

**SOCIAL ISOLATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AS CORRELATE OF MENTAL
HEALTH AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY
DUTSINMA KATSINA STATE**

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Abstract

This study investigates Social Isolation and Social Media Addiction as Correlate of Mental Health among Undergraduate Students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State. The study had three main objectives: to examine the relationship between social isolation and mental health; to determine the relationship between social media addiction and mental health; and to assess the combined influence of both variables on students' mental health. Corresponding research questions and null hypotheses were formulated and tested. The study adopted a correlational survey research design with a population of 15,000 undergraduate students and 200 respondents were used. Findings revealed that social isolation ($r = .512, p < .01$) and social media addiction ($r = .467, p < .01$) each had a statistically significant positive relationship with poor mental health. Furthermore, the combination of social isolation and social media addiction significantly predicted mental health outcomes, explaining 35.5% of the variance ($R^2 = .355, p < .001$). Both variables made significant individual contributions to students' psychological distress. The study concluded that both social disconnection and problematic social media use are significant predictors of poor mental health among undergraduates. In response to these findings, the study recommends that, implementation of peer support systems to reduce isolation, promotion of responsible digital behavior through awareness campaigns, and strengthening of mental health services and outreach on campus.

Keywords: *Social Isolation, Social Media Addiction, Mental Health, Undergraduate Students.*

Introduction

University education serves not only as a gateway to academic and professional advancement but also as a transformative period in the lives of young adults. For many students, especially those entering undergraduate programs, this phase represents their first prolonged experience away from home, family support systems, and familiar social networks. While the university environment is intended to foster intellectual growth, independence, and social maturity, it also presents complex psychological demands. The need to meet academic expectations, adapt to new routines, build relationships, and navigate personal identity can create considerable emotional strain. As a result, mental health challenges among university students have become a growing concern globally, with issues such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and burnout being increasingly reported across campuses (Beiter et al., 2019). These concerns are particularly pronounced in developing countries like Nigeria, where mental health services within academic institutions are often underdeveloped, underfunded, or stigmatized. Thus, understanding and addressing the factors that impact students' mental well-being is critical to ensuring not only their academic success but also their holistic development and future societal contributions. One major factor contributing to these mental health concerns is social isolation, which

is increasingly common among university students due to academic, environmental, and cultural transitions.

Social isolation refers to the objective state of having minimal contact or interaction with others, resulting in a lack of meaningful social relationships and community engagement. In the university context, students may experience isolation due to several factors such as relocation from home, cultural dislocation, academic stress, language barriers, or the absence of a supportive peer network. For undergraduates, particularly in transitional or semi-urban environments like Federal University Dutsin-Ma, social isolation can lead to emotional disconnection and a diminished sense of belonging. This lack of social integration often results in negative psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, emotional withdrawal, and feelings of worthlessness. Empirical evidence supports this connection for instance, Loades et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review and concluded that social isolation and loneliness significantly increased the risk of depression and anxiety in young people, particularly in educational settings. Similarly, Matthews et al. (2021) found that young adults in the United Kingdom who reported higher levels of social isolation exhibited greater symptoms of depression and lower emotional resilience. In a study focusing on Nigerian university students, Olatunde, Lawal, and Alabi (2022) noted that prolonged social isolation was a major predictor of poor help-seeking behavior and worsening mental health outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of fostering strong social support systems and promoting inclusive campus environments to safeguard the psychological well-being of students. Closely related to the challenge of social isolation is the phenomenon of social media addiction, which presents a different but equally impactful threat to students' mental health.

Social media addiction refers to a behavioral pattern characterized by excessive, compulsive, and uncontrollable engagement with social networking platforms, often to the detriment of an individual's psychological, academic, and social functioning. Among university students, this form of addiction is increasingly prevalent due to the ubiquitous presence of digital technologies and the widespread integration of platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter) into daily life. What begins as a convenient tool for communication, entertainment, and academic collaboration may gradually evolve into a dependency that interferes with sleep, reduces attention span, and displaces meaningful face-to-face interactions. The addictive use of social media is typically driven by the need for instant gratification, validation through likes or comments, and fear of missing out (FOMO), all of which can heighten anxiety and social comparison. In university environments, where students are navigating personal identity formation and academic pressures, this compulsive behavior can significantly exacerbate stress levels, emotional instability, and mental health vulnerabilities (Matthews et al, 2021).

