



IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION ON MENTAL HEALTH OF NETIZENS: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Adebayo Ola Afolaranmi, PhD¹, Donald A. Odeleye, PhD²

^{1,2}Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria.

(Corresponding Author: afolaranmi.adebayo@lcu.edu.ng, +2348055159591)

ABSTRACT

Social media has become a part of the everyday activities of many people in the world. Individuals who habitually leverage social media to carry out more functions are referred to as netizens. However, many of these people may have become addicted to the use of social media. This paper aims at a critical review of selected literature on the implications of addiction to social media on the mental health of these netizens. A systematic literature review approach was adopted to review the selected literature. Brief reviews are done on the meanings of social media and mental health. The paper delved into the concept of social media addiction and the effects it has on the mental health of people using the Internet. Among the findings of this study are many netizens are addicted to the Internet and social media, and these addictions are affecting the mental health of netizens in many ways. It was concluded that the use of social media should be kept to a certain limit in order not to be addicted to it. It was, therefore, recommended that various cadres of stakeholders should begin an aggressive awareness programme on the appropriate use of social media and the Internet so that people would not be addicted to the use of these modern technologies.

Key words: *addiction, internet addiction, mental health, netizens, social media, social media addiction*

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet in general and social media in particular have tremendously changed the world and the ways people are living and relating with one another in the world. The contemporary generation is often referred to as "netizens". It embodies the concept of digital citizenship. As Xiao, Peng, and Liao (2022) aptly observed, "being born into the age of the internet" characterizes this group. Consequently, technology and online communication have become ubiquitous elements within their daily experiences. However, it has to be noted that young and older adults are now acculturating them into the world of the Internet. As good as the Internet and social

media are, their addiction has been having adverse effects on the mental health of netizens. This paper explored the concept of social media addiction and the effects it has on the mental health of people using the Internet. A systematic literature review approach was adopted to review the selected literature. The focus of this review is on studies published in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, theses, and authoritative reports between 2014 and 2023. This was essentially a qualitative desk research that leveraged existing literature and perspectives of the authors who are experienced mental health therapists.

METHOD

Introduction

Existing literature on the implications of social media addiction on the mental health of netizens was critically reviewed. This section detailed the type and scope of review, databases used, search terms used, inclusion criteria and extraction processes, analysis and synthesis methods, ethical considerations, and limitations of the review.

Type of Review: This study employed a critical literature review methodology to analyze and synthesize research findings from various studies related to social media addiction and mental health.

Scope of Review: The review focused on studies published in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, theses, and authoritative reports from 2010 to 2023. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media addiction impacts the mental health of individuals who are active and frequent internet users, commonly referred to as netizens.

Databases Used: To ensure a comprehensive literature review, the following databases were searched for relevant studies: PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus.

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Search Terms: Keywords used in the search included "social media addiction," "internet addiction," "mental health," "netizens," "depression," "anxiety," and "behavioral addiction."

Inclusion Criteria:

- Studies that specifically address social media addiction and its psychological or psychiatric implications.
- Peer-reviewed articles, theses, and authoritative reports.
- Publications in English.
- Studies involving participants classified as netizens (active and frequent internet users).

Exclusion Criteria:

- Studies not available in full text.
- Non-peer-reviewed sources (e.g., opinion pieces, non-scientific articles).

Data Extraction Form: A standardized data extraction form was used to collect relevant information from each study, including:

- Author(s) and publication year.
- Study design and methodology.
- Sample size and population characteristics.
- Key findings related to social media addiction and mental health.
- Conclusions and recommendations.

Quality Assessment: Each study was evaluated for methodological rigor using criteria such as sample size, study design,

data collection methods, and analysis techniques. This assessment ensured that only high-quality studies were included in the review.

Thematic Analysis: Data from the selected studies were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns, themes, and gaps in the research. Themes included the definition and measurement of social media addiction, its psychological effects (e.g., anxiety, depression), and proposed interventions.

Comparative Analysis: Studies were compared based on their findings to highlight consistencies and discrepancies in the literature. This comparative approach helped to understand the broader implications of social media addiction on mental health.

Respect for Intellectual Property: Proper citations and referencing were maintained for all reviewed studies to respect intellectual property rights.

Conflict of Interest: No conflicts of interest were identified in the selection and review of the literature, ensuring an unbiased review process.

Publication Bias: The review may be subject to publication bias, as it primarily includes published studies. Unpublished studies or negative findings were not represented.

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Language Limitation: Only studies published in English were included, which may exclude relevant research in other languages.

