

Navigating The Digital Age: Excessive Media Consumption, Emerging Adults' Mental Health and Coping Strategies

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This study examined the intricate nexus between excessive social media consumption, mental health outcomes, and coping strategies among emerging adults within the context of Lead City University, Ibadan. Analyzing data from 195 participants, the research unveils a significant association between the hours spent on social media platforms and dimensions such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. These results resonate with prior research, highlighting the need for proactive interventions to address the potential risks of unrestrained digital engagement. Furthermore, the study illuminates the patterns of seeking help among emerging adults grappling with mental health challenges. While individuals predominantly rely on their immediate social circles for support, there is a comparatively lower utilization of available mental health professionals. This underscores the significance of destigmatizing expert help and enhancing awareness about the array of support services available within the university. In response, the study underscores the importance of fostering an environment that promotes both mindful digital engagement and proactive mental health support mechanisms. These findings collectively advocate for Lead City University, Ibadan, to initiate targeted awareness campaigns, thereby cultivating a holistic ecosystem that prioritizes the mental well-being of its student population within the evolving digital landscape.

Keywords: Digital Age, Mental Health, Social Media, Emerging Adult. Coping Strategy

1.0 Background to the Study

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the pervasive influence of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the way individuals interact, communicate, and engage with the world around them. This radical shift is particularly profound among emerging adults, a demographic characterized by their significant presence in university settings. As these young individuals navigate the complex intersection of their formative years and the digital age, concerns have arisen about the potential consequences of their excessive social media content consumption on their mental well-being.

The prevalence of mental health disorders has become a growing concern due to the increasing use of social media platforms. Social media is a form of computer-mediated technology that enables individuals to generate and disseminate information and various forms of expression within virtual communities, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Obar & Wildman, 2015). The surge in use of social media platforms among teenagers and young adults has given rise to several concerns, including the emergence of anxiety and depression as potential risk factors. Social media platforms provide a secure environment for individuals with social anxiety to avoid in-person contacts. Nonetheless, it may also foster harmful use patterns and intensify the avoidance of offline engagement. A quantitative meta-analysis was conducted on a total of 22 studies, including 13,460 participants. The results of this study revealed a significant positive link between social anxiety and the level of comfort experienced by individuals while interacting online. This finding suggests that the anonymous nature of the Internet serves as an appealing platform for those with social anxiety. The use of social media has emerged as a prominent factor contributing to the prevalence of impairment in mental disorders, ranking second in significance (Weidman et al., 2012).

The relationship between social media use and mental health conditions has been the subject of extensive research (Sobaih et al., 2016; Cauberghe et al., 2021; Aluh et al., 2020). Nevertheless, a body of research conducted over a period of time has shown inconsistent findings regarding the association between the utilization of social media platforms and the occurrence of mental disorders (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). There is a contention that social media may possess a safeguarding influence against mental disorders due to its facilitation of social interaction and connection (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, it is important to acknowledge that social media also presents numerous possibilities for miscommunication and unmet expectations, which can be magnified and result in individuals experiencing heightened feelings of isolation (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; Baek, Bae, & Jang, 2013).

Research has shown a clear link between social media addiction and health, relationships, performance, and emotional issues (Yubo, Dan, Tonglin, Lily, & Wang, 2019). The use of social media platforms has been associated with potential adverse impacts on mental well-being due to the exposure of individuals to unfavourable social interactions, including instances of cyberbullying (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). Research conducted by Valkenburg and Schouten (2006) examined the impact of negative interaction quality on self-esteem and life satisfaction among a sample of 881 Dutch teenagers on a social networking site. The findings revealed a significant association between negative interaction quality and declines in both self-esteem and life happiness. The intricate dynamics and interplay of individuals on social media platforms, their emotional encounters, and the Internet may be multifaceted, potentially highlighting disparities between those who are thriving and those who are facing challenges (Seabrook et al., 2016). Several studies have shown a positive correlation between heightened social media use, engagement across numerous platforms, and the prevalence of depression

and anxiety (Vannucci et al., 2017; Becker et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2013). Nevertheless, some studies have yielded contrasting results, as they have failed to establish a correlation between heightened daily use of Facebook and the occurrence of depression (Jelenchick et al., 2013; Seabrook et al., 2016; Banjanin et al., 2015).

