n = 43,446 / [1 + 43,446(0.0025)]$$

$$n = 43,446 / [1 + 108.615]$$

$$n = 43,446 / 109.615$$

$$n \approx 396$$

Thus, the minimum sample size for this study is approximately 396 respondents.

To account for possible non-response, low return rate, and sample mortality, the sample size was increased by 25%:

$$25\% \text{ of } 396 \approx 99$$

Therefore:

$$396 + 99 \approx 495$$

The sample size was rounded up to 500 respondents to enhance representativeness, accuracy, and robustness of the study.

3.5 Sampling Technique

The sample for this study consists of 500 undergraduate students.

The multi-stage sampling technique was used for this study. In the first stage, the stratified sampling technique was employed to group the faculties of the University of Benin into six broad categories, namely: Sciences, Arts, Social/Management Sciences, Education, Engineering, and Environmental Sciences. From these categories, 10 faculties were randomly selected to ensure broad representation of the student population.

In the second stage, simple random sampling was used to select five (5) departments from each of the 10 selected faculties, bringing the total number of participating departments to 50.

In the third stage, simple random sampling was applied to select students within the departments. Only students in 200 to 500 levels were considered eligible for selection. The exclusion of 100-level students was intentional because they were newly admitted and had not fully settled into academic activities at the time of the study. Including them could have affected the reliability of the data, as many were yet to resume regular lectures or become

familiar with the academic environment.

In the final stage, 10 students were selected from each of the 50 departments, giving a total of 500 respondents. The selection was done using the simple random sampling method (fishbowl technique), where matriculation numbers or names of eligible students were compiled, thoroughly mixed, and randomly drawn. This ensured transparency, fairness, and unbiased selection of respondents.

The use of simple random sampling in the final stage was justified due to its representativeness and its ability to minimize researcher bias. The final sample size of 500 students served as the respondents for the quantitative aspect of the study.

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To ensure proportional representation within each department, the total number of eligible students was identified, and a systematic approach was applied alongside the random draw. Although exact sampling intervals were not presented for each department to avoid excessive detail, the selection of 10 students per department ensured consistent coverage across departments of varying sizes, maintaining fairness and representativeness in the sample.

The use of simple random sampling in the final stage was justified due to its representativeness and its ability to minimize researcher bias. The final sample size of 500 students served as the respondents for the quantitative aspect of the study.

3.6 Research Instrument

The instrument for data collection is a structured questionnaire titled:

Social Media Usage and Mental Health Questionnaire (SMUMHQ)

The questionnaire is designed to collect quantitative data and is divided into six sections:

Section A: Demographic information (e.g., gender, age, faculty, academic level)

Section B: frequency and patterns of social media usage among students.

Section C: common mental health challenges experienced by students.

Section D: Time spent on social media and indicators of anxiety, depression, and emotional wellbeing.

Section E: Students' awareness of the psychological risks associated with excessive social

media use.

Section F: Measures for promoting healthier social media habits and strengthening mental health support.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were administered in person by the researcher. Respondents were approached in lecture halls, faculty buildings, and common areas. The purpose of the study was explained clearly, and students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Only those who voluntarily consent completed the questionnaire. Completed copies were retrieved immediately to minimize loss of data.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for this study was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations was employed to summarize and describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents as well as their responses to the research questions. These descriptive measures helped to present an overall picture of students' social media usage patterns and their mental health indicators.

Inferential statistics was also utilized to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. Specifically, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between social media use and indicators of mental wellbeing such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. In addition, t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine possible differences in mental health outcomes based on gender, level of study, and frequency of social media use among the respondents.

All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

version 25.0, which is widely accepted for quantitative research in the social sciences. The level of significance was set at 0.05, meaning that results with a probability value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. The analyzed data were presented in tables for clarity, and the results were interpreted in line with the research questions and hypotheses of the study.

3.9 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure that the research instrument used in this study produces accurate, consistent, and dependable results, appropriate steps were taken to establish its validity and reliability.

3.9.1 Validity of the Instrument

This study established validity through expert review and a pilot test conducted on a subset of respondents. The drafted questionnaire was submitted to experts in Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, for professional evaluation. Their observations and recommendations guided the revision and refinement of the questionnaire which ensured that each item properly captures the constructs of social media use and mental health indicators such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

3.9.2 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered twice to a group of 30 students selected from a university outside the study area, with a two-week interval between the two administrations. The scores obtained from both tests were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) to assess the internal consistency and stability of the instrument over time.

A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable, indicating that the

instrument is dependable and consistent for data collection. The computation of reliability was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0.

3.10 Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to certain limitations. The use of self-reported data may introduce response bias, as students may under- or over-report their social media use and mental health experiences. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between social media usage and mental health outcomes. Additionally, the study was restricted to full-time undergraduate students of the University of Benin, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Finally, the study focused on selected mental wellbeing indicators and did not capture all possible psychological factors influencing students' well-being.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the study upholds the highest standards of academic integrity and professional ethics, appropriate ethical procedures were followed throughout the research process. The researcher obtained an official letter of introduction from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, which served as authorization to conduct the study among the selected students. Prior permission was also sought from the relevant university authorities before the administration of the questionnaire.

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and respondents were fully informed of the purpose, scope, and objectives of the research before completing the questionnaire. They were also notified that there are no risks or negative consequences associated with either participating or withdrawing from the study at any stage.

All information obtained from respondents were treated with strict confidentiality and used

solely for academic purposes. No respondent's name or identifying detail appears in the final report. The researcher also ensured that the principles of anonymity, beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for persons were fully observed, in line with the ethical standards guiding research in the social sciences.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter focused on the presentation and analysis of the data collected from the field. A total of five hundred (500) copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents for the study. Out of the 500 questionnaires distributed, 490 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 98% of the sample size. The analysis was organized into two main sections: descriptive statistics, which summarized respondents' patterns of social media usage and mental health indicators, and inferential statistics, which tested the study's hypotheses.

4.1 Section A : Background characteristics of respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents involved in the study. The socio-demographic characteristics of the 490 respondents provide critical insights into the background of students who participated in this study on the effects of social media on the mental health of students at the University of Benin.

Table 4.1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency (n =490)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	239	48.8
Female	251	51.2
Age Group		
16–20	213	42.6
21–25	234	46.8
26–30	43	8.6
30 and above	0	0.0
Faculty		
Arts	48	9.8
Education	48	9.8
Engineering	50	10.2
Environmental Sciences	50	10.2
Law	49	10
Life Sciences	49	10
Management Sciences	48	9.8
Pharmacy	50	10.2
Physical Sciences	49	10
Social Sciences	49	10
Level		
200 Level	88	17.6
300 Level	102	20.4
400 Level	162	32.4
500 Level	138	27.6
Marital Status		
Single	489	99.8
Married	1	0.2
Divorced/Separated	0	0.0
Others	0	0.0
Religion		
Christianity	489	99.8
Islam	1	0.2
Traditional Religion	0	0.0
Others	0	0.0
Place of Residence		
University hostel	310	63.3
Off-campus accommodation	147	30.0
Family residence	33	6.7

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.1 shows the gender distribution of respondents in the study. The results indicate that 251 respondents (51.2%) were female, while 239 respondents (48.8%) were male. This reveals a nearly- equal balanced gender representation among the participants at the University of Benin.

The balanced gender distribution strengthens the reliability and representativeness of the findings because it captures the perspectives of both male and female students. The near-equal gender representation in this study therefore ensures that the analysis reflects the experiences of the broader student population at the University of Benin. The age distribution of respondents from the data presented, show that the majority of respondents fall within the 16–25 age range, which is typical of undergraduate populations. Specifically, 234 respondents (46.8%) were between 21–25 years, while 213 respondents (42.6%) were between 16–20 years. A smaller proportion of respondents 43 (8.6%) were aged 26–30, and no respondents were above 30 years. This age distribution indicates that most participants belong to the youth and emerging adulthood stage, a developmental period strongly associated with intensive social media use. Young adults often integrate social media platforms into many aspects of their lives, including communication, identity construction, academic collaboration, and entertainment.

Table 4.1 shows the distribution of respondents across ten faculties demonstrates a broad representation of academic disciplines within the University of Benin. This balanced faculty representation strengthens the external validity of the study by ensuring that findings are not limited to a single academic discipline.

In terms of level of respondents, the study included students from 200 to 500 levels, ensuring that participants represented different stages of university life. Table 4.1 shows that the largest

proportion of respondents were 400 level students (32.4%), followed by 500 level students (27.6%), 300 level students (20.4%), and 200 level students (17.6%).

The higher representation of senior students suggests that many participants have spent significant time within the university environment and therefore may have long-term exposure to social media usage patterns.

As students' progress academically, they often encounter greater academic pressure, research demands, and career concerns. These stressors can influence how students engage with social media. Including students from different academic levels allows the study to examine how academic progression interacts with social media exposure to influence mental health outcomes.

In terms of marital status, the results show that 489 respondents (99.8%) were single, while only one respondent (0.2%) was married. No respondents reported being divorced, separated, or in other marital categories. This distribution reflects the typical demographic structure of undergraduate populations in Nigerian universities, where most students are within age groups associated with single status.

With regard to the religious affiliation of respondents, the data presented in the table above indicate that Christianity was the dominant religion among respondents, accounting for 489 respondents (99.8%), while 1 respondent (0.2%) identified as Muslim.

This distribution reflects the broader religious composition of Southern Nigeria and Edo State, where Christianity is widely practiced.

In relation to the residence type of respondents, Table 4:1 shows that 310 respondents (63.3%) lived in university hostels, 147 respondents (30.0%) lived in off-campus accommodation, and 33 respondents (6.7%) lived with their families.

This indicates that most respondents reside within the university environment and are therefore more immersed in campus social life and peer interactions.

Section B: Frequency and patterns of social media usage among students

This section presents the frequency and patterns of social media usage among the students based on the data collected from the respondents.

Table 4.2: Social media platforms most frequently used

Platform	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Facebook	98	20.0
Instagram	296	60.4
Twitter (X)	322	65.7
WhatsApp	473	96.5
TikTok	395	80.6
Snapchat	113	23.1
YouTube	254	51.8
Telegram	201	41.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

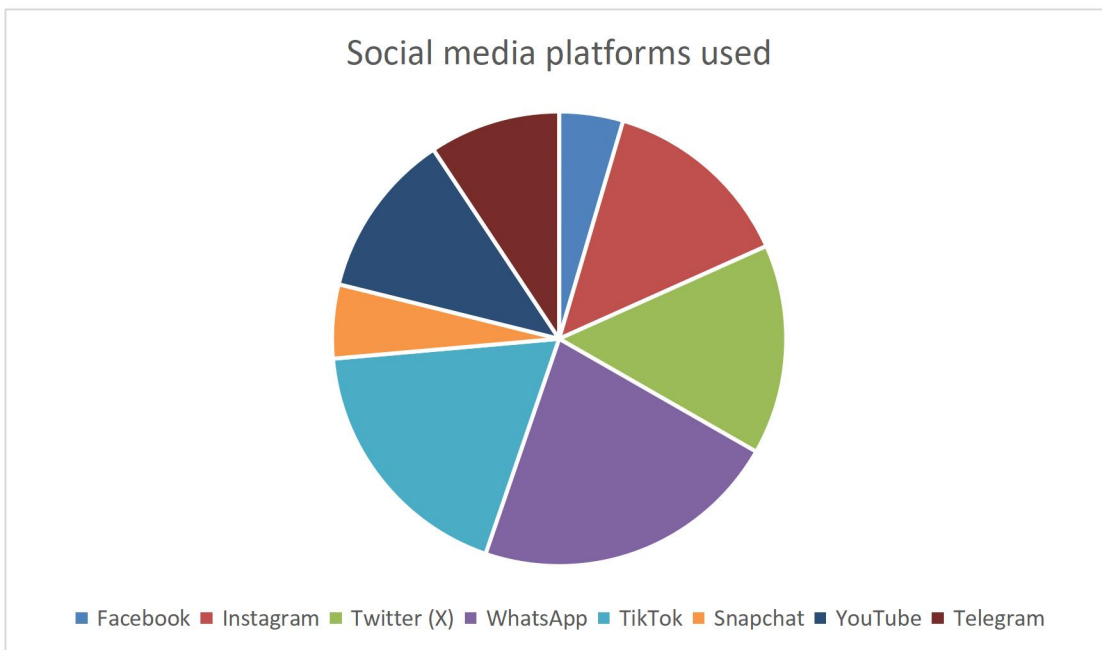


Table 4.2 presents the distribution of social media platforms most frequently used by respondents. The results indicate that WhatsApp was the most widely used platform, with 473 respondents representing 96.5% of the sample reporting that they use the platform regularly. This was followed by TikTok (80.6%), Twitter/X (65.7%), Instagram (60.4%), and YouTube (51.8%). Other platforms such as Telegram (41.0%), Snapchat (23.1%), and Facebook (20.0%) were used by smaller proportions of respondents.

Table 4.3: Daily time spent on social media

Time Spent Daily	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	3	0.6
1–3 hours	56	11.4
4–6 hours	278	56.7
7–9 hours	126	25.7
More than 9 hours	27	5.6
Total	490	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

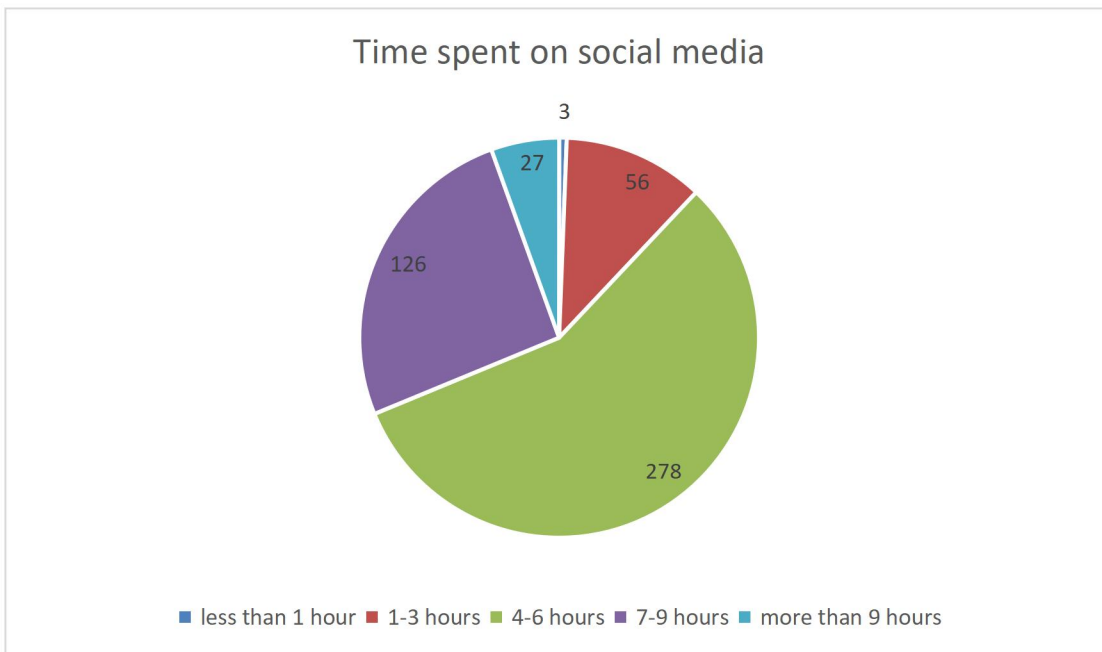


Table 4.3 presents the amount of time respondents spend on social media daily. The findings show that 278 respondents (56.7%) spend between four and six hours on social media each day, making this the most common usage category. Additionally, 126 respondents (25.7%) reported spending between seven and nine hours daily, while 27 respondents (5.6%) spend

more than nine hours per day on social media. Only 56 respondents (11.4%) reported spending between one and three hours daily, while a very small proportion 3 respondents (0.6%) spend less than one hour per day on social media.

