



Social Media Usage and Perceived Depressive Symptoms Among Adolescents in Calabar Metropolis

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Abstract

This study examined social media usage and perceived depressive symptoms among adolescents in Calabar Metropolis. The study set out to know if social media could be responsible for depressive symptoms among adolescents. The study was guided by three objectives, as the study hinged on the Uses and Gratification Theory and Social Comparison Theory. Survey method was used to collect data by means of a questionnaire, which extracted data from a sample size of 350 respondents. The primary objectives were to examine the impact of social media usage on the mental wellbeing of adolescents which lead to depressive symptoms in Calabar Metropolis, assess the level of awareness among adolescents about the risks associated with excessive social media usage in Calabar Metropolis and investigate the social media factors that contribute to depressive symptoms among adolescents in Calabar Metropolis. Findings revealed that social media can negatively impact mental wellbeing and contribute to depressive through several key factors which accounted for over 52%, the level of awareness among adolescents about the risks associated with excessive social media usage is low with 59% admitting that they were not aware of the dangers, and lastly, that 87% of students agreed that the social media factors that contribute to depressive symptoms among adolescents are social comparison with idealised content, excessive and addictive usage, disrupted sleep patterns and loss of self-esteem. The study therefore recommends that educators and parents should collaborate to establish clear, age appropriate guidelines that encourage balanced screen time, initiatives should be formulated to enhance student awareness on the dangers of social media usage and how to protect and lastly, adolescents should guard their mental space by setting clear boundaries around how and when they engage with social media and endeavour to turn off non-essential notifications, limiting scrolling to a reasonable window each day.

Keywords: addiction, social media, adolescents, depression, anxiety

Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has significantly transformed communication, social interactions, and access to information among young adults globally. In Nigeria, the adoption of social media has surged, with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X), TikTok, and WhatsApp serving as primary sources of engagement, self-expression, and news consumption (Okon & Etim, 2021; Ezeaka & Ewetuobi, 2024). Izzal and Yusniza (2015) defined social media as a group of Internet-based applications built on the philosophical and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. In some instances, when adolescents are sad or emotionally and socially withdrawn, their parents or teachers might think they are simply playing pranks or acting out poor behaviour for a purpose, whereas, in actual fact, the adolescents might be suffering from depression. Depression is described as a mood disorder that lies at one extreme of mood or affect and is characterised by lowered self-esteem, changes in sleep patterns, changes in appetite or



weight, and an inability to control emotions such as pessimism, anger, guilt, irritability, and anxiety (Smith et al., 2014). Some other signs of a depressive mood include varying emotions throughout the day, a reduced capacity to experience pleasure (that is, an inability to enjoy what one used to enjoy in the past), reduced pain tolerance for minor aches and pains, changes in sex drive, poor concentration and memory, reduced motivation to carry out usual tasks, and lowered energy levels.

Depression is widely recognised as potentially life-threatening, and Adeniyi, Okafor, and Adeniyi (2012) warned that it ranked second after heart disease worldwide as a killer disease. In other words, given the nature of depression, its signs, and its symptoms, it could negatively affect adolescents' social, physical, and emotional development. For example, depression could be attributable to changes in their emotions, their ability or inability to interact with their peers, and even their school performance. Adolescents who are depressed might be at an increased risk of developing mental health problems, which can interfere with their schoolwork and their ability to get along well with their teachers, peers, and parents. They might even develop a decreased interest in and involvement in most of their daily activities and responsibilities.

While the benefits of social media are well known, the relationship between its use and adolescents' health has been a source of concern to researchers. A study conducted by Ezeaka (2024) revealed that students with depressive symptoms used social media much more than those without symptoms. Excessive online video viewing, social networking, late-night Internet use, and online chatting have also been associated with symptoms of depression among young people (Okon & Etim, 2021). The increasing integration of social media into the daily lives of young adolescents in Cross River State has raised concerns about its potential impact on mental well-being. While social media platforms provide opportunities for communication, self-expression, and access to information, emerging evidence suggests that excessive use may be associated with negative psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem. The widespread adoption of social media platforms has transformed the way adolescents interact, communicate, and navigate their social environments, exposing them to unprecedented levels of information, peer influence, and social comparison. However, this increased connectivity has also introduced new risks, including cyberbullying, online harassment, and the perpetuation of unrealistic expectations and beauty standards, which can erode self-esteem, foster feelings of inadequacy, and exacerbate depressive symptoms.

