

**ROMANTIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN MEDIA
AND ITS INFLUENCE ON YOUTHS PERCEPTION**

BY

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY.**

SEPTEMBER, 2025

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**DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION,
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UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT
OF MASS COMMUNICATION, FACULTY OF ART,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ART (B.A)
DEGREE IN MASS COMMUNICATION**

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DECLARATION

This project is based on a study undertaken by me Ayomide Racheal Okunlola, in the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts under the supervision of Mrs Amenze Bazuaye. All ideas and results of this study, were based off my personal research, where the views of others were used; they were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work **“ROMANTIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON YOUTHS PERCEPTION”** was written and submitted by Ayomide Racheal Okunlola, Matriculation Number ART2101010, to the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

Mrs. Amenze Bazuaye
Supervisor

Date

Dr. Daniel O. Ekhareafo
Head of Department

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this Research Project to God Almighty, for his wisdom, grace, for being my Source of strength and for helping me throughout of this academic journey.

I also dedicate this work to my parents Mr & Mrs Okunlola and Oluwabusola, Omolola and Oluwatosin for their love, guidance and unwavering support. Thank you so much for your love, encouragement, guidance and financial support. I couldn't have done this without you, I love you guys.

STUDENT'S THESIS

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The growing visibility of mental health content across social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube has made discussions around mental illness more common; however, these portrayals are often presented in aesthetic or glorified ways. As a result, conditions such as depression and anxiety are sometimes misrepresented as marks of creativity, emotional depth, or identity rather than as serious psychological challenges requiring support and treatment. This study adopted a survey research design, with the data collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of 11 open ended questions. Respondants were selected using a convenient sampling technique, and the data was analysed using simple percentages and tabular presentations. The findings reveal that while most respondents believe the media has increased awareness of mental health, a significant proportion also acknowledge the spread of misleading portrayals that make mental illness appear desirable or fashionable. The results further indicate that many youths have casually used mental health terms online without medical diagnosis and frequently admire influencers who openly discuss or display mental health struggles. The study concludes that the media plays a dual role it both raises awareness and contributes to misconceptions about mental illness. It recommends that filmmakers, and journalists adopt more responsible and balanced approaches in representing mental health. The research also calls for increased mental health education, collaboration between media professionals and psychologists, and stricter content regulation on social platforms to prevent the glamorisation of psychological disorders among Nigerian youths.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This topic explores how the media represents Mental Illness to the youth, specifically in Nigeria. By Romanticization, we mean making serious conditions seem desirable, to have conditions like OCD, depression, anxiety, even disorders like schizophrenia, not even for the sake of raising awareness, but it has become a trend that downplays the clinical seriousness of these conditions. These new trends have been immensely fueled by pop culture, literature and social media.

If we look back on older media, we can take note of how they started to really create stigma by associating mental illnesses with madness and violence. In films and literature, characters such as villains, outcasts or tragic figures are always portrayed as mentally ill. But in the 20th century and early 2000s, the rise of psychology and mental health advocacy led to a more nuanced portrayal; for instance, movies like “A Beautiful Mind” (2001) and “Girl Interrupted” (1999) tried their best to properly portray and depict the struggles of mental illnesses realistically. Then, from 2010, when social media started evolving, even till this current day (TikTok, Facebook, Instagram), has contributed to making mental illness seem like a nice thing to have.

Social media trends tend to glamorize self-harm and depressive episodes as a sign of being “unique”.

Glamorizing suffering is one thing that social media has made popular, with youths posting about how their depressed and not actually trying to seek help. Some post aesthetic pictures like self-harm scars, getting into drugs to feel numb, they make disorders and trauma look poetic rather than painful.

Another thing that makes mental illness look desirable is when fictional characters with certain mental illnesses or disorders are portrayed as intelligent, artistic or let them be seen as misunderstood geniuses (Sherlock Holmes, Joker). It paints a picture for some that the reason for their desirable traits is their disorder; in another way would also be interpreted as “If I seek help, I might lose my uniqueness,” which reduces their drive for recovery, because visibility brings awareness, but once it's glorified, It becomes desirable, which undermines the need for clinical help.

A study conducted among youths in Southwest Nigeria revealed that media representations significantly shape public attitudes and perceptions towards individuals and mental health conditions. In Nigeria, where general health education is still very limited and stigma is still very dominant, especially for young people. This research recommends that the media provide relevant and new perspectives on public health and communication tactics to reduce this stigma. Social media platforms offer opportunities to enhance knowledge and awareness among emerging adults in Nigeria.

This suggests that while social media can be a valuable tool for connection and information, its overuse may negatively impact mental well-being. The media plays a crucial role in health communication and education. The media plays a crucial role in health communication and education. By promoting self-compassion interventions and psycho-educational programs, media outlets can support the mental health and well-being of Nigerian youth, particularly those facing economic hardships. Responsible media representation can help normalize conversations about mental health and raise awareness about the prevalence and diversity of mental health conditions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The romanticization of mental illness in media has become a growing concern, particularly among Nigerian youths. Films, television shows, books, and social media platforms often portray conditions such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder as mysterious, poetic, or even desirable. This misrepresentation can lead to distorted perceptions, where mental illness is trivialized, glorified, or misunderstood as a personality trait rather than a serious health condition.

In Nigeria, where mental health awareness remains limited and stigma is still very common, mainly because of the traditional Nigerian belief that somewhat attributes to the reason why most youth don't seek help when they're going through things. Mental illness as most people believe is tied to things like "Spiritual attacks"

and curses brought up on one by the supernatural forces, which in turn discourages many from seeking professional help.

Most University students that often face academic pressure and economic struggles are especially vulnerable to falling into depression and anxiety because of their fear of failure and disappointed. Most youths can't voice out their feelings because In Nigeria having feelings other than happiness and gratefulness every other feeling is just you "letting the demon have power over your life". Which further enforces Suicidal thoughts and consumption of depressive and brain rotting content as a way of finding people that feel the same way they do, and also to find what will distract them from their current issues.