These findings indicate that a significant proportion of students spend several hours engaging with social media platforms on a daily basis.

Table 4.4: Time of day social media is mostly used

Time of Day	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Early morning (6am–10am)	17	3.5
Late morning (10am–12 noon)	14	2.9
Afternoon (12 noon–5pm)	61	12.4
Evening (5pm–9pm)	187	38.2
Late night (9pm–2am)	195	39.7
Throughout the day	16	3.3
Total	490	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

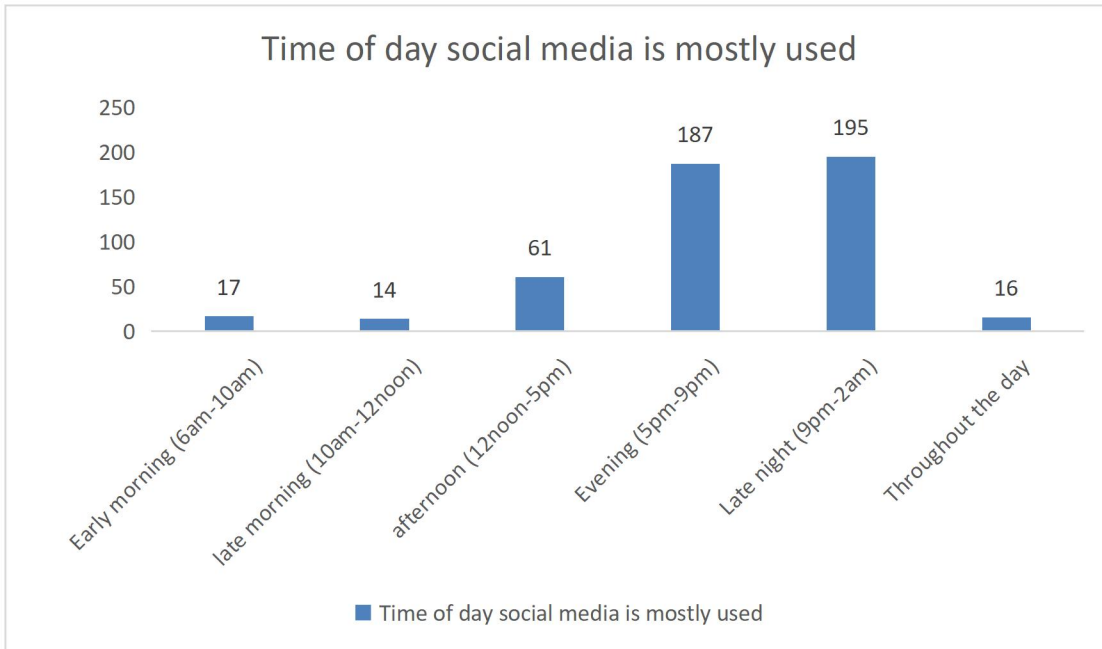


Table 4.10 presents the periods of the day during which students most frequently engage with social media. The results indicate that 195 respondents (39.7%) reported using social media mostly during the late night hours (9:00 pm – 2:00 am), while 187 respondents (38.2%) reported the evening period (5:00 pm – 9:00 pm) as their most active time. A smaller proportion 61 respondents (12.4%) indicated the afternoon period, while very few respondents reported using social media primarily during the morning hours.

These findings suggest that students tend to engage with social media mainly during leisure periods after academic activities, particularly during the evening and late-night hours.

Table 4.5: Primary purposes for social media use

Purpose	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Academic purposes	151	30.8
Entertainment	480	98.0
Communication with friends/family	482	98.4
News and current affairs	96	19.6
Business/marketing	315	64.3
Self-expression/sharing updates	310	63.3

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.11 presents the primary reasons students use social media platforms. The results indicate that the most common purpose is communication with friends and family (98.4%), closely followed by entertainment (98.0%). Other major purposes include business or marketing activities (64.3%) and self-expression or sharing personal updates (63.3%). Meanwhile, academic use was reported by 30.8% of respondents, and 19.6% indicated using social media for news and current affairs.

These findings demonstrate that social media serves multiple functions in students' lives, particularly as a platform for maintaining social relationships and accessing entertainment content.

Table 4.6: Number of social media accounts actively used

Number of Accounts	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1–2 accounts	97	19.8
3–4 accounts	212	43.3
5–6 accounts	158	32.2
More than 6 accounts	23	4.7
Total	490	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

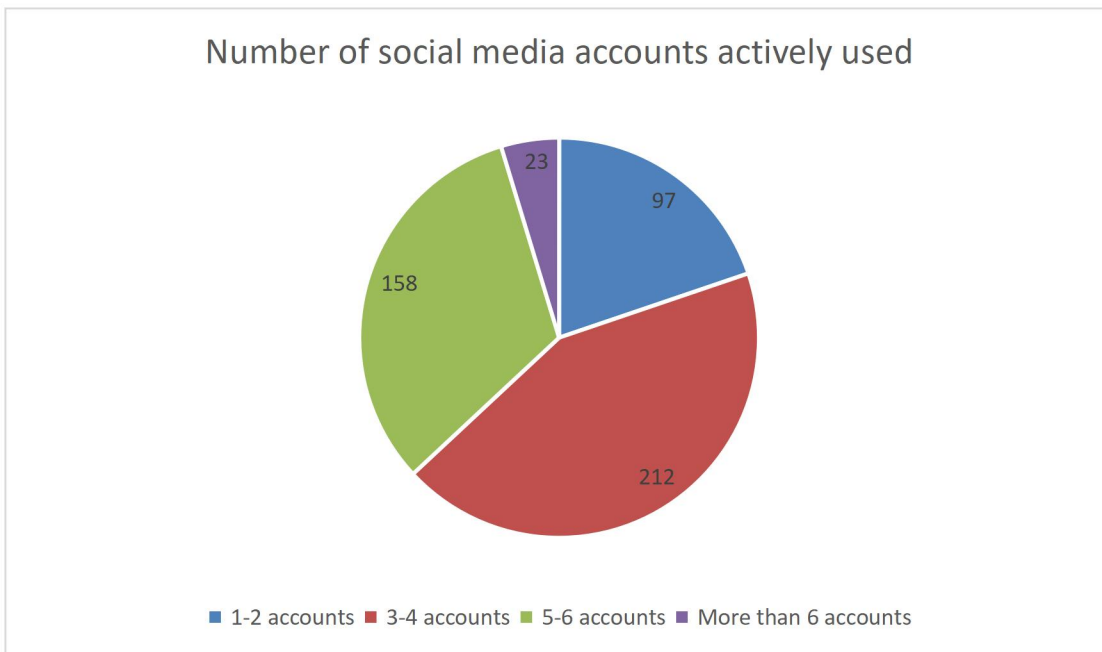


Table 4.6 presents the number of social media accounts actively used by respondents. The findings indicate that 212 respondents (43.3%) maintain between three and four active accounts, while 158 respondents (32.2%) reported using five to six accounts. Additionally, 97 respondents (19.8%) reported using one or two accounts, while 23 respondents (4.7%) indicated using more than six accounts.

These results demonstrate that most students maintain a presence across multiple social media platforms simultaneously.

Table 4.7: Frequency of checking social media notifications while studying

Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Never	23	4.7
Rarely	146	29.8
Occasionally	198	40.4
Frequently	97	19.8
Always	26	5.3
Total	490	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

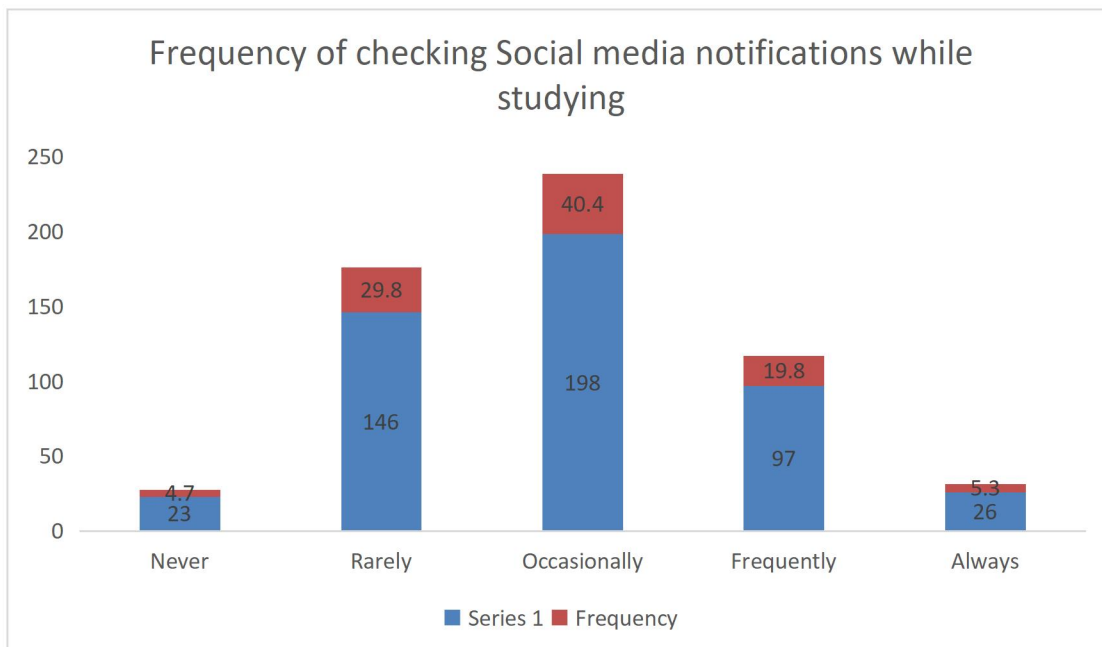


Table 4.7 shows how frequently students check social media notifications while studying. The findings reveal that 198 respondents (40.4%) reported checking social media occasionally during study periods, while 97 respondents (19.8%) reported doing so frequently and 26 respondents (5.3%) indicated that they always check social media while studying. Meanwhile, 146 respondents (29.8%) reported rarely doing so, and 23 respondents (4.7%) indicated that they never check social media while studying.

These results suggest that social media interruptions during study are common among students. Frequent checking of notifications may reduce concentration and disrupt academic focus, potentially affecting learning outcomes and productivity.

Table 4.8: Proportion of daily free time spent on social media

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 25%	54	11.0
25%–50%	121	24.7
51%–75%	315	64.3
Above 75%	0	0.0
Total	490	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

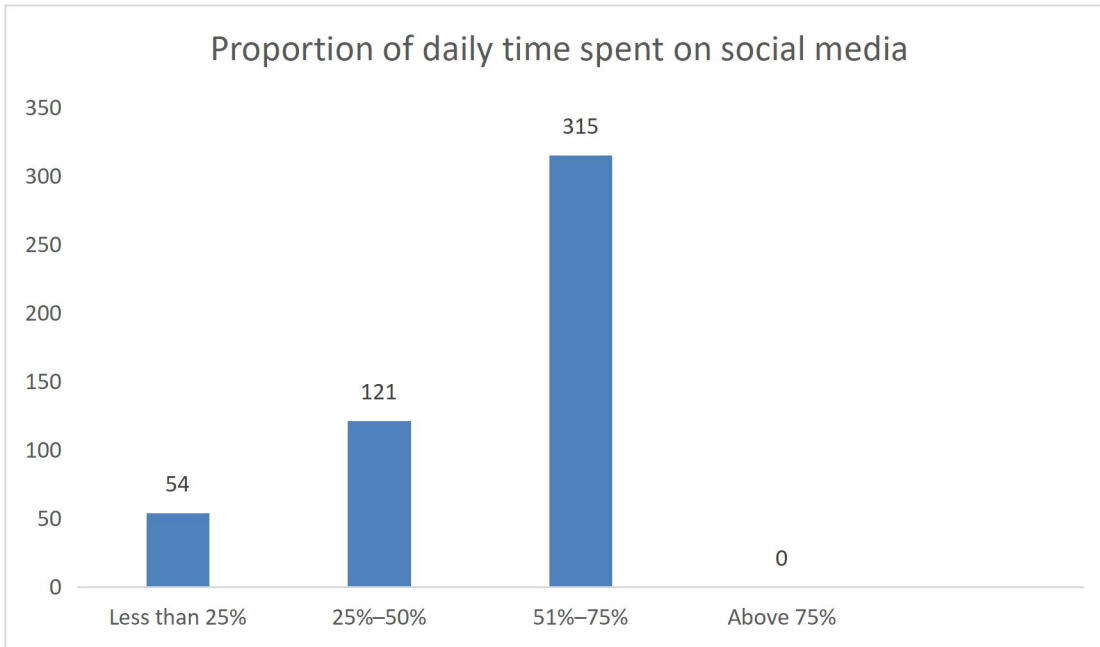


Table 4.8 presents the proportion of respondents’ daily free time spent on social media. The findings indicate that 315 respondents (64.3%) spend between 51% and 75% of their free time on social media, while 121 respondents (24.7%) spend between 25% and 50% of their free time on these platforms. Additionally, 54 respondents (11.0%) spend less than 25% of their free time on social media.

These results suggest that social media occupies a substantial portion of students’ leisure time. The dominance of the 51%–75% category indicates that many students devote a significant share of their non-academic time to online activities.

Section C: Common mental health challenges experienced by students

This section examines the mental health challenges experienced by students within the past six months. Understanding the prevalence of psychological difficulties among students provides important context for evaluating the potential relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes.

Table 4.9: Mental health challenges experienced by respondents

Mental Health Challenge	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Persistent feelings of sadness/hopelessness	311	63.5
Loss of interest in academic or social activities	369	75.3
Difficulty concentrating or paying attention	156	31.8
Frequent headaches/restlessness/fatigue	190	38.8
Sleep disturbances	249	50.8
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	147	30.0
Thoughts of self-harm or suicide	0	0.0
None of the above	67	13.7

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.9 presents the various mental health challenges reported by respondents. The findings indicate that the most frequently reported challenge was loss of interest in academic or social activities, reported by 369 respondents (75.3%). This was followed by persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, reported by 311 respondents (63.5%).