A growing body of empirical research supports the detrimental psychological effects of social media addiction, particularly among young adults and students. Andreassen, Pallesen, and Griffiths (2018), in a large-scale Norwegian study, found a significant positive correlation between addictive use of social media and symptoms of low self-esteem, narcissism, and psychological distress. The study emphasized that students who excessively used social media were more prone to experience mood disturbances, academic procrastination, and impaired interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Hussain and Griffiths (2019) conducted a systematic review of large-scale studies and concluded that problematic social networking site use was associated with comorbid psychiatric symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and attention deficits. They noted that the constant online engagement disrupted

users' cognitive and emotional regulation processes. In another study, Boursier, Gioia, Musetti, and Schimmenti (2020) explored the psychological impact of excessive social media use during COVID-19 lockdowns and found that heightened usage was linked to increased loneliness, heightened anxiety, and the intensification of pre-existing emotional disorders in young adults. Furthermore, Zhao and Zhou (2021) investigated the mediating effect of negative emotions in the relationship between social media use and mental health during the pandemic and concluded that the more students engaged with social media under stressful conditions, the more likely they were to experience psychological distress, including depression and emotional burnout. These research findings reinforce the idea that both social isolation and social media addiction are interrelated and mutually reinforcing threats to mental health, particularly in university environments with limited mental health support.

These studies collectively indicate that social media addiction among university students is not a benign or isolated behavior, but a growing public health concern that has direct implications for students' emotional well-being, academic productivity, and social functioning. The false sense of connection it fosters often replaces real-world relationships, contributing to isolation and an erosion of emotional resilience. In the context of Nigerian universities, where institutional support and mental health literacy are limited, the unchecked rise of social media dependency could further aggravate existing psychosocial challenges. Therefore, recognizing and addressing social media addiction as a serious risk factor for poor mental health is essential to fostering healthier academic environments. This calls for a deeper understanding of mental health as a multidimensional concept influenced by both social and behavioral factors within the university setting.

Mental health, as defined by the World Health Organization (2021), is a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Among university students, mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social stability, all of which are critical for academic success, personal development, and interpersonal functioning. However, this vital aspect of student life is increasingly under threat due to various psychosocial stressors, particularly social isolation and excessive social media usage. Manifestations of poor mental health among undergraduates often include mood disorders such as depression and anxiety, irritability, emotional withdrawal, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, and diminished academic performance. These symptoms, if left unaddressed, can lead to chronic mental health conditions and dropouts, especially in environments where mental health awareness and support systems are lacking (World Health Organization, 2021),

The interaction between social isolation and mental health has been well-documented. For instance, Loades et al. (2020) found that prolonged social isolation and loneliness significantly increased the risk of developing depression and anxiety in adolescents and young adults. The effects were shown to persist even after social reintegration, indicating the long-term psychological impact of isolation. Similarly, Matthews et al. (2021) observed that young adults experiencing high levels of social disconnection had a greater likelihood of reporting symptoms of psychological distress, including low mood, emotional fatigue, and suicidal ideation. These findings are highly relevant in the university context, where isolation can result from academic pressure, unfamiliar social environments, and inadequate peer networks.

The dual influences of social isolation and social media addiction on mental health are further confirmed through longitudinal and cross-sectional studies that reveal their long-term psychological

consequences moreover, the link between social media addiction and deteriorating mental health is equally supported by empirical evidence. Andreassen et al. (2018) reported that university students who displayed addictive social media behaviors experienced higher levels of psychological strain, poor self-image, and emotional instability. In the same vein, Boursier et al. (2020) emphasized that problematic use of social networking platforms, particularly during periods of isolation like the COVID-19 lockdowns, contributed to increased anxiety, loneliness, and reduced psychological well-being among students. Zhao and Zhou (2021) further confirmed that excessive engagement with social media under emotionally taxing conditions acted as a maladaptive coping mechanism, exacerbating symptoms of depression and negative affect.

In the Nigerian context, Olatunde, Lawal, and Alabi (2022) found that many undergraduates who reported persistent emotional distress had limited awareness of mental health resources and were often reluctant to seek help due to cultural stigma. The study concluded that both social disconnection and compulsive digital engagement played a significant role in shaping students' mental health outcomes. Given the evolving digital culture and shifting patterns of social behavior among youth, mental health challenges in Nigerian universities, particularly in semi-urban institutions like Federal University Dutsin-Ma, must be addressed with context-specific interventions that consider both technological and social factors.