Many Nigerian artists and authors incorporate themes of depression, loneliness, and self-destruction into their works, sometimes framing these struggles as signs of artistic genius. Although these narratives raise awareness, they can also contribute to the idea that pain and suffering are essential to creativity and deep thinking. Nollywood movies and even international movies often portrays mental illness through exaggerated stereotypes, depicting mentally ill individuals as either violent, possessed, or comic relief characters. And Films rarely depict therapy, medication, or recovery, reinforcing the notion that mental illness is either incurable or something to be feared.

Despite the rise in conversations about mental health, there remains a gap in responsible media representation and public education. Many Nigerian youths are exposed to misleading narratives that romanticize suffering rather than promote recovery and professional help. This study seeks to investigate how the romanticization of mental illness in media influences youth perception, self-identification with mental disorders, and attitudes toward mental health treatment in Nigeria.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are;

1. To investigate how social media platforms contribute to the self-diagnosis of mental illness among Nigerian teenagers and young adults.
2. To examine the portrayal of mental health conditions in films and television shows, and the extent to which these portrayals reinforce stigma or romanticize mental illness.
3. To determine how media representations influence societal attitudes by challenging the stigma surrounding mental illness in Nigeria.
4. To propose strategies for media platforms, Nollywood filmmakers, musicians, and content creators to promote accurate and sensitive portrayals of mental health issues.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does social media idolization of mental illness affect the self-perception and mental health attitudes of Nigerian youths?
2. What role do Nigerian cultural beliefs and societal norms play in shaping youth perspectives on mental health?
3. How can responsible media portrayals help combat both stigma and idealization of mental illness?
4. How can responsible and ethical media portrayals help counter both the stigma and idealisation of mental illness in Nigeria?

1.5 Research Hypothesis

The following theories can be developed in light of the goals:

H1: Self-diagnosis among young Nigerians is significantly correlated with the "Idealization" of mental issues on social media.

H2: Youths are more likely to view mental disease as a personality attribute than a medical problem if they are exposed to specific depictions of mental issues in music and movies.

H3: Most young people in Nigeria are less likely to seek professional assistance for mental health problems if they've been exposed to "romanticized" mental health content.

H4: Media representations influence the attitudes of young Nigerians regarding mental issues moderated by cultural values and social conventions.

H5: Youths in Nigeria are more inclined to participate in mental health education and seek assistance when they witness responsible and realistic depictions of mental illness in the media.

1.6 **Significance of the Study**

This research aims to highlight the dangers of romanticized mental illness portrayals and their impact on Nigerian youths. By examining various media platforms, age groups, and cultural influences, the study will provide insights into how media can be used as a tool for mental health awareness rather than misinformation. The findings will be valuable for policymakers, educators, content creators, and mental health advocates in Nigeria, helping them develop responsible storytelling, public awareness campaigns, and mental health education programs.

1.7 **Delimitation of Study**

This study explores the influence of romanticized portrayals of mental illness in media on the perceptions and behaviors of Nigerian youths aged 15 to 25, with a particular focus on students and young adults.

This study examines how Media Platforms (TikTok, Instagram and Twitter) Nollywood films, Nigerian music, and selected literary works.

This study also focuses on selected urban and semi-urban areas in Nigeria where access to media is high (e.g., Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and Enugu).

This study also examines how depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and self-harm tendencies affect one's mental health due to their frequent portrayal in both local and international media

Another important part this study focuses on is the traditional beliefs, religious interpretations, and societal norms that may shape how mental illness is viewed in Nigerian communities.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Romanticization of Mental Illness: The depiction of mental health conditions in media as aesthetically alluring, enigmatic, or coveted, frequently downplaying their gravity and clinical reality. This may encompass romanticizing anguish or portraying mental illness as a distinctive personality trait rather than a disorder.

Mental Illness: Clinically recognized psychological disorders that affect a person's thinking, feeling, mood, or behavior. Common examples include depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia.

Self-Diagnosis: The act of self-identifying or associating oneself with a mental health condition without undergoing a formal assessment or diagnosis by a licensed mental health professional, often relying on media depictions or online resources.

Stigma: Negative attitudes, beliefs, or stereotypes directed at individuals with mental health conditions, which can result in discrimination, shame, or social isolation.

Cultural Beliefs: The traditional, religious, and societal norms that influence how mental illness is understood and addressed within Nigerian communities.

Responsible Media Representation: Accurate, balanced, and sensitive depictions of mental illness in media that foster comprehension, diminish stigma, and cultivate positive attitudes towards mental health.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Preamble

The discourse surrounding mental health has gained significant traction in contemporary society, with increasing recognition of its importance, particularly among young people. However, alongside growing awareness, there exists a concerning trend in media portrayals, the glamour of mental illness. Rather than presenting mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder as clinical issues requiring appropriate care and intervention, various media platforms; including social media, film, music, and literature which often depicts these conditions as glamorous, artistic, or symbolic of emotional depth.

In the Nigerian context, this trend is particularly problematic due to existing challenges such as widespread stigma, cultural misconceptions, and limited access to mental health services. Nigerian youths, who constitute a significant proportion of social media users and consumers of Nollywood content, are increasingly influenced by these media representations. The portrayal of mental illness as a lifestyle or identity trait, rather than a serious health condition, has the potential to distort perceptions, encourage self-diagnosis, trivialize psychological distress, and ultimately deter help-seeking behaviour.

This study, therefore, seeks to critically examine the idolization of mental illness in media and its influence on the perception and mental health attitudes of Nigerian youths. By exploring the interplay between media content, cultural beliefs, and youth behaviour, the research aims to contribute to a more accurate understanding of mental health in Nigeria and promote responsible media representation.