Furthermore, 249 respondents (50.8%) reported experiencing sleep disturbances, while 190 respondents (38.8%) reported frequent headaches, restlessness, or fatigue. Additionally, 156 respondents (31.8%) indicated experiencing difficulty concentrating, and 147 respondents (30.0%) reported feelings of nervousness or anxiety.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 67 students (13.7%), indicated that they had not experienced any of the listed challenges, while no respondent reported thoughts of self-harm.

These findings suggest that a considerable proportion of students experience various psychological challenges that may affect their academic engagement, emotional stability, and general well-being.

Table 4.10: Frequency of anxiety or stress among students

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Never	5	1.0
Rarely	53	10.8
Sometimes	195	39.8
Often	162	33.1
Always	75	15.3
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

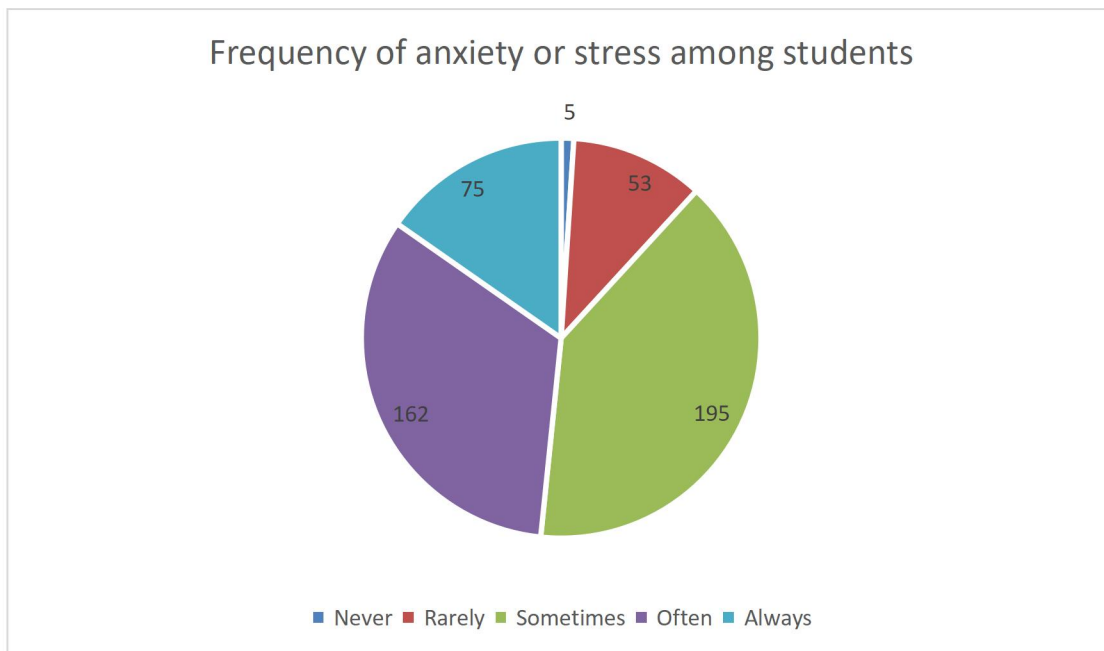


Table 4.10 presents the frequency with which students experience anxiety or stress related to academic or personal issues. The findings show that 195 respondents (39.8%) reported experiencing anxiety or stress sometimes, while 162 respondents (33.1%) indicated experiencing such feelings often. Additionally, 75 respondents (15.3%) reported always experiencing anxiety or stress, while 53 respondents (10.8%) reported rarely experiencing such feelings. Only 5 respondents (1.0%) indicated that they never experience anxiety or stress. These results suggest that anxiety and stress are relatively common experiences among university students.

Table 4.11: Self-rated emotional well-being in the last semester

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very poor	0	0.0
Poor	62	12.7
Fair	213	43.5
Good	156	31.8
Excellent	59	12.0
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

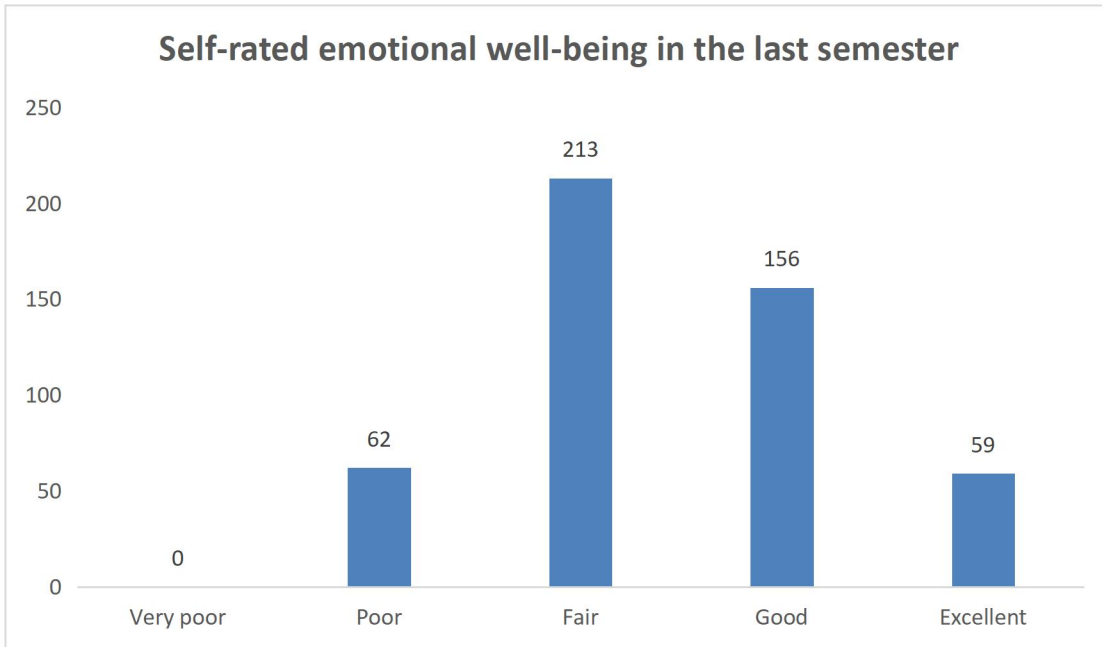


Table 4.11 presents respondents' self-assessment of their emotional well-being during the previous academic semester. The results indicate that 213 respondents (43.5%) rated their emotional well-being as fair, representing the largest proportion of the sample.

Additionally, 156 respondents (31.8%) rated their emotional well-being as good, while 59 respondents (12.0%) rated their emotional state as excellent. However, 62 respondents (12.7%) reported that their emotional well-being was poor, while none of the respondents rated their emotional state as very poor. These findings suggest that although many students perceive their emotional well-being as moderate or positive, a notable proportion experience emotional difficulties that may affect their psychological health and academic functioning.

Table 4.12: Perceived impact of social media on mental health

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	252	51.4
To a small extent	174	35.5
To a moderate extent	64	13.1
To a large extent	0	0.0
Completely	0	0.0
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

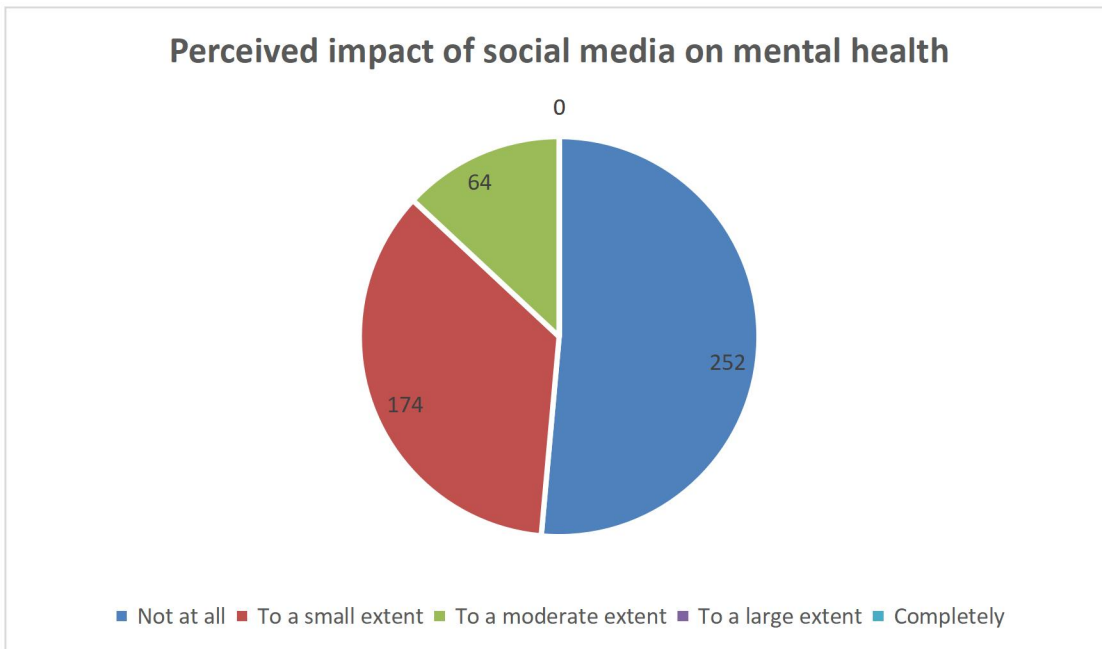


Table 4.12 presents respondents' perceptions regarding the extent to which social media contributes to their mental health challenges. The results indicate that 252 respondents (51.4%) believe that social media does not contribute to their mental health challenges.

However, 174 respondents (35.5%) indicated that social media contributes to their mental health challenges to a small extent, while 64 respondents (13.1%) reported that social media contributes to their mental health challenges to a moderate extent. None of the respondents reported that social media contributes to their mental health challenges to a large extent or completely. These findings suggest that although many students do not directly attribute their mental health challenges to social media, a considerable proportion perceive that social media influences their psychological well-being to some degree.

Table 4.13: Mental health challenges worsened by social media use

Challenge	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Anxiety	158	32.2
Depression	162	33.1
Low self-esteem	309	63.1
Loneliness/social isolation	321	65.5
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	403	82.2
Sleep disturbance	298	60.8
None	2	0.4

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.13 presents respondents’ perceptions of the specific mental health challenges that may be worsened by social media use. Since multiple responses were allowed, percentages were calculated based on the total number of respondents. The results indicate that the most frequently reported challenge was Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), reported by 403 respondents (82.2%). This was followed by loneliness or social isolation, reported by 321 respondents (65.5%), and low self-esteem, reported by 309 respondents (63.1%). Additionally, 298 respondents (60.8%) indicated that social media contributes to sleep disturbances, while 162 respondents (33.1%) associated social media with depression, and 158 respondents (32.2%) associated it with anxiety. Only 2 respondents (0.4%) indicated that none of the listed challenges were worsened by social media.

Section D: Time spent on social media and indicators of mental wellbeing such as, anxiety, depression and emotional well-being.

Table 4.14: Staying up past midnight due to social media use

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Never	6	1.2
Rarely	73	14.9
Sometimes	196	40.0
Often	215	43.8
Always	0	0.0
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

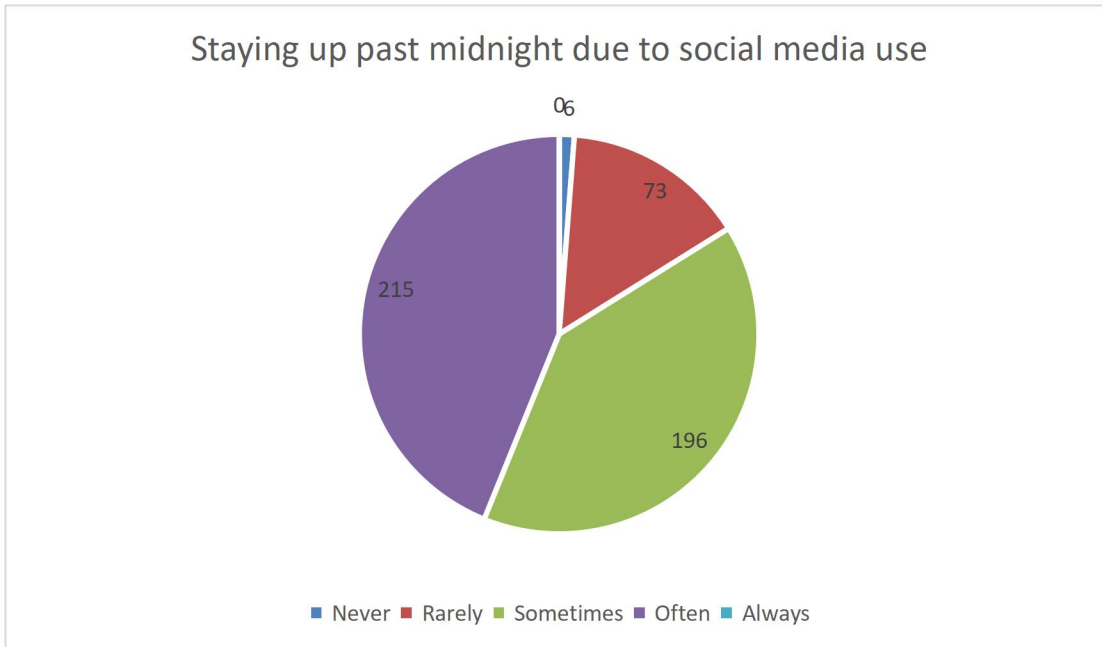
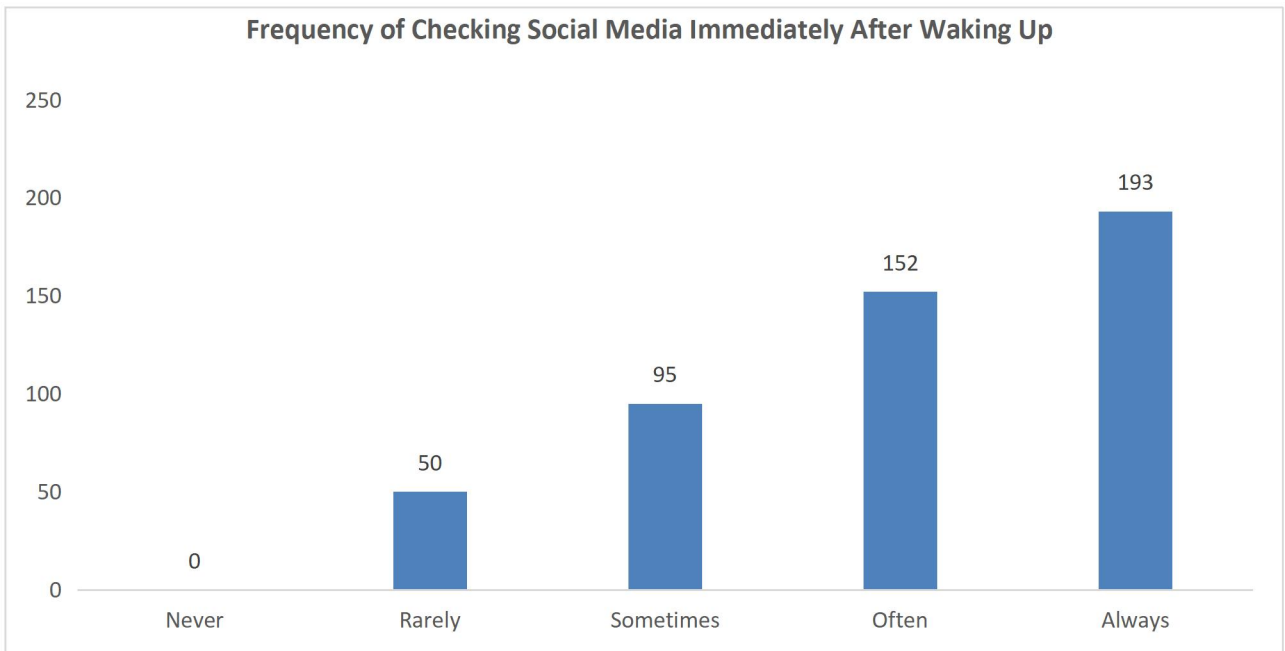


Table 4.14 presents the frequency with which students stay awake past midnight due to social media engagement. The findings reveal that 215 respondents (43.8%) reported staying up past midnight often, while 196 respondents (40.0%) reported doing so sometimes. Additionally, 73 respondents (14.9%) indicated that they rarely stay up past midnight because of social media, while 6 respondents (1.2%) reported never doing so. These results indicate that late-night social media use is widespread among students.

