

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE INFORMATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

Ewomazino Daniel Akpor,

Department of Mass Communication, University of
Delta Agbor ewomazino.akpor@unidel.edu.ng

Abstract

The widespread adoption of social media among Nigerian university students has created new avenues for accessing mental health information, yet concerns about credibility and effectiveness persist. This study examined how undergraduate students at the University of Delta, Agbor, engage with social media to obtain mental-health information. The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Health Belief Model (HBM), which explain students' motivations for seeking mental-health information through social media and the cognitive processes that influence their acceptance and application of such information. A survey design was employed, with 384 students participating. The questionnaire was validated through expert review in Mass Communication, while its internal consistency was established using Cronbach's Alpha reliability test. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics were employed to analyse the data at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings indicate that 94.3% of respondents own a smartphone or digital device, and 64.8% access social media at least once daily, demonstrating the centrality of digital platforms in students' daily lives. Regarding engagement with mental-health content, 30.2% of students agreed and 10.2% strongly agreed that social media discussions enhance their understanding of mental-health issues, while 33.5% reported following mental-health-related pages or groups. Despite frequent exposure, only 30.7% of students perceived online mental-health information as credible, and 38.0% actively verified content before acting on it, suggesting a cautious approach to digital health information. The study underscores the dual role of social media as both a supportive tool and a potential source of misinformation. The study contributes to the growing literature on digital health communication in Africa and offers practical insights for policymakers, university administrators, and mental-health professionals aiming to enhance student well-being in a digital era.

Keywords: Social media, mental health, university students, online information, digital literacy

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, mental-health challenges among young people have become a growing concern globally and nationally. The World Health Organisation (2022) reports that depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders are leading contributors to the global burden of disease among young adults aged 15–24. Within university communities, these issues are increasingly linked to changing patterns of digital engagement, particularly through social media and online information platforms. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media refer to Internet-based interactive platforms that enable users to create, share and exchange information and experiences. Where as mental-health management refers to the adoption of behaviours, coping strategies and information-seeking practices aimed at maintaining or improving psychological wellbeing (Quick et al., 2025). Social media provide spaces for self-expression, peer interaction, and emotional support; however, it also presents risks such as misinformation, social comparison, and digital fatigue (Ogundipe et al., 2025). The dual role of digital media as a supportive environment and a potential source of harm has made it a key factor in understanding youth mental wellbeing in developing societies. Although previous studies have examined social media and mental-health awareness among Nigerian students, relatively few studies have investigated how students simultaneously evaluate the credibility, usefulness and behavioural influence of online mental-health information within an integrated theoretical framework. Existing studies also provide inconsistent evidence regarding whether social media serves primarily as a supportive mental-health

resource or a source of misinformation. This study therefore addresses these empirical and theoretical gaps within the context of Delta State.

In Nigeria, where access to professional mental-health care remains limited, digital platforms play an increasingly influential role in shaping awareness, perceptions, and help-seeking behaviours. Omoruyi and Kerebi (2025) found that university students in Delta State perceived social media as a major channel for mental-health awareness and stigma reduction yet also noted challenges such as misinformation and limited access to credible mental-health resources. Similarly, Ogundipe et al. (2025) observed that while most students in southwestern Nigeria held positive attitudes toward digital health platforms, actual usage remained low due to poor awareness and infrastructural barriers.

Studies conducted among Delta State University students highlight that psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic was aggravated by overexposure to distressing online information (Shitandi et al., 2021). At the same time, students at neighboring institutions, such as Niger Delta University, report using the Internet for self-diagnosis and informal mental health management, though often with limited guidance or professional input (Dudafa & Otodo, 2024). Perceptions of credibility influence whether users act on online health advice. As Okeke (2022) notes, Nigerian students often rely on unverified online sources due to the scarcity of mental-health professionals. This raises concerns about misinformation and self-diagnosis, which can worsen psychological distress.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing availability of online mental-health information, Nigerian university students continue to experience high levels of psychological distress, anxiety, and depression. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become vital sources of mental-health communication, offering accessible spaces for self-expression, social connection, and psychoeducation. However, these same platforms often expose users to misinformation, distressing content, and stigmatising portrayals of mental illness, which can undermine genuine help-seeking and emotional wellbeing.

While recent research highlights the growing role of digital media in promoting mental-health awareness among Nigerian students (Omoruyi & Kerebi, 2025), little is known about how students in Delta State specifically perceive the credibility, usefulness, and emotional impact of online mental-health content. Existing studies have primarily focused on physical health promotion, leaving a gap in understanding how online communication shapes students' coping strategies, emotional regulation, and help-seeking behaviour in mental-health contexts. Despite increasing dependence on digital media for mental-health information, there remains insufficient empirical evidence explaining whether students trust, verify and apply online mental-health information in ways that improve their psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, previous Nigerian studies have focused predominantly on awareness and access while paying limited attention to students' perceptions of information credibility and its relationship with coping behaviours. This study therefore fills this important empirical gap.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine how university students use social media to access mental-health information.
- ii. To evaluate students' perceptions of the credibility of online mental-health content.
- iii. To assess the perceived usefulness of online mental-health information among students.
- iv. To determine the relationship between the frequency of online information use and students' coping behaviours.

Research Questions

- i. How do university students use social media to access mental-health information?
- ii. What are students' perceptions of the credibility of online mental-health content?
- iii. How do students perceive the usefulness of online mental-health information?
- iv. What is the relationship between the frequency of online information use and students' self-reported coping behaviours?