2.2 Historical Review

The representation of mental illness in media has evolved over centuries, shaped by cultural beliefs, scientific advancements, and artistic trends. Historically, mental illness was misunderstood and heavily stigmatised, often associated with supernatural forces, moral weakness, or criminality. However, over time, with the growth of psychology and psychiatry as academic disciplines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, perceptions began to shift albeit unevenly.

In Western literature, early romantic portrayals can be traced back to the Romantic Era (late 18th to mid-19th century), where madness was frequently linked to genius and emotional intensity. Notable literary figures such as Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, and Edgar Allan Poe presented characters whose mental anguish was central to their brilliance or tragic beauty. These early narratives laid the foundation for a recurring theme in Western storytelling: the suffering artist or the tortured soul, whose emotional instability was seen as both a curse and a source of inspiration.

With the rise of cinema in the 20th century, the idolization of mental illness became more visually impactful. Hollywood films, particularly in the post-war era, began depicting characters with mental health challenges in ways that were sometimes sympathetic, but often dramatized. Films such as “A Streetcar Named Desire” (1951) and “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” (1975) contributed to a public fascination with psychiatric institutions and psychological complexity, albeit with limited accuracy.

The 1990s and early 2000s marked a significant shift with the emergence of youth-targeted media, including television shows (*Skins*, *13 Reasons Why*), music, and literature that often framed mental health struggles as intrinsic to youth identity. Although these works sometimes intended to raise awareness, they frequently fell into the trap of portraying mental illness as fashionable or desirable. Social media later amplified this trend, with platforms like Tumblr in the early 2010s becoming hotspots for aestheticized content related to self-harm, depression, and anxiety.

In Nigeria, portrayals of mental illness have been historically shaped by traditional beliefs, often rooted in spiritualism or moral judgement. Early Nollywood films tended to depict characters with mental illness as "possessed," dangerous, or morally corrupt. Only in recent years have some Nigerian filmmakers and content creators begun to address mental health with greater sensitivity. However,

romanticised portrayals remain common, particularly on social media platforms where global trends are adopted without sufficient localisation or medical accuracy.

The digital age has significantly democratised content creation, allowing individuals particularly youths to share personal stories and interpretations of mental health. While this has fostered openness and reduced silence around the topic, it has also led to widespread misinformation and the trivialisation of serious conditions. Romanticised posts, such as aesthetic quotes about sadness, stylised images of crying, or “dark academia” content, can influence impressionable youths to view mental illness as a character trait rather than a medical condition.

In summary, the idolization of mental illness in media has deep historical roots, evolving from literary archetypes to global digital phenomena. While some shifts have contributed to awareness, others have blurred the lines between empathy and glamorisation posing a significant challenge in shaping healthy perceptions among young people, especially in contexts like Nigeria where cultural misconceptions and a lack of professional resources compound the issue.

2.2.1 History of the Romantization of Mental Illness in Media

The idolization of mental illness in media has a long and complex history that reflects evolving societal attitudes, cultural narratives, and aesthetic trends. This phenomenon can be traced as far back as the Romantic Era of the late 18th and early

19th centuries, where literature and art began to depict mental instability as an emblem of genius, passion, and sensitivity.

During this period, writers and poets such as Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and John Keats often portrayed characters with melancholia or emotional turmoil in a manner that elevated their suffering to something sublime and noble. Edgar Allan Poe, for example, used madness as a literary device to explore the darker aspects of the human psyche, blurring the line between mental illness and artistic brilliance. These portrayals helped cement the archetype of the “tortured artist,” a figure whose creativity was inextricably linked to inner turmoil.

Moving into the 19th and early 20th centuries, mental illness began to gain attention from the fields of psychiatry and psychology, yet popular media continued to represent it in romanticised or misunderstood ways. In early cinema, mental disorders were often exaggerated or used as tools for drama and suspense. Films such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1920) and *Spellbound* (1945) capitalised on psychological themes, often reinforcing the notion that those with mental illness were either dangerous or tragically misunderstood.

The post-World War II era brought a slight shift towards more nuanced portrayals, especially in Hollywood. Films like *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) featured characters grappling with psychological disorders in a manner that invited empathy, yet they often relied on

dramatic tropes and did little to accurately depict the medical realities of mental illness. Still, these films contributed to the growing cultural fascination with the inner lives of the mentally unwell.

By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the emergence of youth-oriented media marked a turning point. Television series such as *My So-Called Life*, *Skins* (UK), and later *13 Reasons Why* began to portray teen angst, depression, and trauma in ways that resonated with younger audiences. While these portrayals occasionally aimed to raise awareness, they often romanticised suffering presenting it as deep, meaningful, or even attractive. The depiction of suicide and self-harm, in particular, was criticised for potentially glamorising these issues rather than promoting understanding or prevention.

The rise of social media in the 2010s further intensified the idolization of mental illness. Platforms like Tumblr, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter became spaces where users shared quotes, artwork, and aestheticized imagery associated with depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. Though some content was intended to foster solidarity and self-expression, it often blurred the line between advocacy and aesthetic. While these representations have helped de-stigmatise conversations around mental health to an extent, they have also contributed to a culture where psychological disorders are misunderstood, trivialised, or even fetishized. The impact is particularly

potent among adolescents and young adults, who are in the formative stages of self-concept development and are more susceptible to media influence.

In conclusion, the idolization of mental illness in media originating from artistic and literary traditions has evolved into a modern phenomenon that spans film, television, and digital spaces. Despite some positive shifts in awareness, the persistence of glamorised portrayals continues to shape public perception in ways that may hinder rather than help understanding, empathy, and appropriate responses to mental health challenges.

2.2.2 History of the Romantization of Mental Illness in Nigeria Media

The historical treatment of mental illness in Nigeria has largely been shaped by traditional belief systems, religious interpretations, and, more recently, the evolving influence of modern media. While idolization of mental illness in Western media has a long literary and cinematic history, in Nigeria, the trend is relatively recent and intertwined with changing socio-cultural attitudes, urbanisation, and global media exposure.