Table 4.15: Frequency of checking social media immediately after waking up

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Never	0	0.0
Rarely	50	10.2
Sometimes	95	19.4
Often	152	31.0
Always	193	39.4
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025



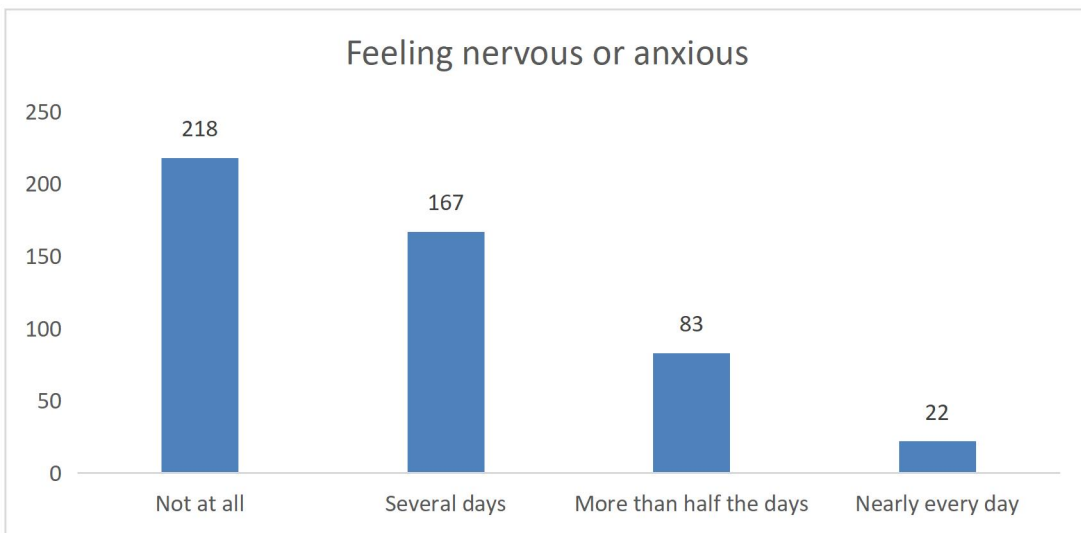
The results show that checking social media immediately after waking up is a highly common behavior among the students. A combined 70.4% reported that they do this often (31.0%) or always (39.4%). Another 19.4% indicated that they sometimes check social media upon waking, while only 10.2% do so rarely. No respondent selected “never.”

This pattern suggests that early-morning social media engagement has become a routine practice for most students and may reflect habitual use or digital attachment behavior.

Table 4.16: Feeling nervous or anxious

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	218	44.5
Several days	167	34.1
More than half the days	83	16.9
Nearly every day	22	4.5
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

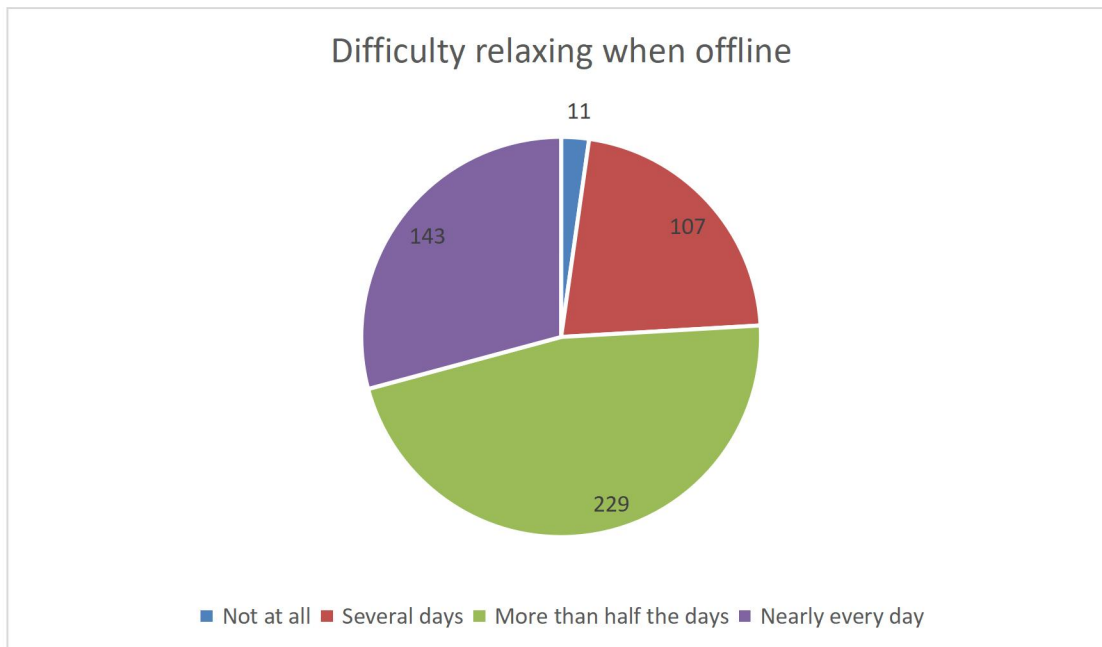


Less than half of the respondents (44.5%) reported that they did not feel nervous or anxious during the reference period. However, a notable proportion experienced anxiety symptoms at varying frequency levels: 34.1% reported feeling anxious for several days, while 16.9% experienced it more than half the days. A smaller group (4.5%) indicated that they felt anxious nearly every day. These findings indicate that although many students maintain relatively stable emotional states, a considerable segment experiences recurring anxiety symptoms.

Table 4.17: Difficulty relaxing when offline

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	11	2.2
Several days	107	21.9
More than half the days	229	46.7
Nearly every day	143	29.2
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025



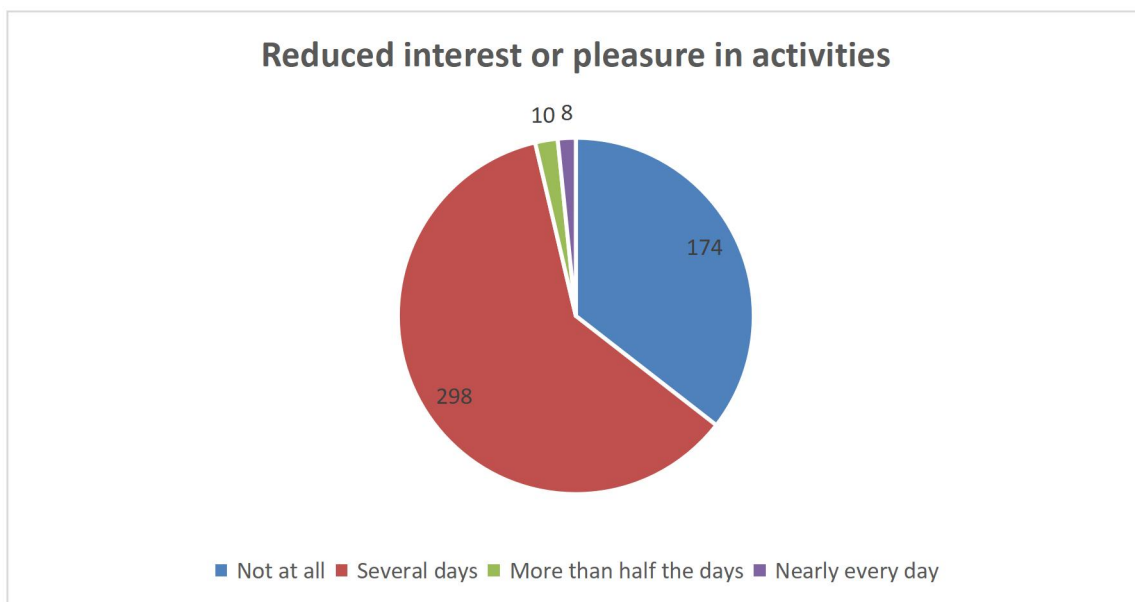
Only 2.2% of respondents reported no restlessness when offline. The majority experienced difficulty relaxing without online engagement, with 46.7% reporting restlessness more than half the days and 29.2% nearly every day.

This distribution suggests a strong tendency toward digital dependence, where many students experience discomfort or agitation when disconnected from social media platforms.

Table 4.18: Reduced interest or pleasure in activities

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	174	35.5
Several days	298	60.9
More than half the days	10	2.0
Nearly every day	8	1.6
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Most respondents (60.9%) reported experiencing reduced interest or pleasure in daily activities for several days within the reference period, while 35.5% did not experience this symptom at all. Only a small proportion (3.6% combined) reported experiencing it more than half the days or nearly every day. This suggests that mild motivational decline is relatively widespread, although severe and persistent loss of interest is less common among the students.

Table 4.19: Depression feelings triggered by social media comparison

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	82	16.7
Several days	178	36.4
More than half the days	147	30.0
Nearly every day	83	16.9
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

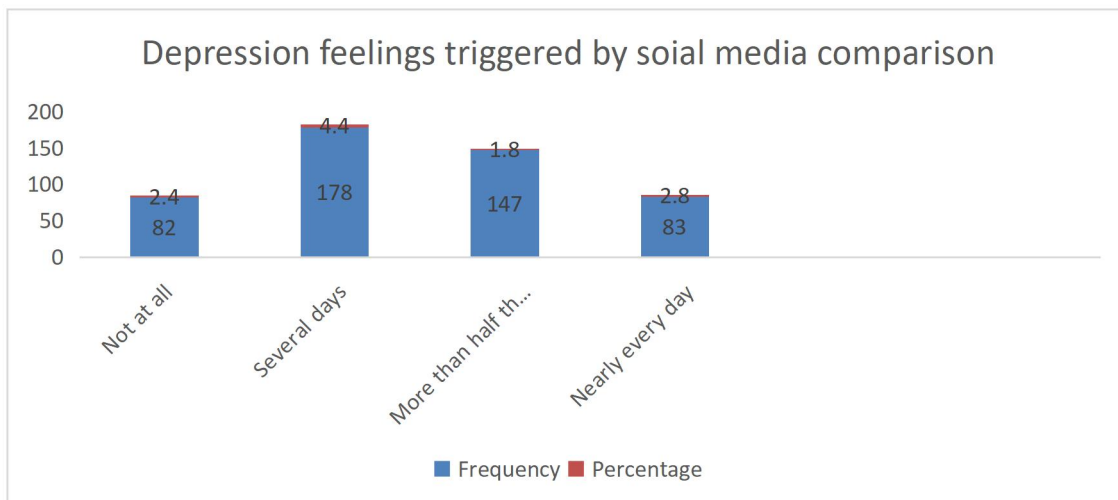


Table 4.19 presents respondents' experiences of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless after

comparing themselves with others on social media platforms. The results show that 178 respondents (36.4%) reported experiencing such feelings for several days, while 147 respondents (30.0%) indicated that they experienced these feelings more than half of the days. In addition, 83 respondents (16.9%) reported experiencing such feelings nearly every day, while 82 respondents (16.7%) indicated that they did not experience such feelings at all. These findings suggest that a substantial proportion of students experience emotional distress related to social comparison on social media platforms. When the responses for “several days,” “more than half the days,” and “nearly every day” are combined, 83.3% of respondents reported experiencing some level of depressive feelings associated with social media comparison.

Table 4.20: Sleep difficulty related to social media use

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	104	21.2
Several days	268	54.7
More than half the days	65	13.3
Nearly every day	53	10.8
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

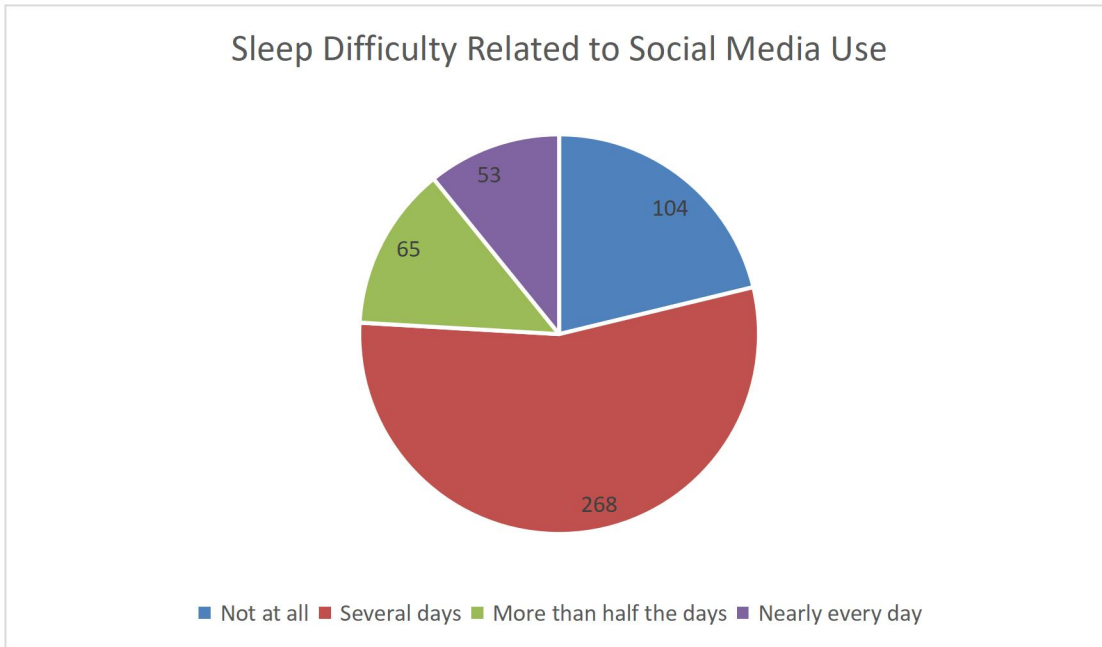


Table 4.20 shows respondents’ experiences of difficulty sleeping as a result of excessive social media use. The findings indicate that 268 respondents (54.7%) reported experiencing sleep difficulties for several days, while 65 respondents (13.3%) experienced sleep disruption more than half the days, and 53 respondents (10.8%) reported experiencing such difficulties nearly every day.