Literature Review

Social Media and Mental Health Management

Social media platforms have transformed interpersonal communication and the dissemination of health information. According to Ali-Chand and Naidu (2024), online platforms provide spaces for emotional expression and peer-to-peer support, thereby acting as informal counseling arenas. These digital interactions often allow users to express vulnerability, find solidarity, and normalise mental-health conversations among peers. However,

overexposure to negative content and online comparison can increase anxiety and depression, particularly among youth (Adegoke & Ayoola, 2023).

Globally, social media has become a major tool for accessing mental-health information, enabling users to share experiences and seek community support (Naslund et al., 2020). Among university students, such interactions play a dual role in promoting awareness while also amplifying stress when not properly moderated. Drouin et al. (2021) noted that digital platforms serve as both coping mechanisms and stressors, depending on content exposure, emotional vulnerability, and social context. In Nigeria, where mental-health infrastructure remains limited, social media has filled an important informational and psychosocial gap. University students frequently turn to WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram to learn coping strategies, share personal experiences, and access informal therapy (Eze et al., 2022). However, this reliance on digital spaces introduces challenges of credibility, misinformation, and emotional overload (Ojo et al., 2023). The reviewed literature demonstrates that social media provides important opportunities for peer support, emotional expression and mental-health education. However, scholars remain divided regarding whether these benefits outweigh the risks associated with misinformation, social comparison and digital fatigue. These inconsistencies justify further empirical investigation.

Digital Media Credibility and Information Reliability

Information credibility is a core determinant of whether social media positively or negatively impacts mental health. While online platforms democratise access to knowledge, they also facilitate misinformation. Sule, Olley, and Akpor (2023) found that digital messages significantly influence user decision-making, even when the accuracy of such information is questionable. Applied to mental health, this finding suggests that persuasive narratives on social media, regardless of factual accuracy, can shape how students perceive and manage their emotional wellbeing. Similarly, Iguoba, Olley, and Akpor (2023) explained that media frames influence public perception and institutional trust. If students perceive online mental-health messages as credible, they may internalise both evidence-based and erroneous advice. Consequently, misinformation can distort help-seeking behaviour, cause emotional confusion, or reinforce stigma (Montag et al., 2021). Collectively, previous studies indicate that information credibility significantly influences users' willingness to accept and apply online health information. Nevertheless, few Nigerian studies have examined how credibility perceptions translate into practical coping behaviours among university students.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Health Belief Model (HBM) to provide a dual lens for understanding the motivational and cognitive processes underlying students' engagement with online mental health information.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

It was developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). The Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that audiences are not passive consumers of media but active seekers who use media to fulfill specific psychological and social needs such as information, personal identity, social integration, and emotional release. In the digital era, this theory has gained renewed relevance, especially with the rise of participatory

media platforms where users can co-create and share content (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

UGT is relevant to this study because it explains why university students turn to social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok when dealing with mental-health challenges. Students often seek information about coping strategies, self-diagnosis tools, or mental-health communities that offer empathy and validation. These motivations are consistent with UGT's central assumption that media choice is goal-directed and based on perceived personal utility (Ruggiero, 2000).

Health Belief Model (HBM)

The Health Belief Model (HBM), proposed by Rosenstock (1974), complements UGT by explaining how individuals make decisions regarding health-related behaviours based on cognitive appraisals. The model emphasises four key constructs: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, and perceived barriers. These elements collectively determine whether individuals will adopt, maintain, or reject health-promoting actions (Janz & Becker, 1984). In the context of digital mental-health management, HBM can be used to understand how students evaluate online information about psychological wellbeing. For instance, students who perceive themselves as vulnerable to stress or anxiety (high perceived susceptibility) and who believe mental distress has serious implications (high perceived severity) are more likely to seek and engage with mental-health resources online. Conversely, students who distrust online information or fear social stigma (high perceived barriers) may avoid or dismiss such content. Rather than functioning independently, the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Health Belief Model complement each other. While UGT explains why students actively seek mental-health information through social media to satisfy informational and emotional needs, the HBM explains how students evaluate the credibility, benefits and potential risks of that information before deciding whether to apply it. Together, the theories explain both information-seeking behaviour and behavioural responses to online mental-health communication.

Empirical Review

Omoruyi and Kerebi (2025) investigated students' perceptions of digital media, including social media platforms and institutional communication channels, in managing mental health in Delta State. Using a quantitative design with structured questionnaires across selected universities, the study found that digital media significantly enhanced students' mental-health awareness, reduced stigma, and encouraged help-seeking behaviours. However, the authors noted persistent challenges, including misinformation, limited access to credible mental health resources, and sociocultural barriers that constrained the effectiveness of digital communication. The study recommended culturally sensitive and evidence-based media strategies, including digital campaigns and policy-driven integration of mental-health education within university systems.

In a similar vein, Ogundipe, Omotosho, and John-Akinola (2025) examined perceptions, attitudes, and use of digital health platforms for mental-health promotion among University of Ibadan students. The cross-sectional survey involved 400 respondents and revealed that although most students had access to mobile phones, awareness of dedicated digital mental-health platforms was low (83.2%). Despite this, nearly half of the students (47%) perceived

these platforms as useful, and the majority (74.2%) expressed favourable attitudes toward their use. Furthermore, the study found a significant positive association between students' awareness of digital platforms and actual usage ($r = 25.429$; $p < 0.001$). They concluded that these findings demonstrate the potential of digital tools to foster positive behavioural intentions toward mental health management, even in contexts where formal mental health infrastructure is limited.