Traditionally, mental illness in Nigeria was viewed through a spiritual and moral lens, often interpreted as a sign of demonic possession, ancestral curses, or divine punishment. Indigenous communities treated mental disturbances with spiritual interventions—such as rituals, herbal remedies, and consultations with traditional

healers rather than medical or psychological approaches. As such, mental illness was not romanticised but heavily stigmatised, with sufferers often isolated or institutionalised in spiritual homes or prayer camps.

With the emergence of Nollywood in the early 1990s, the portrayal of mental illness in Nigerian media began to take a more structured albeit problematic form.

Early films such as *End of the Wicked* and *Karishika* portrayed individuals with psychological disturbances as either victims of supernatural attacks or villains driven by malevolent forces. These depictions reinforced public fear and suspicion of mental illness, framing it as a mysterious or contagious affliction rather than a medical condition.

As Nollywood matured in the 2000s and 2010s, some attempts were made to explore mental health issues with more sensitivity, yet sensationalism remained a dominant trend. Characters experiencing mental breakdowns were often portrayed in exaggerated, theatrical ways screaming, running half-naked in the streets, or engaging in violent behaviour. These dramatizations served more to entertain or scare than to educate, and often lacked psychological accuracy. However, these portrayals did not yet reflect in the Western media; they leaned more towards demonization or victimisation.

The advent of social media in Nigeria around the 2010s introduced a new dimension to mental health discourse. Nigerian youths, increasingly connected to

global platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, began engaging with international mental health narratives. This digital exposure introduced trends that romanticised mental illness through aestheticized quotes about depression, glorified depictions of emotional instability, and the adoption of identities such as the "sad girl" or the "broken but deep" persona. In many cases, these borrowed aesthetics were reproduced without critical context, leading to misinterpretations of genuine mental health challenges as expressions of depth, creativity, or trendiness.

Local content creators and influencers also began sharing personal struggles with anxiety, depression, and trauma. Some with the intention of promoting awareness, while others unintentionally perpetuated romanticised images. For example, melancholic photo filters, poetic captions about emotional pain, and the public display of breakdowns often garnered significant attention and praise, subtly reinforcing the idea that emotional suffering equated to uniqueness or artistic identity.

Despite these shifts, institutional understanding of mental health in Nigeria remains limited, and professional care is often inaccessible. This gap has contributed to a scenario where media becomes a primary source of mental health information, making romanticised portrayals especially influential. As mental health issues become more openly discussed, the challenge lies in balancing openness with accuracy ensuring that awareness does not slip into glorification.

In conclusion, the idolization of mental illness in Nigeria is a relatively recent phenomenon, largely influenced by global media trends and the digital habits of Nigerian youth. While it marks a break from the intense stigmatisation of the past, it introduces new risks particularly the trivialisation of mental disorders and the normalisation of suffering as an aesthetic. This calls for more responsible representation in both traditional and digital media, alongside increased mental health education and access to professional support.

2.3 Conceptual Review

2.3.1 The Concept of Mental Illness

Mental illness includes conditions such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, and bipolar disorder, often underreported due to stigma and poor mental health infrastructure. According to the World Health Organization (2021), Nigeria has one of the highest rates of mental illness in Africa, with approximately one in four Nigerians affected. Despite this, mental illness remains widely misunderstood and frequently interpreted through cultural and spiritual lenses.

In Nigeria, the emergence of social media content that aestheticizes emotional pain and trauma on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, etc. often blend humour and pain in ways that attracts sympathy but also trivialize mental distress.

In films, portrayals of mental illness have gradually shifted from demonisation to more complex, though sometimes romanticised, narratives. A notable example is the 2020 Nollywood film "Finding Hubby", which subtly portrayed a character dealing with depression. While the representation drew attention to mental health issues among young urban Nigerians, some critics argued that the portrayal lacked clinical depth and romanticised the character's suffering by linking it to romantic rejection and existential beauty.

Additionally, popular Nigerian musicians such as Omah Lay and BNXXN (f.k.a. Buju) and even global artists like Billie Ellis, Khalid etc. have released songs that touch on themes of depression, loneliness, and anxiety. For instance, Omah Lay's "Understand" and "I'm a mess" depict emotional turmoil in poetic and aesthetically appealing ways, which resonate with many Nigerian youths. While such music can be cathartic, it also risks normalising or even glorifying persistent emotional instability as part of youth identity.

Research conducted by Oduguwa and Ogundimu (2022) found that Nigerian youths increasingly turn to online communities for mental health expression due to a lack of accessible professional care. This online space often encourages vulnerability and peer validation, but also reinforces the aestheticisation of sadness. In a survey by Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative (MANI), many young Nigerians reported feeling

seen by online content that expressed emotional distress, but admitted that such content rarely motivated them to seek actual help.

Social media's role in shaping youth mental health perceptions in Nigeria is growing rapidly. A study by Adeyanju & Idowu (2021) revealed that 70% of Nigerian youths felt that social media influenced how they understood mental health issues. Many reported seeing content that presented sadness and anxiety as part of being "deep," "artistic," or even "fashionable" a clear marker of idolization.

2.4 **Opinion Review**

The idolization of mental illness in media is a deeply concerning phenomenon that deserves critical attention, particularly in a society like Nigeria where mental health issues are still heavily stigmatised and under-researched. While global media platforms have helped normalise conversations around mental illness, they have also created a new dilemma: the transformation of mental distress into a form of aesthetic expression, especially among youths.

I would say, that the increasing tendency to portray mental illness as 'beautiful suffering' or 'emotionally deep' in Nigerian media and online spaces is both misleading and dangerous. It distorts the harsh realities of living with a mental illness and risks trivialising the seriousness of these conditions. For instance, content

portraying depression with soft lighting, melancholic music, and romantic heartbreak often lacks any reference to the clinical, social, and economic implications of the disorder. Instead of encouraging help-seeking behaviour, it may validate inaction or self-isolation.

