

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTHS IN EKITI STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of social media on the mental health of youths in Ekiti State. The study specifically investigated patterns of social media use, the extent to which social media contributes to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and self-esteem issues, and whether social media serves as a source of psychological support or distress. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised youths aged 18–35 years in Ekiti State, while a sample of 200 respondents was selected from Ado Local Government Area using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on the Influence of Social Media on Mental Wellness (QISMMW)”. The instrument was validated by experts in Social Studies, Test and Evaluation at Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. Reliability was established using test-retest method and Pearson Product Moment Correlation which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The findings revealed intensive social media use among youths, significant relationship between social media use and psychological challenges, and the dual role of social media as both a source of information and a potential source of distress. The study concluded that social media significantly influences youth mental health and recommended digital literacy education, parental monitoring, platform regulation, mental health awareness campaigns, and improved access to psychological support services.

Keywords: Social media, Mental health, Youths, patterns, Psychological well-being, Digital technology, Social media addiction.

Introduction

Social media has ingrained itself into daily life, especially for youth. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have an impact on a number of facets of emotional health, self-perception, and social engagement. Social media brings problems including cyberbullying, social comparison, and digital addiction, all of which can have a detrimental effect on mental health, even though it also provides chances for networking, education, and amusement (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). The purpose of this study is to investigate these dynamics among young people in Nigeria's Ekiti State.

Humans are naturally social species that depend on the companionship of others to thrive in life. Thus, while being socially linked with

others helps alleviate stress, worry, and melancholy, a lack of social connection can pose major threats to one's mental health (Mohamad, 2023). Over the past 10 years, the rapid emergence of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others has led to some significant changes in how people connect and communicate. Over one billion people are currently active users of Facebook, the largest social networking website, and it is anticipated that this number will grow significantly over time, especially in developing countries. Facebook is used for both personal and professional interaction, and its deployment has had a number of positive effects on connectivity, idea sharing, and online learning (Online social networking and mental health, 2014). Furthermore, the number of social

media users globally in 2019 according to Kim (2017) was 3.484 billion, a 9% increase year on year.

Mental health according to Karim, Oyewande, Abdalla, Chaudhry Ehsanullah, Khan. *Cureus* (2020) is represented as a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their potential, successfully navigate daily challenges, perform effectively at work, and make a substantial difference in the lives of others. There is currently debate over the benefits and drawbacks of social media on mental health (Martinsen, 2008). Social networking is an important part of safeguarding our mental health. Mental health, health behavior, physical health, and mortality risk are all affected by the quantity and quality of social contacts (Martinsen, 2008).

Social media use and mental health may be related, and the displaced behavior theory could assist in clarifying why. The displaced behavior hypothesis is a psychology theory that suggests people have limited self-control and, when confronted with a challenging or stressful situation, may engage in behaviors that bring instant gratification but are not in accordance with their long-term objectives (Duckworth, 2016). In addition, when people are unable to deal with stress in a healthy way, they may act out in ways that temporarily make them feel better but ultimately harm their long-term goals and wellness. This can lead to a cycle of bad behaviors and outcomes, as individuals may engage in behaviors that bring short respite but eventually add to their stress and difficulties. According to Berryman (2018), those who participate in sedentary behaviors, including social media, engage in fewer opportunities for in-person social interaction, both of which have been demonstrated to be protective against mental illnesses. Social theories, on the other hand, discovered that social media use influences mental health by affecting how people interpret, maintain, and interact with their social network (Karim, 2020).

Numerous studies on social media's effects have been conducted, and it has been proposed that prolonged use of social media sites like

