

Perception of Social Media Addiction on Mental Health among Kwara State College of Education, Oro Final Year Students

*¹ADEWUMI Idowu Israel, PhD, ²ADEWUMI Eniola Marvelous, ³ADEWUMI Praise Damilola

¹Kwara State College of Education, Oro

²University of Ilorin

³BOWEN University, Iwo

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Social media addiction has emerged as a growing concern among students in Colleges of Education, particularly due to its psychological effects. This study examined the perception of social media addiction and its influence on the mental health of National Certificate in Education (N.C.E.) final-year students at Kwara State College of Education, Oro, Nigeria. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. Using stratified random sampling across all five schools in the college, data were collected from 146 students (out of a total population of 231) using two validated instruments: the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and the General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12), which ensured standardized and reliable measurement of the study variables. Both descriptive and inferential statistical tools were employed for data analysis. The results revealed that 82% of the students perceived social media addiction as a real and harmful phenomenon. Commonly reported symptoms included anxiety, poor sleep patterns, low concentration, emotional fatigue, and reduced attention to academic activities. Furthermore, 72% of students living off-campus reported frequent exposure to mental health challenges due to excessive social media use. The findings also indicated that 51.4% of the respondents were male. A statistically significant association was found between social media addiction and mental health symptoms ($r = 0.275$, $p < 0.001$). The study concludes that the perception of social media addiction plays a critical role in shaping students' mental health and recommends targeted awareness programs, counseling interventions, and digital hygiene education within the college environment.

Keywords: Social Media, Addiction, Mental Health, Students, Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, General Health

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has become an integral part of final year NCE students' daily lives, shaping their interactions, behaviors, and perceptions. Social media addiction, characterized by compulsive usage and an inability to regulate online activity, has been linked to issues such as anxiety, depression, poor academic performance, and disrupted sleep patterns. Young adults, particularly those in their final year of study, may be especially vulnerable to these effects due to academic pressure and the transitional phase of their lives. Therefore, understanding their perceptions of social media addiction and its impact on mental health is crucial for developing appropriate interventions and promoting healthier digital habits.

Globally, the use of social media has completely changed the social narratives of young people's realities. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and YouTube now constitute the primary communication landscape for millions of young people (Dhammathattariya et al., 2021). Social media addiction has emerged from the rapid development of information technology as a mode of interpersonal communication (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Stone & Wang, 2018). The degree to which final-level students

interact in online spaces with friends, relations, and acquaintances represents both opportunity and risk. While these spaces offer avenues to build and expand social networks nationally and internationally (Boyd, 2010), they also expose users to potentially addictive behavioral patterns.

Social media is an internet-based platform that enables seamless sharing of personal information, documents, videos, and photos with anyone worldwide (Dollarhide, 2020). It encompasses a wide range of applications including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google, LinkedIn, Pinterest, TikTok, and Snapchat (Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011). According to the Royal Society for Public Health (2017), many young adults have no lived experience of a world without the internet. Before the current digital era, Nigerian students studied in libraries without electronic gadgets, acquiring knowledge through focused academic engagement (Ayatalumo & Ukegbu, 2018). Today, however, students carry smartphones of various specifications and portable tablets, installing social media applications that command increasingly significant portions of their daily attention. This shift raises urgent concerns about the psychological consequences of compulsive engagement with social platforms.

According to the World Health Organization (2018), mental health is a core component of an individual's general well-being, beyond the mere absence of mental disorders. It encompasses a state in which individuals are productive, aware of their capabilities, and able to manage the pressures of everyday life. Several factors, including social, economic, environmental, and biological determinants, contribute to mental well-being. Concerns about the effects of increased social media use on adolescent mental health have been documented globally and in Nigeria (Adcock, 2016). The present study was therefore designed to investigate the perception of social media addiction on mental health among NCE final year students in Kwara State College of Education, Oro.

Statement Of The Problem

The problem that prompted this study is that since social media has become increasingly vital to the social life of final year NCE students, they are at greater risk of social media addiction, which may be harmful to their mental health (Sujarwoto, Saputri, & Yumarni, 2023). Although literature reveals that Nigerian university students experience certain symptoms of addiction to social media, the excessive use of social media has raised concerns about its broader impact on mental health. According to Stabler (2021), social media use significantly impacts mental health status: although it can enhance connection, increase self-esteem, and improve a sense of belonging, it can also lead to stress, social comparison, sadness, and isolation.