Furthermore, the role of Nigerian youth culture in reinforcing these portrayals cannot be ignored. Many young people consume and reproduce content that presents emotional suffering as a marker of creativity, sensitivity, or uniqueness. Social media trends, such as using phrases like "mentally unstable" or "I'm not okay but its fine" in a humorous or poetic way, promote an unhealthy normalisation of psychological distress. While such expressions may stem from genuine experiences, their stylised presentation often obscures the need for professional intervention. However, this issue is not entirely negative. The idolization trend, though problematic, has inadvertently opened up space for more conversations about mental health in Nigeria. In a society where mental illness has long been a taboo subject, the fact that young people now speak openly albeit imperfectly about their emotional struggles marks a cultural shift. It suggests a readiness to engage with mental health issues, even if the current discourse lacks depth and accuracy.

With that being said, it is crucial to differentiate between awareness and accuracy. While emotional expression through media is valid and important. Media

creators, influencers, and mental health advocates in Nigeria must take responsibility for ensuring that portrayals of mental illness are sensitive, realistic, and balanced.

In conclusion, while the idolization of mental illness in media reflects a broader desire for emotional connection and identity among youths, it must be addressed with caution. Without critical reflection and education, this trend risks perpetuating misconceptions and hindering mental health progress in Nigeria. What is needed now is a more informed, empathetic, and culturally grounded representation of mental health one that moves beyond aestheticisation and toward genuine understanding and support.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two primary theories: Cultivation Theory and Social Learning Theory. These theories provide a comprehensive lens through which the relationship between media content and youth perception particularly regarding mental health can be critically examined.

Cultivation Theory

This Theory explains that prolonged exposure to media content gradually shapes individuals' perceptions of reality. According to George Gerbner (1976), the more time people spend consuming media, the more likely they are to accept the media's version of reality, even if it is distorted or unrealistic.

Relating this context of Nigerian youth, constant engagement with media especially social media, Nollywood, and music which can lead to internalised beliefs that romanticised portrayals of mental illness reflect genuine or desirable experiences. For instance, youths may begin to view emotional suffering as a normal part of adolescence or associate it with creativity, depth, or uniqueness. This exposure can cultivate unrealistic and potentially harmful attitudes towards mental health, including reluctance to seek professional help.

Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura, 1977)

Social Learning Theory is a theory that asserts individuals to learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions through observation and imitation of others, especially those perceived as role models. Bandura emphasises the role of modelling, reinforcement, and self-efficacy in shaping behaviour. Nigerian youths would often look up to influencers, celebrities, and fictional characters who discuss or display signs of mental illness in romanticised ways. When these portrayals are met with admiration or social reward (e.g., likes, shares, and sympathy), young people are more likely to imitate them. This is particularly significant in a digital age where emotional expression online can gain social validation, even if it misrepresents the realities of mental health.

Complementary Perspective: Symbolic Interactionism

Although not a primary theory in this study, Symbolic Interactionism offers a supporting perspective. This theory explores how people give meaning to symbols and interact based on those meanings. In digital spaces, terms like "broken," "unstable," or "depressed" have acquired symbolic value often representing emotional depth or relatability, regardless of clinical accuracy.

In Nigeria, where mental health literacy is still developing, the symbolic use of such terms may lead to further misunderstanding. This highlights the importance of contextual media literacy and public health education.

Conclusion: By combining Cultivation Theory and Social Learning Theory, this study is able to explore both the long-term influence of media content and the behavioural modelling that occurs through social interactions and digital platforms. These theories provide a robust foundation for understanding how romanticised depictions of mental illness shape Nigerian youths' perceptions, attitudes, and potentially, their behaviours.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the proposed methods and procedures that will guide the conduct of the study. It includes the research design, population, sample size, sampling technique, data collection instruments, and the methods intended for data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

This study will adopt the survey research technique to investigate the Romantization of mental illness and its influence to youth perception

3.3 Population of the Study

For this study we are going to work with an estimated number of 200 participants.

3.4 Sample Size

The estimated sample size for this study is 400. The researcher arrived at this figure by using the Taro Yamane's Formula

$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ n = sample size N = Population size (the universe) E = Sampling error at 0.05 = raised to the power of Therefore: $n = \frac{400}{1 + 400(0.05)^2} = \frac{400}{1 + 400(0.0025)} = \frac{400}{1 + 1} = \frac{400}{2} = 200$ n , therefore, is 200

3.5 Sampling Procedure

This study will make use of the simple random sampling method. This technique ensures that every full-time undergraduate student in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Benin, Ekehuan Campus, has an equal chance of being selected.

3.6 Research Instrument

For this study, the questionnaire will be designed in a clear and simple format to make it easy for students to understand and respond to. It will cover key areas related to the study's focus and will include close ended questions to facilitate efficient data collection and analysis. A total of 11 close-ended questions have been carefully crafted to elicit relevant and focused responses from the participants.

3.7 Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it will be carefully developed and reviewed to ensure that the questions are relevant to the study's objectives. The questionnaire will then be presented to the researcher's supervisor for additional feedback and a suggestion, helping to make sure it effectively captures the intended information from the respondents.

3.8 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the research instrument will be determined using the test-retest method. This method involves administering the same set of questionnaires to the same group of participants on two different occasions, with a one-week interval between the two administrations.

The aim is to assess the consistency of responses over time. The results obtained from the first and second administrations will be compared and correlated. A strong positive correlation between the two sets of responses will indicate that the instrument is reliable.

3.9 Method of Data Collection

The primary method of data collection will be through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. After responses have been received, they will be

checked for completeness and carefully sorted. The data will be grouped and analyzed using basic statistical tools such as tables, frequencies, and percentages. These tools will help to present the findings in a clear and easy-to-understand format.

3.10 Method of Data Analysis

After the questionnaires have been collected, the responses will be checked for completeness and then carefully sorted. The data will be grouped and summarized using simple statistical tools such as tables, frequencies, and percentages. These tools will help to present the findings in a clear and easy to understand manner.