On the other hand, 104 respondents (21.2%) indicated that they did not experience sleep problems related to social media use.

When the responses indicating some level of sleep disturbance are combined, 78.8% of respondents reported experiencing sleep difficulties at least occasionally due to social media use. This finding suggests that excessive engagement with social media platforms, particularly during nighttime hours, may interfere with students’ sleep patterns.

Table 4.21: Social media and academic productivity

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Never	51	10.4
Rarely	109	22.3
Sometimes	133	27.1
Often	116	23.7
Always	81	16.5
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

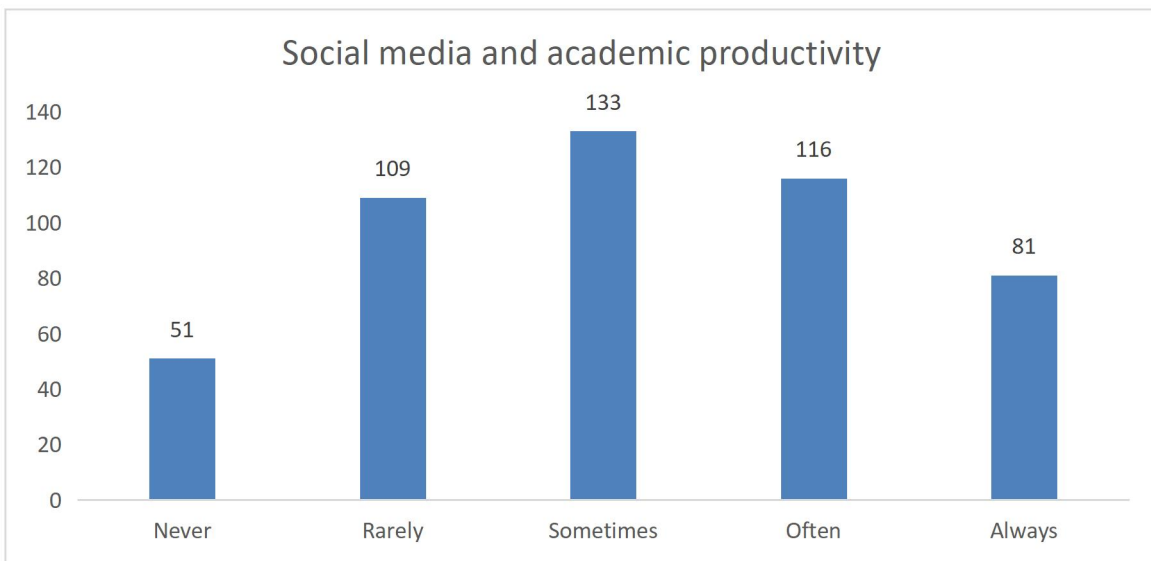


Table 4.21 presents respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of social media on their academic productivity. The findings indicate that 133 respondents (27.1%) reported that social media sometimes affects their academic productivity negatively, while 116 respondents (23.7%) reported that it often affects their productivity, and 81 respondents (16.5%) indicated that it always affects their productivity. In addition, 109 respondents (22.3%) reported that

social media rarely affects their academic productivity, while 51 respondents (10.4%) indicated that it never affects their productivity. When the responses “sometimes,” “often,” and “always” are combined, 67.3% of respondents reported that social media negatively affects their academic productivity to some degree. This suggests that digital distraction is a significant concern among students.

Table 4.22: Self-rated emotional well-being considering social media use

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very poor	16	3.3
Poor	50	10.2
Fair	152	31.0
Good	183	37.3
Excellent	89	18.2
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

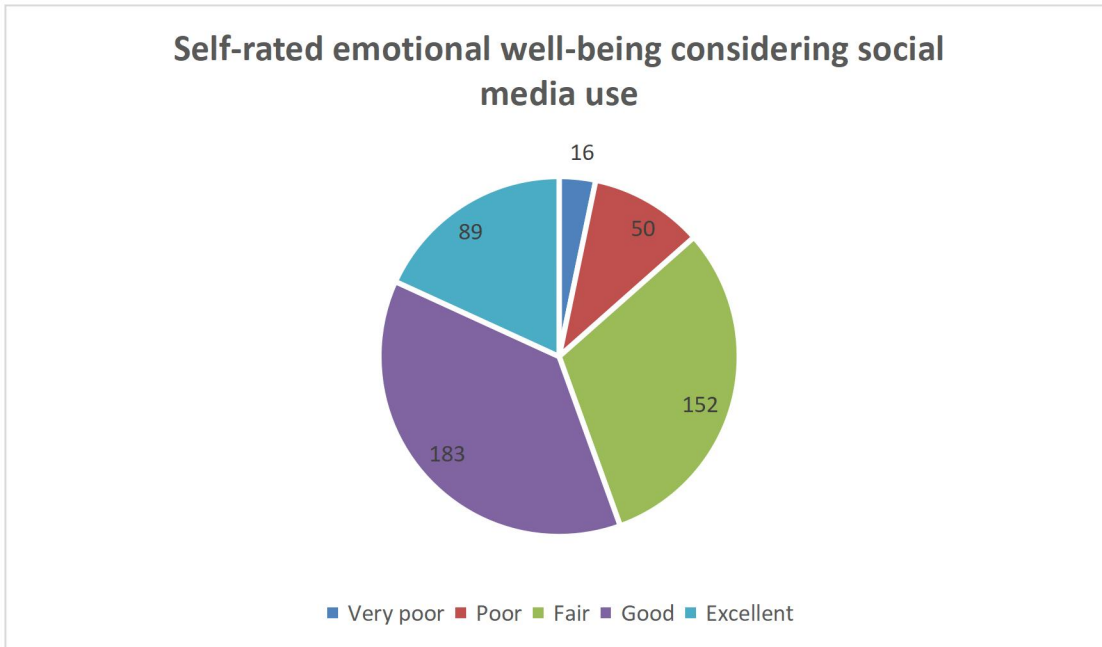


Table 4.22 presents respondents' self-assessment of their emotional well-being in relation to their social media use. The results indicate that 183 respondents (37.3%) rated their emotional well-being as good, while 152 respondents (31.0%) rated it as fair. In addition, 89 respondents (18.2%) reported excellent emotional well-being.

However, 50 respondents (10.2%) rated their emotional well-being as poor, while 16 respondents (3.3%) rated it as very poor.

These findings suggest that although many students maintain relatively positive emotional well-being despite high social media usage, a notable minority experience emotional difficulties that may be linked to their online experiences.

Section E: Students' Awareness of Psychological Risks Associated with Excessive Social Media Usage

This section examines students' awareness, beliefs, and perceptions regarding the psychological risks associated with excessive social media engagement.

Table 4.23: Awareness of mental health risks

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	411	83.9
No	0	0.0
Not sure	79	16.1
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

These findings suggest a high level of awareness among students regarding the potential psychological consequences of excessive social media engagement.

Table 4.24: Identified psychological risks

Risk	Frequency
Anxiety	315
Depression	367
Low self-esteem	402
Sleep disturbance	214
Academic stress	215
Addiction	295
None of the above	9

Source: Field Survey, 2025

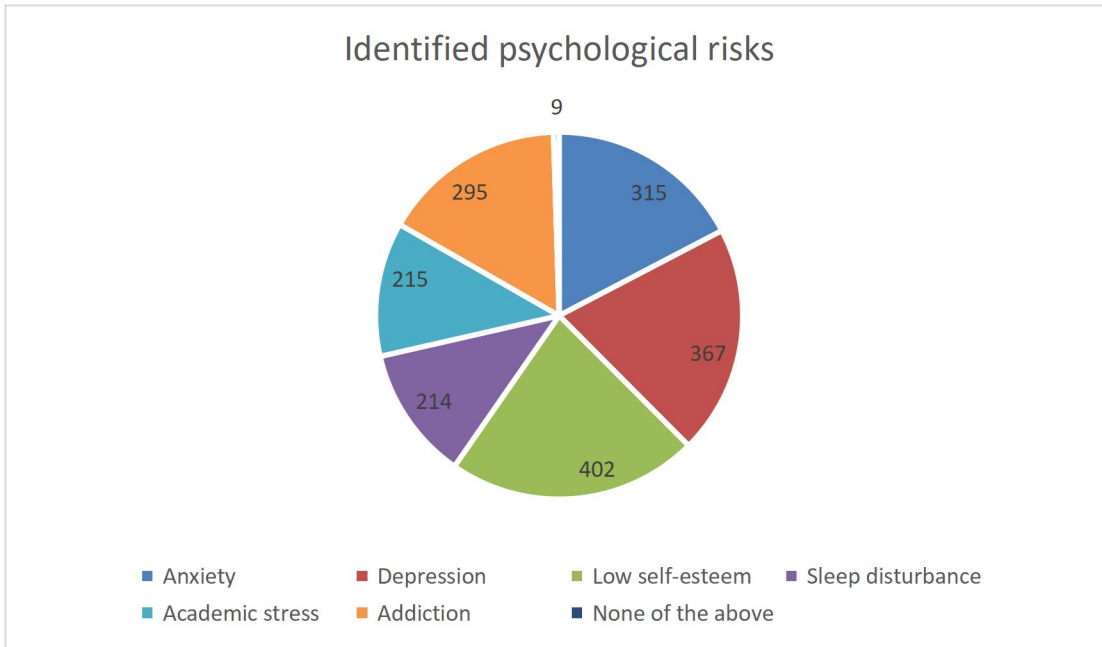


Table 4.24 presents the mental health risks that students associate with social media use. Since multiple responses were allowed, respondents identified several perceived risks. The most frequently identified risk was low self-esteem (402 respondents), followed by depression (367 respondents) and anxiety (315 respondents).

Other commonly identified risks included addiction (295 respondents), academic stress (215 respondents), and sleep disturbances (214 respondents). Only 9 respondents indicated that none of the listed risks were associated with social media use.

These findings suggest that students strongly associate social media with psychological challenges related to self-evaluation, emotional well-being, and behavioral dependency.

Table 4.25: Social comparison and self-esteem

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	56	11.4
Disagree	0	0.0
Sometimes	0	0.0
Neutral	94	19.2
Agree	165	33.7
Strongly agree	175	35.7
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

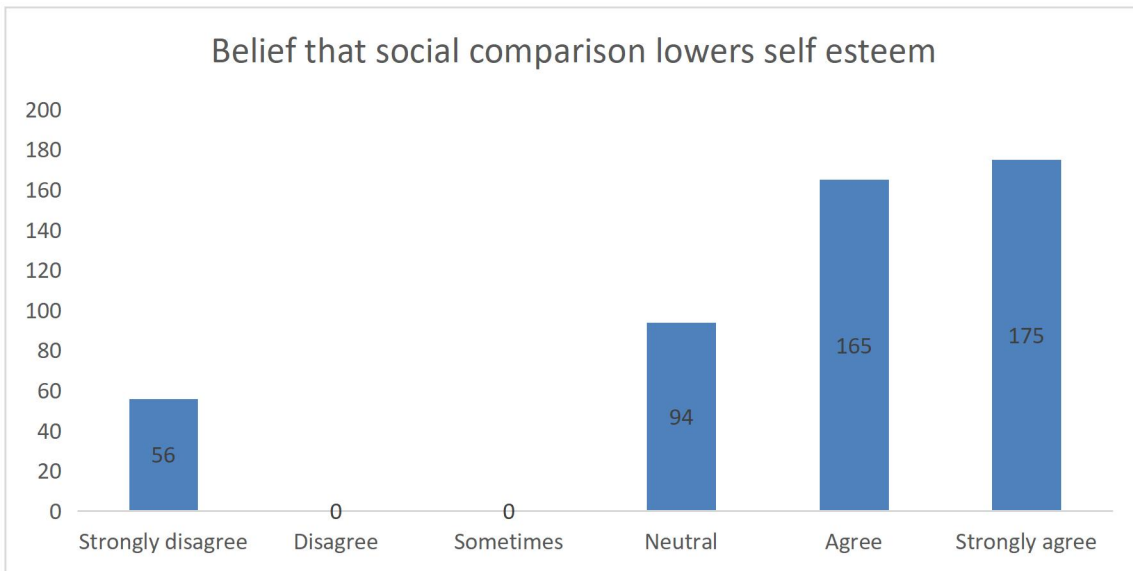


Table 4.25 presents respondents' views on whether social comparison on social media platforms lowers students' self-esteem. The results indicate that 175 respondents (35.7%) strongly agreed, while 165 respondents (33.7%) agreed that constant comparison on social media reduces students' self-esteem. Additionally, 94 respondents (19.2%) were neutral, while 56 respondents (11.4%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Overall, 69.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social comparison on social media can lower self-esteem.

Table 4.26: Late-night use and concentration

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	42	8.6
Disagree	58	11.8
Neutral	45	9.2
Agree	190	38.8
Strongly agree	155	31.6
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

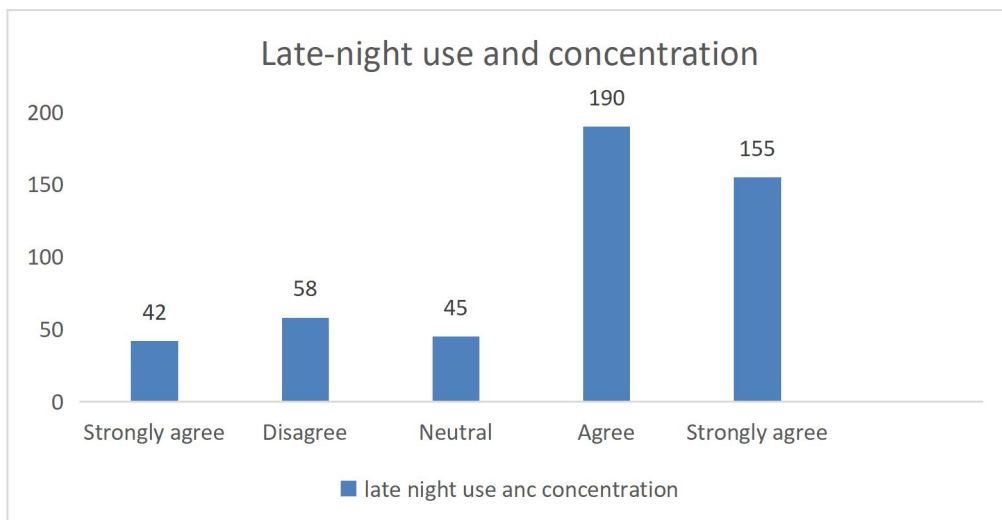


Table 4.26 presents respondents' perceptions of the effect of late-night social media use on learning and concentration. The findings show that 190 respondents (38.8%) agreed, while 155 respondents (31.6%) strongly agreed that staying online late negatively affects concentration and learning. In addition, 45 respondents (9.2%) were neutral, while 58 respondents (11.8%) disagreed with the statement. Overall, 70.4% of respondents agreed that late-night social media use negatively affects learning and concentration,

Table 4.27: Social media and emotional problems

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	23	4.7
To a small extent	186	38.0
To a moderate extent	126	25.7
To a large extent	155	31.6
Completely	0	0.0
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

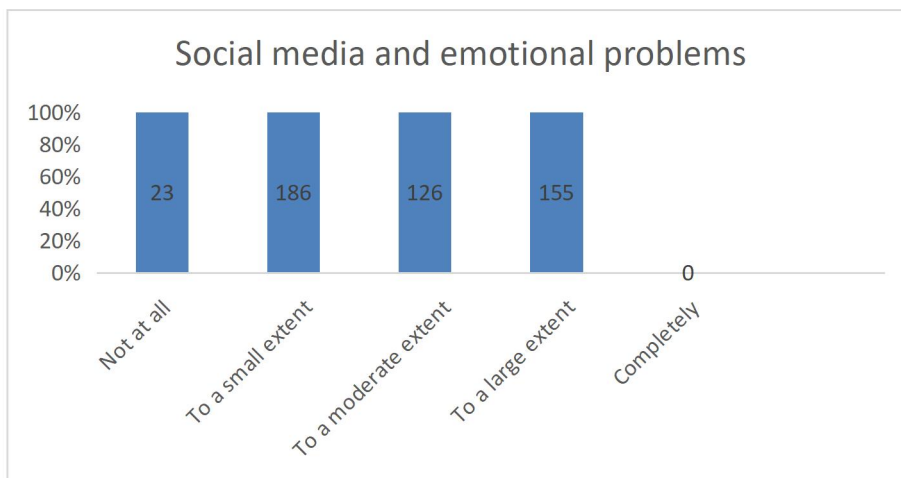


Table 4.27 presents respondents' perceptions of the extent to which excessive social media use contributes to emotional problems. The findings show that 186 respondents (38.0%) indicated that social media contributes to emotional problems to a small extent, while 126 respondents (25.7%) indicated a moderate contribution, and 155 respondents (31.6%) reported that social media contributes to emotional problems to a large extent. Only 23 respondents (4.7%) indicated that social media does not contribute to emotional problems at all. These results indicate that most respondents believe that excessive social media engagement contributes to emotional difficulties to some degree.