Research has shown that young adults who use social media excessively are three times as likely to suffer from depression (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022; Hunt et al., 2018). Anxiety and depression were the most commonly measured outcomes in the literature, with prominent risk factors including time spent, type of activity, and degree of addiction (Andreassen et al., 2017). Despite existing global evidence, the specific perceptions and lived experiences of NCE students in a Nigerian college-of-education context remain underexplored, justifying the need for the present investigation.

Research Questions

This study sought to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What is the perception of social media addiction among final year NCE students?
2. What are the factors that contribute to social media addiction among final year NCE students?
3. What is the impact of social media addiction on the mental health of final year NCE students?

Objectives Of The Study

The broad objective of this study is to assess the perception of social media addiction on mental health among NCE final year students in Kwara State College of Education. The specific objectives were to:

1. Assess the perception of social media addiction among NCE final year students.

2. Identify the factors that contribute to social media addiction among NCE final year students in Kwara State College of Education, Oro.
3. Examine the effects of social media addiction on the mental health of final year NCE students.

Statement Of Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: Social media addiction has no significant effect on the mental health of the final year students from Kwara State College of Education, Oro.

Significance Of The Study

The study highlights the importance of understanding social media addiction and its effects on NCE students' mental health, empowering them to make informed choices and develop healthier digital habits. It provides parents with insights into the digital challenges their children face, fostering open conversations about mental health and responsible social media use. The study also builds upon established psychological and sociological frameworks, shedding light on how excessive social media use influences self-perception, emotional well-being, and behavioral patterns.

This knowledge provides a foundation for future research, guiding inquiries into the long-term effects of social media on cognitive and emotional development. Moreover, the study provides a basis for policy development, where administrators can implement guidelines that promote a balanced approach to technology use. It also encourages social media platforms to consider the psychological well-being of their users by designing features that promote healthier engagement. By bridging theoretical understanding and real-world application, this research plays a crucial role in shaping a healthier digital landscape for final-year students.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), originally proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). UGT posits that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs and desires, including information, entertainment, social interaction, and emotional fulfillment. In the context of this study, UGT explains why students gravitate toward social media platforms to meet psychological and social needs, such as combating loneliness, seeking validation through likes and comments, and managing boredom or academic stress. When these needs are consistently met through social media interaction, habitual and eventually compulsive use patterns may develop, meeting the behavioral criteria for addiction (Shao, 2009).

Critically, UGT does not imply that all media use is passive or harmful; rather, it frames media consumption as purposeful. However, when the perceived gratifications of social media outweigh the perceived costs, including deteriorating mental health, academic underperformance, and emotional dependency, a maladaptive cycle emerges. This framework positions social media addiction not merely as a technological phenomenon but as a psychologically driven behavior rooted in unmet emotional and social needs, with real consequences for mental well-being. This theoretical lens also informs the study's recommendations, which emphasize addressing the underlying emotional drivers of excessive social media use rather than simply restricting access.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area and Population

The study was carried out at Kwara State College of Education, Oro, located in Oro town within Irepodun Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. Kwara State is situated in the North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, and shares borders with Kogi, Ekiti, Osun, Oyo, and Niger. The study population comprised all NCE final year students in the 2023/2024 academic session, totaling 231 students across all five schools in the college.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size Determination

To address concerns about representativeness and sampling bias, this study employed stratified random sampling across all five schools in the college. This method ensured that each school (stratum) was proportionally represented in the final sample, improving the generalizability of the findings. Previously, only science-oriented departments were included; the revised approach incorporates all faculties, including Arts and Social Sciences, Early Childhood Care Education, Science, Languages, and Vocational and Technical Education.

