



## PREVALENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AND ITS PREDICTIVE ROLE ON MENTAL HEALTH OF UNDERGRADUATES IN A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

*The present study examined the prevalence of social media addiction and its predictive role on mental health of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Participants consist of 275 undergraduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka where 141 of them are females, and 134 of them are males. A convenience sampling technique was used to select participants within the campus. Participants' age ranged from 18 years to 35 years with the mean age of 21.95 years and standard deviation of 2.35. Three research instruments were administered to the participants and they include, the Social Media Addiction Scale – student form (SMAS-SF) developed by Sahin (2018), Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) developed by Spitzer et al., (2006), Becks Depression Inventory (BDI) developed by Beck et al., (1996). Hypothesis was tested using the linear regression statistical method. Findings reveal a 43.3% prevalence of social media addiction among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Additionally, findings show that social media addiction significantly predicts general anxiety among study participants, accounting for 15.5% variation in general anxiety of respondents. Similarly, findings also reveal that social media addiction significantly predicts depression among study participants as it accounts for 16% of variance observed in depression. Based on research findings, the researcher recommends that students should set healthy boundaries with social media use and prioritize offline activities. Additionally, there is need to create awareness about the potential negative effects of excessive social media use on mental health.*

## Introduction

The advent of social media platforms has revolutionized communication and networking, providing individuals with new ways to connect and share information. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter(X), snap-chat and few others have become an integral part of our daily lives, offering us a virtual space to express ourselves, engage with others and stay connected. According to studies, people use social media for two hours and twenty-four minutes a day on average (Dean, 2021). In addition, it has been reported that there are 4.021 billion internet users worldwide, of which 3.96 billion regularly use social media, with an average user having eight accounts (Dean, 2021). Nigerian social network users will reach 44.63 million by 2025, up from roughly 24.59 million in 2019, (Predicts Statista, 2021). However, worries about social media's possible detrimental impacts on mental health have surfaced and it is increasing alarmingly. Given that students spend a large amount of time on social media in today's digital age, it is imperative for academics to comprehend the prevalence and ramifications of social media addiction.

The prevalence of social media addiction has become a topic of great interest among researchers, psychologists and society at large. Many believe that using drugs or alcohol is a common component of addiction. According to Harris et al., (2014), addiction is another term for uncontrollable behaviors or habits. A compulsive and excessive involvement in a specific behavior, even in the face of negative consequences, is generally referred to as addiction. Social media addiction manifests as an overwhelming desire to check social media sites for updates, likes, and comments, spending an excessive amount of time on them, and experiencing anxiety or restlessness while unable to access social media. Social media addiction is generally understood as a compulsive use of social media platforms to the point where it seriously impairs a user's ability to function in key areas of their lives, including relationships with others, performance at work or in school, and physical and mental health (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017). One way to characterize social media addiction is as a form of psychological dependence that arises from cognitive, sensory, and behavioral processes and leads to bad social, academic, or professional outcomes for the user (Caplan, 2005).

Globally, social media addiction has grown to be a major area of public health concern. In 32 countries, the prevalence of social media addiction was recently evaluated by a meta-analysis, which revealed a pooled prevalence of 24% (95% confidence interval: 21% to 28%) (Cheng et al., 2021). Literature supports a high prevalence of social media addiction among university students. According to Omoyemiju and Popoola (2021), 14% of Nigerian undergraduate students report having a severe internet addiction. According to Alfaya et al. (2023), there is a 55.2% incidence of social media addiction among Saudi Arabian medical students. There may be serious consequences for mental health from this compulsive behavior. Addiction to social media has been linked to a number of behavioral outcomes, including medical and mental illnesses, increased inertia, restlessness, and rage (Young, 1999). As a result, social repercussions may cause social isolation in addition to the loss of recreational and professional activities (Balci & Gulnar, 2009). A key step in proving that social media addiction is more than just a typical behavioral pattern is determining whether or not it coexists with other mental health conditions.