Table 4.28: Awareness of counseling and mental health support services

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	258	52.7
No	131	26.7
Not sure	101	20.6
Total	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

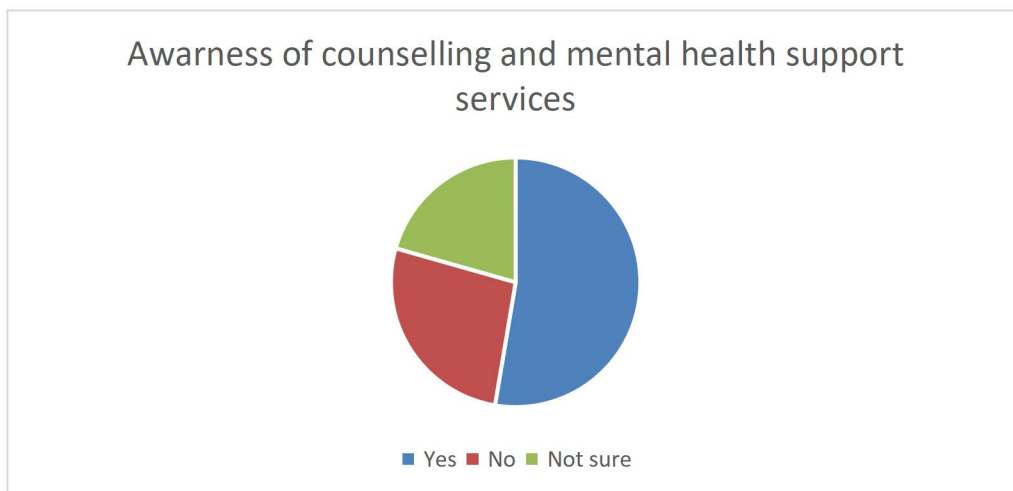


Table 4.28 presents respondents' awareness of counseling or mental health support services available within the University of Benin. The results indicate that 258 respondents (52.7%) reported being aware of such services, while 131 respondents (26.7%) indicated that they were not aware, and 101 respondents (20.6%) reported being unsure.

These findings suggest that although more than half of the students are aware of the availability of counseling services, a significant proportion of the student population remains unaware or uncertain about these resources.

Table 4.29: Use of counseling services among aware students

(Base = 258 students who indicated awareness)

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	68	26.4
No	190	73.6
Total	258	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

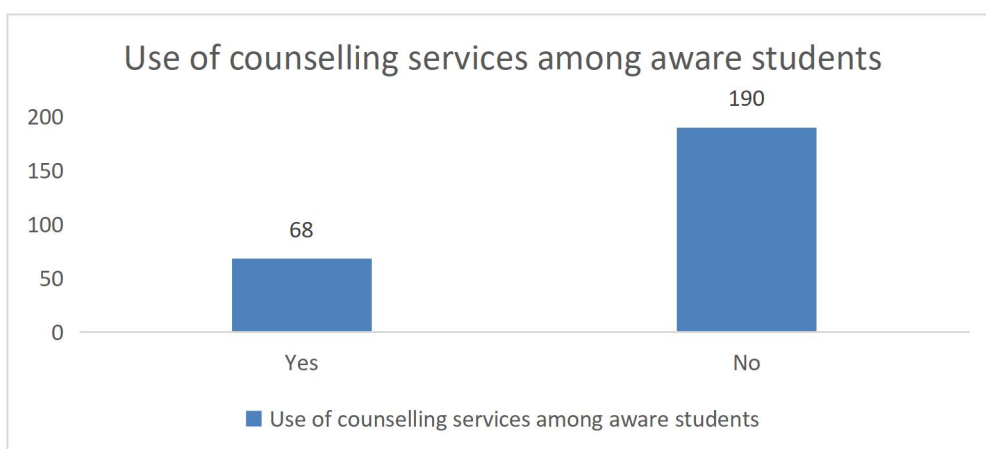


Table 4.29 presents the utilization of counseling services among students who reported being aware of the availability of such services. The findings indicate that only 68 respondents (26.4%) reported having used counseling or mental health support services, while 190 respondents (73.6%) indicated that they had never used these services.

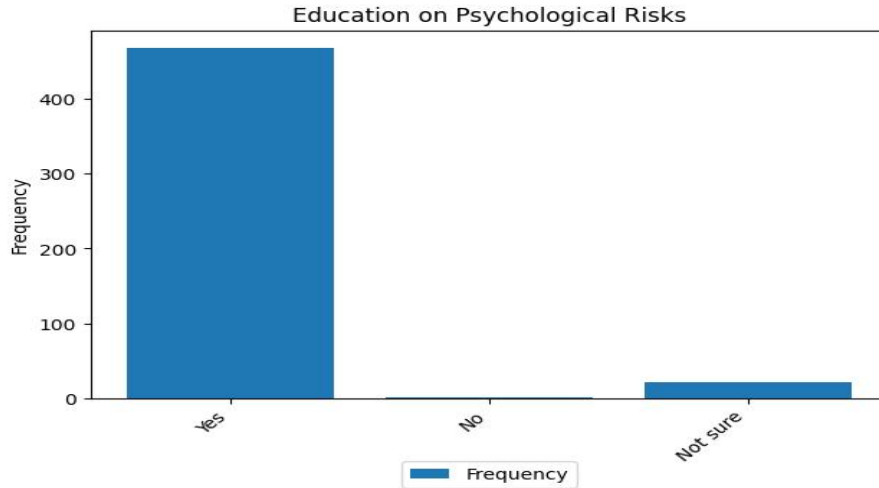
These results reveal a significant gap between awareness and actual utilization of mental health support services among students. Despite being aware of available services, most students have not accessed them.

Section F: Measures for Promoting Healthier Social Media Habits and Strengthening Mental Health Support

This section presents respondents' views on measures that could promote healthier social media habits and strengthen mental health support among students. The responses highlight strategies and institutional roles that may help reduce the negative effects of excessive social media use and improve students' overall well-being.

Table 4.30: Students' views on education about the psychological risks of excessive social media use

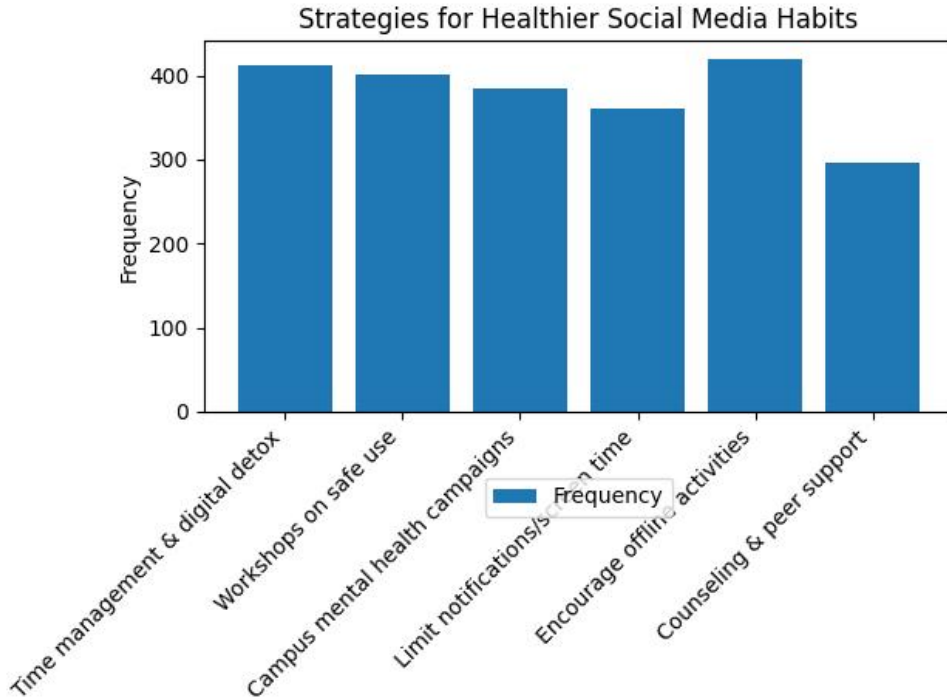
Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	468	95.5
No	1	0.2
Not sure	21	4.3
Total	490	100



The data presented in Table 4.30 show respondents' opinions on whether students should be educated about the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use. The results indicate that 468 respondents (95.5%) agreed that students should be educated on the psychological risks of excessive social media use. In contrast, 1 respondent (0.2%) disagreed, while 21 respondents (4.3%) were not sure. These findings indicate that the vast majority of respondents support awareness and educational initiatives aimed at informing students about the potential mental health implications of excessive social media use

Table 4.31: Strategies that could help students develop healthier social media habits

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Time management and digital detox programs	412	84.1
Workshops on safe and productive social media use	401	81.8
Campus campaigns on mental health awareness	385	78.6
Limiting notifications and screen time through apps	361	73.7
Encouraging offline social and recreational activities	420	85.7
Access to counseling and peer support groups	296	60.4

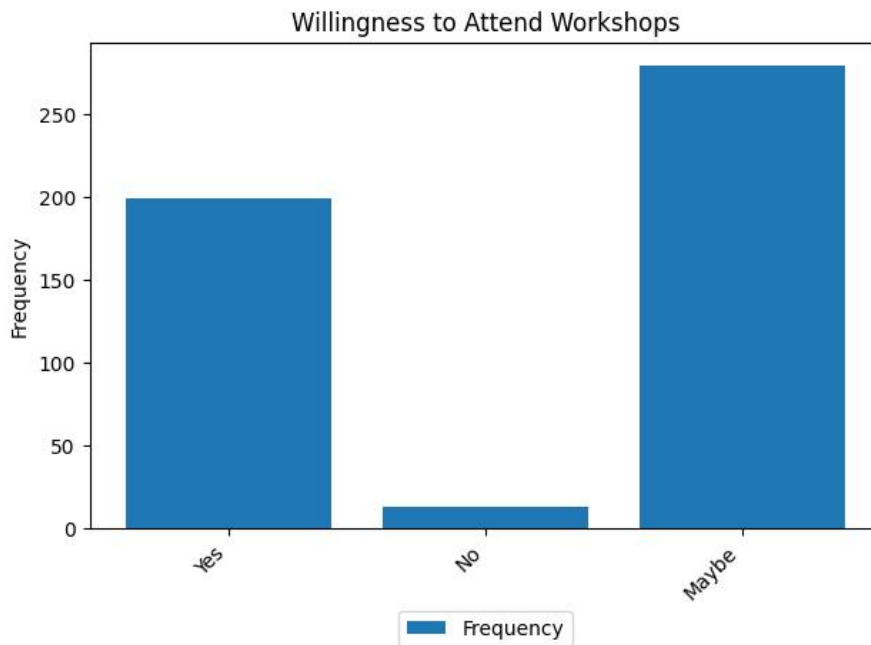


The data in Table 4.31 show respondents' views on strategies that could help students develop healthier social media habits. The results indicate that encouraging offline social and recreational activities had the highest support with 420 respondents (85.7%), followed by time management and digital detox programs with 412 respondents (84.1%), and workshops on safe and productive social media use with 401 respondents (81.8%).

Other strategies include campus campaigns on mental health awareness (78.6%), limiting notifications and screen time through apps (73.7%), and access to counseling and peer support groups (60.4%). These findings suggest that students support various strategies for promoting healthier social media use.

Table 4.32: Willingness to attend workshops or seminars on managing social media use

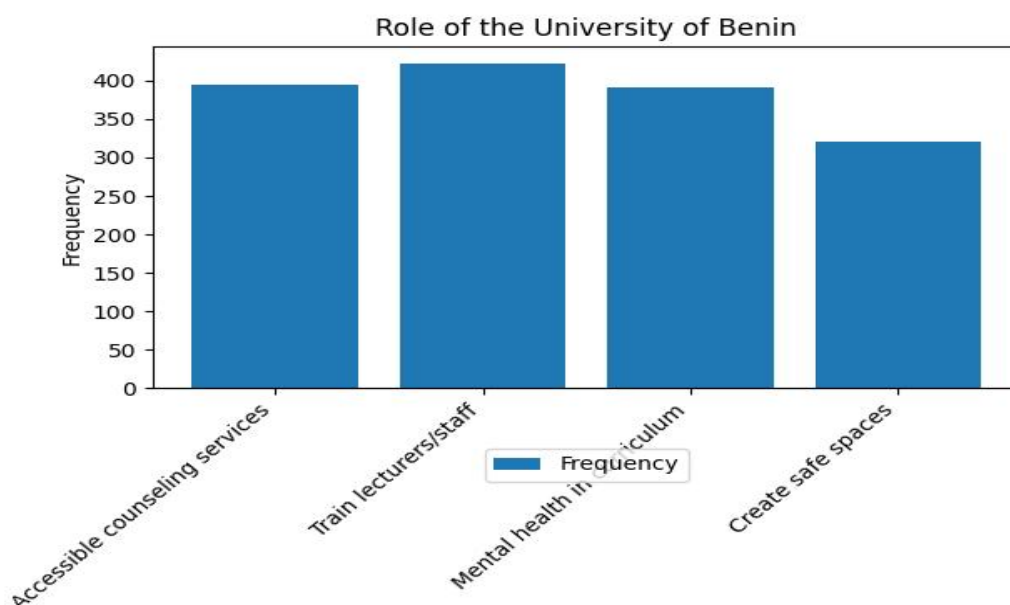
Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	199	40.6
No	13	2.7
Maybe	279	56.9
Total	490	100



The data presented in Table 4.32 show respondents' willingness to attend workshops or seminars on managing social media use and mental health. The results indicate that 279 respondents (56.9%) reported "Maybe," while 199 respondents (40.6%) indicated "Yes." Only 13 respondents (2.7%) indicated "No." These findings suggest that many students are open to participating in programs aimed at promoting responsible social media use and improving mental health awareness.