Furthermore, Eboreime, Olley, and Akpor (2023) conducted a study on public perception of mass media campaigns' effectiveness in Nigeria's control and prevention of suicide amongst youths. Their survey revealed that media reporting plays a crucial role in educating the public, shaping community attitudes, and encouraging help-seeking behaviours. Although previous empirical studies consistently recognise social media as an emerging platform for mental-health communication, findings remain inconsistent regarding its effectiveness because of differences in research design, study populations, theoretical orientation and socio-cultural context. This study contributes by examining these issues among university students in Delta State.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate how undergraduate students at the University of Delta, Agbor, engaged with social media and online information for mental-health management. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect quantitative data from a relatively large population and generalise the findings to the target population. The target population comprised all registered undergraduate students of the University of Delta, Agbor, during the 2024/2025 academic session, using the Taro Yamane sampling techniques, 400 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that covered demographics, social media use, perceptions of online mental health content, and self-reported coping behaviours. Face and content validity were established through independent assessment by three experts in Mass Communication, Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. Their recommendations were incorporated before final administration of the instrument. A pilot study involving 30 students outside the study area was conducted. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.90 confirmed satisfactory internal consistency of the instrument. Analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, correlations, and regression, using SPSS. Ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and counseling referral for distressed participants, were maintained.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Out of 400 participants, only 384 took the survey successfully. Thus, their responses are analysed below:

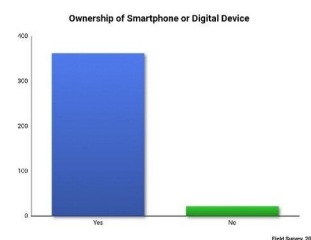


Figure 1: Ownership of Smartphone or Digital Device

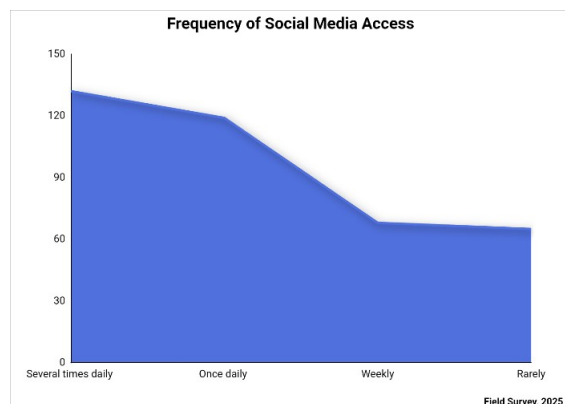


Figure 2: Frequency of Social Media Access

Figure 2 indicates that social media can serve as an effective medium for disseminating mental-health information and support programmes. However, awareness campaigns should also consider the less frequent users to ensure broader outreach and inclusivity.

Use of Social Media for Mental Health and Emotional Well-being Information

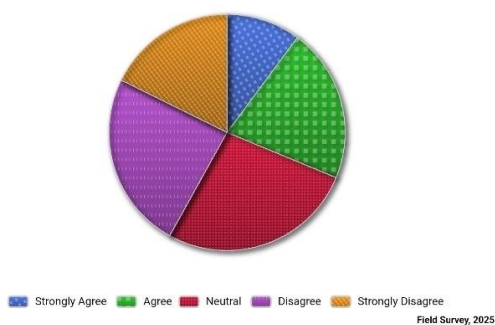


Figure 3: Use of Social Media for Mental Health and Emotional Well-being Information

Figure 3 findings indicates a moderate level of reliance on social media for mental-health information among students. The neutrality and disagreement levels suggest a need to improve the credibility and visibility of trustworthy mental-health resources on social media platforms, encouraging students to engage more confidently with such content.

Following Social Media Pages or Groups Related to Mental Health Awareness

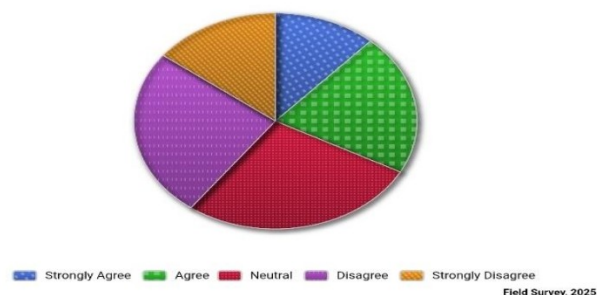


Figure 4: Following Social Media Pages or Groups Related to Mental Health Awareness

Figure 4 findings suggest moderate engagement with online mental-health communities among students. To increase participation, universities and mental-health organisations could promote credible, culturally relevant social media pages and campaigns that actively attract student attention and foster consistent interaction.

Sharing or Commenting on Mental-Health-Related Posts Online

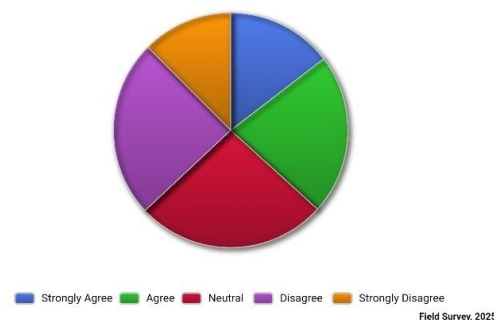


Figure 5: Sharing or Commenting on Mental-Health-Related Posts Online

Figure 5 suggests that while some students actively participate in mental-health discussions online, a nearly equal proportion remains inactive. To foster greater interaction, universities and mental-health organisations can create engaging, credible, and interactive content, encouraging students to share and discuss mental-health topics responsibly.