Facebook may be linked to negative manifestations and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (O'Reilly, 2018). A distinct and important time in a person's life is adolescence. Additionally, risk factors such as family issues, bullying, and social isolation are readily available at this period, and it is crucial to preserve social and emotional growth. The growth of digital technology has affected numerous areas of youths live. Nowadays, teenagers' use of social media is one of their most apparent characteristics. Being socially connected with other people is a typical phenomenon, whether at home, school, or a social gathering, and youths are constantly in touch with their classmates via social media accounts. Youths are drawn to social networking sites because they allow them to publish pictures, images, and videos on their platforms. It also allows teens to establish friends, discuss ideas, discover new interests, and try out new kinds of self-expression. Users of these platforms can freely like and comment on posts as well as share them without any restrictions. Teenagers now frequently post insulting remarks on social media platforms. Youths frequently engage in trolling for amusement without recognizing the potentially harmful consequences. Trolling on these platforms focuses on body shaming, individual abilities, language, and lifestyle, among other things. The effects that result from trolling might cause anxiety, depressive symptoms, stress, feelings of isolation, and suicidal thoughts. The authors explain the influence of social media on teenage well-being through a review of existing literature and provide intervention and preventative measures at the individual, family, and community levels (O'Reilly, 2018).

Although there is a "generally correlated" link between teen social media use and depression, certain outcomes have been inconsistent (such as the association between time spent on social media and mental health issues), and the data quality is frequently poor. Browsing social media could increase your risk of self-harm, loneliness, and empathy loss,

according to a number of research studies. Because of the rapid expansion of the technological landscape in recent years, social media has become increasingly important in the lives of young people. Social networking has created both enormous new challenges and interesting new opportunities.

Research is beginning to indicate how specific social media interactions may impair young people's mental health (Nesi, 2020). Teenagers could communicate with one another on social media platforms, as well as produce, like, and share content. In most cases, these individuals are categorized as active users. On the other hand, teens can also use social media in a passive manner by "lurking" and focusing entirely on the content that is posted by others. The difference between active and passive social media usage is sometimes criticized as a false dichotomy because it does not necessarily reveal whether a certain activity is goal-oriented or indicative of procrastination. However, the text provides no justification for why this distinction is wrong. For instance, one definition of procrastination is engaging in conversation with other people to put off working on a task that is more important. The goal of seeing the information created by other people, as opposed to participating with those same individuals, may be to keep up with the lives of friends. One of the most important distinctions that can be made between the various sorts is whether the usage is social. When it comes to understanding and evaluating all these different applications of digital technology, there are a lot of obstacles to overcome. Combining all digital acts into a single predictor of pleasure would, from both a philosophical and an empirical one, invariably result in a reduction in accuracy. Social media's widespread use among young people in Ekiti State has sparked worries about possible negative impacts on mental health. Although social media sites provide chances for communication and information exchange, there is mounting evidence that excessive usage of these platforms may be linked to a number of

mental health issues in teenagers and young adults.

The connection between social media use and mental health outcomes has been the subject of numerous studies. Excessive social media use has been linked in studies to higher risks of anxiety and depression. (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Other scholars have pointed to the positive aspects of social media, such as providing social support and a platform for self-expression (Naslund et al., 2020). However, context-specific studies focusing on Nigerian youth remain limited, necessitating further investigation. Recent Nigerian studies have also examined the impact of social media on mental health. Olufadi (2016) found that excessive social media use among Nigerian university students contributed to stress and anxiety. Similarly, Alabi (2018) explored the role of cyberbullying and its effect on depression among Nigerian youths. Olanrewaju et al. (2021) emphasized the need for digital literacy and coping strategies to mitigate the negative consequences of social media addiction.

Social media use by youth is nearly universal. Up to 95% of youth ages 13–17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use social media “almost constantly.”² Although age 13 is commonly the required minimum age used by social media platforms in the U.S.,³ nearly 40% of children ages 8–12 use social media.⁴ Despite this widespread use among children and youths, robust independent safety analyses on the impact of social media on youth have not yet been conducted. There are increasing concerns among researchers, parents and caregivers, young people, healthcare experts, and others about the impact of social media on youth mental health.^{5, 6} More research is needed to fully understand the impact of social media; however, the current body of evidence indicates that while social media may have benefits for some children and youths, there are ample indicators that social media can also have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and youths. At this time, we do not yet have enough

evidence to determine if social media is sufficiently safe for children and youths. We must acknowledge the growing body of research about potential harms, increase our collective understanding of the risks associated with social media use, and urgently take action to create safe and healthy digital environments that minimize harm and safeguard children's and youths' mental health and well-being during critical stages of development (Champion, Birrell, Smout, Teesson & Slade 2025).

