

Social Media Usage and Social Well-being of Undergraduates in Nigeria

Temitope Sarah OGUNGBAIGBE

Department of Educational Foundations, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Osun state Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Social well-being is critical to individual's overall well-being and daily functioning. This study assessed the prevalence of social media usage among undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU). It investigated the level of social well-being of the students and examined the influence of social media usage on social well-being of the undergraduates. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population for this study comprised the undergraduates of the university. A sample of 300 undergraduates was selected from the population (females = 57%; age range 22-27 years; favourite social media platform = Whatsapp) using convenience sampling technique. Data were collected using two research instruments, titled Social Media Use Integration Scale ($\alpha = 0.82$) and Social Wellbeing Scale ($\alpha = 0.78$). The Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed that there is a prevalence of social media usage among the undergraduates and the social well-being of the undergraduates is high. Furthermore, a positive relationship was found between social media usage and social well-being ($R = 0.672, p < 0.001$). Based on these findings, it is recommended that school administrators integrate digital wellness modules into orientation and general courses to further enhance student's social wellbeing.

Keywords: Social Media, Social media usage, Social wellbeing, Undergraduates, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Modern technology has no doubt serve as a means of interaction in the social and educational world. Social media has become an integral part of modern communication, particularly among this generation who were born in technology era. The use of social media has become global with the emergence of various social media platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, MySpace, Instagram, LinkedIn and Goggle Plus, among others. Today, social media is used in higher education institutions as a platform where students connect with their instructors, fellow students and other scholars across the globe. Higher education continues to explore the exciting opportunities that technologies have brought to institutions, educators and students. Among undergraduates, social media usage is pervasive, with many students spending significant amounts of time engaging with these platforms daily (Alahmar, 2016). While social media offers numerous benefits, including enhanced communication and social support, concerns have been raised about its potential effects on mental health and overall social well-being (Primack *et al.*, 2017).

Valkenburg (2022) emphasized that social media can have both positive and negative effects on the well-being of users Earlier research such as (Verduyn,2017 and Verduyn, 2020) ascertained an association between social media and wellbeing of users, the studies indicated that the degree of usage determines users' well-being. These studies proposed that active use (sending messages privately or broadcasting) was more associated with well-being, while passive use (browsing other people's posts and profiles) was more associated with ill-being. Shensa, (2016) also found that regular exposure to fanciful and false representations of emotions, lies, and connections on social media platforms can make individuals feel inferior and isolated compared to their peers, because it makes them feel less of themselves .

However, the relationship between social media usage and wellbeing among undergraduates has emerged as a critical area of inquiry (Boniel-Nissim et al, 2022) especially in Nigeria. Contemporary research has presented a nuanced picture of social media's impact as some studies suggest that expanded social media usage correlates with improved mental wellbeing through enhanced connectivity and community building, others highlight substantial risks. Therefore, there is further need to ascertain the effect of social media use integration on student's general wellbeing and specific area of wellbeing such as social wellbeing.

Students' social well-being is the extent to which they feel a sense of belonging and social inclusion in their academic environment (Pang *et al*, 2018). It means how students experience and evaluate their social relationships and sense of belonging, including perceived social support, connectedness, and quality of peer and community relationships (Keyes, 1998; Uchino, 2009). The importance of social well-being has been cited by different authors as one of the key factors in students' school success (Wrigley, 2019).

Social well-being influences students' physical and psychological health, academic performance and personal development, among others (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Tinto, 1993).

Research highlights that undergraduates' social well-being is shaped by their degree of integration into campus life. Students who form relationships with peers and teachers and feel fit into the academic and social environment are more likely to persist and thrive (Tinto, 1993). Researches that viewed social wellbeing as a feeling of sense of belonging suggests that when students feel excluded or socially isolated, engagement and well-being decline, whereas experiences of respect and inclusion support a stronger sense of community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Studies also view social well-being as the presence of supportive peer ties and the reduction of loneliness. Here, Social support has been consistently associated with better mental health outcomes, partly because it provides emotional comfort and practical assistance during stressful periods (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Uchino, 2009). Among undergraduate population, loneliness and weak social connections have been associated with poorer adjustment, lower life satisfaction, and increased risk for mental health difficulties (Qualter et al., 2015; Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010). This study aims to measure social wellbeing as individual's perceived quality of social relationships, sense of belonging, and overall social functioning.