Social Media Discussions and Understanding of Mental-Health Issues

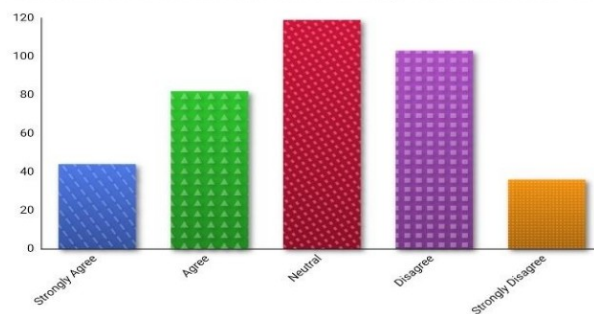


Figure 6: Social Media Discussions and Understanding of Mental-Health Issues

Figure 6 indicate that social media has a moderate role in enhancing students' understanding of mental-health issues. To strengthen this impact, targeted and evidence-based mental-health discussions should be promoted on social media, ensuring clarity, accuracy, and cultural relevance to engage a larger portion of students effectively.



Figure 7: Learning Coping Strategies for Stress or Anxiety Through Social Media

The findings from Figure 7 suggest that social media has a limited impact on students' acquisition of coping strategies. Universities and mental-health practitioners could enhance digital campaigns with practical, evidence-based coping techniques and interactive content to increase students' ability to manage stress and anxiety effectively.

Perception of Credibility of Mental-Health Information on Social Media

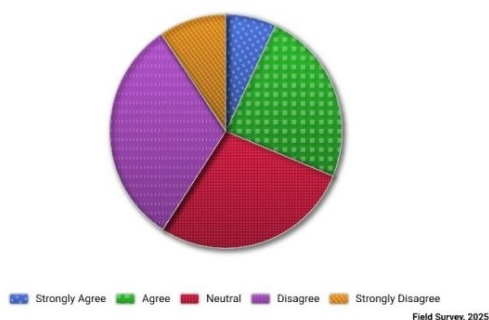


Figure 8: Perception of Credibility of Mental-Health Information on Social Media

The data from Figure 8 reveals skepticism among students regarding the credibility of online mental-health content. To address this, verified mental-health organisations and experts should actively provide accurate, evidence-based information on social media platforms, coupled with educational campaigns to improve digital literacy and critical evaluation skills among students.

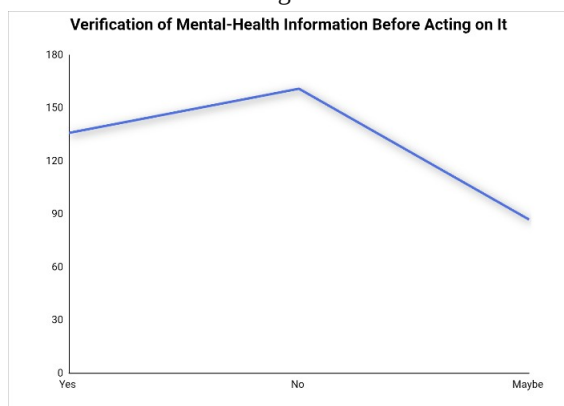


Figure 9: Verification of Mental-Health Information Before Acting on It

The findings suggest a high risk of students acting on unverified information, which could lead to misinformation and ineffective coping strategies. Universities and health authorities should promote digital literacy programmes and critical evaluation skills to ensure students access reliable and accurate mental-health resources online.

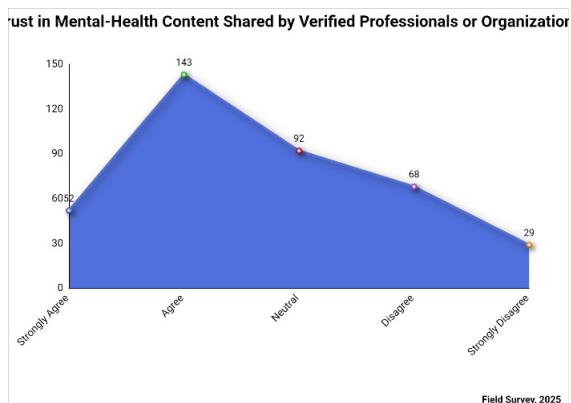


Figure 10: Trust in Mental-Health Content Shared by Verified Professionals or Organizations

Figure 10 highlights that verified professionals and credible organisations are key sources of trust for students. This underscores the importance of promoting expert-backed mental-health content on social media. Universities and

health institutions should actively collaborate with trusted professionals to provide accurate guidance and reduce reliance on unverified information.

Doubt About the Accuracy of Online Mental-Health Information

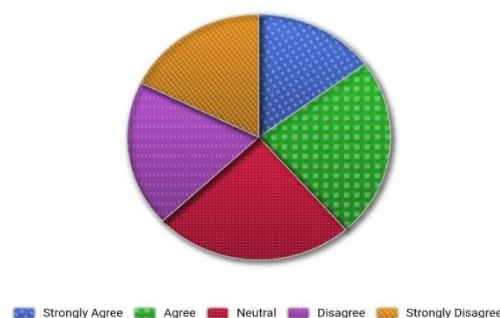


Figure 11: Doubt About the Accuracy of Online Mental-Health Information

Figure 11 reflect ambivalence among students regarding online mental-health information, suggesting the need for improved awareness of credible sources. Universities and health educators should provide guidance on evaluating information accuracy and encourage critical thinking to prevent misinformation and promote informed mental-health decisions.