A systematic review on social media addiction and mental health among Nigerian students was carried out by Awopetu et al. in 2024. Their research showed that social media use has both positive and negative consequences. While academic collaboration and social connectivity were identified as benefits, excessive social media use was associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression as well as worse academic performance. The study stressed how crucial it is to use social media in moderation in order to lessen its negative impact on mental health. A study by Dorothy et al. (2017), provides insights into the prevalent patterns of social media usage among undergraduate students in Nigerian federal universities. It highlights the positive attitude toward social media for social activities but a negative perception regarding its academic utility. This is relevant to the present study as it sets the context for understanding the social media landscape among Nigerian university students. Another research by Brandi and Denise (2022), emphasizes the negative association between excessive digital media use and youths emotional health, particularly among vulnerable individuals with existing anxiety or depression.

Understanding these negative associations is crucial for examining the potential influence of social media on the mental health of Nigerian university students, especially considering the rising rates of anxiety and depression among youths. Deborah et al. (2019), found no significant relationship between social media usage and social media anxiety among students

at the University of Nigeria, it underscores the complexity of the relationship. This highlights the need for nuanced exploration and emphasizes the relevance of considering contextual factors and individual differences in the present study. The study by Shahnaz and Arif (2019), sheds light on the impact of social media use on the mental health of female students, suggesting a relationship between social media usage and mental health threats. This is pertinent to the present study as it highlights gender-specific considerations in understanding the effects of social media on mental well-being. Oberiri and Greg (2018), explore social media addiction among Nigerian students abroad, providing insights into excessive usage patterns and associated triggers. While the study found no direct negative influence on academic performance, it identified adverse effects on psychological well-being. Understanding the addictive nature of social media usage is crucial for assessing its potential impact on the mental health of Nigerian university students.

Family relationships play a central role in shaping an individual's well-being across the life course (Merz, Consedine, Schulze, & Schuengel, 2019). An aging population and concomitant age-related disease underlies an emergent need to better understand factors that contribute to health and well-being among the increasing numbers of older adults in the United States. Family relationships may become even more important to well-being as individuals age, needs for caregiving increase, and social ties in other domains such as the workplace become less central in their lives (Milkie, Bierman, & Schieman, 2014). This study consider key family relationships in adulthood marital, parent child, grandparent, and sibling relationships and their impact on well-being across the adult life course.

The theoretical explanations pointed to the primary pathways and mechanisms through which family relationships influence well-being, and then we describe how each type of family relationship is associated with well-being, and how these patterns unfold over the adult life

course. In this article, we use a broad definition of well-being, including multiple dimensions such as general happiness, life satisfaction, and good mental and physical health, to reflect the breadth of this concept's use in the literature. We explore important directions for future research, emphasizing the need for research that takes into account the complexity of relationships, diverse family structures, and intersections of structural locations. A life course perspective draws attention to the importance of linked lives, or interdependence within relationships, across the life course (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2017). Family members are linked in important ways through each stage of life, and these relationships are an important source of social connection and social influence for individuals throughout their lives (Umberson, Crosnoe, & Reczek, 2016). Substantial evidence consistently shows that social relationships can profoundly influence well-being across the life course (Umberson & Montez, 2016). Family connections can provide a greater sense of meaning and purpose as well as social and tangible resources that benefit well-being (Hartwell & Benson, 2007; Kawachi & Berkman, 2014).

The quality of family relationships, including social support (providing love, advice, and care) and strain arguments, being critical, making too many demands), can influence well-being through psychosocial, behavioral, and physiological pathways. Stressors and social support are core components of stress process theory (Pearlin, 1999), which argues that stress can undermine mental health while social support may serve as a protective resource. Prior studies clearly show that stress undermines health and well-being (Thoits, 2016), and strains in relationships with family members are an especially salient type of stress. Social support may provide a resource for coping that dulls the detrimental impact of stressors on well-being (Thoits, 2016), and support may also promote well-being through increased self-esteem, which involves more positive views of oneself (Fukukawa et al., 2000). Those receiving support from their family members may feel a greater