Self-Determination Theory SDT developed by Ryan and Deci, has been recognized as a vital structure for understanding the mechanisms through which social media use influences adolescents' mental health (West et al, 2024). SDT posits that sustained mental health depends on the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs: autonomy (feeling volitional), competence (feeling effective), and relatedness (feeling connected). In other words, for individual to experience high levels of well-being, three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Autonomy refers to the ability to regulate one's actions in a self-directed manner. It is assumed that well-being is boosted when students use social media volitionally, that is, out of their own freewill for various reasons especially for self-expression rather than compulsively. Competence, which is another essential psychological need highlighted by Ryan and Deci (2017) involves the perception of effectiveness and mastery in one's interactions with the environment. In relation to social media usage, it is argued that when students share achievements or master digital literacy, their sense of effectiveness grows. However, if they struggle with the technical or social rules and regulation guiding effective usage of these platforms, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Relatedness, which pertains to the need for meaningful social connections and a sense of belonging, is considered to be essential to well-being of an individual. Relatedness could be fulfilled when student's engage in Social media platforms where they feel a sense of belonging. When applying SDT to students, the theory suggests that if social media supports relatedness and students meaningful connection the student well-being increases. If social media becomes a venue for competition, frustration due to viewing others as superior could set in. Sheldon and Titova (2023) stated that self-determined motivation for social media use affects the extent peoples' relatedness needs are met during the activity of integrating self-determination theory model which in turn affects their subjective well-being (SWB). According to (Deci & Ryan, 2017) the fulfillment of these basic psychological needs can yield enhanced self-motivation and mental health and when the needs get thwarted, individual motivation and well-being diminish.

Statement of the problem

The increase in social media platforms use has fundamentally transformed how young adults communicate, study, and constructs their identities. For undergraduate students who constitute one of the most digitally connected demographics, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X (formerly known as Twitter) have become integral part of their daily life, serving functions ranging from academic networking and information access to social validation and entertainment . Research indicates that students spend more hours on social media (Ajike & Nwakoby, 2016). Contemporary research presents a conflicting data on social media's impact while some studies suggest that social media usage correlates with improved wellbeing others flagged substantial risks. Among undergraduates specifically, problematic social media use has been linked to elevated symptoms of depression and anxiety, decreased self-esteem, disrupted sleep patterns, and diminished academic engagement. Despite growing global research on this subject, there is limited empirical focus on how social media usage patterns influence social well-being among Nigerian undergraduates, particularly at OAU. Given that the university is a highly social academic environment, it is crucial to investigate how students' social media habits influence their social well-being.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- (i) examine the prevalence of social media usage.
- (ii) investigate the level of social well-being of undergraduates.
- (iii) assess the influence of social media usage on social well-being of undergraduates of OAU.

Research questions

This study will address the following research questions:

- (i) What is the prevalence and level of social media usage among undergraduates of OAU?
- (ii) What is the level of social well-being of undergraduate students?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant influence of social media usage on social well-being among undergraduates of OAU.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. A sample size of 300 undergraduate students was selected using multistage sampling technique. Three faculties were randomly selected for the study, from the faculties two departments were randomly selected, from each department fifty (50) students were selected using convenience sampling method.

Instrumentation

One research instrument titled “Social Media usage and Social Wellbeing Questionnaire (SMUSWQ)” was used to elicit data for the study. This instrument contained three sections. section A sought the respondents' demographic data such as level, sex, age, faculty, department, and favorite social media platforms. Section two comprised 10 items Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS), developed by Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., (2013). The scale consists of two subscales: items 1-5 measure Integration into Social Routines (habitual use in daily life) while items 6-10 measure emotional Connection or psychological reliance on social media. The scale was revalidated and yielded 0.80 reliability coefficient. Section three comprised a 15 item Social Wellbeing Scale (SWS) designed by Keyes, (1998) to measure individual perceived quality of social relationships, Both scales are measured with four points rating scale to indicate the respondent's level of agreement or disagreement on

the items. Strongly Agree (SA) = 4points, Agree (A)= 3points, Disagree (D)=2points, strongly Disagree (SD)=1point.The scale was also revalidated and yielded 0.78 reliability coefficient

Instrument validation

To determine the validity of the instruments, face and content validation were used. The test-retest method was also used to ascertain the reliability of the instruments which yielded 0.70 reliability coefficient.