Time Frame: The review covers literature up to 2023, and newer studies may not be research on social media addiction and mental health. The methodology ensures a

included, potentially missing the latest developments in the field.

Summary of Methodology: This critical review employed a systematic approach to collect, analyze, and synthesize existing

comprehensive and rigorous examination of the topic.

Social Media

The term “social media” can be used intermittently with terms like alternate media, new media, and online social network services (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). However, online social network services are mostly used for a type of social media. Other terms used with social media are Web 2.0, digital media, peer media, and “NextGen PR” (Auwal, 2018). Some scholars opined that social media can also be referred to as “participative Internet use” (Plaisime, Robertson- James, Mejia, Núñez, Wolf, & Reels, 2020). McFarland & Ployhart (2015) simply defined social media as “digital Web 2.0 platforms that facilitate information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration across people.” On the other hand, the term “Web 2.0” means “the type of web site where people can retrieve, share, write, and store information as desired” (Ngai, Moon, Lam,

Chin, & Tao, 2015). Against the backdrop that social media is seen as part of digital media, Daneels & Vanwynsberghe (2017) have defined social media on three specific characteristics, which are: 1) communication through social media is deinstitutionalized, as users choose their own communication channels; 2) the receiver also becomes a sender with the rise of user-generated content; and 3) communication through social media is interactive and runs through networks. Figure 1 shows the logos of some popular social media platforms.

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Figure 1: Logos of Some Popular Social Media Platforms (Wise, n.d.)

Atteh, Assan-Donkoh, Mensah, Boadi Badzi & Lawer (2020) asserted that social media or online social network services vary “from Web blogs, to micro-sharing platforms, to live streams to social networks and much more.” Social media focus on creating online communities of people who have similar interests and/or activities or are interested in exploring other people’s interests and activities (Omosotomhe & Olley, 2018). Manning (2014) was of the opinion that social media involves interactive participation. This is because social media channels allow people to connect and interact, thereby allowing for more effective two-way communication and fostering conversation among the people

(Schlichthorst, King, Reifels, Phelps, & Pirkis, 2019). Social media platforms are more engaging, anonymous, worldwide, and offer constant availability and equality to their users (Segal & Keduri, 2018). As asserted by Akinyetun, Odeyemi & Alausa (2021), “Social media has made the majority of its users, sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural commentators; with everyone having his/her own opinion as well as a platform to air such opinion even without adequate knowledge of the topic.” Social media has transformed and added worth to “communication through content generation, interaction, engagement, sharing and networking” (Ifejika, Asadu, Enibe, Ifejika, & Sule, 2019).

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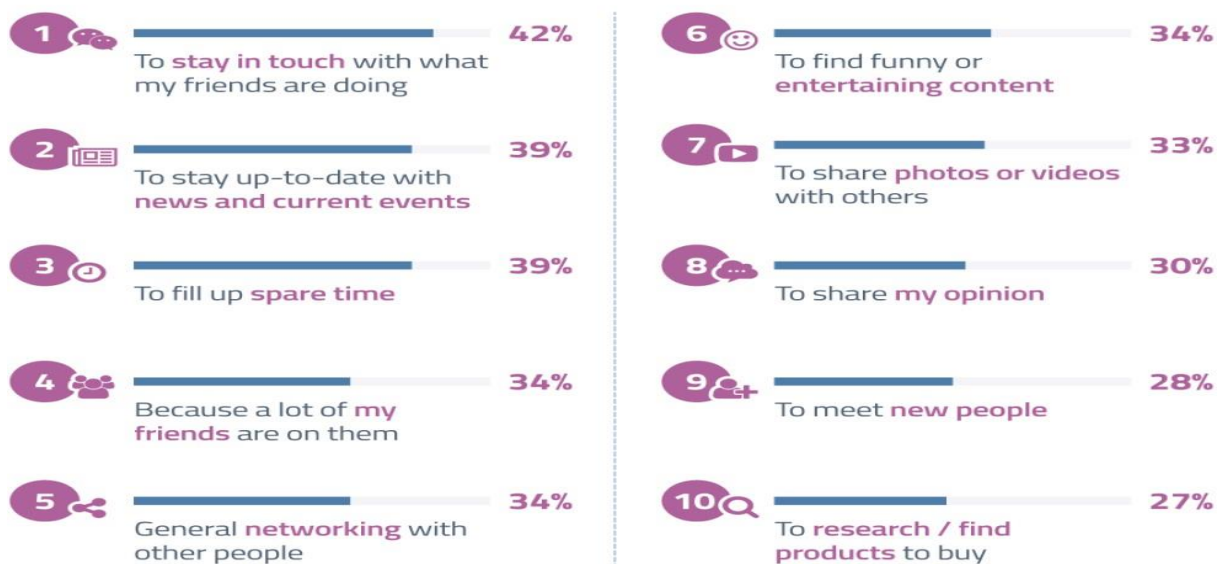
Amodu (2017) asserted that social media tools “are increasingly creating e-communities and e-societies that transcend geographical boundaries and de-territorializes nation-states.” The fact that social media needs little training and is not capital intensive makes it widely acceptable (Monjok, Ulasi & Lee, 2019). Other reasons for the acceptability and popularity of social media are “various target audiences, global reach, and the unprecedented speed of information flow” (Biaty, 2017). The emergence and acceptability of social media have made