sense of self-worth, and this enhanced self-esteem may be a psychological resource, encouraging optimism, positive affect, and better mental health (Symister & Friend, 2017). Family members may also regulate each other's behaviors (social control) and provide information and encouragement to behave in healthier ways and to more effectively utilize health care services (Cohen, 2014; Reczek, Thomeer, Lodge, Umberson, & Underhill, 2014), but stress in relationships may also lead to health-compromising behaviors as coping mechanisms to deal with stress (Ng & Jeffery, 2017). The stress of relationship strain can result in physiological processes that impair immune function, affect the cardiovascular system, and increase risk for depression (Graham, Christian, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2016; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2013), whereas positive relationships are associated with lower allostatic load ("wear and tear" on the body accumulating from stress) (Seeman, Singer, Ryff, Love, & Levy-Storms, 2012). Clearly, the quality of family relationships can have considerable consequences for well-being. Influencers in the media have become important players in raising youth awareness of mental health issues in Nigeria. Owolabi et al. (2024) looked at how media personalities spread knowledge about mental health, highlighting how they might lessen stigma and promote behavior that involves seeking treatment.

Statement of the Problem

Social media seems to be widely used by young people in Ekiti State, little seems to be known about how it affects their mental health. Social media is perceived to present hazards, such as anxiety, sadness, and low self-esteem as a result of cyberbullying, irrational comparisons, and excessive screen time, social media also provides advantages like connectivity and information availability. By examining the effects of social media on the mental health of youth in Ekiti State, this study seeks to close this disparity. There are limited empirical evidences on the influence of social media on mental health of youth in Ekiti State. This study therefore

investigated the extent to which social media influence the mental health and psychological well-being of youth in Ekiti State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to:

- i. examine the influence of social media usage on the mental health of youth in Ekiti State, Nigeria.
- ii. identify patterns of social media use among the youth in Ekiti State,
- iii. determine the extent to which social media contributes to mental health of youth such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and self-esteem,
- iv. assess whether social media serves as a source of psychological support or distress.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the patterns of social media usage among youth in Ekiti State?
2. How does social media use influence the mental health of young people in Ekiti State?
3. What are the positive and negative influence of social media on youth mental health?
4. How do youth in Ekiti State cope with the psychological effects of social media use?
5. What strategies can be implemented to mitigate the negative mental health effects of social media among young people?

Research Method

Descriptive research design of the survey type was used in this study to assess the impact of social media on mental health of youths in Ekiti State. This design enables an interpretation of theoretical meaning of the construct being measured and to draw inference from the entire population. It enables the researchers to obtain data and high response rate from the sample. The population for this study comprised all the youths under the age of 18 to 35 years in Ekiti State as at the time of conducting this research. They have the same cultural practice and share to some extent societal values. The sample for the study comprised 200 participants which were selected in Ado Local Government area of Ekiti

State, through multistage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on the impact of social media on the mental wellness", (QISMMW) the questionnaire comprised of two sections. Section A was designed to reflect personal data of the youths in relation to his or her gender and age while section B contained 20 items that reflects their use of social media and mental well-being. The respondents were asked to indicate how the concept appears to them by making a mark (√) on the appropriate point of the scale on a 4-point continuum: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

The face and content validity of the instrument were ascertained by two experts in Social Science Department and one expert in Tests and Measurement in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. The instrument were checked for adequate coverage of the topic and clarity of questions. Corrections and suggestions were incorporated in the final draft of the instrument. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, test re-test reliability method was used. This involved administering the research instrument to 20 youths outside the sampled for the study and the scores were correlated, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis and a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained which is reliable enough for the study. The researchers with the help of a research assistant administered the questionnaire on 200 youths selected as sample for the study in Ado Local Government Area of Ekiti State. The respondents concerned were briefed about the purpose of the research and solicited for their maximum cooperation. Data collected were coded and arranged before analysis. Statistical analysis was applied with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions raised.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the patterns of social media usage among youth in Ekiti State?