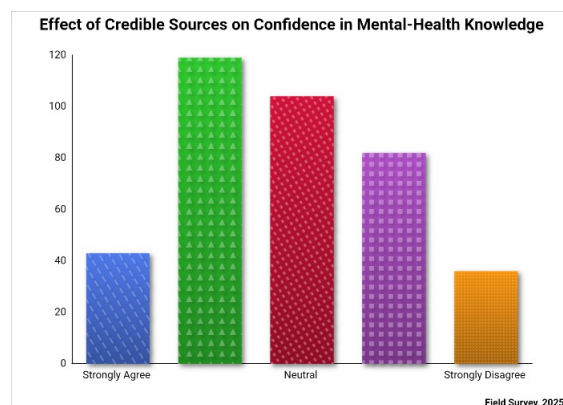


Figure 12: Effect of Credible Sources on Confidence in Mental-Health Knowledge

The bar chart (Figure 12) results suggest that promoting verified and expert-backed mental-health content on social media can enhance students' knowledge and confidence. Universities and mental-health organisations should prioritise sharing accurate information through credible channels to empower students and reduce misinformation.

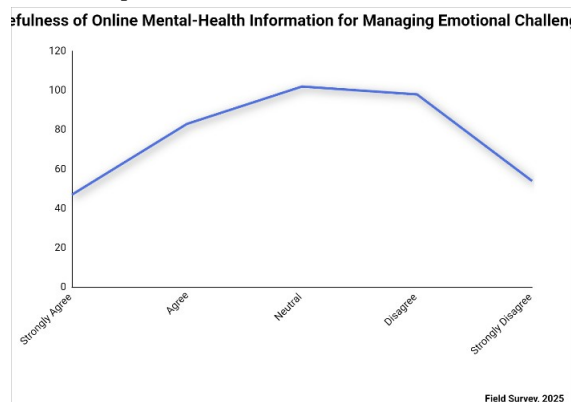


Figure 13: Usefulness of Online Mental-Health Information for Managing Emotional Challenges

The data indicate that while some students benefit from online mental-health resources, a significant proportion remains uncertain or unconvinced. This underscores the importance of ensuring online content is reliable, evidence-based, and accessible. Mental-health educators should guide students on effectively applying online information for emotional well-being.

Figure 14: Social Media's Role in Understanding How to Support Others Experiencing Mental Stress

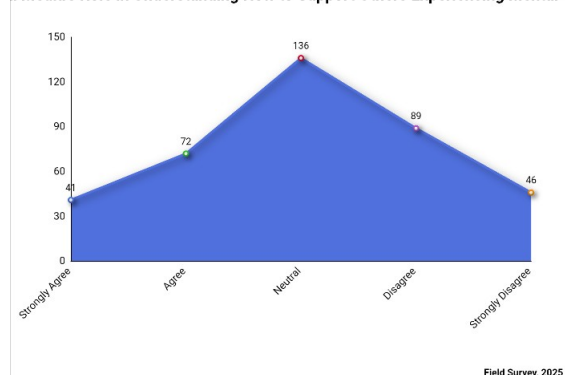


Figure 14: Social Media's Role in Understanding How to Support Others Experiencing Mental Stress

Figure 14 suggests that social media has a moderate role in educating students about supporting others' mental health, but many remain uncertain. Universities and mental-health organisations could develop targeted campaigns or peer-support programmes online to enhance practical understanding and promote empathetic engagement among students.

Figure 15: Usefulness of Social Media Posts in Promoting a Positive Mental Attitude

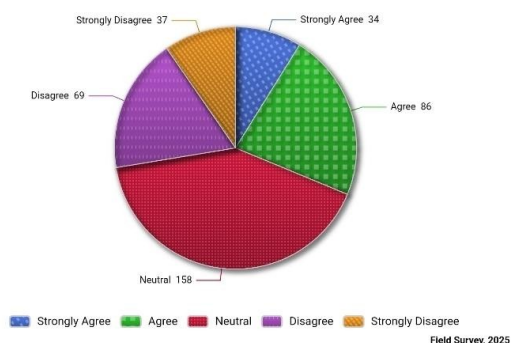


Figure 15: Usefulness of Social Media Posts in Promoting a Positive Mental Attitude

Figure 15 suggests that while social media can encourage positivity, a large number of students remain indifferent or unsure.

Figure 16: Preference for Online Mental-Health Information Over Physical Seminars

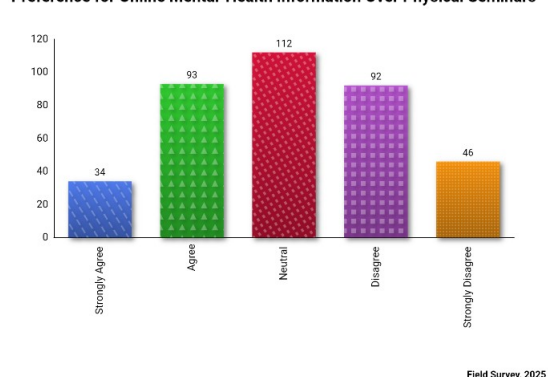


Figure 16: Preference for Online Mental-Health Information Over Physical Seminars

Figure 16 indicates a nearly balanced preference between online and physical modes of mental-health education. Universities and mental-health providers should consider blended approaches, combining digital platforms with in-person seminars to cater to diverse student preferences and maximise engagement and learning outcomes.