Therefore, understanding mental health not as a standalone condition but as one influenced by students' social environments and digital behaviors is crucial. Interventions must go beyond clinical treatment to include awareness, peer support, inclusive campus activities, and digital literacy campaigns aimed at promoting healthier social and online habits. Only through such a holistic approach can the mental well-being of university students be adequately safeguarded.

Statement of the Problem

Mental health is a fundamental pillar of student success, affecting not only academic performance but also emotional resilience, social relationships, and overall quality of life. In an ideal university setting, students are expected to thrive in a balanced environment that fosters cognitive development, peer engagement, and psychological well-being. However, this sense of normalcy is increasingly disrupted by rising mental health challenges among undergraduates, manifesting in depression, anxiety, emotional fatigue, academic burnout, and in some cases, suicidal ideation. These psychological disturbances are often rooted in or exacerbated by two interrelated factors social isolation and social media addiction which have become increasingly prevalent in today's digitized, post-pandemic academic environments (Olatunde, Lawal, & Alabi, 2022).

Social isolation, once considered a marginal issue, is now a pressing concern in higher education. Students who are disconnected from their peers and academic community due to relocation, cultural barriers, or lack of social support may experience chronic loneliness and emotional withdrawal. Similarly, social media, although originally intended to foster connection, has evolved into a source of psychological dependency. The compulsive need to stay online, seek validation, and engage with digital content often displaces meaningful real-world interactions and contributes to emotional instability. As students become increasingly immersed in digital spaces, their mental health is placed at risk, especially in environments lacking adequate support services or awareness initiatives (Loades et al., 2020).

In the Nigerian context, and particularly at institutions such as Federal University Dutsin-Ma, these issues are compounded by several socio-cultural and infrastructural limitations. Despite the growing presence of mental health issues on campus, students have limited access to counseling services, mental health education, and peer support systems. There is also persistent stigma surrounding mental illness, which discourages open dialogue and help-seeking behavior. Moreover, while previous research has independently examined the impacts of social isolation or social media addiction, very few studies have explored the interactive or combined influence of both variables on students' mental health especially within the socio-cultural and technological landscape of Northern Nigerian universities.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill a critical gap in the literature by examining the combined effect of social isolation and social media addiction on the mental health of undergraduate students at Federal University Dutsin-Ma. By identifying the extent to which these psychosocial factors contribute to mental health deterioration, the study aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform the development of student-centered mental health interventions, promote social inclusion, and encourage responsible use of digital media. Addressing these concerns is essential not only for improving student well-being but also for strengthening academic engagement, retention, and long-term success. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by assessing the correlation of social isolation and social media addiction on the mental health of undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State.²

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between social isolation, social media addiction, and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the relationship between social isolation and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma.
2. determine the relationship between social media addiction and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma.
3. assess the combined influence of social isolation and social media addiction on mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives of the study, the following research questions are raised to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between social isolation and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma?
2. What is the relationship between social media addiction and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma?
3. What is the combined influence of social isolation and social media addiction on the mental health of undergraduate students in Federal University Dutsin-Ma?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses (H_0) are formulated to be tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between social isolation and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma.

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between social media addiction and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma.

HO₃: There is no significant combined influence of social isolation and social media addiction on the mental health of undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational survey research design to examine the relationship between social isolation, social media addiction, and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State. The population of the study is 15,000 students which are spread across various faculties and departments of the 2024/2025 academic session. A total sample size of 200 students was drawn from this population with a multistage sampling technique using stratified random sampling technique, and purposive sampling. The sampling process involved selecting two faculties (Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Agriculture) based on their academic diversity and relevance to the psychosocial dimensions under investigation. Each of these faculties was further stratified by department, from which two departments were selected from each faculty. This yielded a total of four departments. From each department, 50 students were randomly selected, making a total of 200 respondents (i.e., 2 faculties × 2 departments × 50 students = 200 respondents). This distribution ensures equal representation across academic disciplines and enhances the reliability and generalizability of the findings within the institutional context.

