



TIKTOK AND INSTAGRAM LIFESTYLE POSTS AND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG WOMEN IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA: EFFECTS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES FROM EXPERTS' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This study explores the psychological effects of TikTok and Instagram lifestyle contents on young women in Southeast Nigeria, particularly in the context of the pressures created by social media influencers and curated posts. Given the growing popularity of these platforms, the research aims to identify how exposure to lifestyle content influences mental health, including issues such as body image dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. It also seeks to understand the recommendations from mental health professionals on mitigating these effects. Through in-depth interviews with ten psychotherapists from the Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Enugu, key themes emerged regarding the extent of social media exposure, the psychological impacts, and coping mechanisms. Findings indicate that social media platforms, especially TikTok and Instagram, play a significant role in shaping young women's self-image, often leading to unrealistic expectations and comparison with influencers. The resulting psychological distress manifests in anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction. Experts recommended strategies such as limiting screen time, promoting social media literacy, and fostering self-awareness to help mitigate these effects. Furthermore, while some young women have found financial independence and social validation through content creation, the negative psychological impact remains significant. This study highlights the need for targeted interventions, including education on the harmful effects of social media and support systems for young women in Southeast Nigeria, to reduce the mental health risks associated with excessive exposure to lifestyle content on TikTok and Instagram.

Keywords: TikTok and Instagram; Mental Health; Young women, Mitigation strategies; Experts Perspectives

Introduction

Available evidence shows that TikTok and Reel serve as a means of relaxation and the platforms are also changing the entertainment industry in Ebonyi states particularly in Abakaliki metropolis (Ogbaeja & Okeke, 2023). In the same way, librarians in Southeast Nigeria demonstrated a high level of readiness and willingness to adopt social media platforms for digital reference service delivery as they perceived numerous benefits of using these platforms, including improved communication and service delivery (Angel & Ogbomo, 2025). For Osagioduwa (2024), youths in Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City, Nigeria have a high adoption rate of TikTok with 95% of respondents using the platform and majority of users engage extensively, spending more than 5 hours per day on TikTok and their activities ranges from watching videos and creating content. They also gain gratification from learning, entertainment, self-expression, and socializing. Investigations from Ligaraba (2023) explained that TikTok and Instagram

platforms possess some qualities like social interaction, however, reports from users confirms the platforms have the potential to influence how individuals perceive their self-worth. Additionally, the actual use of social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram and the subjective experiences affects the psychology of users in different ways. It could range from mental health components like depression, anxiety, and or self-esteem (Yermakov, 2023). Cork, Piwek, Smith, Joinson, Stanton Fraser, and Ellis, (2023) emphasized that the influence of TikTok on user's mental well-being lies on the platforms kind of content rather than the amount of time one spent consuming contents and this can result in addiction and compulsive engagement which has a connection to poor mental health outcomes (Hendrikse & Limniou, 2023). These platforms play a great role and how users adopt them determine how they will influence their mental health (Rajaei& Abraham, 2023).

Qaribu et al., (2024) explained that TikTok has become one of the most popular social media platforms, with millions of users worldwide. They also emphasized that those with higher self-esteem are more likely to use TikTok, while those with lower self-esteem tend to avoid it. They also established a link between TikTok use, social comparison (comparing oneself to others), and self-esteem, while considering gender as a factor and has proven statistically that the effect is more pronounced in the female group than in the male group.

Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram play a major role in the lives of young people around the world. Millions of users share their lifestyles, experiences, and achievements. These platforms, especially Instagram and TikTok, focus heavily on personal success, fashion, beauty, fitness, and travel. They create idealized images of life that often do not reflect everyday reality. Young women, who are more affected by social media content, are increasingly exposed to these curated images. This exposure can lead to negative psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and a distorted self-image.