Analytic procedure

The gathered data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequency count and percentage mean and standard deviation) were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics. A Multiple Regression analysis was performed to examine the extent to which social media usage predict social well-being of the students

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

The demographic characteristics show that 58.0% (174) are female while 42.0% (126) are male. 3.3% (10) of the respondents are between the ages of 15-18, 16.0% (48) are between the ages of 19-21, 67.3% (202) are between the ages of 22-27, 14.3% (24) are between the ages of 28-35, least of the respondents. Majority of the respondents 38.2% (114) are in part 4 (400L), Finally, the order of the types of social media commonly used by the students are Whatsapp, Tiktok, twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and their combination. Majority of the respondents 59.9% (91) have 1-10 years working experience, 36.2% (55) have 11-20 years working experience, and 3.9% (6) have 21 years and above working experience respectively.

Research Question One: What is the prevalence of social media use among the undergraduates?

To answer this research question, the responses on section B which is based on social media usage were described and categorized; the result is presented in Table 1

Table1: Prevalence of social media use among undergraduates of OAU

S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M	Remark
1	I prefer to communicate with others mainly through social media rather than face- to-face.	111(37%)	128(42.6%)	52(17.3%)	9(3.0%)	1.86	Agreed
2	I use social media as part of my everyday routine.	149(49.7%)	140(46.6%)	10(3.3%)	1(0.3%)	1.54	Agreed
3	I feel like part of a community when I use social media.	107(35.7%)	146(48.7%)	40(13.3%)	7(2.3%)	1.82	Agreed
4	I would be disappointed if I couldn't use social media.	90(30.0%)	137(45.6%)	59(19.7%)	14(4.7%)	1.99	Agreed
5	I enjoy using social media.	129(43.0%)	157(52.4%)	12(4.0%)	2(0.7%)	1.62	Agreed

6	I have used social media to make myself feel better when I was down.	126(42.0)	149(49.7%)	22(7.3%)	3(1.0%)	1.67	Agreed
7.	I have used social media to talk to others when I was isolated.	122(40.7%)	150(56.3%)	22(7.3%)	6(2.0%)	1.70	Agreed
8	I sometimes feel I am a different person on social media than in real life.	62(20.7%)	122(40.7%)	98(32.7%)	18(6.0%)	2.24	Agreed
9	I feel disconnected from friends when I have not logged in to social media.	64(21.3%)	126(42%)	90(30%)	20(6.7%)	2.22	Agreed
10.	I get upset when I cannot access social media.	64(21.3%)	124(41.3%)	95(31.7%)	17(5.7)	2.22	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 revealed a high prevalence of social media usage among the respondents. The result revealed a universal agreement with Statement 2 (I use social media as part of my everyday routine), where 96.3% of respondents (Agree and Strongly Agree) which confirmed this habit. Similarly, in statement 5, a strong majority enjoy using social media (95.4% agreement, $\bar{X}=1.62$) and they use it for emotional regulation and connection, likewise statement 6 "to make myself feel better when I was down" has 91.7% agreement ($\bar{X}=1.67$) and Statement 7 "to talk to others when I was isolated" has 97% agreement ($\bar{X}=1.70$). The result implies that the students has inculcated habitual use of social media in their daily life and also revealed high psychological reliance on social media.

Research Question 2: What is the level of social well-being of undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU)?

