# SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION NEXUS WITH STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: THE PSYCHOLOGIST'S X-RAY

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**Abstract**

*Social media has radically become one of the common leisure activities among its users whereof almost half of the world population (49%) actively use social media and these numbers are rapidly rising daily. The addictive use of social media is fathomed as a behavioral addiction characterized in an individual as being overly concerned about social media. Against this backdrop, this paper is aimed at engaging the Psychologist's x-ray to investigate the nexus between social media addiction and prevalent mental challenges suffered by tertiary school students using the selected tertiary institutions as case studies. Conceptual reviews cutting across mental issues as self-esteem, depression among others were x-rayed. Research design used in this work is a descriptive survey which allows testing of hypotheses. Population of the study cut across three tertiary academic communities with aggregate of 300 students and a sample size of 171. Main source of data for this research is primary data sourced from the recipients' responses as the researcher employed well-designed, close-ended questionnaires. Findings show among others, that: 84.6% of the total sampled respondents agreed that Mental Health Practitioners are not aware of trending mental issue among tertiary institution students; 74.7% of the total sampled respondents agreed that tertiary institution students do not believe in the proficiency of mental health practitioner; It was recommended among others that Mental Health Practitioners should work more in curbing the prevalent rate of social media addiction among tertiary students' mental health.*

**Keywords:**Social media, addiction nexus, mental health

## Introduction

The term "Social Media" has often times been defined as those summations of websites which allow profile creation and visibility of relationships between users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). It has radically become one of the common leisure activities among its users. Now, almost half of the world population (49%) actively use social media and these numbers are rapidly rising daily (Kemp, 2020). We use social media for a variety of reasons such as maintaining relationships, access to information and entertainment (Lin & Lu, 2011). This made social media an inseparable part of many individuals' daily life. Although, social media provides a wide range of benefits and opportunities as aforesaid, but, recently, concerns have been raised about its excessive usage globally, and the resultant ills therefrom, thereto.

The addictive use of social media is fathomed as a behavioral addiction that is characterized in an individual as being overly concerned about social media, driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on to or use social media, and devoting so much time and efforts to social media to the detriment of other important aspects of life (Hilliard, 2019). Though in the past, many studies had mainly explored the opportunities provided by social network, but recently, scholars' attention have been tuned towards investigating the adverse effects of the internet and social media among its users.

In the longest while, the universal concern of social media addiction has been x-rayed as a form of internet-resources-use addiction, whereof individuals exhibit a compulsion to use social media excessively. Surprisingly, individuals with social media addiction are often desperately concerned about social media, and are driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on to and use social media (Kashif, Zaki, Abid & Zin, 2019). Previous studies have shown that the symptoms of social media addiction may be revealed in the user's mood, cognition, physical and emotional reactions, interpersonal and psychological problems. It has been reported, that, social media addiction affects approximately 12% of users across all social networking sites (Haand & Shuwang, 2020). Many studies on social media usage and mental health have shown that the prolonged engagement of social media such as Facebook is largely associated with mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression and negatively associated with long-term well-being (Toker & Baturay, 2016).

For instance, the time spent on social media was positively related to depressive symptoms among tertiary school students in Central Serbia (Pantic, 2012) and in the United States (Lin *et al*., 2016). Furthermore, certain categories of social media users have been shown to be associated with poor or average academic performance (Toker & Baturay, 2016). A large sample survey conducted in the United States also found that the time students spent on Facebook was negatively associated with their total CGPA (Junco, 2012). Laboratory experiments have provided further evidence for the negative relationship between social media use and academic outcomes. For example, Wood (2012) found that multi-tasking via texting, email, MSN, and Facebook had negative effects on real-time learning performance (Jiang, Hou & Wang, 2016). It was also found that the use of Weibo, the Chinese equivalence of Twitter, had negative effects on academic information comprehension (Jiang, Hou & Wang, 2016).

More importantly, it should be noted, that, frequent social media usage does not necessarily indicate social media addiction, and therefore does not always have negative implications for individuals' mental health (Griffiths, 2010) or academic performance. A key distinction between normal over-engagement in social media that may be occasionally experienced by many and social media addiction is that the latter is associated with unfavorable consequences when online social networking becomes uncontrollable and compulsive (Andreassen, 2015). Studies investigating social media addiction have mainly focused on Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, and Tweeter addiction. It was revealed that, addiction to Facebook is positively associated with depression, anxiety, and insomnia (Griffiths, 2010) and negatively associated with subjective well-being, subjective vigor, and life satisfaction (Hawi & Samaha, 2017).