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Social Media Usage Patterns (N = 200)

Items	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	S.D	Remark
I spend more than three hours per day on social media platforms	82 (41.0%)	64 (32.0%)	30 (15.0%)	24 (12.0%)	3.02	0.98	Agreed
I primarily use social media for entertainment rather than communication	76 (38.0%)	70 (35.0%)	28 (14.0%)	26 (13.0%)	2.98	0.99	Agreed
I frequently check my social media accounts throughout the day	88 (44.0%)	62 (31.0%)	28 (14.0%)	22 (11.0%)	3.08	0.96	Agreed
I follow influencers or celebrities on social media	90 (45.0%)	58 (29.0%)	30 (15.0%)	22 (11.0%)	3.09	0.97	Agreed
I use social media to connect with friends and family	94 (47.0%)	70 (35.0%)	20 (10.0%)	16 (8.0%)	3.21	0.89	Agreed

Criterion Mean = 2.50

From table 1, the highest mean score (3.21, S.D = 0.89) was recorded for using social media to connect with friends and family, suggesting that communication remains a major motivation. This was closely followed by following influencers or celebrities (Mean = 3.09, S.D = 0.97) and frequently checking accounts (Mean =

3.08, S.D = 0.96), indicating habitual usage patterns. The relatively low standard deviation values (below 1.00) This revealed moderate consistency in respondents' opinions, confirming intensive and regular patterns of social media usage among youth in the state.

Research Question 2: How does social media use influence the mental health of young people in Ekiti State?

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Social Media Use and Mental Health (N = 200)

Items	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	S.D	Remark
I believe social media use has a negative impact on my self-esteem	70 (35.0%)	68 (34.0%)	34 (17.0%)	28 (14.0%)	2.90	1.02	Agreed
I often feel anxious or stressed when using social media	66 (33.0%)	72 (36.0%)	36 (18.0%)	26 (13.0%)	2.89	1.00	Agreed
I believe social media allows me to express my thoughts and feelings freely	84 (42.0%)	76 (38.0%)	22 (11.0%)	18 (9.0%)	3.13	0.94	Agreed
I have experienced feelings of loneliness despite being active on social media	74 (37.0%)	64 (32.0%)	34 (17.0%)	28 (14.0%)	2.92	1.03	Agreed
I find myself comparing my life to others' lives on social media which affects my mood	80 (40.0%)	70 (35.0%)	28 (14.0%)	22 (11.0%)	3.04	0.98	Agreed

Criterion Mean = 2.50

Table 2 revealed that the respondents agreed that social media enables free expression of thoughts and feelings (Mean = 3.13, S.D = 0.94), suggesting a positive psychological outlet. However, substantial proportions also agreed that social media negatively affects self-esteem (Mean = 2.90), contributes to anxiety or stress (Mean = 2.89), and fosters loneliness (Mean =

2.92). Additionally, comparison with others on social media (Mean = 3.04) was reported to affect mood, indicating the presence of social comparison pressures. The results revealed that while social media provides opportunities for self-expression, it also contributes to emotional strain, anxiety, and self-esteem challenges among young people in the state.

Research Question 3: What are the positive and negative impacts of social media on youth mental health?

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media on Youth Mental Health (N = 200)

Items	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	S.D	Remark
Social media helps me stay informed about current events trends	92 (46.0%)	74 (37.0%)	18 (9.0%)	16 (8.0%)	3.21	0.90	Agreed
I feel more connected to others through my social media interactions	86 (43.0%)	72 (36.0%)	24 (12.0%)	18 (9.0%)	3.13	0.93	Agreed
I have experienced cyberbullying or negative comments impacted my mental health	68 (34.0%)	60 (30.0%)	40 (20.0%)	32 (16.0%)	2.82	1.07	Agreed
I use social media to find support groups or communities that help me cope with personal issues	78 (39.0%)	70 (35.0%)	28 (14.0%)	24 (12.0%)	3.01	0.99	Agreed
Social media has made me more aware of mental health issues resources	88 (44.0%)	76 (38.0%)	20 (10.0%)	16 (8.0%)	3.18	0.91	Agreed

Criterion Mean = 2.50

From the table 3, the results revealed that on the positive side, respondents agreed that social media helps them stay informed (Mean = 3.21, S.D = 0.90) and increases awareness of mental health issues and resources (Mean = 3.18, S.D = 0.91). Many also reported feeling more connected to others (Mean = 3.13) and using social media to access support communities (Mean = 3.01), suggesting social and informational benefits. However, a notable

proportion of respondents reported experiencing cyberbullying or negative comments that affected their mental health (Mean = 2.82, S.D = 1.07), highlighting potential psychological risks. The results showed that while social media serves as a valuable source of information, connection, and support, it also exposes youth to experiences that may negatively influence their mental well-being.

