# Experts warn of rising social media addiction among Nigerian youths and its impact on mental health and culture



Experts and researchers across Nigeria are raising concerns about the rising addiction to social media among youths and the profound implications this trend holds for mental health, societal values, and cultural heritage. The widespread use of social media platforms, while offering connectivity and new opportunities, is increasingly linked to adverse effects that demand urgent, multi-dimensional attention.

Social media platforms have become deeply embedded in daily life worldwide, with over 5.24 billion active users representing nearly 64% of the global population. Nigeria alone, with a population exceeding 200 million, has approximately 51 million active Facebook users, alongside millions of Instagram and Messenger users. However, this extensive digital engagement comes at a cost, particularly for young adults. According to the AXA Mind Health Report 2025, 44% of individuals aged 18-24 suffer from mental health issues, a condition strongly associated with social media addiction and financial insecurity.

University of Lagos lecturer Dr Unwana Akpan conveyed particular concern about how social media addiction affects Nigerian youths, likening its prevalence to the widespread consumption of “garri”—a staple food—but warning of increasingly detrimental consequences. “This is a big concern, not just for family units, but for the society at large,” he said, drawing attention to the phenomenon of toddlers who are already adept at using smartphones. He referenced the 2023 “We Are Social” report highlighting that Nigerians spend an average of 3 hours and 42 minutes daily on social media, one of the longest durations in Africa.

Dr Akpan lamented the erosion of traditional cultural practices, including the disappearance of oral storytelling traditions such as “Moonlight stories,” replaced by popular online content like “Skibidi Toilet” and celebrity skits. He attributed social media addiction to several factors, including a culture of instant gratification, fear of missing out (FOMO), parental example, and a lack of digital discipline. He recommended measures such as introducing “No-Screen Hours” in schools and religious centres, implementing scrolling alerts, enforcing stricter regulations by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), and encouraging media programming that emphasises traditional folklore to preserve cultural heritage.

Content creator Erl Sua echoed the addictive nature of social media, describing it as “potentially more addictive than alcohol.” He spoke about the health risks associated with prolonged internet use and suggested strategies to counter addiction, such as developing hobbies, reconnecting with family and friends, and engaging in physical exercise. “You can spend hours and hours scrolling, and by the end of the day, it will still leave you unsatisfied,” he stated.

Tech researcher Tony Dearaujo explained how social media platforms exploit human psychology, noting, “These platforms develop a profile on us. They know what we like and dislike, what makes us return, and what does not. It’s addictive.” He compared the digital engagement to the temptation of sugar and snacks, underscoring the need for awareness and behavioural moderation.

The innovation and technology policy advisor Jide Awe highlighted the sophisticated design of social media to capture user attention endlessly. He pointed to the use of artificial intelligence to personalise content, prioritise sensational stories, and overwhelm users with information. Awe characterised social media addiction as a public health crisis rather than simply a technological issue and urged collaborative interventions between the tech industry and health sectors. He called for early digital literacy education, stronger policy regulations, and addiction mitigation initiatives.

From the academic perspective, Dr Obiageli Okoye of UNILAG’s Sociology Department identified a significant lack of parental guidance as a key driver of social media addiction among young people. She noted that many parents provide smartphones without appropriate instruction on responsible use, leaving youths ill-prepared for the digital world. Dr Okoye highlighted the negative academic consequences of excessive screen time, including poor concentration, diminished learning outcomes, and increased exam malpractice such as bringing phones into examination halls, which has led to serious disciplinary actions. She also discussed health-related problems like eye strain and persistent headaches associated with prolonged social media use. She advocated for a combined approach involving parents initiating guidance conversations, educators enforcing phone rules in classrooms, and students cultivating self-discipline and awareness of potential risks.

Adding to the discourse, Akinbola Olumide expressed concern over the impact of social media on children’s educational achievements, particularly in key areas like Mathematics and English. Rather than banning internet access, Olumide suggested guiding children to engage with digital platforms productively, for instance by assigning research projects with societal benefits and leveraging artificial intelligence to develop digital skills. “The goal is not to discourage digital engagement; the future is undeniably digital. Instead, we must foster digital competency that empowers them,” he remarked.

Together, these perspectives underline a pressing need for coordinated efforts involving families, educational institutions, policymakers, and the technology sector to address the complex challenges posed by social media addiction. They emphasise balancing the benefits of digital connectivity with safeguarding mental health, academic performance, and cultural heritage amid Nigeria’s rapidly evolving digital landscape. The Sun Nigeria has reported on this growing concern, highlighting calls for moderation, regulation, and education to mitigate the multifaceted impacts of the digital age on society.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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