It appears that many adolescents in Calabar Metropolis do not have access to adequate mental health resources, support systems, or awareness of the potential risks associated with social media use, thereby aggravating the problem of depression and other mental health concerns. Without intervention, unchecked social media habits could worsen outcomes such as anxiety, sleep loss, or even suicidality, placing additional strain on already scarce adolescent mental health services. One may ask: What is the impact of social media use on the mental well-being of adolescents in relation to depressive symptoms in Calabar Metropolis? What is the level of awareness among adolescents in Calabar Metropolis about the risks associated with excessive social media use? What social media factors contribute to depressive symptoms among adolescents in Calabar Metropolis?

Objectives of the Study

This study is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To examine the perceived impact of social media usage on the mental wellbeing of adolescents which lead to depressive symptoms in Calabar Metropolis



2. To assess the level of awareness among adolescents about the risks associated with excessive social media usage in Calabar Metropolis
3. To investigate the social media factors that contribute to depressive symptoms among adolescents in Calabar Metropolis

Literature Review

Depression

The term depression was derived from the Latin verb *deprimere*, meaning ‘to press down’. From the 14th century, ‘to depress’ meant to subjugate or to bring down in spirits. It was used in 1665 in the English author Richard Baker’s *Chronicle* to refer to someone having “a great depression of spirit” and by the English author Samuel Johnson in a similar sense in 1753 (Andrew et al., 2021). Depression, also known as major depressive disorder, is a mental health condition characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in activities that once brought pleasure (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is a mood disorder characterised by persistent sadness, a loss of interest in activities, and feelings of hopelessness. It affects how a person feels, thinks, and behaves, and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems that interfere with daily life.

According to Idowu (2024), depression can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease one’s ability to function at work and at home. In its mildest form, depression can mean simply being in low spirits. It does not prevent one from living a normal life, but it makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, major depression (clinical depression) can be life-threatening because it can make one feel suicidal or simply give up the will to live. Depression can be a normal, temporary reaction to life events, such as the loss of a loved one. In Nigeria, mental health services are often limited, and stigma surrounding mental illness can prevent individuals from seeking help (Ezeah, 2017).

Social Media Usage and Depression amongst Adolescents

The word adolescents is derived from the Latin word *adolescere*, meaning ‘to grow up’ or ‘to mature’. It is a period of transition between childhood and adulthood that involves a number of changes in the body and mind. This period is associated with increased vulnerability to health risks, such as mental health disorders, substance abuse, and reproductive health issues (Patton, Sawyer, & Santelli, 2016). In Nigeria, adolescents face unique health challenges, including high rates of HIV/AIDS, early pregnancy, and malnutrition (National Population Commission, 2014). According to Piaget’s theory, adolescents transition from concrete operational thinking to formal operational thinking, enabling them to reason abstractly and think critically. In the Nigerian context, adolescents face challenges in accessing quality education, with many schools lacking resources and trained teachers. This can hinder cognitive development and limit opportunities for social mobility. Patton, et al. (2016) further stressed that adolescence is a critical period for mental health, with many mental disorders emerging during this stage. In Nigeria, mental health services are scarce, and adolescents often face stigma and social exclusion (Gureje et al., 2015). This calls for increased investment in adolescent mental health services and support.

While social media facilitates connectivity and knowledge sharing, concerns have emerged regarding its potential effects on mental well-being, particularly among young adults, who constitute a significant portion of active users (Adebayo, 2020; Ezeoke et al., 2020). The digital landscape encourages continuous connectivity, which often results in addictive behaviours, heightened social comparison, exposure to cyberbullying, and other stressors that can negatively



affect mental well-being. Mental health, a critical yet under-addressed issue in Cross River State, is now at the forefront of public health discourse as young people face rising rates of anxiety, depression, and stress. Young people in Cross River State, already burdened by socio-economic challenges in the country, such as unemployment, academic pressure, and political instability, are increasingly vulnerable to the negative effects of social media use (Adelakun & Abiola, 2020). The constant need for validation, fear of missing out (FOMO), and pressure to maintain idealised online identities often contribute to psychological distress.