the present generation easy access to any kind of information they want through the Internet, especially social media (Olasinde, 2014). Some motivations for using social media have been identified by John, D. J. James, & Y. UleaSalihu (2022). These motivations are: “social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance or knowledge about others (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Figure 2 gives a graphic picture of what motivate people to use social media as revealed in a study.

Top 10 Motivations for Using Social Media



% who say the following are among their main reasons for using social media



Question: What are your main reasons for using social networking services?

Source: GlobalWebIndex Q1 2017 | **Base:** 72,892 Internet Users aged 16-64



PRO Platform:
Social Media > Reasons for Using Social Media

Figure 2. Reasons for Using Social Media (Global Web, 2017)

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Kumar (2020) identified some ways people are using social media. The scholar acknowledged these ways as advantages of social media. These ways are connecting people globally, entertainment, helping needy and poor people, business promotions and Advertising, the source for getting the latest news updates and information, a platform for freedom of speech and

expression, provision of the best learning options and opportunities (education), and the option of searching for a job (Kumar, 2020). However, this scholar also admitted that social media also has its disadvantages like breach of privacy and personal details, cybercrime or cyber-bullying, and the rise of fake news (Kumar, 2020).

Mental Health

According to World Health Organization (2023), it is a “state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community.” Mental health has to do with an individual's overall psychological well-being. It includes the person's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Karim, Oyewande, Abdalla, Ehsanullah, & Khan (2020) also defines as “as a state of well-being in which people understand their abilities, solve everyday life problems, work well, and make a significant contribution to the lives of their communities.” Mental health remains a crucial component of overall well-being. In order to live a meaningful life, it is imperative to prioritize one's mental health alongside physical health.

Good mental health helps individuals thrive in all aspects of life, including spiritual, career, school, and personal relationships. Impairment of any of these are risk factors for mental disorders, or mental illnesses, which are a component of mental health. Depression, anxiety, and substance abuse may be indices of poor mental health. Poor mental health can also have physical consequences, such as headaches, digestive problems, and chronic pain. Left untreated, these symptoms can significantly reduce an individual's quality of life and hinder their ability to function effectively in society. Many factors can influence a person's mental health, such as genetics, environment, and lifestyle choices. Additionally, mental health conditions can range in severity and may require various forms of treatment. Common treatment

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methods include medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of both. It is important to prioritize one's mental health and to seek help as soon as issues arise. Mental health professionals, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and therapists, are trained to help individuals navigate mental health challenges and develop strategies to manage symptoms and improve overall well-being. Additionally, community resources such as support groups, hotlines, and online forums can offer vital support and resources for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.

Social Media Addiction

Wallace (2014) and Mejía-Suazo, Landa-Blanco, Mejía-Suazo, & Martínez-Martínez (2021) asserted that Internet and social media addiction has been one of the issues that many people have been battling since the advent of the Internet. Addiction to surfing the Internet or social media addition is simply the overuse or excessive use of the Internet that interferes with daily life (Afolaranmi, 2017). Hou, Xiong, Jiang, Song & Wang (2019:2) viewed social media addiction as a situation “where individuals exhibit a compulsion to use social media to excess.” According to

