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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTSINFEDERALCOLLEGEOFEDUCATION(TECHNICAL),OMOKU, RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study examined influence of social media usage on the mental health of students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, Rivers State. Four research questions guided the study, covering the students' pattern of social media usage, their level of social media addiction, their mental health status in relation to social media usage, and the extent to which social media usage influenced anxiety, depression and low self-esteem among them. The study was anchored on Social Comparison Theory and Cognitive Behavioural Theory and adopted the descriptive survey design. A sample of 230 students was drawn from a population of 995 degree students of the College through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected with a validated self-structured Social Media Usage and Mental Health Questionnaire (SMUMHQ) with a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.82. The 221 valid copies retrieved were analysed using mean and standard deviation, with 2.50 as the criterion mean. The findings revealed that the pattern of social media usage among the students was heavy and multi-platform (grand mean = 3.28); that the level of social media addiction among them was high (grand mean = 2.95); that the students reported disturbed sleep, poor concentration, mood changes and reduced self-confidence in relation to their usage (grand mean = 3.02); and that social media usage influenced anxiety, depression and low self-esteem among them to a high extent (grand mean = 2.81), with the strongest influence on selfesteem. The study concluded that the mental health of the students could not be separated from their digital habits. It was recommended, among others, that the College should introduce a digital wellness programme, that the Guidance and Counselling Unit should screen students for social media addiction and provide cognitive behavioural group counselling, and that students should set daily limits on their social media use

Keywords: *Social Media usage, mental health. Students: College of Education.*

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Introduction

Mental health is the foundation on which every other aspect of a student's life rests. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) defined mental health as a state of well-being in which a person realized his or her own abilities, coped with the normal stresses of life, worked productively, and contributed to the community. For a student in a tertiary institution, this state of well-being shaped attendance at lectures, preparation for examinations, and the quality of relationships with peers. Where mental health was weak, concentration dropped, motivation declined, and academic performance suffered. The mental health of students therefore deserved attention in its own right, and not merely as a consequence of academic difficulty. Social media had become the most constant social environment of the modern student. Nesi (2020) observed that these platforms had moved to the centre of how young people communicated, presented themselves, and formed relationships. Several tools dominated this space in Nigeria, and each one related to the student in its own way. WhatsApp served as a messaging tool for private and group conversation, and students used it for family contact, class groups, and the daily exchange of notes and announcements. Facebook operated as a general social network where students posted updates, joined groups, and followed public pages. TikTok built its appeal on short videos that played one after another, and it rewarded the user with a steady stream of entertainment that was difficult to stop. Instagram centred on photographs and short videos, and it placed appearance, lifestyle, and personal presentation at the heart of the experience. X carried fast moving public conversation on news, opinion, and trending topics, while YouTube supplied longer videos that students used for tutorials, lectures, and music (Kemp, 2025). Together these tools filled the hours between lectures and followed students into their hostels and homes at every hour of the day. The character of each tool shaped what a student did online, and what a student did online in turn shaped how that student felt, so the usage of these platforms carried a direct bearing on the mental health of students.

The usage of social media influenced the mental health of students through psychological pathways rather than through the amount of time spent alone. Keles et al. (2020) linked the habitual use of social media to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, loneliness, and disturbed sleep among young people, and they treated the pattern of engagement as the decisive factor rather than the platform itself. Orben et al. (2024) argued that social comparison, changes in self-concept, sensitivity to social feedback, and experiences of online exclusion stood at the centre of these pathways. Every platform presented a curated and edited version of other people's lives, and a student who measured an ordinary personal reality against a polished public image was likely to come away with a diminished sense of self-worth.

Approval also became visible and countable, since likes, comments, and shares turned social acceptance into a figure that rose and fell with each post. Passive scrolling deepened the effect, because the student consumed the achievements of others without taking part in any exchange, and anxiety grew alongside the habit of constant checking. The time these platforms consumed carried a further consequence, since hours spent online were hours removed from sleep, study, physical activity, and face to face interaction, each of which protected mental health. Ahmed et al. (2024) identified sleep as one of the areas in which the association between social media use and mental health became visible. A student who scrolled late into the night arrived at lectures tired, and the fatigue fed back into stress, irritability, and low mood. The influence was therefore cumulative, because the loss of restorative activities weakened the very resources a student needed in order to cope.