Over the past several decades, adolescent depression and suicidal behaviours have increased considerably. Social media use has been linked to increased rates of depression among Nigerian adolescents, with studies suggesting a correlation between social media use and depressive symptoms (Adepetun, 2020). The widespread adoption of social media has raised concerns about its impact on mental health, particularly among adolescents in society. In parallel, depression has reached unprecedented levels among adolescents, and concerns have emerged about the potential for social media use to compromise mental health. Research suggests that excessive social media use can contribute to increased feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). While the benefits of social media are well known, the relationship between its use and adolescents' mental health has been a source of concern for researchers.

Studies conducted by Lam and Peng (2010) revealed that adolescents with depressive symptoms used social media much more than those without symptoms. Excessive online video viewing, social networking, late-night online activities, and online chatting have also been associated with symptoms of depression among young people. In a study conducted to investigate the association between social media use during adolescence and depression in young adulthood, it was discovered that the large amount of advertising often promoted on social media could affect adolescents' mental health. This is because the content often presents adolescents with unattainable images, role models who exhibit high levels of risk-taking behaviour, stereotypical characters that may affect self-image, and anxiety-provoking shows, all of which are potential factors that can contribute to depression among adolescents (Akintola, 2021).

Research by Ajike and Nwakoby (2016) indicates that increased social media use among adolescents correlates with heightened risks of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and low self-esteem. Evidence suggests that unrestricted social media use is linked to an escalation in mental health problems, with cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content exacerbating these issues. Furthermore, the addictive nature of these platforms negatively affects academic performance among Nigerian adolescents. As adolescents in senior secondary schools increasingly engage with social media, there is an urgent need to address concerns surrounding its effects on mental health and the development of depression. Research indicates that this age group is more likely to experience adverse outcomes, such as depression, due to factors such as cyberbullying and addictive use patterns (Omolaiya, et al., 2015).

Review of Empirical Studies

Adedeji et al. (2020) carried out a study on *Internet Access and Use of Social Media among Adolescents in Selected Secondary Schools in Ile-Ife, Nigeria*. The study utilised Technological Determinism Theory as its theoretical framework. A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted in four secondary schools (two public and two private) in Ile-Ife, Osun State. Findings from the study revealed that almost all private secondary school students (97.7%) had access to



the Internet, compared with 82.3% of students in public schools. The majority of the students who had access to the Internet were between the ages of 14 and 16 years (75%), female (73.7%), and of Yoruba ethnicity (90.2%). Likewise, 63.5% of students in private schools and 41.2% of those in public schools had used social media. Nonetheless, 17.7% and 2.3% of the respondents in public and private schools, respectively, had never browsed the Internet. The study recommended that, since most adolescents have access to the Internet and use social media, health practitioners should adopt social media platforms, especially Facebook, for meaningful online health education and communication with adolescents.

Also, Ibimiluyi (2019) investigated *Social Media and Depression among Adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria: Counselling Implications*. The objective of the study was to find out the level of depressive behaviour among adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study adopted the Uses and Gratifications Theory as its theoretical framework. It employed a descriptive survey design. A sample of 600 adolescents was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique from the 16 local government areas of Ekiti State, from a population of 5,000. The results showed evidence of depressive symptoms and even depression among adolescents. Exposure to social media was not significantly related to the development of depression among adolescents. Among other recommendations, the study suggested that school counsellors should design effective methods for detecting, assessing, and treating adolescent depression in schools, where most adolescents are found.

Agbo (2021) embarked on a study titled *Social Media Use: A Risk Factor for Depression among School Adolescents in Enugu State of Nigeria*. A self-structured questionnaire and the Hamilton Depression Scale were used to elicit information for data collection. The results were analysed using mean scores and standard deviations. The findings revealed that risk factors for depression among school adolescents associated with social media use included spending their siesta periods on social media, staying awake at night to use social media, preferring to search for solutions to their problems online rather than discussing them with their parents, using time allocated for reading to chat online, and eating while chatting online. In Table 2, the data revealed that [the relevant finding is unclear in the original text]. The findings also indicated that adolescents who spent up to 10 hours daily on social media experienced reduced activity levels and feelings of incapacity. Adolescents who did not get enough sleep at night due to social media use reportedly experienced hallucinations, low mood, and other symptoms. The study recommended that awareness should be created among adolescents about the risks associated with excessive social media use. However, despite these studies, the perceived depressive symptoms experienced by adolescents, particularly in Calabar Metropolis, where there is a high concentration of young people who are actively involved in social media use, remain insufficiently established. This study would also evaluate their level of awareness of the dangers associated with the devices in their hands.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications theory