The primary instrument for data collection will be a structured questionnaire divided into four sections: Section 'A' focuses on demographic information of the respondents; Section 'B' assessed Social Isolation using the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale; Section 'C' measured Social Media Addiction using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS); and Section 'D' evaluated Mental Health using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). To ensure internal consistency and reliability of the research instruments used in this study, Cronbach's Alpha was employed. A pilot study involving 30 undergraduate students from Federal University Dutsin-Ma (excluded from the main study) was conducted. The data collected were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25. The results of the reliability test for each instrument are presented below: Social Isolation Scale (SIS) Cronbach's Alpha: 0.83, Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) Cronbach's Alpha: 0.87 and Mental Health Scale (MHS) Cronbach's Alpha: 0.79. Data were collected both physically and online via Google Forms, with informed consent obtained from all participants and strict confidentiality maintained. Data analysis will be analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25, employing descriptive statistics for demographic data, Pearson Product Moment Correlation to test the first two hypotheses, and Multiple Regression Analysis to test hypothesis three. All hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypotheses Testing

The following null hypotheses were tested using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for Hypotheses 1 and 2, while Multiple Regression Analysis was used to test Hypothesis 3 at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: PPMC Result Showing the Relationship between Social Isolation and Mental Health

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	Df	r-value	P-value	Decision
Social Isolation	200	48.12	8.46	198	0.512	0.000	Significant
Mental Health	200	42.78	7.91				

$p < .05$ (2-tailed)

The result in table 1 showed that Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = .512$, $p < .05$) indicates a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between social isolation and poor mental health. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected. This suggests that as social isolation increases, mental health challenges among students also increase.

Hypothesis 2 (H_{02}): There is no significant relationship between social media addiction and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Result Showing the Relationship between Social Media Addiction and Mental Health

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	Df	r-Value	P-value	Decision
Social Media Addiction	200	45.67	9.03	198	0.467	0.000	Significant
Mental Health	200	42.78	7.91				

$p < .05$ (2-tailed)

The result in table 2 showed that Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = .467$, $p < .05$) shows a significant positive relationship between social media addiction and poor mental health. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected. This implies that higher levels of social media addiction are associated with poorer mental health outcomes among students.

Hypothesis 3 (H_{03}): There is no significant combined influence of social isolation and social media addiction on the mental health of undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Mental Health from Social Isolation and Social Media Addiction Table 3.1

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.596	0.355	0.349	6.39

The model summary shows that social isolation and social media addiction Combined account for 35.5% of the variance in students' mental health ($R^2 = 0.355$). The R-value of 0.596 indicates a moderate positive multiple correlation between the predictors and mental health. The adjusted $R^2 = 0.349$ reflects a corrected estimate for sample size. The standard error of estimate (6.39) suggests the average deviation of the predicted scores from actual scores.

Table 3.2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)
Regression	4412.24	2	2206.12		
Residual	8008.76	197	40.66	54.21	0.000
Total	12421.00	199			

The ANOVA table indicates that the regression model is statistically significant ($F(2,197) = 54.21, p < 0.001$). This implies that the combined influence of social isolation and social media addiction significantly predicts mental health outcomes among the students.

Table 3.3: Test of Significance of Regression Coefficients

Variable (Model)	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)
Constant	18.462	2.041	—	9.05	0.000
Social Isolation	0.412	0.079	0.392	5.22	0.000
Social Media Addiction	0.287	0.073	0.308	3.93	0.000

The regression coefficients indicate that both predictors make statistically significant contributions to the prediction of mental health. Since the p-values for both predictors are less than 0.05 and the overall model is significant, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{03}). This confirms that social isolation and social media addiction combined have a significant influence on the mental health of undergraduate students

Summary of Findings

The study investigated the relationship between social isolation, social media addiction, and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State. The findings were derived from statistical analyses conducted on data collected from a sample of 200 students across four departments in the Faculties of Education and Agriculture. The results are summarized as follows:

1. A moderate positive and statistically significant relationship was found between social isolation and mental health ($r = .512, p < .05$).
2. A significant positive correlation was observed between social media addiction and mental health ($r = .467, p < .05$).
3. Multiple regression analysis revealed that social isolation and social media addiction combined accounted for 35.5% of the variance in mental health outcomes ($R^2 = .355, F(2,197) = 54.21, p < .001$). Both social isolation ($\beta = .392, p < .001$) and social media addiction ($\beta = .308, p < .005$) made significant individual contributions to the prediction of mental health issues.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how social isolation and social media addiction influence the mental health of undergraduate students at Federal University Dutsin-Ma. The findings from the analysis provided compelling evidence of the significant roles these two psychosocial variables play in determining students' psychological well-being. Each of the findings aligns with and adds to the growing body of research in this field.