There exists a significant association between the use of social networks and the emergence of many psychological issues, including anxiety, sadness, sleeplessness, stress, reduced subjective happiness, and a feeling of mental deprivation. The prevailing body of evidence suggests that there exists a positive correlation between the length of time allocated to social media engagement, the frequency of use, and the number of platforms employed, and the probability of experiencing mental health issues attributable to these online platforms. Numerous potential rationales have been implicated, encompassing detrimental effects on self-esteem stemming from unhealthy comparisons, exhaustion from excessive engagement with social media, heightened stress levels, compromised emotional regulation resulting from preoccupation with social media, and the emergence of social anxiety due to diminished face-to-face social interactions. There exists a postulation suggesting that the escalation in social media use is motivated by preexisting worry and serves as a mechanism for coping. The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized the contemporary landscape, particularly for emerging adults—an important cohort that is well-represented in university settings. Yet, apprehensions have arisen regarding the potential repercussions stemming from the excessive consumption of social media content on the psychological well-being of individuals. This concern is especially pertinent for university students, given the prevalent use of social media within this demographic and the critical juncture of self-discovery they traverse. In this context, it is crucial to evaluate variables like self-image, anxiety, and depression that social media use may affect (Alkis et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the lack of extensive scholarly literature in this particular field and, most importantly, in a developing nation such as Nigeria emphasizes the need for detailed research endeavours. Much of the prevailing data and research originate from high-income countries, leaving a substantial knowledge gap. However, among emerging adults, university students are a crucial group to study due to their active engagement with social media and their unique challenges during this transitional phase. Specifically, this study seeks to investigate the impact of excessive social media consumption on the mental health of undergraduate students at Lead City University, Ibadan, and explore their awareness of available social and mental health counselling services as well as their adoption of these services as coping mechanisms for mental health issues.

Research Questions

The following research questions are designed to guide this study:

1. What are the prevalent patterns of social media content consumption among emerging adults (aged 18 to 24) at Lead City University?

2. How does excessive social media consumption relate to the mental health status of emerging adults at Lead City University?
3. What is the association between excessive social media consumption and self-esteem among emerging adults at Lead City University?
4. What coping strategies do emerging adults at Lead City University employ to mitigate mental health and self-esteem issues linked to excessive social media consumption?

2.0 Materials and Methods

The research population includes 18–25-year-old emerging adults. Emerging adults are between youth and adulthood, undergoing life transitions including education, jobs, and social interactions (Yang et al., 2020). This cohort is important since they use social media most in Nigeria (Ugwu et al., 2023) and may be affected by its mental health effects (Lenhart, 2015). Therefore, the population of this study focused on undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25 at Leadcity University, Ibadan. An online survey was utilized to purposively sample emerging adults from different faculties and departments of the university. A sample size of 215 participants indicated their interest in participating in the study. However, a sample of 20 did not complete or withdraw from the study, leaving the sample size at 195 respondents. A purposeful sampling method was employed where the questionnaire link was sent to students' social media pages for voluntary participation. The research captured a broad variety of experiences and viewpoints on social media's possible influence on emerging adults' mental health.

The research instrument for the study consists of a structured questionnaire divided into four major sections: sociodemographics, social media consumption, mental health, and self-image. The Likert-scale items measure social media consumption patterns, mental health issues (emotional problems such as anxiety and depression), and help-seeking behaviour related to emotional challenges. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of participants to ensure the clarity, validity, and reliability of the items before being administered to the main sample. A Cronbach-Alfa result of .83 help seeking behavior, .88 for mental health .89 for self-image, and an overall value of .84 for all the items together. The researchers ensure adherence to ethical guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their responses. Also, an option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty was stated in the consent form. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, to assess the extent of social media consumption and the prevalence of mental health issues among the sample. Furthermore, an ANOVA analysis was carried out to establish the effect that hours of social daily consumption have on students' anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Socio demographic analysis of students

Table 1: Sociodemographic Variables

Variable	Categories	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	62	31.8%
	Female	133	68.2%
Age	18-19years	65	33.3%
	20-21years	69	35.4%
	22-23years	47	24.1%
	24-25 years	14	7.2%
Level	100 level	8	4.1%
	200 level	59	30.3%
	300 level	67	34.4%
	400 level	49	25.1%
	500 level	12	6.2%

Table 1 underscores the diverse composition of the study's participants in terms of gender, age, and academic level. From the table, a notable gender imbalance, with 68.2% of the participants identified as female, while 31.8% are male was observed. The participants' age distribution is delineated across various categories. The largest proportion falls within the 18-19 years bracket, representing 33.3% of the total participants. Following closely, the 20-21 years category comprises 35.4% of the participants, and the 22-23 years and 24-25 years categories account for 24.1% and 7.2%, respectively. Furthermore, the 300 level students represent the largest proportion at 34.4%, followed by the 200 level at 30.3%, and the 400 level at 25.1%. The lower academic levels 100 level and 500 level—constitute 4.1% and 6.2% of the participants, respectively.