According to the proponents of the theory, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), the theory states that media users actively select and employ media to fulfil specific needs. It assumes that people are self-aware and can explain why they use the media. According to Onyemaechi and Okafor (2025), unlike traditional media effects theories that emphasise passive audience reception, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) highlights the agency of users in selecting and using media

content based on their psychological and social motivations. According to Flora and Alaaddin (2023), Uses and Gratifications Theory, which seeks answers to questions such as why individuals use the media and what motivates them to choose certain media content, examines how they use the media. The theory is applicable to this study as it explains why adolescents in Calabar Metropolis engage with social media and how their usage patterns influence their mental well-being, potentially leading to depression. For instance, some adolescents turn to social media for social support and community-building, which may enhance their psychological health (Adekeye et al., 2021; Onyemaechi et al., 2018). Others, however, may develop compulsive usage patterns driven by the need for validation, fear of missing out (FOMO), or social comparison, potentially leading to anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem (Adebayo, 2020).

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory, initially proposed by social psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954, centres on the belief that individuals are driven to gain accurate self-evaluations. In other words, Social Comparison Theory suggests that people evaluate their personal and social worth by assessing how they compare with others (Madison, et al., 2021). The theory explains how individuals evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing themselves with others to reduce uncertainty in these domains and learn how to define themselves. According to Jiang and Ngien (2020), Social Comparison Theory proposes that people evaluate their own abilities, opinions, and worth by comparing themselves with others. Social Comparison Theory is very relevant to this study, as it suggests that adolescents in Calabar Metropolis compare themselves with others on social media, leading to negative comparisons and decreased self-esteem, which can contribute to depression. Social Comparison Theory proposes that adolescents evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design for this study and it involved administering questionnaire to students across selected schools in Calabar Metropolis. The population of this study covers adolescents of Calabar Metropolis, mainly made up of students who are social media users and the sample size was determined as 350 using the Taro Yamane determination template. The sampling technique adopted for this study was the multistage sampling technique, comprising the random sampling and the purposive sampling techniques. The decision is based on the cost of studying the entire population. Simple random sampling was used to 10 streets in Calabar Metropolis, where the schools were selected from. Next, Purposive sampling was applied to select adolescents who are active social media users whether or not they are experiencing symptoms of depression in Calabar Metropolis. The questionnaire was used to get responses from the students. Tables and simple percentage were used in analysing the various responses in the questionnaire. Statistically, the tables helped in displaying the number of occurrences of each subject matter, while simple percentages assisted to indicate the frequency of each subject matter on the tables.

Results

Table 1. *Frequency distribution table showing whether respondents have experienced recently*

S/N	Items	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
1	Sleep problems (e.g., hard to sleep)	178	52
2	Feeling lonely/isolated	41	12
3	Low self-esteem (e.g., I am not good enough)	39	11
4	Loss of interest in hobbies/school	67	19
5	Cyber bullying/harassment	20	6

6	None	0	0
	Total	385	100%

The data indicate that sleep-related problems are the most commonly reported experience among adolescents, suggesting that disturbances in sleep may be a central pathway through which social media use relates to mental wellbeing. While other indicators such as loss of interest in activities, loneliness, and low self-esteem are also present, they occur at noticeably lower levels. Experiences such as cyberbullying appear relatively less reported, though still significant. Overall, the pattern suggests that physiological and behavioural disruptions (particularly sleep) may be more immediate and widespread than emotional or social consequences. This implies that interventions targeting adolescent wellbeing should pay particular attention to sleep hygiene and night-time media use, as these may be early warning indicators of broader psychological strain

Table 2. Frequency distribution table showing the impact of social media usage on the mental wellbeing which can lead to depression

S/N	Items	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
1	Breeding ground for bullying, harassment, and online abuse, leading to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and depression	18	5
2	exposure to curated and manipulated content on social media can lead to unrealistic comparisons and a distorted view of reality	11	3
3	exposure to screens and the constant notifications from social media interferes with sleep patterns	21	6
4	it can create a sense of FOMO (Fear of missing out), leading to anxiety, stress and feelings of inadequacy	7	2
5	All of the above	295	84
6	None of the above	0	0
	Total	385	100%

A clear pattern emerges in which respondents overwhelmingly perceive social media as having multiple, interconnected negative implications for mental wellbeing, rather than a single isolated effect. The clustering of responses around combined effects such as exposure to unrealistic content, sleep disruption, online harassment, and fear of missing out suggests that adolescents experience these factors as mutually reinforcing rather than independent risks. This indicates that the influence of social media is multidimensional, simultaneously shaping emotional, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes. The implication is that addressing only one aspect (e.g., cyberbullying) may be insufficient, as adolescents are navigating a complex ecosystem of risks embedded within everyday social media use.