In Southeast Nigeria, where societal expectations about beauty, success, and social status are strong, the impact of social media on young women may be even be greater. As these women compare their lives to the images they see online, they may feel inadequate, dissatisfied, and have lower self-esteem. Although global research has looked into the link between social media and mental health, there is still a lack of understanding about these effects in the specific cultural setting of Southeast Nigeria.

This study aims to explore the psychological effects of TikTok and Instagram lifestyle content on young women in Southeast Nigeria. It also seeks to identify expert advice on how to reduce these effects. By doing this, the study hopes to provide important insights into how social media exposure affects mental health and offer practical strategies for managing its influence on this vulnerable group.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the effects of TikTok and Instagram Lifestyle posts on the psychology of young women in Southeast Nigeria.
2. To Identify experts' recommendations for mitigating the mental health effects associated with exposure to lifestyle posts on TikTok and Instagram among young women in Southeast Nigeria.

Review of Concepts

Social media

For Naudiet (2022), social media is not just a channel for creating and sharing contents, rather a space for active users to construct their own social reality. It is a reciprocal system where user's identities, values and

motivations play a great role in what they choose to share, comments and engage with and the contents and networks which they see also reshape users' perceptions. Also, Khalikhali (2025) conceptualized social media as an interactive environment shaping reputation and identities through various lenses. Khalikhali added that social media is a participatory ecosystem where value comes through interaction and networking with other users in the form of likes, shares and comments. Sergeeva (2023) frames social media as not just a technology but a social institution with norms, rules and principles that determines how communication happens in the society. On the contrary, Nurfa et al., (2025) define social media as a societal element with little or no behavioral orientations and social norms, showing signs of broken or weak values and potential links to disregard for culture.

Lifestyle

Lifestyle according to Kram and Tam (2022) is a signifying construct that reflect audience values, identities and behavior and also a means to connect with consumer's relatable and aspirational life pattern. For them, it is a dynamic narrative tool use to model desired behavior in audience. Liyana et al., (2024) conceptualized lifestyle as a desired way of living rather than actual lived experiences and it is connected to luxury and social status. They further defined lifestyle as a tool or a mechanism used to reshape audience perceptions of social reality. Bloom et al., (2021) simply defined lifestyle as an observable daily habit influencing ones physical and psychological well-being. Husnain and Akhtar (2015), defined Lifestyle as a predictive tool influencing consumer behavior or consumption pattern. One common ideology that cut across the definition above is that Lifestyle is a tool used to shape or influence audience behavior and, in this study, it is also a tool used to influence young women's behavior towards TikTok and Instagram posts.

Mental Health

The World Health Organization (2014) defines mental health as an individual's capacity to know and use their own strengths and resources, to deal with everyday challenges, to engage in meaningful and successful employment, and to have a positive impact on their community. An optimistic outlook and the capacity to carry out one's everyday tasks are emphasized in this description. Scholars and academics have been interested in mental health for decades, and the many meanings of the term reflect the diversity of viewpoints and methods used to study this multifaceted concept.

An alternate definition of mental health proposed by the American Psychological Association (2015) reads as follows: the ability to adapt to novel circumstances, overcome challenges, and participate meaningfully in one's own life. Both cognitive ability and resilience in the face of adversity are highlighted in this definition. Here is a third definition of mental health provided by the National Institute of Mental Health (2021): When one's mental functions are functioning well, they are able to engage in meaningful activities, create satisfying relationships, adjust to new situations, and overcome obstacles. This is known as mental health. The significance of mental function and overcoming life's obstacles is emphasized by this definition. When there is a malfunction in the psychological, biological, physical or developmental processes that underpin mental functioning, it manifests clinically as a disturbance in an individual's behavior, emotion control, or cognition leading to anxiety, stress, depression, low self-esteem, Body Image Dissatisfaction and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). This disruption is known as a mental health disorder.