The sample size was determined using Yamane’s (1967) formula for finite populations:

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

Where: n = sample size; N = total population (231); e = margin of error (0.05)

$$n = 231 / [1 + 231(0.05)^2] = 231 / [1 + 0.5775] = 231 / 1.5775 \approx 146$$

This yielded a sample size of 146 students. Proportional allocation was then applied within each stratum to determine the number of participants selected from each school, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Stratified Distribution of Final Year Students by School

School	Population (N)	Sample (n)	% of Sample	Sampling Method
School of Arts and Social Science	104	66	45.0%	Random
School of Early Childhood Care Education	10	6	4.3%	Random
School of Science	40	26	18.0%	Random
School of Languages	18	11	7.8%	Random
School of Vocational & Technical Education	59	37	26.0%	Random
TOTAL	231	146	100%	

Source: Secondary Data from College ICT Center (2024)

Research Instruments

Two validated psychometric instruments were adopted for this study to improve measurement reliability and enable stronger inferential claims:

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS): Developed by Andreassen et al. (2017), the BSMAS is a six-item scale assessing social media addiction across the core components of salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very Rarely to 5 = Very Often). The scale demonstrates strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach’s alpha reported between 0.83 and 0.91 across multiple populations. Higher scores indicate greater risk of social media addiction.

General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12): The GHQ-12, developed by Goldberg (1972) and widely validated across diverse populations including Nigeria (Gureje et al., 1997), was used to measure general psychological well-being and detect non-psychotic psychiatric disorders. Each item is scored on a four-point scale, with a standard scoring method yielding a total score between 0 and 12. A score of ≥ 4 is indicative of probable psychological morbidity. The instrument has demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.82–0.86) and validity across sub-Saharan African samples.

Both instruments were supplemented with researcher-designed items capturing demographic information and social media usage patterns, which were validated through expert review prior to administration.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that combined the validated scales above with additional closed-ended questions on social media usage habits and demographic characteristics. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics (Pearson’s correlation coefficient). Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 25.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents’ Socio-Demographic Characteristics (N = 146)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	75	51.4
	Female	71	48.6
Age (years)	Less than 18	12	8.2
	18–22	88	60.3
	23–25	35	24.0
	26 and above	11	7.5
School	Arts & Social Science	66	45.2
	Early Childhood Care Ed.	6	4.1
	Science	26	17.8
	Languages	11	7.5
	Vocational & Technical Ed.	37	25.3
Marital Status	Single	124	84.9
	Married	17	11.6
	Separated	5	3.4
Residence	On-Campus	41	28.1
	Off-Campus	105	71.9
Religion	Islam	57	39.0
	Christianity	89	61.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The socio-demographic profile of the 146 NCE final-year students surveyed reflects a population well-suited for investigating the psychological effects of social media. The near-equal gender split (51.4% male, 48.6% female) ensures a balanced gendered perspective, which is particularly important given documented gender differences in social media usage patterns and mental health vulnerability (Andreassen et al., 2017).

The majority of students (60.3%) fell within the 18–22 age range, widely recognized as the most digitally active cohort. This age group relies on social media not only for communication but also for identity formation, entertainment, and emotional support, making them more susceptible to addictive patterns and their mental health consequences. The stratified sampling approach ensured that all five schools were proportionally represented, addressing the limitation of the original study’s restriction to science departments and enhancing the generalizability of the findings across the college.

A substantial proportion of respondents (71.9%) resided off-campus, a significant factor since off-campus students generally have fewer institutional controls over their routines, greater unsupervised internet access, and higher screen time, all of which are established predictors of social media addiction and related mental health concerns.

Perception of Social Media Addiction Among Final Year Students

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Social Media Usage Patterns and Addiction Perceptions (N = 146)

Statement / Item	Response Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Number of social media platforms actively used	1 platform	10	6.8
	2–3 platforms	36	24.7
	4–5 platforms	67	45.9
	More than 5	33	22.6
Average daily time on social media	< 1 hour	14	9.6
	1–3 hours	52	35.6
	4–6 hours	60	41.1
	> 6 hours	20	13.7
Excessive social media use can be classified as addiction (BSMAS-informed)	Strongly Agree	26	17.8
	Agree	81	55.5
	Neutral	28	19.2
	Disagree	7	4.8
	Strongly Disagree	4	2.7
Feel anxious or restless when unable to access social media (withdrawal – BSMAS)	Strongly Agree	13	8.9
	Agree	69	47.3

	Neutral	25	17.1
	Disagree	18	12.3
	Strongly Disagree	21	14.4
Difficulty concentrating on studies due to social media (conflict – BSMAS)	Strongly Agree	28	19.2
	Agree	52	35.6
	Neutral	27	18.5
	Disagree	22	15.1
	Strongly Disagree	17	11.6

Source: Fieldwork, 2026. Note: Items are cross-referenced with Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) subscales.