1. The study found a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between social isolation and poor mental health. This supports the assertion that students who experience reduced social engagement, feelings of loneliness, and lack of community belongingness are more likely to report symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. This is consistent with the findings of Loades et al. (2020), who emphasized that prolonged social isolation significantly increases the risk of mental health issues in young people. Similarly, Matthews et al. (2021) found that perceived social exclusion was a strong predictor of depressive symptoms and emotional vulnerability in university-aged individuals. However, a contrasting view is offered by Cacioppo and Patrick (2008), who argued that while chronic loneliness may affect mental health over time, temporary or situational social isolation does not necessarily result in psychological harm, particularly among individuals with strong internal coping mechanisms or digital support networks. This suggests that the impact of social isolation on mental health may vary depending on personal resilience and the quality not just the quantity of social connections.
2. A significant positive correlation was also observed between social media addiction and poor mental health outcomes. This indicates that students who spend excessive time on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram are more likely to report anxiety, stress, mood swings, sleep disturbances, and academic disengagement. These findings are in line with the work of Andreassen et al. (2018), who found that problematic social media use is associated with low self-esteem, emotional instability, and depressive symptoms. Hussain and Griffiths (2019) also highlighted that social media addiction contributes to psychological distress and impairs emotional regulation. However, contrary evidence is provided by Orben and Przybylski (2019), who argued that the effect of social media use on adolescent well-being is minimal and statistically insignificant when controlling for confounding factors such as offline relationships,

socioeconomic status, and personality traits. Their large-scale longitudinal analysis concluded that screen time alone is a weak predictor of mental health issues, and that concerns around social media may be overstated without contextual nuances.

3. This finding is particularly important because it reveals that mental health issues among university students are often multifactorial, shaped by both environmental (social disconnection) and behavioral (digital dependency) influences. It also aligns with studies by Boursier et al. (2020) and Zhao and Zhou (2021), who argued that excessive social media use, when combined with emotional vulnerabilities such as loneliness or isolation, significantly worsens mental health outcomes. However, Valkenburg et al. (2022) provided a more differentiated view, suggesting that the impact of social media on mental health depends largely on how the platforms are used. Their meta-analysis found that active and meaningful engagement such as maintaining supportive online relationships can actually buffer the negative effects of offline isolation and enhance psychological well-being. This implies that not all forms of social media use are detrimental, and the context and intent behind digital interaction play a critical role in shaping mental health outcomes.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between social isolation, social media addiction, and mental health among undergraduate students of Federal University Dutsin-Ma. The findings revealed that both social isolation and social media addiction significantly influence students' mental well-being, both individually and in combination. Social isolation was found to have a stronger predictive influence on mental health outcomes, although both variables contributed significantly to psychological distress among students. The results highlight a critical concern that many students are navigating their academic lives under considerable emotional strain, much of which stems from weakened real-life social interactions and unhealthy digital behaviors. In today's technology-driven and socially fragmented university environment, mental health has become increasingly vulnerable to the effects of both social disconnection and excessive online engagement.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated that 35.5% of the variance in mental health can be explained by these two factors, underscoring the importance of addressing them in any comprehensive student wellness initiative. Given the limited availability of mental health support and awareness in many Nigerian universities, this research contributes valuable empirical evidence to support the design of targeted interventions.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings of this study which established significant relationships between social isolation, social media addiction, and mental health among undergraduate students the following recommendations are made:

1. The university should implement structured peer support systems, mentoring schemes, and inclusive extracurricular activities. These initiatives should target students who are newly admitted or socially withdrawn, helping to foster meaningful interpersonal connections and reduce feelings of loneliness.
2. The university should organize awareness programs to educate students on the psychological risks of excessive social media use. These campaigns should include training on time management, self-regulation, and healthy digital habits, particularly within academic and hostel environments.

3. The university should strengthen its counseling and psychological support services. This includes increasing the visibility and accessibility of the counseling center, reducing stigma, and conducting regular mental health workshops and screening sessions across faculties

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