Research Question 4: How do youth in Ekiti State cope with the psychological effects of social media use?

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis of Coping Strategies Adopted by Youth (N = 200)

Items	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	S.D	Remark
I take regular breaks from social media to improve my mental health	84 (42.0%)	72 (36.0%)	24 (12.0%)	20 (10.0%)	3.10	0.93	Agreed
I talk to friends or family about my feelings related to social media use	78 (39.0%)	74 (37.0%)	26 (13.0%)	22 (11.0%)	3.04	0.96	Agreed
I use mindfulness or relaxation techniques to cope with stress caused by social media	70 (35.0%)	68 (34.0%)	34 (17.0%)	28 (14.0%)	2.90	1.02	Agreed
I limit my social media usage during stressful periods in my life	82 (41.0%)	70 (35.0%)	26 (13.0%)	22 (11.0%)	3.06	0.95	Agreed
I seek professional help when I feel overwhelmed by social media interactions	60 (30.0%)	64 (32.0%)	40 (20.0%)	36 (18.0%)	2.74	1.08	Agreed

Criterion Mean = 2.50

Table 4 revealed that the most commonly adopted coping strategy is taking regular breaks from social media (Mean = 3.10, S.D = 0.93), followed closely by limiting usage during stressful periods (Mean = 3.06). Many respondents also reported discussing their feelings with friends or family (Mean = 3.04), indicating reliance on social support systems. Although mindfulness techniques are

moderately practiced (Mean = 2.90), seeking professional help recorded the lowest mean score (2.74), suggesting that formal psychological support is less commonly utilized. The findings showed that youth primarily rely on self-regulation and informal social support to cope with the psychological effects of social media use.

Research Question 5: What strategies can be implemented to mitigate the negative mental health effects of social media among young people?

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis of Strategies to Mitigate Negative Mental Health Effects (N = 200)

Items	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	S.D	Remark
Schools should provide education on healthy social media habits	96 (48.0%)	72 (36.0%)	18 (9.0%)	14 (7.0%)	3.25	0.88	Agreed
I believe social media platforms should implement stricter regulations to prevent cyberbullying	90 (45.0%)	76 (38.0%)	20 (10.0%)	14 (7.0%)	3.21	0.89	Agreed
I think parents should monitor their children's social media use actively	84 (42.0%)	74 (37.0%)	24 (12.0%)	18 (9.0%)	3.12	0.93	Agreed
There should be more campaigns promoting mental health awareness on social media	92 (46.0%)	78 (39.0%)	16 (8.0%)	14 (7.0%)	3.24	0.85	Agreed
I would benefit from workshops on managing social media use and its impact on mental health	88 (44.0%)	72 (36.0%)	24 (12.0%)	16 (8.0%)	3.16	0.92	Agreed

Criterion Mean = 2.50

Table showed that the highest mean scores were recorded for school-based education on healthy social media habits (Mean = 3.25, S.D = 0.88) and increased mental health awareness campaigns (Mean = 3.24, S.D = 0.85), indicating that educational and awareness strategies are widely supported. Respondents also agreed that stricter platform regulations against cyberbullying (Mean = 3.21) and active parental monitoring (Mean = 3.12) are important preventive measures. Additionally, many expressed willingness to participate in workshops focused on managing social media use (Mean = 3.16). The results showed that a combination of school-based education, parental involvement, regulatory enforcement, awareness campaigns, and youth-focused workshops are perceived as effective strategies for mitigating the negative mental health effects of social media among young people.