Table 4.33: Perceived role of the University of Benin in addressing social media-related mental health challenges

Role	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Provide more accessible counseling services	394	80.4
Train lecturers and staff to identify students in distress	423	86.3
Incorporate mental health education into the curriculum	391	79.8
Create safe spaces for students to discuss challenges	321	65.5

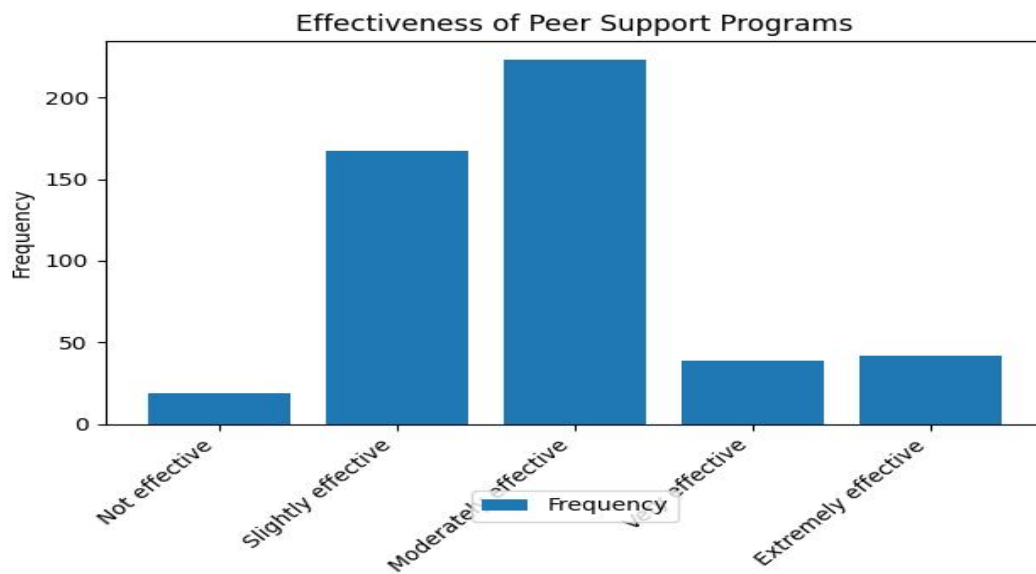


The data presented in Table 4.33 show respondents' views on the role the University of Benin should play in addressing mental health challenges related to social media use. The results indicate that training lecturers and staff to identify students in distress received the highest support with 423 respondents (86.3%). This was followed by providing more accessible counseling services with 394 respondents (80.4%), and incorporating mental health education into the curriculum with 391 respondents (79.8%). Additionally, 321 respondents (65.5%) supported creating safe spaces for students to discuss their challenges. These findings suggest

that students expect the university to play an active role in supporting student mental health and well-being.

Table 4.34: Perceived effectiveness of peer support programs

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not effective at all	19	3.9
Slightly effective	167	34.1
Moderately effective	223	45.5
Very effective	39	8.0
Extremely effective	42	8.6
Total	490	100

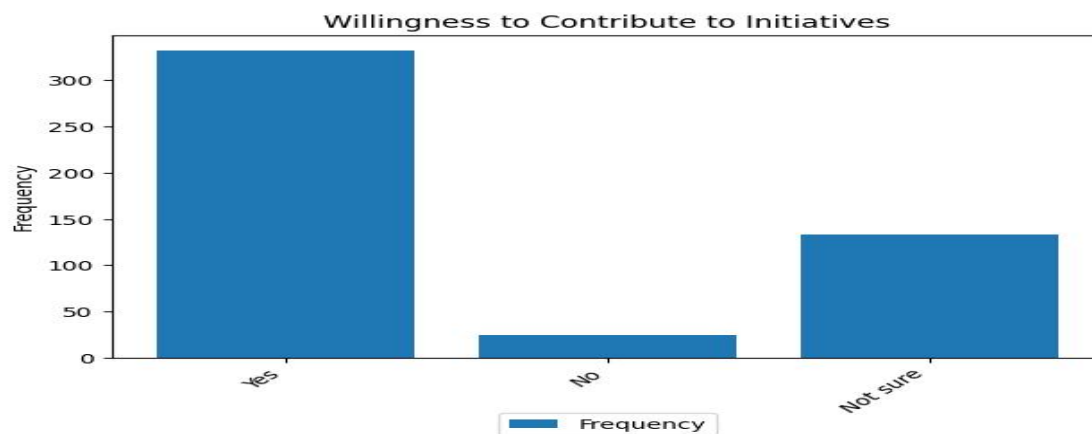


The data presented in Table 4.34 show respondents' views on the effectiveness of peer support programs in improving students' mental health. The results indicate that 223 respondents (45.5%) considered peer support programs to be moderately effective, while 167 respondents (34.1%) believed they were slightly effective.

Additionally, 42 respondents (8.6%) rated them as extremely effective, and 39 respondents (8.0%) considered them very effective. Only 19 respondents (3.9%) believed that peer support programs would not be effective at all. These findings suggest that many students perceive peer support initiatives as beneficial for improving mental health among students.

Table 4.35: Willingness to contribute to initiatives that promote healthy social media use

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	332	67.8
No	25	5.1
Not sure	133	27.1
Total	490	100



The data presented in Table 4.35 show respondents' willingness to contribute to initiatives that promote healthier social media use and strengthen mental health support on campus. The results indicate that 332 respondents (67.8%) expressed willingness to participate in such initiatives, while 133 respondents (27.1%) were not sure. Only 25 respondents (5.1%) indicated no interest in contributing to such initiatives. These findings suggest that a majority of students are willing to participate in programs aimed at promoting responsible social media use and improving mental well-being on campus.

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

This section presents the inferential statistical analysis conducted to test the hypotheses formulated in Chapter Three. The analysis employed Pearson Product–Moment Correlation (PPMC), independent-samples t-test, and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). These statistical techniques were used to determine the relationships and differences between social media usage variables and mental health outcomes among students of the University of Benin. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule adopted was that the null hypothesis would be rejected if the p-value was less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant relationship or difference.

4.2.1 Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between the frequency of social media usage and levels of anxiety among students of the University of Benin.

Test Statistic: Pearson Product–Moment Correlation (PPMC)

Variables	R	N	P-value	Decision
Frequency of Social Media Usage & Anxiety	0.452	490	0.000	Reject H_0

A Pearson Product–Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between frequency of social media usage and anxiety levels among students of the University of Benin.

The results revealed a moderate positive correlation between the variables ($r = 0.452$, $n = 490$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that higher frequency of social media usage is associated with higher levels of anxiety among students.

Since the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that frequency of social media usage significantly relates to anxiety levels among undergraduate students.

From a social psychological perspective, increased exposure to online interactions, social comparison, and digital feedback mechanisms may contribute to heightened emotional sensitivity and anxiety among students.

4.2.2 Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between time spent on social media and symptoms of depression among undergraduate students.

Test Statistic: Pearson Product–Moment Correlation (PPMC)

Variables	R	N	P-value	Decision
Time Spent on Social Media & Depression	0.398	490	0.000	Reject H_0

A Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between time spent on social media and depressive symptoms among students. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.398$, $n = 490$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that students who spend more time on social media tend to report higher levels of depressive symptoms.

Because the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

This finding suggests that prolonged exposure to social media platforms may contribute to emotional distress among students. Social psychological theories suggest that excessive social media engagement may intensify social comparison, feelings of inadequacy, and exposure to idealized online lifestyles, which may contribute to depressive feelings.

4.2.3 Hypothesis three

Students' awareness of the psychological risks of social media use does not significantly influence their mental health outcomes.

Test Statistic: Pearson Product–Moment Correlation (PPMC)

Variables	R	N	P-value	Decision
Awareness & Mental Health Outcomes	-0.276	490	0.000	Reject H ₀

The relationship between students' awareness of the psychological risks associated with social media use and their mental health outcomes was examined using Pearson correlation analysis. The results revealed a small to moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.276$, $n = 490$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that higher awareness of the psychological risks associated with social media use is associated with better mental health outcomes.

Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

This finding suggests that students who are more aware of the potential psychological risks of excessive social media use may be more cautious in their digital behaviors and may adopt healthier coping strategies when engaging with social media platforms.

4.3 Summary of Correlation Findings

The correlation analyses conducted in this study revealed several important relationships between social media usage patterns and students' mental health outcomes.

First, the findings show that frequency of social media usage is positively related to anxiety levels among students. This suggests that students who engage more frequently with social media platforms may experience increased anxiety.

Second, the analysis revealed that time spent on social media is positively associated with depressive symptoms. Students who spend longer hours on social media appear more likely to report symptoms of depression. Third, the results indicate that awareness of the psychological risks associated with social media use is negatively related to mental health challenges. This suggests that students who are more aware of the potential risks may experience fewer psychological difficulties.

Overall, these findings highlight the important role of social media engagement patterns and psychological awareness in shaping students' mental health outcomes.

4.4 T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

This section examines whether mental health outcomes differ significantly across selected demographic variables. Specifically, an independent-samples t-test was used to examine gender differences, while one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences across faculties and levels of study.

4.4.1 Independent-samples T-test: Gender differences in mental health outcomes
Test Statistic: Independent-Samples T-test

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	260	2.78	0.63
Female	230	2.95	0.59

t.	df.	P-value	Decision
-312	488	0.002	Significant

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there were significant differences in mental health outcomes between male and female students. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(488) = -3.12, p = 0.002$.

Female students ($M = 2.95, SD = 0.59$) reported slightly higher levels of mental health challenges compared to male students ($M = 2.78, SD = 0.63$). This finding suggests that gender significantly influences mental health outcomes related to social media use. From a social psychological perspective, female students may be more vulnerable to emotional distress associated with social comparison, online self-presentation pressures, and cyber-social interactions.

4.4.2 One-way ANOVA: Differences across faculties

Test Statistic: One-Way ANOVA

Source	SS	df.	MS	F.	P-value
Between groups	12.48	9	1.387	4.52	0.000
Within groups	147.30	480	0.307		
Total	159.78	489			

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether mental health outcomes differ significantly across faculties.

The results revealed a statistically significant difference among the faculties, $F(9, 480) = 4.52$, $p < 0.05$.

This indicates that students' mental health outcomes vary significantly across academic disciplines. These differences may be influenced by variations in academic workload, learning environments, assessment pressures, and faculty-specific expectations.

4.4.3 One-way ANOVA: Differences by level of study

Source	SS	df.	MS	F.	P-value
Between groups	6.92	4	1.73	2.85	0.024
Within groups	152.86	485	0.315		
Total	159.78	489			

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether mental health outcomes differ across students' levels of study. The results revealed a statistically significant difference across academic levels, $F(4, 485) = 2.85$, $p = 0.024$.

This finding suggests that students' mental health experiences vary depending on their academic level. Students in higher levels may experience increased psychological strain due to factors such as academic workload, research requirements, and concerns about graduation and future career prospects.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationship between social media usage and the mental health of undergraduate students at the University of Benin. The results presented in Chapter Four indicate that social media has become deeply embedded in the daily routines of students and plays a significant role in shaping their psychological experiences and behavioral patterns.

The socio-demographic characteristics presented in Table 4.1 show that the respondents were fairly balanced in terms of gender distribution, with females representing 51.2% and males representing 48.8% of the sample. The age distribution further indicates that the majority of respondents were within the 16–25 age range, which represents the typical undergraduate population. This age category is widely recognized as a developmental stage characterized by identity formation, increased peer influence, and intensive engagement with digital technologies. Previous studies have similarly noted that young adults are among the most active users of social media platforms due to their familiarity with digital communication and the social importance attached to online interaction (Keles *et al.*, 2020; Hou *et al.*, 2021). The high representation of students residing within the university environment, as indicated in Table 4.1, further suggests that respondents are immersed in peer networks and campus social life where social media communication is frequently integrated into daily interaction patterns. The findings relating to the frequency and patterns of social media usage indicate that undergraduate students at the University of Benin engage extensively with multiple social media platforms. As shown in Table 4.2, WhatsApp emerged as the most widely used platform among respondents, followed by TikTok, Twitter (X), and Instagram. These results align with earlier studies which reported that students often maintain accounts on multiple

platforms in order to fulfill different communication and entertainment needs (Adeosun & Akinwalere, 2016; Nduka & Popoola, 2024). The high usage of WhatsApp among respondents may be attributed to its accessibility, low data consumption, and its frequent use for academic communication such as sharing lecture notes, group discussions, and assignment coordination.

The findings presented in Table 4.3 further reveal that a significant proportion of respondents spend several hours on social media each day. Specifically, the majority of students reported spending between four and six hours daily on social media platforms, while a considerable number reported spending between seven and nine hours. These results indicate that social media consumption occupies a substantial portion of students' daily routines. Similar findings were reported by Sabo and Audu (2025), who observed that a large proportion of tertiary students spend several hours online each day, with many reporting between one and five hours of daily engagement. The high level of daily usage observed in the present study suggests that social media has become an integral component of students' social interaction, entertainment, and information access.

In addition to frequency of use, the temporal pattern of social media engagement also provides important insights into students' digital habits. The findings in Table 4.4 indicate that most respondents reported using social media during evening and late-night hours. Late-night usage accounted for the largest proportion of respondents, suggesting that many students engage with social media during periods that would traditionally be allocated to rest or sleep. This finding is consistent with earlier studies which identified nighttime browsing as a common pattern among university students (Shiraly *et al.*, 2024; Khalaf *et al.*, 2023). Excessive nighttime engagement with digital platforms has been linked to sleep disruption

and increased fatigue, which may subsequently affect cognitive performance and emotional stability.

The findings also demonstrate that social media serves multiple purposes in students' daily lives. As shown in Table 4.5, the primary uses of social media include communication with friends and family, entertainment, business activities, and self-expression. Academic purposes were reported by a smaller proportion of respondents. These results suggest that although social media has the potential to support educational collaboration, its dominant functions among students remain social and recreational. This observation aligns with the findings of Omoyemiju and Popoola (2022), who reported that Nigerian students primarily use social media platforms for communication and entertainment rather than academic activities.