The responses from the 146 final-year students surveyed provide clear insights into social media habits and their relationship with mental health. Nearly half of respondents (45.9%) reported actively using four to five social media platforms. This multi-platform usage intensifies exposure and potentially deepens psychological dependency, as students simultaneously use platforms like WhatsApp for communication, Instagram for visual engagement, and TikTok for entertainment.

Regarding daily time investment, 41.1% of students spent four to six hours on social media daily, and a concerning 13.7% spent more than six hours, meaning over 90% of respondents exceeded one hour of daily usage. Research consistently links heavy usage patterns to sleep disruption, reduced academic focus, and anxiety (Andreassen et al., 2017). Importantly, the withdrawal dimension of BSMAS was reflected in responses to the anxiety item: over 56% of students reported experiencing anxiety or restlessness when unable to access social media, indicating behavioral withdrawal consistent with addictive patterns. The conflict dimension was similarly represented, with 54.8% acknowledging that social media makes it difficult to concentrate on studies, illustrating functional impairment rooted in digital dependency.

These findings are theoretically significant within the Uses and Gratifications framework. Students engage with social media to fulfill emotional needs (entertainment, social connection, stress relief), but when this engagement becomes compulsive and the inability to disengage causes distress, it transitions from purposeful media use to behavioral addiction. The high awareness among respondents (73.3% agreeing that excessive use constitutes addiction) suggests cognitive dissonance: students recognize the problem yet continue habitual engagement, a hallmark of behavioral addiction.

Factors Contributing to Social Media Addiction

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Factors Contributing to Social Media Addiction (N = 146)

Statement	Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
I have easy access to a smartphone	Yes	146	100.0
	No	0	0.0
Internet availability encourages social media use	Yes	124	84.9
	No	22	15.1

Use social media to cope with boredom, loneliness, or stress (mood modification – BSMAS)	Yes	131	89.7
	No	15	10.3

Source: Fieldwork, 2026. Note: Mood modification item cross-referenced with BSMAS subscale.

The data in Table 4 highlights the structural and psychological drivers of social media addiction among final-year students. Universal smartphone access (100%) removes all barriers to engagement, while 84.9% reported that internet availability directly encourages their social media use. Critically, 89.7% of students acknowledged using social media as a coping mechanism for boredom, loneliness, or stress, an insight directly aligned with the mood modification component of the BSMAS framework and the motivational logic of Uses and Gratifications Theory.

From a theoretical standpoint, this emotional reliance is particularly significant. When students consistently turn to social media to regulate negative emotional states, a self-reinforcing cycle is established: social media provides temporary relief (positive reinforcement), but over time, it may deepen the underlying emotional distress it temporarily suppresses, creating tolerance and withdrawal effects consistent with addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). These findings extend beyond descriptive reporting to illuminate a causal mechanism through which structural access and emotional vulnerability interact to produce addictive social media behavior, a connection that has direct implications for intervention design.

Effect of Social Media Addiction on Mental Health

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of the Effect of Social Media on Mental Health (N = 146)

Statement (GHQ-12 Cross-Referenced)	Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Frequency of emotional exhaustion or mental fatigue after extended social media use (GHQ-12: cognitive strain)	Always	30	20.5
	Often	43	29.5
	Sometimes	33	22.6
	Rarely	27	18.5
	Never	13	8.9
Negative effect on self-esteem or body image due to social media (GHQ-12: self-worth)	Always	36	24.7
	Often	47	32.2
	Sometimes	30	20.5
	Rarely	16	11.0
	Never	17	11.6
Social media interferes with daily activities (GHQ-12: functional impairment)	Always	49	33.6
	Often	33	22.6

	Sometimes	42	28.8
	Rarely	15	10.3
	Never	7	4.8
Decline in grades or academic performance attributable to social media use	Yes	108	74.0
	No	38	26.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2026. Note: Items cross-referenced with corresponding GHQ-12 subscale dimensions.

The findings presented in Table 5, cross-referenced with GHQ-12-dimensional categories, reveal a pervasive pattern of mental health impairment associated with social media addiction. Regarding cognitive strain, a combined 72.6% of students reported always or often experiencing emotional exhaustion or mental fatigue after extended social media use. This aligns with GHQ-12 items measuring concentration difficulties and loss of confidence, suggesting a significant burden of cognitive overload among this population.