Empirical Review

Effects of TikTok and Instagram Lifestyle posts on the psychology of users

Nienstedt, Smith, Braithwaite, Gilbert and Wright (2023) used online survey to compare 407 college students at Brigham University–Idaho TikTok account holders and non-users in terms of their mental health stability and the findings justify that TikTok users experience a high level of negative mental health indicators in all measured areas compare to non-account holders in the study. What this means is that having TikTok account corresponds to worse well-being and to minimize this, users should always reflect on the

amount of time spent and the quality of the contents consumed. In the same way, Nasidi, Norde, Dahiru and Hassan (2024) studied the relationship between the use of social media like TikTok and social comparison and how that in turn influences young adult self-esteem with gender serving as the moderating factor. Using a cross sectional study of 314 Nigerian University students, it was discovered that TikTok usage has a direct effect on social comparison ($\beta = .570$, $p = 0.000$), which influences young adults' self-esteem ($\beta = .330$, $p = 0.000$) and this significant effect is stronger in female than male counterpart and by implication, female TikTok users are more vulnerable than males in terms of social comparison on these platforms while recommending that contents that trigger comparison should be blocked or filtered.

Highlighting this scenario, Blackburn and Hogg (2024) investigated how exposure to “pro-anorexia” (pro-ana) content on the social media platform like TikTok affects body image satisfaction and the internalization of societal beauty standards among young women. The study also assessed whether the amount of daily TikTok use is associated with disordered eating behaviors. Using a mixed experimental cross-sectional design on a sample of 273 females in Austria that are within the age of 18-28 and were randomly assigned to view either pro-ana TikTok content or “neutral” TikTok content and were grouped base on low, moderate, high and extreme users and the results reveals that women viewing pro-ana TikTok content showed a great dissatisfaction in their body image and increase in internalization societal beauty standards compared to the neutral-content group. Participants classified as “high” or “extreme” daily TikTok users in the study had higher average scores on disordered eating behaviors (EAT-26) compared to low/moderate users. It also indicates that low/moderate users also showed dissatisfaction to their body image which is attributed to exposure to TikTok Pro-ana contents but not as much concern as high/extreme users. By implication, even a little amount of time spent on TikTok can trigger a dissatisfaction in the user's body image and thereby recommend strict control over Pro-ana eating disordered contents.

Although, Lunia(2024) differed with Blackburnet. al., above in terms of methodology employed in the study, however, Lunia also explored how exposure to Instagram posts among users results to mental-health symptoms like sleep disorder and low self-esteem. Using a well structure questionnaire distributed to 100 college students in US reveals that almost all participants 95.2% reported accessing their Instagram account on daily basis with close to 50% spending over 4 hours per day with majority of them 70% explained feeling inadequacy due to exposure to Instagram posts. The fact is that Instagram contribute meaningfully to body image concerns among users due to constant comparison after consuming curated contents on this app. While monitoring the amount of time spent on this app will help users mitigate the effects, the study also suggested that platforms should promote realistic contents often.

Alejos, Manalili, Monteverde, Nalus and Valencia (2025) studied how young adults in Philippines are using mental-health content on TikTok to self-diagnose psychological conditions using semi-structure interview on 14 participants aged 18-25 and have used TikTok for a minimum of one year and also indicate self- diagnosis behavior. The study discovered that participants engaged with mental health contents on this platform which increased their level of awareness on mental health issues but also there was concerns for having OCD among the participants including increase anxiety, self labelling even without consulting a mental health expert. The effect is that TikTok is playing a great role in how users interpret their mental health situation which determines if they will seek expert supports or not while recommending that other researchers should access this phenomenon from other geographical locations. This concern suggests that there is an existing geographical gap in this area, hence the existence of this study.

Tips to mitigate the effects of TikTok and Instagram Posts on the mental health of users

Kaler et al., (2020) in a qualitative study explored how to equip undergraduate females in the U.S to rethink the effects of social media on their mental health and after engaging 26 female students in an interview, evidence shows that engagement with social media triggered pressured and social comparison among

participants which affected how much value they have for themselves. The study further reveal that participants were highly aware of this influence but had no expert guidance. What this means is that transition to tertiary education makes students vulnerable and relying on social media makes them even worse and it was recommended that school management pioneering the affairs of the students should incorporate social media reflection and discussion into orientation so as to get them empowered.