The results presented in Table 4.7 further indicate that social media interruptions during study periods are relatively common. A considerable proportion of respondents reported checking notifications occasionally or frequently while studying. This behavior reflects the increasing integration of digital communication into students' daily routines and highlights the potential for distraction associated with constant connectivity. Previous research has similarly noted that frequent notification checking during academic activities can disrupt concentration and reduce learning efficiency (Khalaf *et al.*, 2023).

The findings relating to mental health challenges among students reveal that a considerable proportion of respondents experience psychological difficulties. As shown in Table 4.9, the most frequently reported challenges included loss of interest in academic or social activities and persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Other commonly reported challenges include sleep disturbances, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating. These findings are consistent with earlier research which indicates that university students often experience elevated levels

of psychological distress due to academic pressures, financial challenges, and social expectations (Keles *et al.*, 2020; Patel *et al.*, 2018).

The prevalence of anxiety and stress among respondents is further illustrated in Table 4.10, where a large proportion of students reported experiencing anxiety either sometimes or often. These findings highlight the psychological pressures associated with university life and reinforce the argument that mental health challenges among students are becoming increasingly common globally. Patel *et al.* (2018) similarly noted that university students constitute a high-risk population for mental health problems due to transitional life stages and academic demands.

The findings relating to the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes were further examined through inferential statistical analysis. The results of Hypothesis One indicate a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of social media usage and anxiety levels among students ($r = 0.452$, $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that students who engage more frequently with social media platforms tend to report higher levels of anxiety. This result supports earlier studies which reported that excessive engagement with social media is associated with increased emotional distress among young adults (Lin *et al.*, 2016; Twenge *et al.*, 2018). From a theoretical perspective, this relationship can be explained through Social Comparison Theory, which posits that individuals evaluate their self-worth by comparing themselves with others (Festinger, 1954). In social media environments where users are frequently exposed to idealized portrayals of peers' achievements, lifestyles, and appearances, such comparisons may generate feelings of inadequacy and emotional discomfort.

Similarly, the results of Hypothesis Two indicate a statistically significant relationship between time spent on social media and depressive symptoms among students ($r = 0.398$, $p < 0.05$). This finding implies that prolonged engagement with social media platforms is associated with increased depressive feelings among respondents. Previous studies have also documented similar relationships between extended social media use and depressive symptoms among adolescents and young adults (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Hou *et al.*, 2021). Continuous exposure to curated digital content often encourages upward social comparison, which may intensify dissatisfaction with personal achievements and life circumstances.

The findings presented in Table 4.19 further demonstrate that a substantial proportion of respondents reported experiencing depressive feelings after comparing themselves with others on social media platforms. When the responses are combined, a majority of students reported experiencing such feelings at least occasionally. This finding strongly supports the propositions of Social Comparison Theory, which explains how upward comparisons in social environments can negatively influence self-esteem and emotional well-being (Vogel *et al.*, 2020).

The study also revealed that social media use is associated with sleep disturbances among students. As indicated in Table 4.20, a large proportion of respondents reported experiencing difficulty sleeping as a result of excessive social media engagement. These findings support previous research which identified late-night digital engagement as a major contributor to sleep disruption among young adults (Shiraly *et al.*, 2024). Poor sleep quality has been widely linked to emotional instability, fatigue, and reduced academic performance among students.

Another important dimension of the study relates to students' awareness of the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use. The findings in Table 4.23 indicate that the

majority of respondents are aware that social media use can influence mental health outcomes. Similarly, Table 4.24 reveals that many respondents recognize risks such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and addiction as potential consequences of excessive social media use. These findings are consistent with earlier studies which reported moderate awareness of the psychological risks associated with digital media use among students (Nazari *et al.*, 2023; Osman *et al.*, 2025).

However, the inferential analysis presented in Hypothesis Three revealed a significant negative relationship between awareness of psychological risks and mental health challenges ($r = -0.276, p < 0.05$). This suggests that students who demonstrate greater awareness of the potential psychological consequences of excessive social media use tend to report better mental health outcomes. This finding supports the argument that awareness and digital literacy may serve as protective factors against harmful digital behaviors (Yeo *et al.*, 2024).

The findings also revealed the importance of institutional support in promoting healthier digital habits among students. Many respondents expressed strong support for awareness programs, counseling services, and campus-based mental health initiatives. These findings suggest that students recognize the need for institutional interventions that address the psychological implications of social media use. Similar recommendations have been proposed by Murthy (2025) and the World Health Organization (2024), who emphasized the importance of coordinated educational and policy responses to address the mental health challenges associated with digital media use.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that social media usage patterns significantly influence the mental health experiences of undergraduate students at the University of Benin. While social media platforms provide valuable opportunities for communication and

information exchange, excessive and unregulated engagement may expose students to psychological risks such as anxiety, depressive feelings, sleep disruption, and reduced academic productivity. These findings reinforce the relevance of Social Comparison Theory in explaining how digital environments shape students' self-perceptions and emotional well-being.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study examined the effects of social media usage on the mental health of undergraduate students at the University of Benin. The study was motivated by increasing concerns about the rapid growth of digital platform usage among young people and its potential implications for psychological well-being. Social media has become an important aspect of students' daily lives, influencing communication patterns, access to information, and the construction of social identities. While these platforms provide opportunities for interaction, learning, and entertainment, excessive engagement has been associated with psychological challenges such as anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and reduced self-esteem.

Guided by Social Comparison Theory, the study investigated the frequency and patterns of social media use among students, the relationship between social media engagement and mental health outcomes, students' awareness of the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use, and strategies for promoting healthier digital engagement.

Data for the study were obtained from 490 undergraduate students drawn from different faculties of the University of Benin. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze patterns of social media usage and mental health experiences, while inferential statistical techniques including Pearson Product–Moment Correlation, independent-samples t-test, and one-way Analysis of Variance were used to test the hypotheses of the study.

The results indicate that social media usage is highly prevalent among undergraduate students. A large proportion of respondents reported active engagement across multiple platforms such

as WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). Many students reported spending between four and six hours daily on social media platforms. The study also showed that students frequently engage with social media during evening and late-night hours, with many staying awake past midnight or checking social media immediately after waking up.

The study further indicates that a considerable proportion of students experience psychological challenges such as anxiety, emotional distress, sleep disturbances, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating. Inferential statistical analysis demonstrated significant relationships between social media usage patterns and mental health outcomes. Specifically, the frequency of social media usage was positively associated with anxiety levels, while the amount of time spent on social media was significantly related to symptoms of depression. The findings also suggest that students who demonstrate greater awareness of the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use tend to report better mental health outcomes.

Overall, the findings suggest that although social media plays an important role in students' communication and social interaction, excessive engagement may expose students to psychological risks that affect their emotional well-being and academic productivity.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that social media usage has significant implications for the mental health of undergraduate students at the University of Benin. The increasing integration of social media into students' daily routines means that digital platforms now play a major role in shaping their social interactions, self-perceptions, and emotional experiences.

The findings demonstrate that frequent and prolonged engagement with social media platforms is associated with increased vulnerability to psychological challenges such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, sleep disturbances, and reduced concentration. Continuous

exposure to digital environments characterized by curated self-presentation and social comparison may intensify feelings of inadequacy and emotional distress among students.

The study also confirms the relevance of Social Comparison Theory in explaining the relationship between social media use and students' mental health outcomes. Social media platforms create environments that encourage comparison with peers, which may negatively affect self-esteem and emotional well-being.

Although many students demonstrate awareness of the potential risks associated with excessive social media use, such awareness does not always translate into behavioral change. Therefore, promoting healthier social media habits requires not only individual awareness but also institutional support systems that encourage responsible digital engagement.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed.

First, undergraduate students should develop healthier digital habits by setting limits on the amount of time spent on social media platforms. Reducing late-night engagement with digital devices and maintaining balanced daily routines may help improve sleep quality and emotional well-being.

Second, students should be encouraged to engage more purposefully with social media platforms by using them for academic collaboration, professional networking, and meaningful communication rather than passive browsing or comparison-based interactions.

Third, universities should incorporate digital mental health literacy programs into student orientation programs, seminars, and academic workshops. Such initiatives can educate students about the psychological effects of excessive social media use and equip them with strategies for maintaining healthy digital habits.

Fourth, university counseling services should be strengthened in order to provide adequate support for students experiencing mental health challenges associated with excessive social media use. Counseling units can offer confidential psychological support, peer mentoring programs, and awareness campaigns aimed at reducing stigma surrounding mental health issues.

Finally, policymakers and educational stakeholders should recognize the growing influence of digital technologies on young people's mental health and develop policies that promote responsible social media usage among students.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge in several important ways.

First, the study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between social media usage patterns and mental health outcomes among undergraduate students in a Nigerian university context. Much of the existing literature on social media and mental health has focused on Western and Asian societies; therefore, this study contributes context-specific evidence from the University of Benin.

Second, the study demonstrates that both the frequency and duration of social media engagement significantly influence psychological outcomes such as anxiety and depressive symptoms among university students.

Third, the study contributes theoretically by applying Social Comparison Theory to explain how social media environments influence students' psychological well-being. The findings show that digital platforms create opportunities for constant comparison with others, which may shape students' self-perceptions and emotional experiences.

Finally, the study contributes to institutional and policy discussions by emphasizing the importance of digital mental health literacy programs and support systems within universities. The findings highlight the need for universities to adopt proactive strategies that promote balanced and responsible social media engagement among students.

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APPENDIX (Questionnaire)

Questionnaire: Effects of Social Media on Mental Health of University of Benin Students

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

1. Age: 16–20 years 21–25 years 26–30 years Above 30 years

2. Gender: Male Female

3. Level of Study: 100 Level 200 Level 300 Level 400 Level 500 Level and above

4. Faculty: Arts Education Engineering Environmental Sciences Law Life Sciences Management Sciences Pharmacy Physical Sciences Social Sciences
 Other (please specify): _____

5. Marital Status: Single Married Divorced/Separated Other: _____

6. Religion: Christianity Islam Traditional Other (please specify):

7. Do you reside in: University Hostel Off-campus accommodation Family resident

Section B: Frequency and Patterns of Social Media Usage among Students

8. Which social media platforms do you use most frequently? (Tick all that apply)
 Facebook Instagram Twitter (X) WhatsApp TikTok Snapchat
YouTube Telegram Others (please specify): _____

9. How often do you access social media in a typical day? Less than 1 hour 1–3 hours
- 4–6 hours 7–9 hours More than 9 hours
10. At what time of the day do you mostly use social media? (Choose the most applicable)
- Early morning (6am – 10am) Late morning (10am – 12noon) Afternoon (12noon – 5pm) Evening (5pm – 9pm) Late night (9pm – 2am) Throughout the day
11. What is your primary purpose of using social media? (Tick all that apply) Academic purposes (research, study groups, learning) Entertainment (videos, music, memes, games) Communication with friends/family News and current affairs
- Business/marketing Self-expression/sharing personal updates Other (please specify): _____
12. How many social media accounts do you actively use? 1–2 3–4 5–6 More than 6
13. How often do you check your social media notifications while studying? Never
- Rarely Occasionally Frequently Always
14. On average, how much of your daily free time is spent on social media? Less than 25%

25%–50% 51%–75% Above 75%

Section C: Common Mental Health Challenges Experienced by Students

15. In the past 6 months, have you experienced any of the following? (Tick all that apply)

Persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness Loss of interest in academic or social activities Difficulty concentrating or paying attention Frequent headaches, restlessness, or fatigue Sleep disturbances (insomnia or oversleeping) Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge Thoughts of self-harm or suicide None of the above

16. How often do you feel anxious or stressed about academic or personal issues?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

17. How would you rate your overall emotional well-being in the last semester? Very poor

Poor Fair Good Excellent

18. Do you feel that social media contributes to your mental health challenges? Not at all

To a small extent To a moderate extent To a large extent Completely

19. Which of the following mental health challenges do you believe are most worsened by social media use? (Tick all that apply) Anxiety Depression Low self-esteem

Loneliness or social isolation Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Sleep disturbance

None Excellent

Section D: Time Spent on Social Media and Indicators of Anxiety, Depression, and Emotional Well-being

Part 1: Time Spent on Social Media

20. On average, how many hours per day do you spend on social media? Less than 1 hour

1–3 hours 4–6 hours 7–9 hours More than 9 hours

21. How often do you stay up late at night (past midnight) because of social media use?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

22. How often do you check social media immediately after waking up? Never

Rarely Sometimes Often Always

Part 2: Indicators of Anxiety, Depression, and Emotional Well-being

(In the last two weeks, how often have you experienced the following?)

23. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge Not at all Several days More than half the

days Nearly every day

24. Trouble relaxing or feeling restless while offline Not at all Several days More

than half the days Nearly every day

25. Little interest or pleasure in doing things (including academic work) Not at all

Several days More than half the days Nearly every day

26. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless after comparing yourself with others on social

media: Not at all Several days More than half the days Nearly every day

27. Difficulty sleeping because of excessive social media use: Not at all Several days

More than half the days Nearly every day

28. How often do you feel that social media affects your academic productivity negatively?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

29. How would you rate your overall emotional well-being considering your social media use?

Very poor Poor Fair Good Excellent

**Section E: Students' Awareness of the Psychological Risks Associated with Excessive
Social Media Usage**

30. Are you aware that excessive use of social media can negatively affect mental health?

Yes No Not sure

31. Which of the following mental health risks do you know can be linked to excessive social

media use? (Tick all that apply) Anxiety Depression Low self-esteem

Sleep disturbance Academic stress Addiction None of the above

32. Do you believe that constant comparison with others on social media can affect students'

self-esteem? Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

33. Do you think staying online late at night on social media can affect your concentration and learning ability? Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

34. In your opinion, does excessive social media usage contribute to emotional problems such as loneliness or isolation? Not at all To a small extent To a moderate extent To a large extent Completely

35. Are you aware of any counseling or mental health support services available to students at the University of Benin? Yes No Not sure

36. If Yes, have you ever used such services? Yes No

Section F: Measures for Promoting Healthier Social Media Habits and Strengthening Mental Health Support

37. Do you think students should be educated on the psychological risks of excessive social media use? Yes No Not sure

38. Which of the following strategies would help students develop healthier social media habits? (Tick all that apply) Time management and digital detox programs Workshops on safe and productive use of social media Campus campaigns on mental health awareness Limiting notifications and screen time through apps Encouraging offline social and recreational activities Access to counseling and peer

support groups

39. Would you be willing to attend workshops or seminars on managing social media use and mental health? Yes No Maybe
40. What role do you think the University of Benin should play in addressing mental health challenges linked to social media use? (Tick all that apply) Provide more accessible counseling services Train lecturers and staff to identify students in distress Incorporate mental health education into the curriculum Create safe spaces for students to talk about challenges Partner with NGOs/health organizations for awareness programs
41. How effective do you think peer support programs (students supporting fellow students) would be in improving mental health? Not effective at all Slightly effective Moderately effective Very effective Extremely effective
42. If given a chance, would you like to contribute to initiatives that promote healthier social media use and stronger mental health support on campus? Yes No Not sure
43. In your own opinion, what other measures can be taken to help students use social media more responsibly and protect their mental health?