To answer the research question, responses to section three of the questionnaire, designed to measure social well-being, were analyzed and categorized. The mean and standard deviation of each item was calculated and the mean of each 3-item subscale was calculated to determine the level of social wellbeing among the respondents. Scores with ≤ 3.5 is adjudged as low, score of 3.6-5.4 is adjudged as Moderate social well-being while score below or equal to 5.5 is adjudged as high social well-being. The result is presented in Table2 and 3

Table 2: Descriptive statistics showing the level of social well-being of undergraduates

S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
1.	I feel like I belong to a community.	83(27.7%)	170(56.6%)	41(13.7%)	6(2.0%)	3.01	2.64
2	My community is a source of comfort.	65(21.7%)	181(60.4%)	50(16.7%)	4(1.3%)	3.02	2.56
3	I feel connected to others in my community.	66(22.0%)	192(64.3%)	34(11.3%)	7(2.3%)	3.05	2.59

4	People are generally kind.	20(6.7%)	116(38.6%)	142(47.3%)	22(7.3%)	2.45	2.02
5	People can be trusted.	22(7.3%)	96(32.0%)	146(48.7%)	36(12.0%)	2.35	1.94
6	Society has stopped improving.	22(7.3%)	104(34.6%)	147(49.0%)	27(9.0%)	2.6	2.17
7	I have something valuable to give the world.	125(41.7%)	150(50%)	22(7.3%)	3(1.0%)	3.32	2.85
8	Others value my contribution to the society.	71(23.7%)	194(64.6%)	33(11.0%)	2(0.7%)	3.11	2.63
9	My daily activities do not matter to society.	39(13.0%)	96(32%)	131(43.7%)	34(11.3%)	2.47	2.16
10	Society is becoming a better place.	43(14.3%)	172(57.3%)	76(25.3%)	9(3.0%)	2.17	2.38
11	Society's institutions works well for all.	41(13.7%)	148(40.3%)	97(32.3%)	14(4.7%)	2.28	2.29
12	Society has made progress in the last decade.	53(17.7%)	190(63.3%)	54(18.0%)	3(1.0%)	2.02	2.51
13	The world is too complex for me.	24(8.0%)	103(34.3%)	150(50%)	23(7.7%)	2.58	2.15
14	I cannot make sense of society problem.	20(6.7%)	104(34.6%)	151(50.3%)	25(8.3%)	2.61	2.17
15	I understand how society works.	54(18%)	189(63%)	51(17.0%)	6(2.0%)	2.03	2.51

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The result in table 2 shows the level of social well-being among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University. From the result, the majority of students show profound sense of belonging and value within their immediate communities. This is evidenced by the high agreement rates for feeling like they belong to a community, finding comfort in their community and feeling connected to others. Importantly, students feel personally valued, with 91.7% agreeing they have "something valuable to give the world" and 88.3% agreeing that "others value my contribution" However, this positive self-perception sharply contrasts with a moderate to low level of well-being regarding broader societal trust and coherence. Students express significant skepticism about the wider world; less than half (45.3%) agree that "people are generally kind" and only 39.3% agree that "people can be trusted". Furthermore, students demonstrate moderate levels of confusion and pessimism about societal progress and their role within it. While they believe society has progressed and is becoming a better place a significant portion (45%) feel their daily activities do not matter to society. Many also find the world complex and difficult to understand indicating feelings of alienation from larger social structures and problems. This result was cumulated based on the scoring pattern of the scale and the result is presented in table3

Table 3: Descriptive statistics showing cumulative level of social well-being of undergraduates

Social well-being(sub-scale)	Mean \bar{X}	SD
Social Integration	5.82	2.61
Social Acceptance	7.19	3.84
Social Contribution	6.09	2.86
Social Coherence	6.47	2.99
Social Actualization	7.20	3.44

The result in Table 2 reveals a high level of social well-being among undergraduate students with all the subscale having a score of more than the mean threshold of 5.5 for high social well-being. This implies a high level of social integration with mean of 5.82, social acceptance with 7.19 mean score, social contribution with mean score of 6.09, social coherence is of 6.47 mean and the mean score of social actualization is also high at 7.20.

Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of social media usage on social well-being among undergraduates of OAU.

To test this hypothesis, responses on Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) in Section B and social well-being scale in Section C were cross-tabulated. The data were subjected to a multiple regression analysis. The results are presented in table 4 and 5

Table 4: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Influence of Social Media Use on Social Well-Being

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	28.634	1	28.634	191.42	0.000***
Residual	34.789	298	0.117		
Total	62.423	299			

$R = 0.672$, $R^2 = 0.451$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.449$

$p < 0.001$, significant at 0.05 level.