In the same direction, data available continue to prove that there is a considerable link between exposure to Instagram contents and a feeling of body image dissatisfaction especially among young women. This means that social media plays a role in shaping young women's perception of self and attention should focus on the type of contents that they consume (Etzinger 2023; Waxman & Tremblay 2024). The study concluded that future research should examine longitudinal study from varied population focusing on young women and Instagram use.

Avella (2023) employed the tool of mixed method to understand how young people who engage with therapeutic TikTok contents and how algorithm streams influence their mood. The finding shows that this streams curate contents for this population but with no expert's recommendation in place thereby leading users to self-diagnose or even experience mind shift due to this constant engagement. No doubt, social media can help improve mood for young users but expert consultation should be the primary intervention for mental health messages.

Supporting the findings above, Nguyen (2024) examined TikTok Role in Shaping Body Image and Self-esteem in Asian and Asian American Girls and Women using a mixed method approach and the study discovered that exposure to influencer's contents on social media particularly TikTok negatively affected participants body image perception due to constant comparison between Western and Asian culture. To minimize this effect, the study recommended TikTok contents should be culturally tailored, platform should crosscheck influencers contents to understand its effects on larger samples.

Setia, Tichy and Gilbert (2024) conducted a semi-systematic review to understand how improving youth's social-emotional learning can enhance their engagement with social media positively and results on the one hand indicate that incorporating project-Based learning into social-emotional learning can inculcate digital mindful behavior but on the other hand, the use of social media threatens the mental health of young adults resulting to sleep disorder and lazy habits but increase in soft skills like self-awareness, decision making can help them have a healthy digital engagement. Lahti et al., (2024) studied the problematic situations adolescents encounter online and how to prevent them. The results after involving 22 Finnish experts confirm that youths online experience varied negative mental health indicators like cyberbullying and sexual harassments and knowing when to seek help was considered the most effective approach to curb the menace.

Barnea-Goraly et. al., (2025) focused on App development and descriptive evaluation as a strategy to mitigating the negative influence of TikTok and Instagram on teen girls and young women aged 13-25 and early adopters confirmed that they felt more real and received more support in the App than the mainstream social media. Users also admitted that the App shielded them from mental health indicators and unnecessary online validation. The study suggests that designing alternative apps that prioritize the mental health of users can foster a safe space for young women.

For Avella (2023), Lahti et al., (2024), consulting an expert should be the major therapeutic intervention for mental health message. This suggests that there is limited literature in this direction which this study has set out to fill the gap.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Support Theory

Francis Cullen in 1994 found that social support could operate as a "protective" aspect, reducing the harmful effects of stress on people's health. This theory posits that, particularly in trying times, people's relationships and social networks determine their health and happiness. There are various forms of social support, including informative, emotional, and instrumental forms. Offering solace, understanding, and motivation to individuals going through tough times are all ways to offer emotional support. Support in the form of information is provided when individuals require guidance, advice, or facts in order to overcome difficulties.

One kind of instrumental support is helping people in need by providing them with material products or practical aid. Consider someone whose news of a chronic illness, such as diabetes, has just broken. This person may feel anxious, worried, and unprepared to deal with their disease. The psychological and logistical burdens of these difficulties can be shared with a trusted friend, family member or health experts.

People might find solace, empathy, and motivation from others they care about or from a support group when they are going through tough times. When dealing with mental health issues, for example, it could be helpful to get informational support from healthcare professionals or from online forums that offer support and guidance. The offer to do mundane tasks, like taking a loved one grocery shopping or to the doctor, can be a kind of instrumental assistance.