Griffiths, Pontes, & Kuss (2016:2), social media addiction is “a subset of behavioral addictions.” It is a condition defined by Shahnaz & Karim (2014:273) as “Internet addiction disorder” (Shahnaz & Karim, 2014). Its symptoms include: undue preoccupation with the Internet or social media, loss of control of time spent on the Internet and social media, inexplicable sadness or moodiness when not online, dishonesty in regard to Internet or social media use, creation of virtual intimate relationships with other Internet and social users, loss of a significant relationship due to Internet and social media use, lack of sleep, and the likes (Afolaranmi, 2017). Specifically, Salihu, Yusuf, & Lawal (2020) opined that “addiction to social media is a type of non-substance/behavioural addiction that affects millions of Internet users on the globe today, which necessitates, for many people, the adoption of certain psychotherapeutic methods to gain a regression from the compulsive behaviour.” As observed by Nazir & Thabassum (2021), addiction to the Internet and social that increases with the wave of COVID-19 and its resultant lockdown and physical distancing have “...made people all the more dependent on varied forms of

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information and communication technologies.” This made the scholars conclude that everyone has become “slaves to the internet and other information and communication technologies” (Nazir & Thabassum, 2021). It was found out in a study that social media addiction can be positive and, at the same time negative (Afolaranmi, 2022). However, the use of social media may become excessive if care is not taken, and it may result to “Social use of social media has led to some relationship conflicts among the youth in their churches.

Implications of Social Media Addiction to the Mental Health of Netizens

Social media addiction can have a range of negative implications for the mental health of netizens. In the first instance, consistently spending so much time on social media may lead to loneliness and isolation, poor self-esteem, and negative self-image, which may lead to chronic anxiety and depression. Statista (2022) reports that every individual spends an average of 2.3 hours every day on social media. Pew Research Centre (2023) asserts that YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat have become more and more popular among young people in 2022. It is also reported that about a third of the youths

Media Obsession” (Afolaranmi, 2022). This obsession, in the words of Chairunisa, Harahap & Khairani (2021) is “losing time... to the point that sometimes it makes us ignore other activities. Not only that, but social media also makes some users move away from the real environment and become other people in their content or posts” (Chairunisa, Harahap, & Khairani, 2021). Some respondents even argued that the excessive

in the study think they spend too much time on these platforms. However, it is postulated that qualitative usage of social media has a positive impact on the overall wellness of people (Marciano L, Ostroumova M, Schulz PJ, Camerini AL 2022). Thus, if individuals would spend ample time on social media working on self-development and other growth issues, it will result in positive mental health. Also, social media addiction can interfere with netizens’ sleep schedules. The constant notifications and urge to check posts can lead to insomnia, and other sleep disorders which can negatively impact people’s mental health. Comparing oneself to others on social media can lead to low self-esteem.

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Social media addiction may lead to feeling inadequate and not good enough. Various forms of addictive and obsessive behaviours may be another consequence of social media addiction. An addiction to social media can leave people with a constant craving for attention and leave them unable to focus on the real world, leading to obsession. Thus, netizens's capacity for effective time management will be hampered since they may be busy with non-essentials of life to the detriment of the more important issues. Research has established that cyberbullying may also be another consequence of social media addiction (Naslund, Bondre, Torous, & Aschbrenner, 2020). Cyberbullying has been recognized by Afolaranmi (2022) as one of the dangerous effects of using the Internet. It is argued that online tools and bullies can lead to negative comments on social media that can escalate to harassment and impact one's mental health. Mejía-Suazo, Landa-Blanco, Mejía-Suazo, & Martínez-Martínez (2021) asserted that excessive use of social media may adversely affect both relationships between people and the personal well-being of the users. The researchers identified sacrifice as a possible emotional factor to lessen the damaging effects of Internet addiction

(Mejía-Suazo, Landa-Blanco, Mejía-Suazo, & Martínez-Martínez, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

While the social media provides an enabling environment for netizens to pursue their life goals and aspirations, it may be helpful to always keep its usage within limits. Thus, it is suggested that prioritization of goals and programmes may be expedient for netizens to optimize their potential. Unmonitored use of social media may lead to addiction, and may also result in poor mental health. In the light of the foregoing, social media addiction may be inimical to the mental health of people, especially the netizens. It is thus suggested that various cadres of stakeholders should begin an aggressive awareness programme on the appropriate use of social media and the Internet so that people would not be addicted to the use of these modern technologies. Parents and siblings who are the first socialisation agency and support system for the individual should make it a point of duty to help netizens in ensuring reasonable boundaries as they engage the social media. Even within families, social media addiction seems to be quite destructive and is leading to the breakdown of healthy social relationships. Overall, social media addiction can lead to negative emotions and mental illness if left unchecked. Regular



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self-care and planned digital detoxes may help curb addiction before it turns into a severe problem. This paper, therefore, suggests that counsellors, psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, parents, and others in the helping profession should

create awareness among netizens on the imperative of spending quality and directed time on social media to ensure better overall mental wellness.

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