Table 5: Coefficient for Social Media Usage on Social Well-being

Predictor	Unstandardized B	Std.Error	Beta (β)	T	Sig.
	1.245	0.118	-	10.551	0.000
Social Media Usage	0.489	0.035	0.672	13.837	0.000

$p < 0.001$, significant at 0.05 level

The regression result in table 4 indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between social media usage and social well-being ($R = 0.672$). The R^2 value of 0.451 shows that, 45.1% of the variation in social well-being is explained by social media usage. The regression model is statistically significant. ($F(1, 298) = 191.42$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that social media usage is a significant predictor of social well-being.

The coefficient in Table 5 revealed that social media usage with $B = 0.489$, and the standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.672$, are both statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in social media usage, social well-being increases by approximately 0.489 units.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the first research question showed a high prevalence of social media use among the undergraduates. It also showed that social media usage is deeply embedded in the social and emotional daily routines of the undergraduates. This result is not surprising as social media is seen as a platform that fosters social connectedness (Smahel, et al., 2020). This finding supports Boniel-Nissim et al. (2022) study that found 78 % of a larger sample from 42 countries to be active users of social media. Similarly, Ajike & Nwakoby, (2016) found the use of social networks/media to be prominent among students in Nigerian universities. Idubor (2015) study also found social media usage and addiction level among undergraduates.

Findings from the second research question revealed a high social wellbeing among the students, which showed that the student possess high social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherence, and social actualization. It can be argued that the high social well-being reported by the students in this study probably points to the fact that social community joined through social media usage has improved their social connectedness and happiness. This finding corroborates with the findings of Ogunbaigbe & Omoteso (2023) who reported high level of subjective well-being among students in Nigeria and Dionne and Pruneau (2025) study on sustainable university campuses which found that students' social well-being thrived when there are places for socialization. Zhao and Hua (2025) in their study also suggest that communication skills, collaboration abilities, and intercultural competence (which can be acquired through social media) play a crucial role in shaping social wellbeing of undergraduate.

The regression analysis showed a significant influence of social media usage on social well-being of the students ($R^2 = 0.451$, $B = 0.489$, $p < 0.001$). This positive relationship suggests that, on a balance, the benefits of connection, support and community access afforded by social media outweigh its potential negatives for the students. It appears that, social media acts as a vital bridge that helps the undergraduates to cultivate and maintain the strong, close-knit social networks that form the foundation of their high social well-being. This finding supports the work of Boniel-Nissim et al. (2022) indicating that active engagement with social media benefits the mental and social well-being of students and agreed with part of the digital Goldilocks hypothesis (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017) which states that, at a point, adolescents' well-being increases as their screen time increases. Similarly, Viner et al., (2019) study indicates that social media usage predicts well-being of young people. On the contrary, this finding negates the finding of University of North Carolina UNC, 2024 which suggests that students who use social network platforms as a form of distraction rather than active connection, experience increased anxiety and depression.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that social media usage is prevalent among undergraduates and social wellbeing of undergraduates was high and the level of social media usage increases social well-being in the dimension of social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherence, and social actualization among undergraduates in the study area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. The University should integrate mandatory digital wellness modules that will enhance positive use of social media into orientation and general courses.
- ii. Student affairs and departmental units should actively use dominant platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram to strengthen micro-communities. This includes creating official groups for academic support, peer mentoring and promoting extracurricular activities.

iii. Part advisers and faculty should encourage student participation in online clubs, societies, and community service projects.

Limitation of the study

This research provided information on social media usage and social well-being of undergraduates in Nigeria, and the results must be taken into context within the limitations. The population for the study was limited to undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University. By implication, other universities in Nigeria were left out which could affect the generalisability of findings to all undergraduates in Nigeria. Also, the data for the study were obtained using self-report questionnaires; therefore, various biases might affect the responses.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies should assess the kind of activities students prefer on social media and the content the students are exposed to. A further investigation is also needed on the classification of social media users into active or passive users or public and private users. This study can also be extended to different categories of students, such as secondary school students and postgraduate students.

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