When people have each other's backs, it improves their health, resilience, and capacity to handle hardship. Supporters of the social support hypothesis argue that being in an environment of pleasant, supportive relationships may help people stay healthy and resilient. This theory is relevant to our study because it provides a basis for understanding how to assist individuals with mental health illnesses and support their recovery.

Methodology

The researchers were able to learn how the mental health of young women in Southeastern Nigeria has been affected by lifestyle posts on Instagram and TikTok by conducting an in-depth interview. Ten participants (psychotherapists) from Federal Neuropsychiatrist Hospital, Enugu Nigeria were engaged in a Face-to-Face interview at their convenience for 20 to 30 minutes using a recorder; the transcripts of these interviews were then used for the analysis. A snowball sampling technique was used to ensure that only psychotherapists working at Federal Neuropsychiatrist Hospital, Enugu were interviewed. The interview generated six dominant themes: Exposure to TikTok and Instagram by young women in Southeast, Nigeria; General Perceptions of Social Media Particularly TikTok and Instagram; the Psychological Impacts of TikTok and Instagram on young women in southeast Nigeria; Clinical Observations and Case Reflections; Coping Mechanisms and Support and Broader Reflections and Recommendations.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Participant Number	Gender	Working Experience
No. 1	Female	2 years (Visiting Expert)
No. 2	Female	5 years
No. 3	Female	8 years
No. 4	Female	15 years
No. 5	Male	10 years
No. 6	Male	5 years
No. 7	Female	7 years
No. 8	Female	8 years
No. 9	Male	11 years
No. 10	Male	14 years

The participants are made up of 6 females and 4 males, providing a balanced representation of both genders in the study with diverse range of working experience from 2-15 years

Discussion of Findings

Summary of Qualitative Data Analysis

In this section, the researcher carried out interview with the 10 participants who were psychotherapists. They provided answers in line with the research questions. The interviewee participants were ascribed code INT1, INT2, INT3, INT4, INT5, INT6, INT7, INT8, INT9, and INT10. This was done to hide the identity of the interviewees. The analysis was done with themes.

Exposure to TikTok and Instagram by young women in Southeast, Nigeria

The researcher asked this question “have you noticed an increase in clients discussing social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, in your sessions?” This question is to find out the extent young women in Southeast, Nigeria are expose to TikTok and Instagram. Having asked this question the interviewees responded that:

"Oh yes, they have access to the platform. You know, hardly you will see young people who don't talk about one thing or two that are happening on the social media especially on TikTok and Instagram" INT2

“They get engage with their social media handle most of the times. You know this is the new values now. People hardly do without social media particularly TikTok and Instagram, maybe because they are engaging”INT1 and INT5

Similarly, INT7 and INT9 noted that

They discuss it especially with the monetization thing. Every now and then you see them talk about one content or the other they watch on the platforms. You can't take that away from them"

Furthermore, INT3 and INT4

Most times you hear them discuss the latest hairstyle or fashion they come across on these platforms. For me, the truth is, you can't separate these young women from these platforms especially in recent times."

"The fact that everyone is looking for ways to be relevance on these platforms, you see them discuss all sort of topics on it."INT10

Speaking further INT8 and INT6 observed that

"They speak about it however, not frequent as you may think. Some of them claim that they are busy with other engaging things that do not give them much time to spend on the platforms of TikTok and Instagram"

From the above responses from the interview participants, it is quite obvious that the young women in Southeast Nigeria are well exposed to TikTok and Instagram as they are seen discussing about the platforms whenever there is need to. This affirms Lunia (2024) discovery that almost all college students in US admitted accessing their Instagram account everyday with close to half of them spending over 4 hours daily.