Many young people don't realize that some of the individuals they follow on social media have somewhat of an unreal lifestyle. Individuals adhere to the guidelines set by social media content and experience pressure to meet these expectations (Onyeizu et al., 2022). Stressful circumstances and mental health problems like anxiety and depression that afflict youths of today result from this. More research by both mental health professionals and general researchers has been necessary due to this phenomenon.

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like elevated blood pressure. As individuals with social media addiction tend to spend more time on web-based than in-person social interactions, their prolonged social media use may erode social skills and promote greater fear of meeting people in real life (Lee-won et al., 2015). Their anxiety may in turn aggravate their symptoms of social media addiction, as these individuals continue to perceive in-person interactions as a source of threat (Ruggieri et al., 2020). Baltaci (2019) reports a positive relationship between students' social media addiction levels and their social anxiety and loneliness. Hardie and Tee

(2007) opined that social anxiety has a relationship with social media addiction.

Depression is an emotional state, marked by feelings of low self-worth or guilt and loss of interest in activities one used to enjoy. The depression symptoms are observed in individuals who spend a lot of time on social media and, in particular, in young people (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). In a study by Karim et al. (2020), it was demonstrated that highly intense social media users are most likely to experience a certain level of depression. Alfaya et al., (2023) pointed out that student with symptoms of depression and anxiety score high on social media addiction levels. According to Bashir and Bhat (2017), excessive social media use can result in anxiety, which in turn might cause depression asserting that extended periods of time spent on social media can cause depression. Conversely, individuals experiencing depression are more prone to retreat from social connections and allocate more time to their online activities.

Understanding the problem of social media addiction is vital to addressing it effectively. The impact of social media addiction on mental health is a multifaceted issue that requires exploration from various angles. Findings from this study will shed more light on the prevalence of social media addiction among Nigeria undergraduates and its possible role in mental health.

This research adopts the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as a framework. The self-determination theory proposes that individuals have three basic psychological needs which are autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the need to feel in control of one’s own actions and choices, in the context of social media as a way to regain a sense of autonomy or control over their lives. They may feel that they have more freedom and agency in expressing themselves and connecting with others online. Competence refers to the need to feel capable and effective in one’s actions. Social media platforms often provide opportunities for individual to showcase their skills and talent and achievement. The validation and positive feedback received from others can boost one’s sense of competence. This can create a cycle where individuals become addicted to the constant validation and recognition they receive on social media. Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected to others and to experience a sense of

belonging. Social media platforms offer a way to connect with friends, family, and even strangers. The constant availability of social interactions and the ability to maintain relationships online can fulfill the need for relatedness. However, excessive reliance on social media for social interaction can lead to addiction and a decrease in real world social interactions.

According to social determination theory, when these basic psychological needs are not fulfilled in offline life, individual may turn to social media as a means of compensating for these unmet needs. However, while social media can provide temporary satisfaction, it may not fully meet these needs in a meaningful and lasting way. This can lead to a cycle of dependence on social media, resulting in addictive behaviours. Therefore, the following research questions was sought in this study:

1. What is the prevalence of social media addiction among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka?
2. Will social media addiction significantly predict general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka?
3. Will social media addition significantly predict depression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka?

The primary objective of this research, is to determine the prevalence rate of social media addiction and its predictive role on mental health of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Specifically, the study aims to determine:

1. The prevalence rate of social media addiction among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
2. The predicting role of social media addiction on general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
3. The predicting role of social media addiction on depression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

### **Hypothesis**

1. Social media addiction will significantly predict general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
2. Social media addiction will significantly predict depression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

## Methods

### Participants

Research participants consist of 275 undergraduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka where 141 of them are females, and 134 of them are males. A convenience sampling technique was used to select participants within the campus. Participants' age ranged from 18 years to 35 years with the mean age of 21.95 years and standard deviation of 2.35.

### Instruments

Three research instruments were administered to the participants and they include, the Social Media

Addiction Scale – student form (SMAS-SF) developed by Sahin (2018), Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) developed by Spitzer et al., (2006), Becks Depression Inventory (BDI) developed by Beck et al., (1996).