However, not all social media use, however, produced the same outcome, and the manner of use mattered more than the amount of time spent. Nesi (2020) noted that the same platforms offered young people connection, peer support, and access to information, and that the difficulty lay in the conditions under which benefit turned into risk. Odgers and Jensen (2020) argued that the public alarm around digital technology had outrun the strength of the available evidence, and that the difficulties a young person carried offline shaped the risks that person met online. A student who used WhatsApp to organize a group assignment and to stay close to family stood in a different position from a student who scrolled through Instagram and TikTok and measured personal worth against the achievements of others. The question before researchers was therefore not whether social media was good or bad, but under what conditions and through what patterns of use it affected the mental health of students. In Nigeria, this question carried particular weight.

Students in Nigerian tertiary institutions faced heavy academic demands, financial pressure, and limited access to professional psychological support. Social media filled part of the gap by offering connection and distraction, but it also introduced comparison, online harassment, and exposure to distressing content. The combination of high exposure and thin support services made the mental health of Nigerian students a pressing concern for institutions and for families. Parents and guardians formed part of this picture, since parental guidance shaped how young people handled the opportunities and risks of online activity (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

Most of the attention given to this subject in Nigeria had been directed at universities, and colleges of education received far less consideration. This gap mattered for two reasons. Colleges of education trained the teachers who would later handle the emotional and psychological development of pupils in primary and secondary schools, so the mental health of their students carried consequences beyond the students themselves. In addition, the students population of a college of education differed from that of a university in programmes structure, age spread, and residential arrangement, and these differences could shape both social media habits and mental health outcomes. belonged to this category and little was known about how their social media usage related to their mental health. The present study therefore became necessary. It examined the influence of social media usage on the mental health of students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, Rivers State. The study intended to provide evidence that the College management, counsellors, parents, and policy makers could act upon, and to contribute Nigerian evidence from a college of education to a body of literature that had relied mainly on university students.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of social media usage on the mental health of students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

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1. Determine the pattern of social media usage among students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku.
2. Examine the level of social media addiction among students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku.
3. Examine the mental health status of students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku in relation to social media usage.
4. Investigate whether social media usage contributes to anxiety, depression and low selfesteem among students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the pattern of social media usage among students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku?
2. What is the level of social media addiction among students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku?
3. What is the mental health status of students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku in relation to their social media usage?
4. To what extent does social media usage influence anxiety, depression and low self-esteem among students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku?

Methods

The researchers adopted the descriptive survey design for this study. This design was chosen because the study sought to describe the social media behaviour of students and their mental health status as these exist, without altering either of them. The study was conducted at the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, which sits in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State Nigeran, the population of the study comprised all the students of the University of Uyo affiliated degree programmes at the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, from 200 level to 400 level. The figure stood at 995 students, made up of 332 male students and 663 female students, and it was obtained from the Director, Directorate of Degree Programmes (2026). The students were spread across the eight departments of the affiliated programmes. This group formed the population of the study because its members were young adults in a residential academic setting, they were within the age range at which social media use is heaviest, and they were the students whose mental health the study set out to examine. The sample for the study was drawn as a proportion of the total population. The researchers took 23.1 per cent of the 995 students, which gave a sample of 230 students. The proportion was applied to each gender group in the same ratio in which the genders appeared in the population, so that the sample carried 77 male students and 153 female students. The researchers used the stratified random sampling, the researchers gathered the data with a self-structured questionnaire titled Social Media Usage and Mental Health Questionnaire (SMUMHQ). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A collected the demographic information of the respondents, which covered gender, age, level, and department. Section B contained the items of the study, and the items were arranged in four clusters, with each cluster built to answer one research question. Cluster One answered research question one, which asked for the pattern of social media usage among the students, cluster two answered research question two, which asked for the level of social media addiction among the students, cluster three answered research question three, which asked for the mental health status of the students in relation to their social media usage and cluster four answered research question four, which asked to what extent social media usage influenced anxiety, depression and low self-esteem among the students. Clusters One, Two, and Three were answered on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) - 4, Agree (A) - 3, Disagree (D) - 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1. While cluster four was answered on a four point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) - 4, High Extent (HE) - 3, Low Extent (LE) - 2, and Very Low Extent (VLE) - 1.

The questionnaire was submitted to face and content validation before it was used. Copies were given to the three (3) specialists in Measurement and Evaluation, Guidance and Counselling, and Educational Psychology. The specialists examined the language of the items for clarity, the relevance of each item to the variable it was meant to measure, the suitability of the content for students of a college of education, and the adequacy of the coverage against the objectives and the research questions of the study. They also examined whether the items on mental health were worded in a manner that would not distress a respondent who was already carrying a difficulty. The corrections and the suggestions they made were applied, and the revised questionnaire was then used for the study.