Social Media Usage

Social Media Usage

Table 2: Cross tabulation result of social media platform and frequency of consumption
(Number of hours use on social media on a daily basis)

SOCIAL MEDIAL PLATFORMS (SMP)		SOCIAL MEDIA CONSUMPTION					Total
		<1hour	1-3hrs	4-6hrs	7-9hrs	10hrs and above	
WhatsApp	Count	4	12	9	7	0	32
	% within SMP	12.5%	37.5%	28.1%	21.9%	0.0%	100.0%
Facebook	Count	4	24	9	16	0	53
	% within SMP	7.5%	45.3%	17.0%	30.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Instagram	Count	4	10	14	12	3	43
	% within SMP	9.3%	23.3%	32.6%	27.9%	7.0%	100.0%
Twitter	Count	0	3	4	5	1	13
	% within SMP	0.0%	23.1%	30.8%	38.5%	7.7%	100.0%
Tiktok	Count	2	6	6	9	1	24
	% within SMP	8.3%	25.0%	25.0%	37.5%	4.2%	100.0%
Snapchat	Count	1	3	2	2	0	8
	% within SMP	12.5%	37.5%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Telegram	Count	1	4	1	6	0	12
	% within SMP	8.3%	33.3%	8.3%	50.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Pinterest	Count	1	3	3	2	0	9
	% within SMP	11.1%	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Others	Count	0	0	0	1	0	1
	% within SMP	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	17	65	48	60	5	195
	% within SMP	8.7%	33.3%	24.6%	30.8%	2.6%	100.0%

The crosstabulation result in table 2 above showed the association between different social media platforms and the corresponding consumption patterns among the surveyed participants. For instance, among participants who use WhatsApp, the highest proportion (37.5%) falls within the 1-3 hours consumption bracket, followed by 28.1% in the 4-6 hours bracket, and so on. This pattern provides a glimpse of how WhatsApp users allocate their time on the platform across varying consumption ranges. A similar analysis can be made for other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter,

Tiktok, Snapchat, Telegram, Pinterest, and "Others." Overall, the total distribution across all social media platforms reveals that the largest proportion (33.3%) of participants spend 1-3 hours on social media daily. This is followed by 30.8% of participants in the 7-9 hours consumption range, and 24.6% in the 4-6 hours range. The data also suggests that a smaller percentage of participants (8.7%) spend less than 1 hour, and an even smaller proportion (2.6%) spend 10 hours or more on social media. However, the crosstabulation showcases the relationship between social media consumption patterns and the specific platforms used by the participants. It provides a comprehensive snapshot of how individuals allocate their time across various platforms in terms of daily social media engagement.

Test of hypothesis

There is no significant impact of daily hours spent consuming social media content on the self-esteem and mental health-related issues of emerging adults.

Table 2: ANOVA result of effect of social media consumption on self-esteem and mental health issues among emerging adults

Variables	Hours of Social media consumption daily	N	Mean	Sta Dev	F	Sig
Anxiety	Less than 1hour	17	8.12	1.111	26.714	.000
	1-3hrs	65	8.74	1.726		
	4-6hrs	48	11.79	3.968		
	7-9hrs	60	13.43	3.137		
	10hrs and above	5	13.00	2.828		
Depression	Less than 1hour	17	6.71	0.985	20.095	.000
	1-3hrs	65	7.60	1.730		
	4-6hrs	48	9.81	4.355		
	7-9hrs	60	11.82	3.357		
	10hrs and above	5	13.00	2.345		
Self esteem	Less than 1hour	17	2.00	0.000	61.701	.000
	1-3hrs	65	1.75	0.434		
	4-6hrs	48	1.19	0.394		
	7-9hrs	60	1.00	0.000		
	10hrs and above	5	1.20	0.447		

