# Experts warn of social media addiction's impact on Nigerian youth's mental health and culture



In Nigeria, growing concerns have emerged over the harmful effects of social media addiction, particularly among young people, with experts highlighting the profound impact on mental health, cultural values, and academic performance. According to recent analyses, the unregulated and pervasive nature of social media platforms is significantly altering the way youth interact with the world, prompting calls for moderation and strategic interventions.

Globally, social media commands immense influence with 5.24 billion active users, representing nearly 64% of the world’s population. In Nigeria, with a population of over 200 million, there are more than 51 million active Facebook users, alongside millions accessing Instagram and Messenger. Despite the connectivity these platforms provide, experts warn that widespread digital engagement comes at a substantial cost, especially among young adults.

The AXA Mind Health Report 2025 highlighted that 44% of individuals aged 18 to 24 suffer from mental health conditions, with social media addiction and financial instability identified as leading contributing factors. Dr. Unwana Akpan, a lecturer at the University of Lagos (UNILAG), emphasised the seriousness of this trend, likening young people's social media consumption to the ubiquitous Nigerian staple "garri" but noting increasingly dire consequences. Dr. Akpan also cited data from the 2023 “We Are Social” report showing Nigerians spend an average of 3 hours and 42 minutes daily on social media, among the highest figures on the African continent.

The impact of social media addiction is multifaceted, touching upon youths’ academic performance, health, and the erosion of traditional cultural practices. Over 60% of young Nigerians reportedly prefer scrolling through platforms like TikTok and Instagram over reading books, underscoring a shift in leisure activities away from more traditional forms of learning and storytelling. Dr. Akpan expressed concern about the decline of communal gatherings and oral traditions such as “Moonlight stories,” which are being replaced by online content like “Skibidi Toilet” and celebrity skits.

Content creator Erl Sua described social media as potentially more addictive than alcohol, explaining, “You can spend hours and hours scrolling, and by the end of the day, it will still leave you unsatisfied.” He highlighted the sedentary lifestyle associated with prolonged use and advocated for hobbies, social connections, and physical exercise to counterbalance the effects.

Technological design also plays a role in addiction. Tech researcher Tony Dearaujo noted, “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 social media’s allure to that of sugar and snacks, urging awareness and moderation.

Calls for urgent remedial measures include the promotion of “No-Screen Hours” in schools and religious institutions, application of scrolling alerts, stricter regulatory oversight by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), and media campaigns to revive traditional folklore. Dr. Akpan stressed the importance of parental guidance in addressing these challenges, warning that the loss of cultural heritage would be a "tragic loss" if not addressed.

Innovation and Technology policy advisor Jide Awe highlighted the intentional design behind social media platforms, stating, “Social media’s allure isn’t accidental… These platforms are engineered for engagement, trapping users in an endless scroll.” He emphasised the complex factors behind addiction, including AI-personalised content and the prioritisation of sensationalism, calling for multi-dimensional interventions encompassing early digital literacy and coordinated policy actions. "This is not just a technology problem," Awe said. "It is a public health crisis, a mental health challenge of the digital age."

From a sociological perspective, Dr. Obiageli Okoye from UNILAG identified a significant lack of parental guidance and self-discipline among youths as key factors enabling addiction. She highlighted academic repercussions including poor concentration, declining performance, and increased incidence of examination malpractice, alongside health issues like headaches and eye strain due to excessive screen time. Dr. Okoye urged a comprehensive approach involving parents, educators, and students to foster responsible phone use and self-discipline.

Another voice, Akinbola Olumide, stressed that rather than banning internet access, efforts should focus on guiding children toward productive use of digital platforms. He recommended leveraging Artificial Intelligence tools and assigning research tasks with societal benefits to build digital competency. “The goal is not to discourage digital engagement; the future is undeniably digital. Instead, we must foster digital competency that empowers them,” Olumide said.

Overall, the concerns raised reflect a pressing need for balanced social media consumption strategies, aiming to harness the benefits of digital connectivity while mitigating its adverse effects on mental health, culture, and education within Nigeria’s youthful population. The conversation involves researchers, policymakers, educators, and communities seeking collaborative solutions to this evolving challenge.

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

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