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested through a pilot study. The researchers administered the instrument to 35 students of a college of education in a neighboring local government area, who carried characteristics similar to those of the respondents of the study but who were not part of the main sample. The responses were analyzed with the Cronbach Alpha method, which was chosen because the instrument was made up of several items answered on graded rating scales. The coefficient obtained was 0.82, which stood the instrument was therefore regarded as reliable enough to measure the variables of the study with consistency. The researchers obtained permission from the appropriate authority of the college before the exercise began. The questionnaire was then administered in person, with the help of two research assistants who had been briefed on the procedure, the data collected for the study were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, Any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was be regarded as accepted Any item with a mean score of below 2.50 was regarded as rejected.

Results

Questionnaire Administration and Return Rate

Table 4.1: Distribution and Retrieval of the Questionnaire

Gender	Copies Administered	Copies Retrieved	Copies Discarded	Copies Used	ValidCopies (% of Administered)
Male	77	75	1	74	96.1
Female	153	151	4	147	96.1

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Total	**230**	**226**	**5**	**221**	**96.1**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.1 showed that 230 copies of the questionnaire were administered (77 to male and 153 to female students), 226 copies (98.3 per cent) were retrieved on the spot, and 5 copies were discarded because they were incomplete or carried more than one response to an item. The 221 valid copies (74 male; 147 female) represented a return rate of 96.1 per cent and retained the gender proportion of the population (33.5 per cent male to 66.5 per cent female, against 33.4 per cent to 66.6 per cent in the population). All the analyses in this chapter were based on the 221 valid copies.

Research Question One: What is the pattern of social media usage among students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku?

Table 4.2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Ratings on the Pattern of Social Media Usage among Students (N = 221)

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Std.	Remark
1	Students commonly use more than one social media platform daily.	131	74	12	4	3.50	0.69	Strongly Agreed
2	Social media is frequently used by students for academic information and learning materials.	89	95	26	11	3.19	0.83	Agreed
3	Social media is commonly used by students for entertainment and relaxation.	111	88	19	3	3.39	0.70	Strongly Agreed
4	Students often use social media communicate with friends, classmates and family members.	123	77	16	5	3.44	0.73	Strongly Agreed
5	Social media is often used by students during Strongly leisure time.	105	87	22	7	3.31	0.78	Agreed
6	Some students use social media during study periods or lectures.	53	105	39	24	2.85	0.91	Agreed
Grand Mean						**3.28**	**0.77**	**Strongly Agree**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.2 showed that all the six items on the pattern of social media usage recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 3.28 (Std. Dev. = 0.77) fell within the range of 3.26 – 4.00 and indicated strong agreement. The pattern of social media usage among the students was therefore heavy and multi-platform, serving communication, entertainment and leisure first and academic purposes next, and extending into study periods and lectures.

Research Question Two: What is the level of social media addiction among students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku?

Table 4.3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Ratings on the Level of Social Media Addiction among Students (N = 221)

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
7	Some students find it difficult to control the amount of time spent on social media.	77	98	36	10	3.10	0.83	Agreed
8	Social media use can make students stay online longer than intended.	91	94	28	8	3.21	0.80	Agreed
9	Some students feel uncomfortable when they are unable to access social media.	54	100	47	20	2.85	0.89	Agreed
10	Social media use can interfere with students' academic activities.	54	108	47	12	2.92	0.82	Agreed
11	Frequent social media use can make students lose interest in other important activities.	45	94	57	25	2.72	0.92	Agreed
12	Attempts to reduce social media use may be difficult for some students.	55	106	44	16	2.90	0.86	Agreed
Grand Mean						**2.95**	**0.85**	**Agree**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.3 showed that all the six items on social media addiction recorded mean scores above 2.50 and were rated Agree. Staying

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online longer than intended (3.21; Std. Dev. = 0.80) and difficulty in controlling the time spent (3.10) recorded the highest means, followed by interference with academic activities (2.92), difficulty in reducing use (2.90) and discomfort when access was unavailable (2.85), while loss of interest in other important activities recorded the lowest mean (2.72; Std. Dev. = 0.92). The grand mean of 2.95 (Std. Dev. = 0.85) fell within the range of 2.51 – 3.25. The level of social media addiction among the students was therefore high.

Research Question Three: What is the mental health status of students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku in relation to their social media usage?