Table 3 presents the ANOVA result of the effect of hours spent consuming social media content on the self-esteem and mental health-related issues of emerging adults. The ANOVA result for anxiety levels shows a highly significant F-value (26.714) with a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that there are significant differences in anxiety levels among the different groups of daily social media users. The p-

value is well below the conventional threshold of 0.05, indicating strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. In other words, daily hours of social media consumption have a significant effect on anxiety levels among emerging adults. Similarly, the ANOVA result for depression levels also shows a highly significant F-value (20.095) with a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that there are significant differences in depression levels across the various groups of social media users. Again, the low p-value suggests that the null hypothesis can be rejected, signifying that daily hours of social media consumption significantly affect depression levels in emerging adults. Furthermore, the ANOVA result for self-esteem levels demonstrates a substantial F-value (61.701) with a p-value of 0.000. Like in the previous cases, the p-value is well below 0.05, implying that there are significant differences in self-esteem levels based on the different levels of social media consumption. This suggests that daily hours of social media usage significantly influence self-esteem levels among emerging adults.

In light of the ANOVA results, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is not supported. There is indeed a significant effect of daily hours of social media consumption on emerging adults' anxiety levels, depression levels, and self-esteem. The findings imply that as daily hours of social media consumption increase, there are notable shifts in mental health-related issues and self-esteem among emerging adults. To further establish how these emerging adults cope with the negative impact of social media consumption, a health seeking behaviour analysis was carried out, and the result is presented in Table 4.

Health Seeking Behavior

Table 4: Where emerging adults seeks help when having mental health related issues

Do you seek counseling service from professionals (counselor/therapist) when going through had times?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	51	26.2%
No	112	57.4%
Not sure	32	16.4%
Total	195	100.00%
Where do you seek help when having mental health related issues?		
Intimate partner	48	24.6%
Parent	51	26.2%
Friends (not related by blood)	32	16.4%
Other relatives/family member	20	10.3%
Mental health professional (counselor/therapist)	21	10.8%
Doctor	10	5.1%
Religious leader	10	5.1%
Will not seek help	3	1.5%
Total	195	100.0%

The findings from table 4 showed that majority (57.4%) of the emerging adult to necessarily seeks help from mental health professionals. The table also indicate that while emerging adults do reach out to their intimate partners and parents for assistance, with 24.6% and 26.2% seeking solace respectively, there remains a significant portion that may not feel comfortable or adequately supported within these relationships. Similarly, 16.4% of respondents seek assistance from friends who are not blood relatives, and 10.3% rely on other relatives or family members. This distribution highlights the pivotal role that interpersonal relationships play in addressing mental health concerns, but also underscores the potential gaps in providing comprehensive mental health support. Interestingly, 10.8% of emerging adults seek mental health services from counsellors and therapists. Yet the proportion is low compared to other sources, suggesting an understanding of the importance of seeking professional help. Only 5.1% said they're seeking help from physicians or religious leaders, suggesting more support system integration. Furthermore, the fact that 1.5% explicitly state that they will not seek help underlines the significance of stigma and the need for concerted efforts to destigmatize mental health issues within the university environment. This finding emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that encourages open discussions and the normalization of seeking professional help when needed.

4.0 Discussion and Implication

The findings of this study resonate with previous research that has illuminated the intricate relationship between excessive social media consumption and its impact on emerging adults' mental health. The study's observations align with the concerns raised by Yubo, Dan, Tonglin, Lily, and Wang (2019), who highlighted the strong correlation between social media addiction and a gamut of health, relational, performance, and emotional problems. The data presented in this study further underscores the gravity of these concerns by demonstrating the discernible influence of daily hours spent on social media content consumption on mental health outcomes.

The connection between social media usage and mental health is multifaceted. Social media platforms offer avenues for individuals to evade face-to-face interactions, catering to the needs of those with social anxiety. However, as Best, Manktelow, and Taylor (2014) pointed out, this can unintentionally result in problematic usage patterns and exacerbate the avoidance of offline interactions, affecting people's wellbeing. The findings in this study echo this notion, particularly as evidenced by the significant correlations between social media consumption and dimensions of anxiety and depression. Moreover, Valkenburg and Peter (2006) brought attention to the quality of interactions within the online realm. This study resonates with their observations as it revealed associations between negative interaction quality, diminished self-esteem, and life satisfaction. This implies that the digital interactions within various social media platforms could contribute to complex emotional states and self-perceptions among emerging adults.

