

COPING STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN DELTA STATE POLYTECHNIC, OTEFE-OGHARA.

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ABSTRACT

Social media use has become an integral part of undergraduate students' academic, social, and personal lives because it facilitates communication, learning, and information sharing. Despite these benefits, excessive and uncontrolled use has increasingly been associated with adverse psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, poor self-esteem, sleep disturbances, and reduced academic performance. Although previous studies have examined the relationship between social media use and mental health, limited attention has been given to the coping strategies adopted by undergraduate students, particularly in Nigerian polytechnic institutions. This study assessed the coping strategies adopted by undergraduate students to manage the psychological effects of social media use in Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara, Delta State, Nigeria. A descriptive cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. A sample of 400 undergraduate students was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured researcher-developed questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics were employed to test the hypotheses at a 5% level of significance using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0. The findings revealed that students adopted several adaptive coping strategies, including limiting time spent on social media, engaging in

physical exercise and recreational activities, seeking emotional support from family and friends, practicing digital detox, and participating in academic, religious, and social activities. However, professional counselling services were the least utilized coping strategy. The study concludes that undergraduate students primarily rely on self-regulation, social support, and healthy lifestyle practices to manage the psychological effects of social media use. It recommends strengthening campus mental health services, promoting digital wellness education, improving mental health literacy, and encouraging greater utilization of professional counselling services to enhance students' psychological well-being.

KEYWORDS: Social media use; Coping strategies; Psychological effects; Mental health; Undergraduate students; Delta State Polytechnic.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has significantly transformed communication, education, business, and healthcare worldwide. Among these innovations, social media has become one of the most widely used digital communication tools, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), Snapchat, and YouTube have become integral to students' academic, social, and recreational lives by facilitating communication, collaborative learning, information sharing, entertainment, and professional networking (DataReportal, 2025). Globally, social media adoption continues to rise, with over 5.2 billion active users in 2025, representing more than 60% of the world's population (DataReportal, 2025).

Undergraduate students constitute one of the most active groups of social media users due to widespread smartphone ownership, affordable internet access, and the growing integration of digital technologies into higher education. Social media provides numerous educational benefits, including access to online learning resources, academic collaboration, research information, and professional networking opportunities. It also promotes social connectedness by enabling students to maintain relationships with peers, lecturers, and family members regardless of geographical distance (Osman, 2025). Consequently, social media has become an indispensable component of students' academic and personal lives.

Despite these advantages, growing evidence indicates that excessive or problematic social media use is associated with adverse psychological outcomes among university students. Prolonged engagement with social networking platforms has been linked to anxiety,

depression, emotional exhaustion, stress, sleep disturbances, loneliness, poor concentration, cyberbullying, fear of missing out (FoMO), low self-esteem, and poor academic performance (Valkenburg et al., 2022; World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). Similarly, recent studies have shown that excessive screen time and compulsive social media use significantly increase the risk of psychological distress and mental fatigue among young adults (Boer et al., 2024).

The relationship between social media and mental health is multifaceted because these platforms offer both benefits and risks. Positive online interactions may strengthen social support, facilitate access to educational and health information, and enhance students' sense of belonging. Conversely, continuous exposure to unrealistic lifestyles, idealized body images, misinformation, cyberbullying, online harassment, and social comparison may negatively affect emotional well-being. The tendency to compare one's achievements with carefully curated online content often contributes to feelings of inadequacy, reduced self-worth, and dissatisfaction with life, particularly among young adults who are still developing their identities (Pew Research Center, 2025).

Mental health is recognized as a fundamental component of overall health and well-being. According to the World Health Organization (2023), good mental health enables individuals to realize their abilities, cope effectively with everyday stress, maintain productive relationships, and contribute meaningfully to society. However, undergraduate students are increasingly exposed to academic pressure, financial challenges, family expectations, and digital-related stressors that heighten their vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and other psychological problems. Consequently, many higher education institutions are prioritizing mental health promotion and psychosocial support services to enhance students' well-being (WHO, 2023).

An important factor in reducing the psychological effects of social media use is the adoption of effective coping strategies. Coping strategies refer to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural efforts individuals employ to manage stressful situations and minimize their psychological consequences. Adaptive coping mechanisms include limiting screen time, practicing digital detox, engaging in physical exercise, seeking emotional support from family and friends, participating in religious and social activities, maintaining healthy sleep habits, practicing mindfulness, and utilizing professional counselling services. These strategies have been shown to improve resilience, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being among university students (UNESCO, 2023; WHO, 2023).

Conversely, maladaptive coping behaviours such as excessive online engagement, avoidance, social withdrawal, emotional suppression, and substance use may worsen psychological

distress and increase susceptibility to anxiety and depression (Boer et al., 2024). Consequently, researchers and healthcare professionals increasingly advocate interventions that promote digital literacy, healthy online behaviours, and psychological resilience rather than discouraging social media use entirely (UNESCO, 2023).