Table 3. Frequency distribution table showing how often respondents think about the risks of spending too much time on social media (e.g., mental health, privacy, addiction)

S/N	Responses	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
1	Never	89	26
2	Rarely	170	49
3	Sometimes	33	10
4	Often	42	12
5	Always	11	3
	Total	385	100%

The findings reveal a generally low level of reflective awareness among adolescents regarding the risks of excessive social media use, as most respondents report rarely or never thinking about such risks. Only a small proportion demonstrate consistent awareness. This pattern suggests that risk perception is not yet internalised among the majority of adolescents, which may contribute to unregulated or excessive usage behaviours. The implication is that adolescents may be engaging with social media in a largely uncritical and habitual manner, highlighting the need for structured awareness and media literacy interventions that encourage more conscious and informed usage.

Table 4. *Frequency distribution table showing other risks respondents think social media can cause*

S/N	Responses	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
1	Anxiety	35	10
2	Cyber bullying/Harassment	8	2
3	Sleep problems	129	38
4	Addiction (hard to stop using)	173	50
5	All of the above	0	0
6	None of the above	0	0
	Total	385	100%

The responses suggest that adolescents are more likely to associate social media risks with addictive use and sleep disruption than with social or emotional harms such as anxiety or cyberbullying. This indicates a tendency to recognise behavioural and physiological consequences more readily than psychological ones. Such a pattern may reflect limited mental health literacy, where adolescents can identify visible or immediate effects (like excessive use or poor sleep) but may not fully connect these to deeper emotional outcomes. This has important implications for intervention design, as it suggests that awareness programmes need to explicitly link behavioural patterns with their psychological consequences

Table 5. *The level of awareness among adolescents about the risks associated with excessive social media usage*

S/N	Responses	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
1	Low	205	59
2	Very low	81	24
3	High	43	12
4	Very high	16	5
5	Undecided	0	0
	Total	385	100%

The overall distribution shows that awareness of social media-related risks is predominantly low, with only a small minority demonstrating high levels of awareness. This reinforces earlier findings that adolescents do not consistently reflect on the implications of their online behaviour. The dominance of low awareness levels suggests a significant knowledge gap, which may increase vulnerability to harmful usage patterns.

Table 6. *Frequency distribution table showing whether respondents think there are social media factors that contribute to depression among adolescents*

S/N	Responses	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	268	78
2	Not at all	28	8
3	Maybe	61	18
	Total	385	100%

The findings show a strong consensus among respondents that social media contains factors that can contribute to depressive experiences, although a smaller proportion remain uncertain. This indicates that while awareness of specific risks may be low (as earlier shown), there is still a general recognition that social media can have negative mental health implications. The presence of uncertainty among some respondents further suggests that adolescents may sense potential harm without clearly understanding its mechanisms, reinforcing the need for clearer education on how these effects occur.

Table 7. *Frequency distribution table showing how often respondents feel pressure to look perfect or get likes/followers on social media*

S/N	Responses	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
1	Never	74	22
2	Rarely	136	39
3	Sometimes	113	33
4	Often	22	6
5	Always	0	0
	Total	385	100%

The responses indicate that perceived pressure to conform to idealised online standards exists but is not uniformly experienced, with most adolescents reporting only occasional or minimal pressure. However, the presence of even moderate levels of pressure among a substantial proportion suggests that social comparison processes are active, though not always consciously acknowledged. This implies that while adolescents may not consistently recognise or admit such pressures, they are still operating within an environment that subtly reinforces validation-seeking behaviours, which may cumulatively affect self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.