Table 4.5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Ratings on the Mental Health Status of Students in Relation to Social Media Usage (N = 221)

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
13	Excessive social media use may be associated with feelings of worry among students.	52	107	42	20	2.86	0.88	Agreed
14	Frequent social media use may contribute to restlessness among students.	47	103	52	19	2.81	0.87	Agreed
15	Social media content may affect the mood of students.	65	112	34	10	3.05	0.79	Agreed
16	Comparing oneself with others on social media may affect students' self confidence.	63	104	39	15	2.97	0.86	Agreed
17	Late-night social media use may affect students' sleep patterns.	91	104	23	3	3.28	0.70	Strongly Agreed
18	Social media use may influence students' ability to concentrate on academic work.	80	104	28	9	3.15	0.79	Agreed
Grand Mean						**3.02**	**0.82**	**Agree**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.5 showed that all the six items on mental health status recorded mean scores above 2.50. The grand mean of 3.02 (Std. Dev. = 0.82) was rated Agree. The mental health status of the students in relation to their social media usage therefore showed that the students associated their usage with disturbed sleep, poor concentration, changes in mood, reduced self-confidence, worry and restlessness to a high degree.

Research Question Four: To what extent does social media usage influence anxiety, depression and low self-esteem among students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku?

Table 4.7: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Ratings on the Extent to which Social Media Usage Influences Anxiety, Depression and Low Self-Esteem among Students (N = 221)

S/N	Item	VHE (4)	HE (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
19	Social media use contributes to anxiety among students.	49	110	44	18	2.86	0.85	High Extent
20	Fear of missing out on online activities influence students' anxiety.	37	103	54	27	2.68	0.89	High Extent
21	Waiting for likes, comments or online reactions increase students' worry.	35	99	52	35	2.61	0.94	High Extent
22	Social media use contributes to sadness or low mood among students.	42	98	58	23	2.72	0.89	High Exten
23	Comparison with others on social media influence feelings of inadequacy among students.	63	99	44	15	2.95	0.87	High Extent
24	Online criticism or negative comments affect students' self esteem.	71	99	35	16	3.02	0.88	High Extent
Grand Mean						**2.81**	**0.89**	**High Extent**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.7 showed that all the six items recorded mean scores within the range of 2.51 – 3.25 and were rated High Extent. The effect of online criticism on self-esteem recorded the highest mean (3.02; Std. Dev. = 0.88), followed by comparison and feelings of inadequacy (2.95), anxiety (2.86), sadness or low mood (2.72) and fear of missing out (2.68), while worry over waiting for likes, comments or reactions recorded the lowest mean (2.61; Std. Dev. = 0.94). The grand mean of 2.81 (Std. Dev. = 0.89) was rated High

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Extent. Social media usage therefore influenced anxiety, depression and low self-esteem among the students to a high extent.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are discussed below in the order of the research questions: The first finding of the study showed that the students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, used social media heavily and across several platforms at once, that they used the platforms mainly for communication, entertainment and leisure, that they also drew academic information and learning materials from the platforms, and that a large proportion of them used the platforms during study periods and lectures. This finding agreed with the picture of Nigerian usage painted by Kemp (2025), who reported that WhatsApp was used by 96.5 per cent of Nigerian internet users aged sixteen and above, followed by TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and X, each of which was used by more than eight out of every ten users, a distribution that could only arise if most users held accounts on several platforms at once. It also agreed with Popoola et al. (2018), who found WhatsApp to be the most favoured platform among young adults in Lagos State, and with Akinwalere and Adeosun (2022), who documented the spread of social media usage and preference across platforms among students of tertiary institutions. The high rating given to communication with friends, classmates and family members confirmed the observation of Nesi (2020) that the platforms had moved to the centre of how young people communicated and formed relationships, and the high rating given to academic use showed that the same platforms carried lecture notes, announcements and group discussions, so that a student could not withdraw from them without losing contact with the academic life of the College. The pattern found in this study was therefore not one of occasional or purely instrumental use, but one in which the platforms had become the constant social environment of the student, as the background to the study anticipated.

The second finding showed that the level of social media addiction among the students was high, and that three out of every four respondents recorded a high or very high level. The six items on which the finding rested corresponded to the components of addiction identified by Griffiths (2005): staying online longer than intended and difficulty in controlling time pointed to tolerance and loss of control; discomfort when access was unavailable pointed to withdrawal; interference with academic activities pointed to conflict; loss of interest in other activities pointed to salience; and difficulty in reducing use pointed to relapse. This finding agreed with Onyeizu et al. (2022), who found among undergraduates of Afe Babalola University that addicted users valued their social media friends above real-life interaction with family and friends and that addiction rose alongside deterioration in mental health. It was also in line with Asibong et al. (2020), who found that about one-fifth of the undergraduates of the University of Calabar carried moderate to severe forms of internet addiction, although the proportion found in the present study was considerably higher, which may reflect the growth of short video platforms since that study was carried out and the fact that the present study measured addiction to social media in particular rather than to the internet as a whole. The finding, however, disagreed with Ilori et al. (2025), who reported a low prevalence of social media addiction among undergraduates in Ekiti State.