Discussion

The study revealed intensive and habitual use of social media, particularly for communication, entertainment, and following influencers. This supports the assertion by Olufadi (2016), who developed the Social Networking Time Use Scale (SONTUS) and emphasized the high time investment of youths on social networking platforms. Similarly, Awopetu et al. (2024), in their systematic review of Nigerian university students, identified excessive engagement as a defining feature of social media addiction. From a methodological standpoint, the consistency in

responses (low S.D. values) reflects patterns of shared behavioural norms, consistent with Bernard's (2017) discussion of quantitative behavioural trends in social research.

The findings showed that while social media facilitates self-expression, it is also associated with anxiety, loneliness, reduced self-esteem, and social comparison. These results are consistent with Berryman (2018), who found significant associations between social media use and psychological distress among young adults. Likewise, Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) concluded that social media exposure is linked to depression and anxiety in adolescents. Karim et al. (2020) further highlighted that excessive online engagement may intensify emotional strain. The observed social comparison effect aligns with Nesi (2020), who argued that curated online identities often foster unrealistic standards that negatively affect youth self-perception.

The study also found that social media increases awareness of mental health issues and facilitates access to support communities. This aligns with Mohamad and Abd Mubin (2023), who reported that social media can enhance mental health awareness and promote help-seeking attitudes among youths. Kawachi and Berkman (2014) and Thoits (2016) emphasized the protective role of social networks in promoting psychological well-being, suggesting that online communities may replicate aspects of offline social support systems. However, the experience of cyberbullying reported in this study supports Aribamikan (2022), who linked social media exposure to negative behavioural

and psychological outcomes among students in Ekiti State. Keles et al. (2020) similarly identified cyberbullying as a significant predictor of depression and psychological distress.

The findings revealed that youths primarily rely on self-regulation strategies such as taking breaks, limiting usage, and seeking informal support from friends and family. This aligns with Ibimiluyi, Fasina, and Ireto-Oscar (2022), who found that social support significantly reduces stress among adolescents in Ekiti State. Umberson and Montez (2016) also emphasized the strong relationship between social ties and improved mental health outcomes. However, the relatively low inclination toward seeking professional help suggests possible stigma or limited access to mental health services, echoing broader concerns in Nigerian youth mental health literature (Awopetu et al., 2024). From the perspective of life course theory (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2017), coping mechanisms adopted in youth may shape long-term psychological trajectories.

The strong support for school-based education, parental monitoring, awareness campaigns, and stricter platform regulation indicates a preference for multi-level interventions. Cohen and Sherman's (2014) theory of psychological intervention suggests that structured, affirming programs can foster resilience and positive behavioural change. Duckworth (2016) similarly emphasized the development of grit and self-regulation as protective factors in managing environmental pressures. Furthermore, Olanrewaju et al. (2021) highlighted digital gaps in Nigeria, suggesting that structured digital literacy education could improve responsible technology use. The emphasis on regulation and campaigns also resonates with Swartz's (2019) discussion on institutional responsibility in shaping behavioural norms.

Conclusion

This study has established that social media plays a significant role in the lives of youths in Ekiti State, particularly in shaping their social

interactions and psychological experiences. The growing presence of digital platforms among young people reflects broader technological and social changes affecting youth development. While social media offers opportunities for communication and access to information, it also presents challenges that require continuous academic attention and policy consideration. Therefore, understanding the broader social and psychological implications of digital technology use among youths remains important for future research and social development planning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Schools in Ekiti State should integrate digital literacy and responsible social media education into their curriculum to promote healthy online behaviours among youths.
2. Parents and guardians should provide guidance and supervision on youths' social media activities to reduce exposure to harmful online content and promote positive usage habits.
3. Social media platforms should strengthen policies and enforcement mechanisms to reduce cyberbullying, online harassment, and other harmful online behaviours affecting young users.
4. Government and non-governmental organizations should intensify mental health awareness campaigns targeted at youths to improve knowledge of mental health risks associated with excessive social media use.
5. Youths should be encouraged to practice self-regulation by limiting excessive social media use, especially during periods of emotional or academic stress.
6. Mental health support services should be made more accessible and affordable to encourage youths to seek professional psychological help when needed.

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