Hence, this paper affiliates with the submission of Hawi & Samaha (2017) who revealed that about half of those tertiary school students who used social media extensively complained of poor sleep quality, poor retention ability which was also corroborated by other studies where a significant proportion of respondents also had poor sleep quality.

Additionally, this paper is poised to show a statistically significant yoke between duration of social media use and mental health concerns. Meanwhile, those with longer duration of social media use were having five times the odds of having a poorer sleep quality; this further buttresses the relationship between social media use and tertiary students' mental health.

Apparently, few prior studies have explored the relationship between social media excessive usage and the users' health issues (e.g. depression, anxiety, etc) among the various age group of its operators. But, more worrisomely, in least developed countries such as Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Niger Republic, there exist really not enough relevant academic literatures. Hence, this paper is poised against this backdrop to take up a Psychologist's x-ray unearthing the bridge between social media addiction and tertiary students' related mental issues. This paper is primarily borne out of the core objective of x-raying the hook between the menace of extravagant social media addiction and tertiary students' mental issues from the Psychologist's overview or angle. But then, the writer cannot but outline specific objectives that would further guide this paper towards a successful investigation of the foregoing subject of research interest which is to explore what impacts of Mental Health Practitioners' level of awareness about possible effects of social media addiction can have on tertiary students' mental health.

**Conceptual Issues**

**Some Mental Issues Coined with Social Media Addiction among Tertiary Students**

**a. Self-Esteem**

Sequel to painstaking findings, it has been noted that, one factor that may underlie the negative effects of social media addiction is self-esteem. Although viewing or editing one's own online profile enhances self-esteem, according to the (Gonzales & Hancock, 2010). Hence, some social media users are frequently exposed to other people's selective and glorified online self-presentations, which can, in turn, reduce the viewers' self-esteem (Kemp, 2020). For example, frequent Facebook users believe that others are happier and more successful than themselves, especially when they do not know well what the other users do offline. It was further revealed, that, the extent of upward social comparisons on Facebook is greater than the extent of downward social comparisons, and that upward social comparisons on social media may diminish self-esteem. Empirical studies have provided support to this proposal. For example, a study by Hilliard (2019) showed that the use of Facebook was correlated with reduced self-esteem, such that individuals who spent a greater amount of time on Facebook per session, and who made a greater number of Facebook logins per day had lower self-esteem. Another study found that adolescents' self-esteem was lowered after receiving negative feedback on social media. Moreover, recent studies have revealed a negative relationship between addictive use of social media and lower self-esteem (Andreassen, 2015).

A considerable number of studies have shown that low self-esteem is associated with many psychological dysfunctions such as depression and anxiety (Toker & Baturay, 2016). Self-esteem has also been shown to be positively associated with academic performance and further serves as a protective factor against adversities in aiding academic and emotional resilience. It is possible that social media addiction contributes to lower self-esteem, which, in turn, leads to a decrease in mental health and academic performance. In other words, self-esteem may play a mediating role in the relations of social media addiction to mental health and academic performance (Jiang, Hou & Wang, 2016).

**b. Depression**

Depression is another major mental health problem globally, especially among young adults. According to World Health Organization (WHO), more than 264 million people suffer from depression. Depression can cause the infected individuals to suffer greatly in their everyday life and it mainly affects their daily routine activities such as studying, working and household chores, whereas the severe level of depression can lead to committing suicide (Kashif *et al.,* 2019). Around 800,000 people commit suicide every year and suicide is identified as the second leading cause of death among young people between ages of 15 to 29 years (Kashif *et al.,* 2019).

Depression is defined as depressive disorders that are characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness, and poor concentration arising from certain ambiguous apparata use. On the other hand, evidence suggests that using social media can adversely affect its users' mental health, mainly the youth generation. Other studies reported that the excessive use of social media among young adults is associated with mental health problems, e.g. depression, anxiety, stress, and self-esteem (Kashif *et al.,* 2019).

**c. Boot-legging or Cyber-Bullying**

This refers to unsocial menace whereof an anonymous social media user consistently threatens or harasses or intimidates other users with baseless fallacies and/or fake news. Users of social media may experience bullying, shaming, negative responses to their posts from unsuspected users living far away, or even, close under the disguise/pretense of e-anonymity. These users may also experience great dangers, risks and discomforts arising from desperate threats and coercions coming from nefarious users standing at the other obscure edge.

**d. Emotions**

Consequent upon the users' (especially, tertiary students) inward comparison of their self-image and life satisfaction to other users, they tend to consciously or unconsciously develop untold negative social media behaviors yoked with isolation, inferiority-complex, and mood swings based on negative content the vulnerable users see while scrolling addictively (Belluomini, 2015).