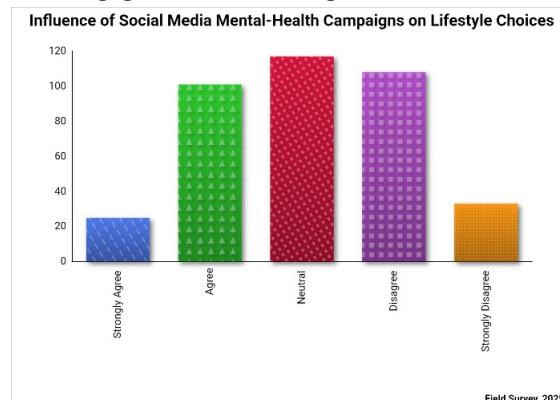


Figure 17: Influence of Social Media Mental-Health Campaigns on Lifestyle Choices

Figure 17 indicates that while social media campaigns reach a portion of students effectively, their impact on lifestyle changes is moderate. Mental-health promoters should design more engaging, culturally relevant, and actionable content to increase behavioural influence and encourage healthier lifestyle choices among university students.

Figure 18: Relationship Between Frequency of Social Media Use and Application of Coping Skills

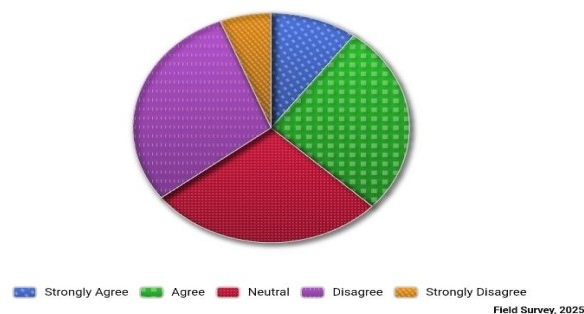


Figure 18: Relationship Between Frequency of Social Media Use and Application of Coping Skills

Figure 18 findings suggest that while some students actively translate online mental-health information into practical coping skills, a significant portion remains unaffected or unsure. It highlights the need for targeted interventions that enhance the practical applicability of online mental-health content to strengthen students' coping behaviours.

Figure 19: Impact of Regular Exposure to Mental-Health Content on Emotional Resilience

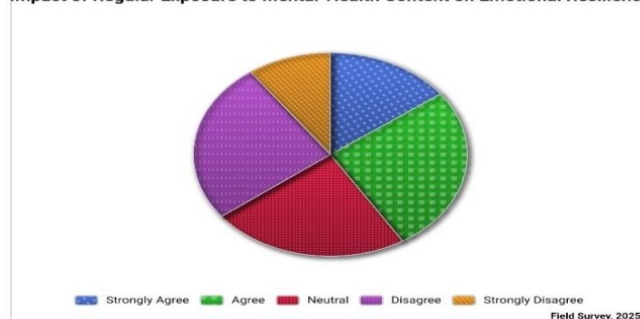


Figure 19: Impact of Regular Exposure to Mental-Health Content on Emotional Resilience

Figure 19 results imply that social media can support emotional resilience, but its effectiveness is inconsistent across students. There is a need for curated, evidence-based mental-health content and engagement strategies to ensure a broader positive impact on emotional wellbeing.

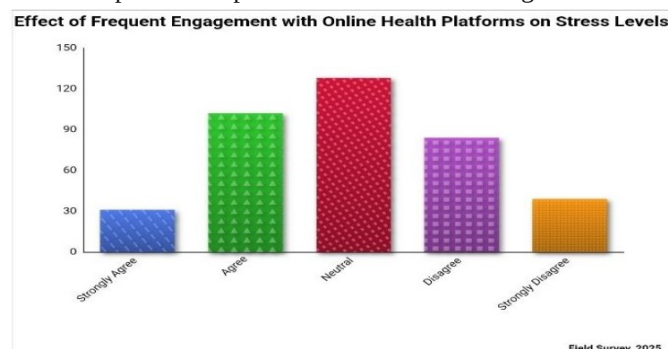


Figure 20: Effect of Frequent Engagement with Online Health Platforms on Stress Levels

The findings in Figure 20 suggest that while online mental-health resources have the potential to mitigate stress, many students are unsure of their efficacy. Institutions and content creators should focus on evidence-based, user-friendly platforms and guide students on how to effectively use online tools for stress management.

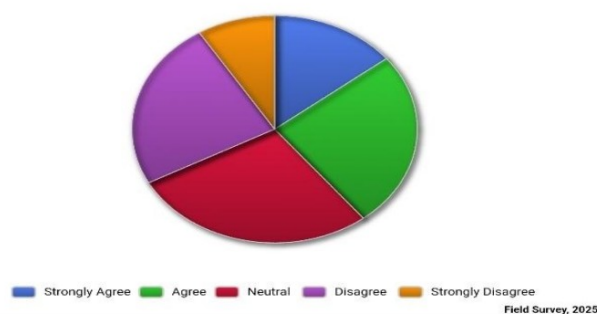


Figure 21: Motivation to Seek Professional Help after Engaging with Online Mental-Health Content

Figure 21 indicate that digital mental-health content has a moderate influence on encouraging help-seeking behaviours. To enhance effectiveness, content should be accurate, engaging, and linked to professional services, while universities can integrate guidance on seeking mental-health support into online campaigns.