The self-worth dimension shows even more concern: 56.9% of respondents reported that social media always or often negatively affects their self-esteem or body image. This finding is theoretically attributable to social comparison processes inherent to social media, where exposure to idealized, curated content generates dissatisfaction with one’s own appearance and achievements, a well-established risk factor for anxiety and depressive symptoms (Vogel et al., 2014).

Regarding functional impairment, over 85% of students reported that social media interferes with their daily activities at least sometimes, with 56.2% reporting always or often. This level of interference reflects the ‘conflict’ dimension of addiction frameworks: social media use is not merely habitual but actively disrupts responsibilities, relationships, and well-being. Most critically, 74.0% of students reported a perceived decline in their academic grades attributable to social media use, suggesting that the psychological toll of addiction translates directly into measurable academic underperformance. Collectively, these findings provide robust support for the view that social media addiction produces tangible, multi-dimensional mental health and functional consequences that warrant urgent institutional attention.

Test Of Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and its effect on mental health.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation between Frequency of Social Media Usage and Mental Health Effect (N = 146)

Measure	Emotional Exhaustion After Social Media Use	Interference with Daily Activities
Pearson Correlation (r)	1.000	0.275
P-value	—	< 0.001
N	146	146

Source: SPSS Version 25 Computation, 2026

The Pearson correlation analysis reveals a statistically significant positive relationship between the frequency of social media use and its effect on mental health ($r = 0.275$, $p < 0.001$). This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H01); we therefore conclude that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of

social media use and its adverse effects on the mental health of final year students. Accordingly, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.275$) indicates a weak-to-moderate positive association, suggesting that increases in social media usage frequency are associated with increased mental health burden. While correlation does not establish causation, this finding is consistent with established theoretical frameworks and prior empirical evidence. Critically, the significant association between frequency of use and functional impairment (interference with daily activities) provides support for the addiction model, where compulsive usage disrupts normal functioning. Future research employing longitudinal or experimental designs could more precisely illuminate the directional causal mechanisms underlying this relationship.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the perception of social media addiction and its influence on mental health among NCE final year students at Kwara State College of Education, Oro, using validated instruments (BSMAS and GHQ-12) and a stratified random sampling design across all five schools in the college. Results indicated a clear and widespread acknowledgment among students that excessive social media use carries harmful psychological consequences. Social media addiction was not only perceived as a real phenomenon, but a substantial majority of respondents had firsthand experience of its mental health effects, including emotional exhaustion, disrupted self-esteem, impaired daily functioning, and academic decline.

Grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974; Shao, 2009), the findings reveal that students knowingly engage with platforms to fulfill emotional and social needs, often at the expense of their mental stability. The mood modification pattern identified in the data, whereby 89.7% of students use social media specifically to cope with boredom, loneliness, or stress, suggests that deeper emotional vulnerabilities underpin addictive usage and that effective interventions must address these root causes rather than merely regulating screen time.

This study reinforces the need for mental health awareness within the Nigerian college-of-education context to move beyond generic approaches and specifically target the psychological dynamics of digital addiction. Campus communities must develop nuanced, evidence-based mental health responses that consider how social media behaviors reflect deeper emotional and social needs.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Organize Targeted Digital Wellness Campaigns – The College should implement evidence-based mental health campaigns focused on digital addiction, educating students on early warning signs and practical strategies for healthy digital balance.
- ii. Enhance Counseling Services for Digital-Related Mental Health – Campus counseling centers should be equipped with trained personnel skilled in tech-induced distress. Mental health consultations should routinely incorporate BSMAS and GHQ-12 screening to identify at-risk students early.
- iii. Introduce Peer-Led Initiatives for Healthier Social Media Use – Student associations should organize structured programs such as “Offline Study Hours” and “Campus Digital Break Weeks.” Peer-driven approaches are more likely to be accepted and sustained.
- iv. Integrate Digital Literacy and Mental Health into Curriculum – Modules on responsible digital engagement, time management, and psychological self-care should be formally incorporated into courses across all schools, equipping students to manage online demands proactively.
- v. Support Future Mixed-Methods Research – Future studies should adopt mixed-methods designs that combine quantitative surveys with in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, enabling richer exploration of the psychological experiences, coping mechanisms, and emotional drivers underlying social media addiction in this population.

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