After all the questionnaires were collected, the data was sorted, organized, and carefully analyzed. The responses were entered into tables and interpreted using simple percentages and frequency counts. This method was chosen because it is easy to understand and effective for summarizing the opinions and responses of a large number of people.

The use of tables and percentages made it possible to clearly show patterns in the data, such as how many people are aware of how mental illness is glamorized, what type of media they are most exposed to, and how these campaigns have influenced their thinking. The analysis helped to provide answers to the research questions and supported the overall objective of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter depicts the information garnered from the respondents and discusses the findings in sequence with the topic of this research: "Romantization of Mental Illness in media and its influence on youths perception" among UNIBEN Students. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed across different levels in the Department of Mass Communication, and all were successfully filled and returned, giving a 100% response rate. The data collected is presented in simple tables and explained in a straightforward manner.

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	97	48%
Female	103	52%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Out of 100 respondents that partook in this survey, 48% were male and 52% were female. This table shows the male and female perspectives on how media portrayals of mental illness influence youth perception. Since both genders engage

with media differently, the distribution helps ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
16 – 20 years	52	25.6%
21 – 25 years	97	47%
26 – 30 years	41	22.5%
31 and above	10	4.9%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows that most respondents were between 21–25 years (47%), followed by 16–20 years (25.6%) and 26–30 years (22.5%), while only 4.9% were 31 and above. This indicates that the majority of participants are young adults, the group most active on social media where the romanticisation of mental illness is common, making their responses highly relevant to this study.

Table 3: Education Level of Respondants

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
100 level	26	12%
200 level	68	35%
300 level	50	26%
400 level	56	27%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the above table we can see that most respondents were 200-level students (35%), followed by 400-level (27%), 300-level (26%), and 100-level (12%). This suggests that the majority of participants are students with some academic experience, making them more capable of understanding and analysing media portrayals of mental illness and their possible influence on youth perception.

Table 4: Residency of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	124	62%
No	76	38%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 indicates that 62% of respondents reside in Benin City, while 38% do not. Since the study was conducted mainly among students of the University of Benin (UNIBEN), the majority living within the city ensures that their responses reflect the media exposure and social environment typical of youths in Benin City. This adds relevance to the study's focus on how media influences youth perception of mental illness.

Table 5: Social Media Platforms used by the Respondants

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Tiktok	72	36%
Facebook	58	29%
Youtube	40	20%
Instagram	30	15%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 shows that TikTok (36%) is the most used platform among respondents, followed by Facebook (29%), YouTube (20%), and Instagram (15%). This indicates that most participants engage actively on visual and interactive platforms, especially TikTok, where mental health content is often romanticised. This pattern highlights how such platforms can strongly influence youth perceptions of mental illness.

Table 6: Time Spent on Apps by Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 1 hours	11	5%
1 – 3 hours	85	41%
4 – 6 hours	80	40%
6 and more hours	24	14%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 6 reveals that most respondents spend 1–3 hours (41%) or 4–6 hours (40%) on social media daily, while 14% spend over 6 hours, and only 5% use it for less than an hour. This shows that the majority of participants are highly active social media users, aligning with studies in Chapter Two which suggest that increased exposure to online content heightens the likelihood of encountering romanticised portrayals of mental illness. Such frequent engagement can significantly shape how young people perceive, normalise, or even identify with mental health issues presented in digital spaces.

Table 7: Determining if media influences false illness narrative

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
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Yes	122	62%
No	78	38%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 7 shows that 62% of respondents admitted to using terms such as “I’m depressed,” “I have anxiety,” or “I’m mentally ill” casually on social media without a medical diagnosis, while 38% said they had not. This finding suggests that many Nigerian youths may have normalised or trivialised mental health terms due to constant exposure to romanticised portrayals online. Such casual use of serious mental health language reflects how social media trends can blur the line between genuine awareness and unhealthy idealisation, further influencing how young people perceive and express mental illness.

Table 8: Has media influenced your understanding of what mental illness truly means?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, positively	148	73.1%
Yes, Negatively	52	28.4%%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 8 indicates that most respondents (73.1%) believe the media has positively influenced their understanding of mental illness, while 28.4% think it has

had a negative impact. Although this suggests that the media has played a role in improving awareness, it also highlights a subtle concern: many young people may not recognise the romanticisation of mental illness within this “positive” influence. This shows that while media exposure can promote open discussions on mental health, it can also normalise or glamorise certain conditions, shaping youth perceptions in misleading ways.

Table 9: Getting the respondents thoughts on mental illness

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	29	14%
Agree	81	43%
Neutral	62	30%
Strongly Disagree	17	8%
Disagree	11	5%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 9 reveals that a majority of respondents either *agreed* (43%) or *strongly agreed* (14%) that the media romanticises mental illness and influences how it is perceived. About 30% remained *neutral*, while a smaller percentage *disagreed* (5%) or *strongly disagreed* (8%). This suggests that most Nigerian youths recognise how media, especially social media and entertainment platforms, often make mental illness

appear attractive, artistic, or emotionally deep. The responses support the idea that media portrayals can blur the line between genuine awareness and glorification, influencing how young people interpret and discuss mental health

Table 10: Identifying if respondents have encountered mental issues being portrayed in an artistic way.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	116	66%
No	73	34%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 10 shows that 66% of respondents have encountered content that portrays mental illness in an artistic, poetic, romantic, or “aesthetic” way, while 34% said they have not. This finding indicates that the majority of Nigerian youths are frequently exposed to media content that romanticises mental illness. Such portrayals often seen on platforms like TikTok and Instagram can make psychological struggles appear appealing or fashionable, rather than serious health concerns. This supports the study’s argument that continuous exposure to romanticised depictions can distort youths’ understanding of mental health and normalise unhealthy perceptions of emotional suffering.