Influence of Social Media on Managing Academic and Personal Pressure

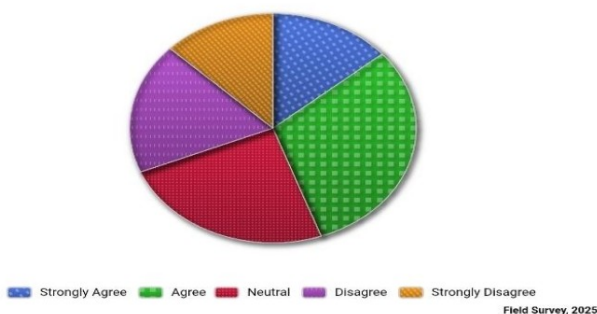


Figure 22: Influence of Social Media on Managing Academic and Personal Pressure

Figure 22 implies that social media serves as a moderate coping tool for students handling stress, suggesting the need for structured and evidence-based online mental-health content to better support academic and personal well-being.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One: How do university students use social media to access mental-health information?

The data in figures 2–6 indicate that most students engage with social media frequently, with 132 (34.4%) accessing platforms several times daily and 119 (31.0%) daily. A significant proportion of students reported using social media to obtain information on mental health and emotional well-being (Figure 3), while many followed pages or groups dedicated to mental health awareness (Figure 4). Engagement through sharing or commenting on mental-health posts (Figure 5) and discussions that enhance understanding (Figure 6) further confirm that students actively seek and interact with mental-health content online.

These findings align with previous research highlighting social media as a vital avenue for informal counseling and peer support, where youths can express emotions and receive guidance (Ali-Chand & Naidu, 2024; Adegoke & Ayoola, 2023). Husseini and Murphy-Morgan (2022) emphasise that engagement with online mental-health interventions allows users to learn strategies for managing stress and anxiety. In the Nigerian context, Uzor and Idemudia (2024) report similar patterns among undergraduates, showing that digital platforms supplement traditional coping resources.

Research Question Two: What are students' perceptions of the credibility of online mental-health content?

Figures 8–12 indicate mixed perceptions of credibility. While 52 (13.5%) strongly agree and 143 (37.2%) agree that they trust content from verified professionals (Figure 10), 121 (31.5%) disagree that social media content is credible (Figure 8). Additionally, many students verify information before acting on it (Figure 9), suggesting caution and selective trust. Despite skepticism, exposure to credible sources improved students' confidence in their mental-health knowledge (Figure 12). This reflects the importance of source verification in online health information (Okeke, 2022; Eze & Okoro, 2023). The findings support the Health Belief Model, where perceptions of reliability and risk influence whether individuals act on health information (Janz & Becker, 1984; Rosenstock, 1974). Similarly, Drouin et al. (2021) note that youth are aware of the potential risks of misinformation and selectively rely on trustworthy sources. The findings support the Health Belief Model because students' willingness to trust and apply online mental-health information depended largely on their perceptions of its credibility, perceived benefits and potential risks.

Research Question Three: How do students perceive the usefulness of online mental-health information?

Figures 13–17 reveal that students find online mental-health content moderately useful. Most respondents indicated that online information helps manage emotional challenges (Figure 13), understand how to support others (Figure 14), and promote a positive mental attitude (Figure 15). However, many remained neutral (Figure 14–18), particularly regarding preference for online information over physical seminars. Social media campaigns also influence lifestyle choices (Figure 17), though not universally.

These results resonate with prior studies showing that social media can be both informative and motivational for mental-health management (Naslund et al., 2020; Ojo, Adeyemi, & Ogundele, 2023). Digital platforms provide flexible access to resources and coping strategies, yet their effectiveness is

moderated by content credibility, cultural interpretation, and user engagement (Ede, Okafor, & Okechukwu, 2023; Ogunyemi, 2021).

Research Question Four: What is the relationship between the frequency of online information use and students' self-reported coping behaviours?

Figures 18–22 demonstrate that frequent engagement with mental-health content correlates positively with the application of coping strategies. Students reported that regular exposure improved emotional resilience (Figure 19), reduced stress (Figure 20), motivated them to seek professional help (Figure 21), and influenced the management of academic and personal pressure (Figure 22).

This finding aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals actively select media to satisfy personal needs, including emotional support and stress management (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Sundar Limperos, 2013; Ruggiero, 2000). Moreover, empirical studies in Nigeria demonstrate that students' online interactions with mental-health content foster coping behaviours and enhance well-being (Dudafa & Otodo, 2024; Omoruyi & Kerebi, 2025). The results suggest that higher frequency of social media use for mental-health information can translate into practical, self-reported coping strategies, although exposure to misinformation remains a potential risk (Eze, Agu, & Okoye, 2022; Koç & Turan, 2023).