**e. Cyber-sexual menace (Pornography)**

Many tertiary students and other under-aged users are unguardedly exposed to, and eventually get engrossed in social media sexual graphic contents such as pornographic movies, erotic images, sex-chatting, illegal breach of nude privacy policies, among others. Eventually, this estranged addiction to pornographic contents lead the students astray into a deeper secret world of sexual lust and mental derangement and sexual obsession with utmost desperation.

**Positive Sides of the Coin (Social Media Use)**

With the continuing technological advancements, social media also known as social networking has become the most popular form of communication and interaction between people of all ages throughout the world. Consequently, its positive sides or relative merits or benefits include but are not limited to the following:

**a. Serves as a Communication Stream**

Social media (SM) is a way to communicate and share contents through various technological platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Tumblr, etc. Research on the growing popularity of social media use has found that nearly 8 in 10 Americans use social media, which amounts to a total population basis of 68% on Facebook, 21% on Twitter, 25% on Pinterest, and 26% on Instagram (Greenwood, 2018). Statistics show that the extent of time people spend on social media sites amount

to significantly high rates. On the average, 28% of the time spent using the internet is for social media interaction, and hardly for academics (Huang, 2018).

**b. Fosters High Level of Awareness**

The use of social network is able to facilitate the rate of awareness among the public as regard certain subjects of special interest in the areas of politics, security insurgence, education¸ public enlightenment campaigns, advertisement of necessary commodities, up-and-coming celebrities, government policies among others. Hence, tertiary students and the general public are seamlessly informed about trending news and updates on any subjects of primary concern to their social, academic, economic, spiritual, mental, emotional life (Huang, 2018).

**c. Destigmatization of Mental Health Issues among others**

The social network diligently serves as a virtual facility through which appropriate authorities might debunk or jettison the scourge of Destigmatization of mental health-related issues, ubiquitous medical issues, hate speech addiction, corrupt practices, cultism, social menaces, and others among tertiary students and the general public.

**d. Seamless Access to Online Resources (Vital Information)**

Social media availability and utilization eases the airlines or vaults of access to e-resources, crucial information, and serves as a platform for individuals to relate to one another regarding their fundamental life issues, fundamental human rights, civic duties, and prompt offering of solutions while using the social media applications (Huang, 2018).

**e. Even Access For both Mentally-ill and mentally sane Users**

Social media can also serve as a positive outlet to reduce the potential barriers individuals of all mental backgrounds face in the cause of their living while trying to lay their hands on inevitable data of interest to their life (Huang, 2018). Some few literatures in the past had linked social media use with the liberalism of unbiased access for all and sundry – irrespective of their cerebral peculiarities.

**Methodology**

The research design used in this work is a descriptive survey which gives room for testing of hypotheses**,** it is designed to show the characteristics of particular individuals, organizations and situations. It also helps to provide information on which decisions to prepare and the background upon which further constructive programmes or researches will be based. The population of the study comprises of:

i) One hundred (100) students of Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU), Ago-Iwoye.
ii) One hundred (100) students of Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB).
iii) One hundred (100) students of Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED), Ijebu-Ode.

The population of the study cutting across these three tertiary academic communities aggregate 300 students in all. The sample size to be administered for the purpose of the study was determined using Taro Yamane (1964) formula:

***Whereby*** $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$

***Key Interpretations*:**

n = The desired sample size

N = The size of the population of interest (in this case, N = 300 persons)

e = Limit of error tolerance which the Researcher, assumed to be 5.0% = 0.05

By way of substituting the figure (e = 0.1) into the formula, we therefore have:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{300}{1 + 300(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{300}{1 + 300\ (0.0025)} = \frac{300.0}{1.75} = 171 \text{ (sample size)}$$

The researcher obtains a sample size of one hundred and seventy-one (171) respondents from the population study size of three hundred (300).

Main source of data for this research is primary data sourced from the recipients' responses. The researcher employed well-designed, close-ended questionnaires for primary data-gathering aimed at investigating the foregoing subject. The first section of the questionnaire containing six (6) questions was designed to collect demographic data of respondents while the second section contained twelve (12) questions. The close-ended questionnaire design contained four Likert scale. Reliability of the instrument was determined with the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test. Thereafter, the research instrument was eventually adjudged as having utmost validity and reliability.The data obtained through this research findings was presented for insightful understanding of concerned stakeholders and the reading public with the use of descriptive statistics; table and percentage method.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