Table 11: Understanding if the respondents have been influenced by Media

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	127	64%
No	73	36%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 11 shows that 64% of respondents have encountered content that portrays mental illness in an artistic, poetic, romantic, or “aesthetic” way, while 36% said they have not. This finding indicates that the majority of Nigerian youths are frequently exposed to media content that romanticises mental illness. Such portrayals often seen on platforms like TikTok and Instagram can make psychological struggles appear appealing or fashionable, rather than serious health concerns. This supports the study’s argument that continuous exposure to romanticised depictions can distort youths’ understanding of mental health and normalise unhealthy perceptions of emotional suffering.

Table 12 : Determining How far respondents have been influenced

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
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Yes	130	69%
No	70	31%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 12 shows that 69% of respondents have admired a character, celebrity, or influencer who displays symptoms of mental illness, while 31% said they have not. This indicates that many Nigerian youths are influenced by public figures who openly discuss or portray mental health struggles. Such admiration can contribute to the romanticisation of mental illness, especially when these figures present their struggles in a way that appears inspiring, artistic, or appealing. This finding supports the study's claim that media representations and influencer culture can shape how young people perceive and even idealise mental illness.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: How does social media idolization of mental illness affect the self-perception and mental health attitudes of Nigerian youths?.

The idolisation of mental illness on social media significantly influences both the self-perception and mental health attitudes of Nigerian youths. As shown in this study, many young people spend long hours on visual platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, where mental illness is sometimes portrayed as *aesthetic*, *creative*, or *emotionally deep*. This directly relates to the first research question, which examines how media portrayals shape youths' perception of mental illness. Continuous exposure to such romanticised content can cause young users to normalise or glorify emotional distress, viewing it as part of their identity rather than a health concern.

In connection with the second research question how media content affects youths' mental health attitudes idolisation often leads to self-diagnosis and reduced willingness to seek professional help. When mental illness is presented as something admirable or fashionable, it discourages open discussion about treatment and instead promotes validation through online attention. This is particularly worrying in Nigeria, where cultural stigma already limits conversations about mental wellbeing.

Overall, the idolisation of mental illness through social media fosters distorted self-perceptions, unhealthy comparisons, and shallow understandings of real mental health challenges. It supports the argument in this research that media romanticisation

has a measurable impact on how Nigerian youths see themselves, relate to others, and approach mental health issues.

Research Question 2: What role do Nigerian cultural beliefs and societal norms play in shaping youth perspectives on mental health?

Nigerian cultural beliefs and societal norms play a major role in shaping how young people view mental health. Traditionally, many communities associate mental illness with spiritual causes, such as witchcraft, curses, or divine punishment. These long-held beliefs contribute to stigma and misunderstanding, making it difficult for people to see mental illness as a genuine medical condition.

Among youths, this cultural backdrop often clashes with modern media portrayals. While social media may romanticise or normalise mental struggles, cultural norms still discourage open discussion about them. As a result, many young Nigerians experience confusion they may empathise with online expressions of sadness or anxiety, yet still feel ashamed to seek professional help because of societal judgement.

Furthermore, societal expectations in Nigeria often promote emotional strength and resilience, especially among men, while discouraging vulnerability. This pressure can cause young people to mask emotional distress or turn to online spaces for validation instead of clinical support.

Overall, Nigerian cultural beliefs and social norms continue to influence how youths interpret, express, and respond to mental health issues. When combined with media romanticisation, these factors shape a complex environment where awareness increases, but understanding and acceptance remain limited.

Research Question 3: How can responsible media portrayals help combat both stigma and idealization of mental illness?

Responsible media portrayals can play a powerful role in reducing both the stigma and the idealization of mental illness among Nigerian youths. From the study's findings, a large percentage of respondents actively use platforms like TikTok and Facebook, where emotional or mental health content is often dramatized or aestheticized. This shows that social media significantly shapes how young people understand mental health.

When media creators portray mental illness accurately showing it as a real health condition rather than something glamorous or attention-worthy it helps dispel false narratives and encourage empathy rather than imitation. Responsible portrayals can also promote mental health literacy, by emphasizing treatment options, support systems, and recovery stories instead of focusing solely on suffering or “tragic beauty.”

Furthermore, such portrayals can counter deep-rooted stigma in Nigerian society by normalizing conversations around mental health. If youths consistently see realistic, balanced content, they become more likely to seek help, reject stereotypes, and develop healthier attitudes toward those experiencing mental illness.

In essence, ethical media representation provides a middle ground, neither glorifying mental struggles nor condemning them helping young Nigerians form a more informed and compassionate perspective.

Research Question 4: How can responsible and ethical media portrayals help counter both the stigma and idealisation of mental illness in Nigeria?

Responsible media portrayals play a vital role in countering both the stigma and romanticisation of mental illness among Nigerian youths. When the media presents mental health accurately showing it as a real and treatable condition rather than something to be glamorised or mocked, it helps young people develop a more informed and empathetic understanding.

Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, which many Nigerian youths actively use, often shape perceptions through trends, short videos, and influencer content. By encouraging creators and journalists to represent mental illness realistically highlighting recovery stories, therapy, and coping mechanisms rather than

associating disorders with beauty, creativity, or attention the media can foster healthier discussions around mental health.

Moreover, balanced portrayals help reduce stigma, encouraging young people to seek professional help instead of self-diagnosing or trivialising their struggles. When responsible media coverage is combined with awareness campaigns and mental health education, it not only challenges harmful stereotypes but also helps youths differentiate between genuine awareness and the romanticisation of pain.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter entails the summary, findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of this study.

5.1 Summary

The romanticisation of mental illness in the media has become a prominent issue in recent years, driven largely by the growing influence of social media and entertainment platforms. This phenomenon occurs when mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder are portrayed as beautiful, mysterious, or artistically appealing rather than serious medical conditions. Such portrayals have blurred the line between genuine awareness and glorification, leading many young people to associate emotional suffering with depth, creativity, or identity. Through films, music, and online trends, mental illness is often presented as a lifestyle or aesthetic rather than a challenge requiring professional help.