In Nigeria, internet penetration and smartphone ownership have expanded considerably, resulting in increased social media use among undergraduate students. Although these platforms provide educational, social, and entrepreneurial opportunities, concerns regarding their psychological effects continue to increase. Reports from Nigerian tertiary institutions indicate growing cases of digital addiction, cyberbullying, sleep deprivation, academic distraction, and emotional distress associated with excessive social media engagement. Nevertheless, empirical evidence on the coping strategies adopted by students, particularly in polytechnic institutions, remains limited.

Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara, provides an appropriate setting for examining this issue because its students actively utilize multiple social media platforms while facing academic and psychosocial challenges similar to those experienced by undergraduates in other Nigerian tertiary institutions. Understanding the coping strategies employed by these students will provide valuable evidence for developing institutional mental health programmes, counselling services, digital wellness initiatives, and evidence-based interventions that encourage healthy social media use. Therefore, this study examined the coping strategies adopted by undergraduate students in Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara, to manage the psychological effects of social media use, with the aim of informing mental health promotion, educational policy, and nursing practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design to investigate the coping strategies adopted by undergraduate students in managing the psychological effects of social media use in Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara. A descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a representative sample of undergraduate students at a single point in time and to describe existing patterns of coping behaviours without manipulating any study variables. The design also facilitated the collection of quantitative data regarding students' experiences, perceptions, and behavioural responses to the psychological effects associated with social media use.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted at Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara, located in Ethiope West Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Established in 2002, the institution offers National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes across several schools, including Applied Sciences, Business Studies, Engineering Technology, Environmental Studies, Information and Communication Technology, and Arts and Design. The Polytechnic attracts students from different parts of Delta State and neighbouring states, providing a diverse undergraduate population with widespread access to smartphones, internet facilities, and various social media platforms.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised all registered undergraduate students of Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara during the 2025/2026 academic session. According to records obtained from the Academic Planning Unit, the Polytechnic had an estimated undergraduate population of 8,462 students distributed across the various schools and departments.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for this study was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations:

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

Where:

- **n** = Sample size
- **N** = Population size (8,462)
- **e** = Level of precision (0.05)

$$n = \frac{8462}{1 + 8462(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{8462}{22.155}$$

$$n \approx 382$$

To improve representativeness and compensate for possible non-response, 400 undergraduate students were selected for participation in the study.

Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was employed.

In the first stage, the various schools within the Polytechnic were stratified according to academic programmes.

In the second stage, departments were selected proportionately from each school.

Thereafter, proportionate sampling was used to allocate questionnaires according to departmental student population.

Finally, simple random sampling using the balloting method without replacement was employed to select individual respondents who met the inclusion criteria.

This procedure ensured adequate representation of students across different academic disciplines and levels of study.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a researcher-developed structured questionnaire titled:

"Coping Strategies for Managing the Psychological Effects of Social Media Use Questionnaire (CSMPSMUQ)."

The instrument consisted of six sections.

Section A: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Section B: Prevalence and patterns of social media use.

Section C: Psychological effects associated with social media use.

Section D: Students' perceptions regarding social media and mental health.

Section E: Coping strategies adopted for managing psychological effects.

Section F: Suggested interventions for promoting healthy social media use.

Sections B–F consisted of statements measured on a five-point Likert scale as follows:

- Strongly Agree (SA) = 5
- Agree (A) = 4
- Neutral (N) = 3
- Disagree (D) = 2
- Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1

Higher scores indicated stronger agreement with each statement.

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity by three experts comprising one specialist in Mental Health Nursing, one expert in Nursing Research and Statistics, and one specialist in Educational Measurement and Evaluation. Their comments, observations, and

recommendations were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, adequacy, and appropriateness of the questionnaire before administration.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered to 40 undergraduate students of Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro, who were not part of the main study but possessed characteristics similar to the study population. The instrument was re-administered after an interval of two weeks, and the scores obtained from both administrations were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC).

The instrument yielded an overall reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating good internal consistency and confirming that the questionnaire was reliable for data collection.

Procedure for Data Collection

An introductory letter was obtained from the Department to facilitate access to the study area. Permission was subsequently obtained from the Polytechnic management and departmental authorities before data collection commenced.

The researcher, assisted by two trained research assistants, personally administered the questionnaires to eligible undergraduate students during lecture periods with the cooperation of course lecturers. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents, and informed consent was obtained before questionnaire administration.

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and respondents were given adequate time to complete them. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately after completion to minimize non-response and enhance the response rate.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Permission was also obtained from the management of Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara.

Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study by ensuring that no personal identifiers were included on the questionnaire. Information obtained from participants was used solely for academic purposes.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were coded, entered, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0.

Descriptive statistics comprising frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions.

The criterion mean for decision-making was 3.00. Mean scores of 3.00 and above were interpreted as High (Agreed), while mean scores below 3.00 were interpreted as Low (Disagreed).

Inferential statistics were employed to test the study hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance using the Chi-square test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation, where appropriate.

RESULTS

Response Rate

A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered to undergraduate students of Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara. Of these, 386 copies were correctly completed and returned, giving a response rate of 96.5%, while 14 (3.5%) questionnaires were either not returned or were incompletely filled and therefore excluded from the analysis.