The third finding showed that the students associated their social media usage with disturbed sleep, poor concentration, changes in mood, reduced self-confidence, worry and restlessness, and that about three-quarters of them reported these effects to a high or very high degree. The prominence of sleep among the effects agreed with Ahmed et al. (2024), whose systematic review identified sleep as one of the areas in which the association between social media use and mental health became most visible, and with the observation that a student who scrolled late into the night arrived at lectures tired and carried the fatigue into stress, irritability and low mood. The prominence of concentration agreed with Keles et al. (2020), who linked the habitual use of social media to disturbed sleep and to anxiety, depression and low self-esteem among young people, and it explained in part the academic consequences that the statement of the problem raised. The finding on mood and self confidence agreed with Ukponahiusi and Ohikhueme (2026), who found that 76.4 per cent of students of the University of Benin agreed that social media caused them to compare themselves with others in a way that harmed their self-esteem, and with Orben et al. (2024), who placed social comparison and sensitivity to social feedback at the centre of the mechanisms through which social media reached the mental health of young people. Additionally, the present finding was consistent with Cognitive Behavioural Theory as set out by Beck (1976). Social media content that lowered mood and comparison that reduced self-confidence supplied the raw material of the negative automatic thoughts and cognitive errors that Beck described, and the loss of sleep and concentration weakened the very resources with which a student might have resisted those thoughts.

The fourth finding showed that social media usage influenced anxiety, depression and low selfesteem among the students to a high extent, and that the influence was strongest on self-esteem, through online criticism and comparison with others, followed by depression and anxiety. The finding on self-esteem agreed with Ukponahiusi and Ohikhueme (2026), who found that a combined 75.2 per cent of students agreed that online harassment harmed their self-esteem and emotional well-being and who identified comparison culture as a driver of low self-esteem.

The finding on anxiety and depression agreed with Shannon et al. (2022), whose meta-analysis of 18 studies found moderate and statistically significant correlations between problematic social media use and depression, anxiety and stress; with Ilori et al. (2025), who found that social media addiction correlated significantly with depression and stress among Nigerian undergraduates; and with Onyeizu et al. (2022), who concluded that social media addiction exerted a moderate influence on the mental health of undergraduates. Shannon et al. (2022) reported the strongest correlation with anxiety, whereas the present study found the strongest influence on self-esteem. The finding that the influence was high rather than very high was consistent with the caution of Odgers and Jensen (2020) that public alarm had at times outrun the strength of the evidence, and with the position of Nesi (2020) that the same platforms carried both benefit and risk.

Conclusion

The study concluded that social media has become an inseparable part of the daily life of students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, and that the manner in which students use it has a real bearing on their mental health. The platforms are neither good nor bad in themselves; the same tools

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that keep students in touch with family, classmates and course work also expose them to compulsive use, late-night scrolling, constant comparison with the edited lives of others, and the judgement of strangers, and it is through these patterns that the harm to sleep, concentration, mood, self-worth and emotional stability arises. The mental health of students therefore cannot be separated from their digital habits, and any effort to support the well-being and academic success of students in colleges of education must address how they use social media. Because these students are the teachers of tomorrow, helping them to build healthy digital habits and a stable sense of selfworth is an investment not only in their own lives but in the pupils they will one day teach, and it calls for concerted action by the College, its counsellors, parents and policy makers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The management of the College should introduce a digital wellness programme, through orientation and periodic seminars, that teaches students to plan their daily social media use and to keep their phones away during lectures and study periods.
2. The Guidance and Counselling Unit should screen students for social media addiction tendency at the start of every session and provide cognitive behavioural group counselling for those who record high scores.
3. Counsellors should include sleep hygiene and study skills in their programmes, with emphasis on a screenfree period before bedtime and on keeping the phone away from the study table.
4. Counsellors should run self-esteem enhancement and media literacy programmes that teach students that online content is selected and edited and is not a fair standard for judging their own lives.
5. Parents and guardians should discuss social media use openly with their wards and refer them to the counselling unit when they notice sleeplessness, withdrawal, irritability or loss of interest in study.
6. The National Commission for Colleges of Education and the affiliating university should integrate digital literacy and cyber wellness into the teacher education curriculum and strengthen counselling units with trained personnel.
7. Students should set daily limits on their social media use, avoid late-night scrolling, use the platforms for exchange rather than passive viewing, and seek help early when their usage becomes difficult to control.

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