However, the nuanced relationship between social media and mental health remains a subject of contention. The different conclusions drawn from the ANOVA results of this study are similar to the different conclusions drawn from studies like Jelenchick et al. (2013), Seabrook et al. (2016), and Banjanin et al. (2015), where some researchers found no significant link between more time spent on social media and depression. These contradictory outcomes suggest that the dynamics between social media use and mental health are multifaceted, influenced by various contextual factors and individual differences.

In light of the results presented in Table 4, there is a compelling case for Lead City University, Ibadan, to intensify awareness campaigns about mental health services available on campus. By amplifying the visibility of mental health professionals, counsellors, and therapists, the university can encourage more emerging adults to overcome any hesitations and avail themselves of expert assistance. The data strongly advocates for the promotion of a supportive and inclusive mental health ecosystem within the university, wherein both peer support and professional guidance coexist harmoniously. However, the findings of this study add weight to the mounting body of evidence that underscores the multifaceted impact of social media on emerging adults' mental health. The results converge with previous research in acknowledging the potential pitfalls of excessive consumption, particularly concerning anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. However, the inconsistencies underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between digital engagement and mental well-being, emphasizing the complexity of this emerging field of study.

Mental Health Service Promoting Strategies for a University Setting.

There are several strategies that the institution's management could consider to increase awareness about seeking help from mental health professionals:

- 1. Counseling Services Promotion:** The university can actively promote its existing counseling services through various channels. This could include informative posters, digital screens across campus, and announcements during orientation programs. Highlighting the availability of trained professionals who can provide confidential support for mental health concerns can encourage students to consider seeking help.
- 2. Peer Support Programs:** Building on the observed reliance on friends for support, the university could establish peer support programs. These programs can train students to provide empathetic listening and encourage their peers to seek professional help when needed. Peer-led workshops, group discussions, and awareness campaigns can create a supportive environment that normalizes seeking help.
- 3. Mental Health Awareness Workshops:** Organizing workshops that address the importance of mental health and debunk misconceptions can be beneficial. These workshops can educate

students about the signs of mental health issues, the benefits of seeking professional help, and how to access counselling services within the university.

4. **Collaboration with Faculty and Advisors:** Faculty members and academic advisors can play a crucial role in recognizing signs of distress in students. Training them to identify and approach students who might need help, and providing information about available mental health resources, can bridge the gap between students and support services.
5. **Online Platforms and Social Media:** Leveraging digital platforms, including the university's website and social media accounts, can effectively disseminate information. Regular posts about mental health awareness, personal testimonials, and success stories of students who sought help can engage a wider audience and normalize the concept of seeking professional support.
6. **Integration into Curriculum:** Infusing mental health awareness into the curriculum can integrate the importance of seeking help into students' academic journeys. Incorporating relevant topics into classes, seminars, and projects can contribute to an environment where mental health discussions are encouraged and valued.
7. **Open Dialogues and Supportive Campus Culture:** Organizing open dialogues, panel discussions, and mental health-themed events can foster a culture that prioritizes well-being. This can encourage students to share their experiences, destigmatize seeking help, and create a sense of unity in facing mental health challenges.
8. **Anonymous Helplines or Chat Services:** Introducing anonymous helplines or chat services can offer an additional layer of privacy for students seeking help. This can particularly benefit those who may hesitate to seek assistance due to concerns about confidentiality.

5.0 Conclusion

This study highlights the profound influence of excessive social media consumption on the mental health of emerging adults in a university setting. The findings underscore a significant correlation between the hours spent on social media platforms and dimensions such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. These outcomes resonate with previous research, emphasizing the imperative for the university to address the potential risks of unchecked digital engagement. Additionally, the study illuminates a key aspect of coping strategies among the university's emerging adults. While participants predominantly seek support from their immediate social circles, there is limited utilization of available mental health professionals. This points to the importance of destigmatizing expert help and raising awareness about the array of services offered on campus. Therefore, by implementing a combination of the strategies suggested above, University management can proactively address the gaps in mental health awareness and create an environment where seeking help from mental health professionals is embraced and valued. Conclusively, University management is prompted to implement targeted

awareness campaigns, fostering an environment that promotes both mindful digital engagement and proactive mental health support mechanisms to facilitate the well-being of its students.

Limitations of the Study

The study focuses exclusively on undergraduate students at Lead City University, Ibadan, and the generalizability of the findings to broader populations may be limited. The study acknowledges the potential for self-reported biases in survey responses. Additionally, while the study examines the relationship between social media consumption and mental health, it primarily centres on the role of counselling services as coping mechanisms, without delving extensively into other potential strategies.

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