Research Question

What coping strategies do undergraduate students adopt to manage the psychological effects of social media use?

Coping strategies adopted by undergraduate students to manage the psychological effects of social media use.

S/N	Item	SA f (%)	A f (%)	N f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)	Mean	Interpretation
1	I deliberately limit the amount of time I spend on social media to reduce stress and anxiety.	105 (27.2)	165 (42.7)	65 (16.8)	36 (9.3)	15 (3.9)	3.80	High
2	I engage in physical exercise or recreational activities to reduce the psychological effects of excessive social media use.	95 (24.6)	150 (38.9)	82 (21.2)	40 (10.4)	19 (4.9)	3.68	High
3	I seek emotional support from friends, family members, or trusted individuals whenever social media affects my mental health.	100 (25.9)	170 (44.0)	62 (16.1)	38 (9.8)	16 (4.1)	3.78	High
4	I take regular breaks from social media (digital detox) to	88 (22.8)	160 (41.5)	80 (20.7)	40 (10.4)	18 (4.7)	3.67	High

S/N	Item	SA f (%)	A f (%)	N f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)	Mean	Interpretation
	improve my mental well-being.							
5	I participate in academic, religious, or social activities to minimize the psychological effects of social media use.	110 (28.5)	168 (43.5)	60 (15.5)	33 (8.5)	15 (3.9)	3.84	High
6	I seek professional counselling or mental health support whenever I experience emotional distress related to social media use.	70 (18.1)	120 (31.1)	100 (25.9)	60 (15.5)	36 (9.3)	3.20	Moderate
	Grand Mean							3.66

The results presented in the Table indicate that undergraduate students adopted various coping strategies to manage the psychological effects associated with social media use, with an overall grand mean of 3.66, indicating a high level of adoption of coping strategies.

The most highly adopted strategy was participating in academic, religious, or social activities (Mean = 3.84), suggesting that students frequently engage in productive offline activities to reduce the psychological burden associated with excessive social media use. This was followed by deliberately limiting time spent on social media (Mean = 3.80) and seeking emotional support from friends and family members (Mean = 3.78), indicating that self-regulation and interpersonal support are common approaches used by students.

Furthermore, respondents agreed that engaging in physical exercise or recreational activities (Mean = 3.68) and taking regular breaks from social media (digital detox) (Mean = 3.67) were effective coping mechanisms for improving psychological well-being.

However, seeking professional counselling or mental health support recorded the lowest mean score (Mean = 3.20), although it remained above the criterion mean of 3.00. This finding suggests that while students recognize counselling as a potential coping strategy, they rely less on professional psychological services than on personal, social, or behavioural coping mechanisms.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that undergraduate students employ a combination of self-regulation, social support, physical activity, and participation in meaningful offline engagements to cope with the psychological effects of social media use.

Summary of Finding

The study found that undergraduate students generally adopted adaptive coping strategies to manage the psychological effects of social media use. The most frequently adopted strategies included participation in academic, religious, and social activities; limiting time spent on social media; seeking emotional support from family and friends; engaging in physical exercise; and practicing digital detox. Professional counselling services were the least utilized coping strategy despite being recognized as beneficial. These findings suggest that students predominantly rely on informal and self-directed coping approaches rather than formal mental health services.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study showed that undergraduate students adopted various adaptive coping strategies to manage the psychological effects of social media use, with an overall grand mean of 3.66, indicating a high level of utilization. The most commonly adopted strategies included participation in academic, religious, and social activities, limiting time spent on social media, seeking emotional support from friends and family, engaging in physical exercise and recreational activities, and practicing digital detox. However, professional counselling and mental health services were the least utilized coping strategy.

Participation in academic, religious, and social activities emerged as the most frequently adopted coping mechanism, suggesting that students relied on productive offline engagements to reduce stress, improve emotional well-being, and maintain psychological balance. This finding is consistent with the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) and Naslund et al. (2024), who emphasized that meaningful social participation enhances resilience and reduces psychological distress among young adults.

The study further revealed that students deliberately regulated their social media use by limiting screen time, a strategy that aligns with recommendations for healthy digital habits to improve mental health and academic performance (UNESCO, 2023; Valkenburg et al., 2022). Seeking emotional support from family members and friends was also widely practiced, reinforcing the importance of social support in promoting emotional resilience and reducing stress (WHO, 2023; Rideout & Fox, 2023). Additionally, respondents reported engaging in physical exercise and recreational activities, as well as taking regular breaks from social media (digital detox), both of which have been shown to improve psychological well-being and reduce anxiety (Biddle et al., 2023; Montag & Elhai, 2024).

Despite these positive coping behaviours, professional counselling services remained the least utilized strategy, possibly due to limited awareness, accessibility, or stigma surrounding mental health care. Overall, the findings indicate that undergraduate students primarily depend on self-regulation, healthy lifestyle practices, and social support to manage the psychological effects of social media use. The study highlights the need for tertiary institutions to strengthen counselling services, promote digital wellness education, and improve mental health literacy to encourage greater utilization of professional psychological support.

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