In Nigeria, where conversations about mental health are still emerging, this romanticisation poses particular risks. With the increasing popularity of platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, Nigerian youths are frequently exposed to global media content that shapes their perceptions of mental illness. Many young people now casually use terms like “I’m depressed” or “I have anxiety” without understanding their medical context, often influenced by how such conditions are portrayed online.

This behaviour not only trivialises genuine mental health struggles but also creates confusion about what it truly means to live with a psychological disorder. The glamorisation of mental illness can also discourage proper diagnosis and treatment, as some youths may perceive such conditions as socially desirable or emotionally validating.

Despite these challenges, the media remains a powerful tool for positive influence when used responsibly. Balanced portrayals that depict recovery, therapy, and resilience can help dismantle harmful stereotypes and encourage help-seeking behaviour. Responsible media coverage can also promote empathy and understanding, creating a supportive environment for those affected by mental illness. By highlighting the reality of mental health conditions rather than their aesthetic appeal, the media can contribute to a more accurate and compassionate public understanding of mental health.

This study, therefore, underscores the importance of media accountability in mental health representation. While the media can amplify awareness, it must do so without sensationalism or distortion. Nigerian youths, being active media consumers, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of romanticisation, which can shape their attitudes, language, and self-perception. For this reason, content creators, filmmakers, and journalists should strive for authentic depictions that prioritise education and empathy over aesthetics. Ultimately, responsible storytelling can transform the media

from a source of misconception into a powerful instrument for mental health advocacy and awareness.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has examined how the romanticisation of mental illness in the media influences the perceptions and attitudes of Nigerian youths. The findings reveal that while the media has increased general awareness about mental health, it has also contributed to distorted understandings by portraying mental illness as fashionable, creative, or emotionally appealing. Many young people, influenced by the media's selective and aesthetic representations, now use mental health-related terms casually or admire public figures who appear to “embody” mental illness in a romanticised way. This not only trivialises the seriousness of these conditions but also risks normalising emotional suffering as part of youth identity or social appeal.

The study concludes that the media, especially social platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, plays a dual role both educational and misleading. While it has the capacity to promote empathy and reduce stigma, it often crosses into glorification, making mental illness seem desirable or profound. For Nigerian youths, this can have lasting effects on how they perceive their own mental wellbeing, shaping their understanding of what it means to be “mentally ill.” Therefore, there is a need for

a more balanced approach to mental health representation one that informs rather than misleads.

5.3 Recommendations

1. **Responsible Media Representation:** Media organisations, influencers, and content creators should portray mental illness accurately and sensitively. Storylines should focus on recovery, support systems, and treatment rather than on romantic or aesthetic suffering.
2. **Mental Health Education:** Schools, universities, and youth programmes should incorporate mental health literacy into their curricula to help young people differentiate between awareness and romanticisation.
3. **Collaboration Between Media and Mental Health Experts:** Mental health professionals should be consulted in film production, journalism, and online campaigns to ensure accuracy in representation.
4. **Digital Regulation and Awareness Campaigns:** Social media platforms can help regulate misleading or harmful mental health content and promote verified educational materials instead. Campaigns led by trusted organisations can counter the glamorisation trend with evidence-based awareness.

5. **Encouraging Positive Influencer Behaviour:** Nigerian influencers and celebrities should use their platforms responsibly by promoting genuine mental health discussions rather than aestheticising or trivialising mental illness for engagement.
6. **Further Research:** Future studies should explore how gender, socioeconomic background, and cultural context influence the way Nigerian youths interpret romanticised mental health content. This will help create more targeted awareness and policy responses.

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APPENDIX

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

Dear Respondent

REQUEST FOR COMPLETION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a final year student of the above mentioned Department and institution. I am currently conducting a research study titled "**ROMANTIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON YOUTHS PERCEPTION**". This research is in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the ward of a Bachelor of Arts degree in mass communication.

This Research questionnaire is designed to help us understand how media campaigns have influenced public awareness, attitudes, and opinions about Romantication of mental illness and its influence on youth perception in Benin City. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and used purely for academic purposes.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully
Ayomide Racheal okunlola
(Researcher)

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Gender: (a) Male ☐ (b) Female ☐
2. Age Group:
(a) 16–20 ☐ (b) 21–25 ☐ (c) 26–30 ☐ (d) 31 and above ☐
3. Do you reside in Benin City?
(a) Yes ☐ (b) No ☐

SECTION B: MEDIA CONSUMPTION HABITS

4. Which of the following platforms do you use frequently? (Tick on all that apply)
☐ TikTok ☐ Instagram ☐ Twitter (X) ☐ YouTube ☐ Facebook
5. on average, how many hours do you spend consuming media daily?
☐ Less than 1 hour ☐ 1–3 hours ☐ 4–6 hours ☐ More than 6 hours
6. Have you ever used terms like “I’m depressed”, “I have anxiety”, or “I’m mentally ill” casually on social media without a medical diagnosis?
☐ Yes ☐ No
7. Has media influenced your understanding of what mental illness truly means?
☐ Yes, positively
☐ Yes, negatively

SECTION C: PERCEPTIONS OF MENTAL ILLNESS ON MEDIA

8. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
 - a) Media makes mental illness look attractive or deep.
 - b) Characters with mental illness in films or shows are often romanticised.
 - c) Media has helped me better understand mental illness.
 - d) Media often confuses emotional struggles with clinical disorders.
 - e) Social media rewards people who talk about their mental health struggles.
- () Strongly Agree () Agree () Neutral () Disagree () Strongly Disagree

9. Have you ever come across content that portrays mental illness (e.g., depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder) in an artistic, poetic, romantic, or “aesthetic” way?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐
10. Has media influenced your understanding of what mental illness truly means?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

SECTION D: INFLUENCE ON PERSONAL PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOUR

11. Have you ever admired a character, celebrity, or influencer who openly talks about or displays mental illness symptoms? (Depression, Anxiety, ticks, OCD)
- ☐ Yes ☐ No