### Design and statistics

This research adopts a cross-sectional survey design. The prevalence of social media addiction was tested using frequency distribution. Hypothesis was tested using the linear regression statistical analysis.

## Results

**Research question 1:** What is the prevalence of social media addiction among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka?

**Table 1:** Frequency table showing the prevalence of social media addiction among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Social media addiction	Frequency (N)	Percent
Addicted to social media	119	43.3%
Not addicted to social media	156	56.7%
Total	275	100%

Research findings in table 1 indicate a high prevalence rate of social media addiction (43.3%, n = 119) among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe university, Awka.

**Research question 2:** Will social media addiction significantly predict general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka?

**Table 2:** Regression model showing the prediction of role of social media addiction on general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of estimate	df	F	Sig	$\beta$
	.398	.158	.155	2.794	1(273)	51.340	.000	.398

Dependent variable: General Anxiety

Research findings in table 2 indicate that social media addiction significantly predicts general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka ( $\beta = .398$ ,  $p < .05$ ), as it accounts for 15.5% variation observed in General anxiety (Adjusted  $R^2 = .155$ ,  $F = 51.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Based on this finding, hypothesis which states that social media addiction will significantly predict general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka is confirmed.

**Research question 3:** Will social media addiction significantly predict depression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka?

**Table 3:** Regression model showing the predicting role of social media addiction on depression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of estimate	df	F	Sig	$\beta$
	.404	.163	.160	4.476	1(273)	53.334	.000	.404

Dependent variable: Depression

Similarly, findings in table 3 indicate that social media addiction significantly predicts depression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka ( $\beta = .404$ ,  $p < .05$ ), as it accounts for 16% variation observed in depression, (Adjusted  $R^2 = .160$ ,  $F = 53.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Based on findings, hypothesis which states that social media addiction will significantly predict depression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka is confirmed.

## Discussion

The study examined the prevalence of social media addiction and its predictive role on mental health of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Findings reveal a prevalence rate of 43.3% on social media addiction. This reveals that social media addiction is a real concern among undergraduates in Nigeria.

It is observed that social media addiction significantly predicts general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University accounting for 15.5% of variance observed in general anxiety. This finding confirms the first hypothesis which states “social media addiction will significantly predict general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka”. This discovery is also supported by Baltaci (2019) and Hardie et al. (2007) who reported a positive relationship between students’ social media addiction levels and their social anxiety. Lee-won et al., (2015) attributes this to loss of social skills that emanate due to prolonged web-based activity rather than in-person social interaction, therefore leading to feelings of anxiety when around people.

Additionally, findings indicate that social media addiction significantly predicts depression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, accounting for 16% of variance observed in depression. This confirms the second hypothesis which states “social media addiction will

significantly predict general anxiety among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka”. This discovery is supported by Alfaya et al., (2023) and Bashir et al. (2017) who reported an association between social media addiction and depression.

The findings of this study can serve as a valuable resource for psychoeducation. Clinicians can use this information to educate the general public about the potential negative effects of excessive social media use on mental health. This will help individuals develop awareness and make informed choices about their social media habits.

## Recommendations

In promoting digital well-being: there is need to encourage students to find a balance between their online and offline lives. There is need to take breaks in social media and engage in activities that promote wellbeing such as exercise or spending quality time with loved ones

In order to increase awareness, there is need to educate students about the potential risks and consequences of excessive social media use. Clinicians should help them understand the addictive nature of social media and the impact it can have on their mental health.

In provision of support services, students struggling with social media addiction, depression or anxiety should be provided with counselling services. In fostering healthy coping mechanism, students should

be encouraged to develop healthy coping strategies to manage stress and anxiety.

The study concluded that digital literacy is very necessary, and there is need to educate students on responsible social media use, privacy concerns and online safety. Online or tele-psychotherapists should help the victim of social media addiction to develop critical thinking skills to navigate social media platforms in a way that supports their mental wellbeing

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