Table 8. *The social media factors that contribute to depression among adolescents*

S/N	Responses	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
1	Social comparison with idealized content	0	0
2	Excessive and addictive usage	15	4
3	Disrupted sleep patterns	19	6
4	Loss of self-esteem	11	3
5	All of the above	300	87
6	None of the above	0	0
	Total	385	100%

The data strongly suggest that adolescents perceive the relationship between social media use and depressive experiences as multifactorial, with key elements such as social comparison, excessive usage, sleep disruption, and diminished self-esteem occurring together rather than in isolation. The dominance of combined responses indicates that these factors are interlinked and reinforcing, pointing to a cumulative effect on mental wellbeing. This underscores the complexity of the issue, implying that adolescent mental health outcomes are shaped not by a single exposure but by a network of interacting social media behaviours and experiences

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study suggest that social media use among adolescents in Calabar Metropolis is associated with a range of behavioural and emotional experiences, with sleep disruption emerging as the most prominent pattern, alongside reduced engagement in activities, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Respondents also tended to perceive the effects of social media as interconnected rather than isolated, highlighting a combination of exposure to unrealistic content, fear of missing out, online harassment, and disrupted sleep patterns. This reinforces the view that



adolescents experience social media within a complex network of influences that shape their well-being. These findings are consistent with studies such as Twenge and Campbell (2018) and Ajike and Nwakoby (2016), which reported associations between social media engagement and psychological strain, although they differ from Ibimiluyi (2019), who found no significant relationship. Within the Uses and Gratifications framework, this pattern suggests that, while adolescents actively use social media to satisfy social and emotional needs, such engagement may also coincide with unintended negative experiences, particularly when usage becomes excessive. The study further reveals that awareness of the risks associated with excessive social media use is generally low, as most respondents rarely reflect on these risks and overall awareness levels remain limited. Although adolescents were able to identify certain risks, especially addiction and sleep-related problems, they showed less recognition of psychological outcomes such as anxiety and emotional distress. This suggests that adolescents may possess only a surface-level understanding of social media risks, focusing more on observable behaviours than on deeper mental health implications. This finding contrasts with Umegbolu (2021), who reported higher levels of awareness, indicating possible contextual differences across study locations. From a theoretical standpoint, Uses and Gratifications Theory helps explain this pattern, as adolescents may prioritise immediate gratifications over long-term considerations, thereby limiting critical reflection on potential risks.

In addition, the findings indicate that adolescents recognise the presence of multiple social media-related factors associated with depressive experiences, particularly social comparison, excessive use, sleep disruption, and diminished self-esteem. The perception that these factors operate together suggests a multifactorial understanding of how social media relates to well-being. This is further supported by evidence of moderate pressure to conform to idealised online standards, pointing to the subtle but persistent influence of validation-seeking behaviours. These findings align with Agbo (2021) and Jiang and Ngien (2020), who emphasised the roles of excessive use, sleep disruption, and social comparison in shaping adolescents' mental health experiences. In line with Social Comparison Theory, the results suggest that exposure to curated online content may encourage comparative evaluations that are associated with reduced self-perception. However, it is important to emphasise that the study identifies perceived associations rather than causal relationships, indicating that these factors coexist with, rather than directly produce, depressive experiences.

Conclusion

The study examined social media usage and perceived depressive symptoms among adolescents in Calabar Metropolis. The findings indicate that adolescents commonly report experiences such as sleep disruption, reduced engagement in daily activities, and feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem in relation to their social media use. In addition, respondents largely perceive social media as presenting multiple, overlapping challenges, including exposure to idealised content, fear of missing out, online harassment, and disrupted sleep patterns. The study further shows that awareness of the risks associated with excessive social media use is generally low, with many adolescents reporting limited reflection on these risks and demonstrating a stronger recognition of behavioural outcomes such as addiction and sleep problems than psychological implications. Additionally, respondents identify a combination of factors such as social comparison, excessive use, sleep disruption, and reduced self-esteem as being associated with negative emotional experiences, suggesting that these factors are perceived as interconnected



rather than independent. Overall, the findings highlight that adolescents' engagement with social media is accompanied by a range of reported behavioural and emotional experiences, as well as limited awareness of associated risks. However, given the descriptive survey design, the results reflect perceived patterns and associations rather than causal relationships. These findings therefore provide context-specific insights into how adolescents in Calabar Metropolis experience and interpret social media use in relation to their wellbeing.

Recommendations

From the findings of this work, the following recommendations were made:

1. The findings suggest the need for targeted educational interventions within schools to improve adolescents' understanding of social media use, particularly in relation to excessive engagement, sleep disruption, and social comparison identified in the study.
2. There is a need to strengthen awareness initiatives that encourage adolescents to reflect more critically on their social media habits, given the generally low level of risk awareness observed.
3. Practical guidance should be promoted among adolescents, parents, and educators to support healthier usage routines especially in managing screen time and reducing night-time use in line with the behavioural patterns highlighted in the findings

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AI Use Declaration:

None