In sum, the findings show that university students actively engage with social media for mental-health information, exhibit cautious trust in credible sources, perceive online content as moderately useful for emotional well-being, and translate frequent engagement into coping behaviours. These patterns support theoretical frameworks such as Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Health Belief Model, highlighting the dual role of social media as both an information source and a coping tool. Nevertheless, content credibility and digital literacy remain critical factors influencing the effectiveness of online mental-health engagement.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social media have become important complementary platforms for mental-health communication among university students. However, their effectiveness depend largely on information credibility, students' digital literacy and their ability to critically evaluate online content before applying it to personal mental-health management. Social media play significant role in shaping university students' engagement with mental-health information and coping strategies. Students actively use digital platforms to access, share, and discuss mental-health content, with frequent engagement linked to improved emotional resilience, stress management, and motivation to seek professional help. While students generally perceive online mental-health information as useful, credibility concerns persist, highlighting the importance of verified sources and digital literacy.

The findings reflect the dual potential of social media as both an educational and supportive tool in mental-health management, aligning with the theoretical insights of Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Health Belief Model. Importantly, the study suggests that culturally sensitive, evidence-based digital interventions can enhance mental-health awareness, reduce stigma, and strengthen coping behaviours among university students. Future interventions should prioritise credible content dissemination, integrate online and offline support systems, and foster digital literacy

to maximise the benefits of social media for youth mental well-being in Nigeria and similar contexts.

Recommendations

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

1. Universities should provide programmes that enhance students' ability to critically assess online mental-health information, enabling them to identify credible sources and avoid misinformation.
2. Collaboration between educational institutions and mental-health organisations is needed to maintain verified social media platforms that offer accurate, culturally relevant, and evidence-based mental-health content.
3. Digital mentalhealth initiatives should be complemented with accessible counseling services and peer-support systems to provide comprehensive care for students.
4. Students should be encouraged to actively participate in mental-health discussions, share coping strategies, and support peers, creating a collaborative environment that promotes awareness and psychological resilience.

REFERENCES

- Adegoke, O., & Ayoola, T. (2023). Social media influence on youth mental health in Nigeria. *Journal of Media and Society*, 15(2), 45–59.
- Ali-Chand, Z., & Naidu, R. (2024). Exploring the impact of emojis on paralanguage in social media communication. *Digital Discourse Studies*, 12(1), 33–48.
- Drouin, M., McDaniel, B. T., Pater, J., & Toscos, T. (2021). How parents and their children used social media and technology at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and associations with anxiety and depression. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 24(9), 593–603.
- Dudafa, U. J., & Otodo, I. (2024). Internet diagnosis among undergraduates: Prevalence, perceptions, and implications for healthcare practices at Niger Delta University. *International Institute of Academic Research and Development (IIARD) Journal of Health Studies*, 10(1), 101–119.
- Eboreime, T. R., Olley, W. O., & Akpor, D. E. (2023). Public perception of mass media campaigns' effectiveness in Nigeria's control and prevention of suicide amongst youths. *Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(5), 18–29.
- Ede, M. O., Okafor, P. A., & Okechukwu, C. I. (2023). Mental health and the digital divide: Evaluating access and attitudes toward online support among Nigerian youths. *Nigerian Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 18(1), 22–39.
- Eze, P., Agu, C., & Okoye, U. (2022). Social media and mental health awareness among Nigerian youths. *Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 14(2), 45–59.
- Husseini, S., & Murphy-Morgan, C. (2025). Exploring the Experience and Efficacy of Online Interventions for Mental Health: A Qualitative Study. *Northumbria Psychology Bulletin*, 2(1), 43–77.

- Iguoba, G. V., Olley, W. O., & Akpor, D. E. (2023). Influence of mass media on the image of the Nigeria Armed Forces operation. *The International Journal of English and Research*, 10(7), 307-314.
- Janz, N. K., & Becker, M. H. (1984). The Health Belief Model: A decade later. *Health Education Quarterly*, 11(1), 1-47.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509-523.
- Montag, C., Yang, H., & Elhai, J. D. (2021). On the psychology of TikTok use: A first glimpse from empirical findings. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9, 641673.
- Naslund, J. A., Bondre, A., Torous, J., & Aschbrenner, K. A. (2020). Social media and mental health: Benefits, risks, and opportunities for research and practice. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, 5(3), 245-257.
- Oduguwa, B. K., & Akinola, A. S. (2024). Digital counseling and mental health awareness among university students in Southwest Nigeria. *Journal of Psychological Research in Africa*, 12(1), 14-29.
- Ogundipe, R. O., Omotosho, O. E., & John-Akinola, Y. O. (2025). Perception, attitude and use of digital health platforms for mental health promotion among students in a national university in the south-western part of Nigeria: A cross-sectional study. *Digital Health*, 11, 20552076251331841.
- Okeke, R. (2022). Trust and skepticism in online health information: Evidence from Nigerian students. *Journal of Health Communication*, 10(1), 77-94.
- Omoruyi, J. O., & Kerebi, T. F. (2025). University students' perceptions of digital media's role in mental health information and communication in Delta State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Communication Review*, 4(3), 55-72.
- Rosenstock, I. M. (1974). The health belief model and preventive health behavior. *Health Education Monographs*, 2(4), 354-386.
- Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(1), 3-37.
- Shitandi, O. B., Efe, J. O. J., & Sunday, I. P. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Delta State University students, Nigeria. *Acta Bio Medica: Atenei Parmensis*, 92(6), e2021347.
- Sundar, S. S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). Uses and gratifications 2.0: New gratifications for new media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 57(4), 504-525.
- Uzor, M. I., & Idemudia, E. S. (2024). Social media use and wellbeing among undergraduates in South-South Nigeria. *African Journal of Communication Studies*, 6(2), 88-105.
- World Health Organization. (2022). World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all. *World Health Organization*. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240050860>