**Table 1: Impact of Mental Health Practitioners' level of awareness on Social Media Addiction on Tertiary Students' Mental Health**

| S/N | Variables | SA | A | D | SD | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Mental Health Practitioner are not aware of trending mental issue among tertiary institution students | 121 (74.7%) | 16 (9.9%) | 17 (10.5%) | 8 (4.9%) | **162 (100%)** |
| 2 | Tertiary School students do not believe in the proficiency of mental health practitioners | 89 (54.9%) | 32 (19.8%) | 25 (15.4%) | 16 (9.9%) | **162 (100%)** |
| 3 | Higher percentage of tertiary school students are negatively affected by excessive use social media application | 113 (69.8%) | 24 (14.8%) | 17 (10.5%) | 8 (4.9%) | **162 (100%)** |
| 4 | The positive impact of social media use surpasses the negative side in students' life | 113 (69.8%) | 16 (9.9%) | 17 (10.5%) | 16 (9.9%) | **162 (100%)** |
| 5 | Level of awareness does not guarantee an effective therapy of solution to the tertiary students mental ordeals | 81 (50.0%) | 48 (29.6%) | 17 (10.5%) | 16 (9.9%) | **162 (100%)** |
| 6 | The unhealthy urge to overcome inferiority complex makes most tertiary institution students to use social media | 81 (50.0%) | 48 (29.6%) | 17 (10.5%) | 16 (9.9%) | **162 (100%)** |

The result above shows the level of agreement to variable raised to test the impact of Mental Health Practitioners' level of awareness on social media addiction on tertiary students' mental health. The findings shows that 84.6% of the total sampled respondents agreed that Mental Health Practitioners are not aware of trending mental issue among tertiary institution students while 15.4% of the total sampled respondents disagreed with the assertion. Also, 74.7% of the total sampled respondents agreed that tertiary institution students do not believe in the proficiency of mental health practitioner while 25.3% of the total sampled respondents disagreed with the assertion. In the same vein, 84.6% of the total sampled respondents agreed that higher percentage of tertiary institution students are negatively affected by excessive use of social media applications while 15.4% of the total sampled respondents disagreed with the assertion. In another analysis, 79.7% of the total sampled respondents agreed that the positive impact of social media use surpasses the negative side in students' life and 20.3% of the total sampled respondents disagreed with the assertion. Similarly, 79.6% of the total sampled respondents agreed that level of awareness does not guarantee an effective therapy of solution to the tertiary students' mental ordeals while 20.4% of the total sampled respondents disagreed with the assertion. Lastly, 79.6% of the total sampled respondents agreed that the unhealthy urge to overcome inferiority complex makes most tertiary institution students to use social media while 20.4% of the total sampled respondents disagreed with the assertion.

**Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it goes without saying the fact that, from the Psychologist's x-ray, there is a strong line of connection between the prevalent mental issues of global concern and tertiary students consequent upon the foregoing findings. Larger percentage of respondents believes there is an high degree of awareness on the part of the Mental

Health Practitioners as regard prevalent rate of social media addiction among Tertiary Students' Mental Health. Larger percentage of respondents believes Mental Health Practitioner are not aware of trending mental issue among tertiary institution students. Larger percentage of respondents opines that, tertiary school students do not believe in the proficiency of mental health practitioners. More so, an higher percentage of respondents believes higher percentage of tertiary school students are negatively affected by excessive use social media application. Also, larger percentage of respondents are of the opinion that, higher percentage of tertiary school students are negatively affected by excessive use social media applications. Larger percentage of respondents supports the notion, that, the positive impact of social media use surpasses the negative side in students' life. Larger percentage of respondents believes the level of awareness does not guarantee an effective therapy of solution to the tertiary students' mental ordeals. Finally, larger percentage of respondents agreed that, the unhealthy urge to overcome inferiority complex makes most tertiary institution students to use social media.

**Recommendations**

Consequent upon the foregoing findings, the researcher hereby makes the following policy recommendations:

1. Mental Health Practitioners should work more in curbing the prevalent rate of social media addiction among tertiary students' mental health.

2. Mental Health Practitioner should carry out more researches as regard novel areas of trending mental issue among tertiary institution students, and profer solutions thereto.

3. National Orientation Agency of Nigeria should enlighten and convince tertiary school students so as to secure their subscription to the proficiency of mental health practitioners.

4. The management and Guidance & Counselling Unit of tertiary schools should work out modalities as to eradicate the prevalent negative norms of social media addiction among their students.

5. The tertiary school students' psyche should be professionally re-engineered and reconfigured through appropriate psychological and emotional apparata and systems to explore positive impact of social media rather than the negative sides.

6. Government and concerned authorities should meet at a round table to devise better alternatives through which affected tertiary school students could be made to overcome inferiority complex rather than the addictive social media.

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