General Perceptions of Social Media Particularly TikTok and Instagram

The researcher asked this question "What are your general views on the role of TikTok and Instagram in the lives of young women today" and "In your opinion, how do lifestyle influencers and curated contents on these platforms shape young women's self-image or expectations?" These questions are to find out the views of health experts concerning the subject under investigation. Having asked these questions the interviewees responded that:

"These platforms have mounted pressure on the lifestyle of most young women today I will not lie. You will hear them talk about what this one or that one is put on." INT3

"Most of the times these contents make them have unrealistic expectations. They want to appear rosy and classic just like the influencers and if they don't meet up, they tend to be frustrated" INT4 and INT5

Speaking further, INT1 and INT8 noted that:

"Yes, they want to be sexually appealing in their effort to emulate influencers on these platforms because most of them have taking these influencers as their role models or idols that they can always learn one or two things from."

"Oh yes, you see most of them daydreaming of how they want to command everything around them just like the influencers. They will tell you they can do just anything just to be like this person and you will see them going out of the way in order to achieve that thing at the detriment of their health." INT7 and INT10

Additionally, INT9 and INT2 observed that:

“You see most of the times these young ladies behave abnormally because of they want to match up with the social media life. Some of them fail to realize that some of the things they see online are packaged.”

“Today, most young women are not proud of their body parts. They want to go and enhance it even though they do not have the means all and they don't also understand the consequences but just because they see it on either Instagram or TikTok” INT6. Extending this idea, Nasidi et. al., (2024) mentioned that unlike males; female TikTok users are more fragile as documented data reveals that they feel dissatisfied with their body image after exposure to glamorous pictures and videos on TikTok.

Psychological Impacts of TikTok and Instagram on young women in southeast Nigeria

The researcher asked these question “Have you observed any specific psychological impacts that appear linked to TikTok and Instagram use among your clients? Probe: Issues like anxiety, depression, body image concerns, low self-esteem, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), etc.” “Can you share any patterns or recurring themes in how young women compare themselves to what they see online?” “Do you believe TikTok and Instagram lifestyle contents contributes to unrealistic standards or pressures? If so, how?” These questions are to find out the views of health experts concerning the subject under investigation. Having asked these questions the interviewees responded that:

“One of the psychological impacts is that it has affected real life relationship. Most of these young women who are addicted to these platforms can be in the same room with their partners for hours without uttering a word because they are glued to their screen. Such attitude is capable of ruining relationship” INT4 and INT3

“No doubt, it has great psychological impact, for instance, in a bid to match up with influencers or celebrities and cause undue pressure on a young lady. This is one of the effects of the platforms” “Again, some that go there don't usually sleep and when you don't sleep you are stress which can lead to mental health issues” INT8 and INT2

Additionally,

“Yes, it causes depression and anxiety especially if you are not getting what you want after dedicating your savings in order to meet up with the unrealistic expectations, they set for themselves” Some even go as far as doing liposuction just to be like the celebrities they see on the platforms INT1 and INT6

“It is undeniably that such expectations cause mental stress. Unhealthy comparison with others especially those who brands may have been sponsoring to promote their brands. When you want to put yourself in their shoes you will tend to do things beyond your limit and such expectations can put one under intense pressure and if one does not meet up it starts affecting the self-esteem of the person” INT7 and INT9

Furthermore, INT5 and INT10 observed that

“These platforms have the ability to affect human to human interactions. It has also cause significant damage to family values. You see family these days hardly talk even when they are together because of social media. These days everyone wants to be a content creator and make money forgetting the need for human-to-human interactions” Also, it makes them to lose interest

in other things. “Most of the time you see some suffering from low self-esteem withdrawing from the society”

Clinical Observations and Case Reflections

The researcher asked these questions “Can you describe any cases (anonymously) where social media appeared to be a contributing factor in a young woman’s psychological distress? “How do young women typically talk about their experiences on these platforms during therapy?” These questions are to find out the views of health experts concerning the subject under investigation. Having asked these questions the interviewees responded that:

“...yes, by trying to mimic bloggers, influencers or celebrities they tend to follow a pattern that is not suitable to them but because of the craze of having a sense of belonging they don’t care about the consequences.” INT7 and INT9

“They will tell you ‘we are in the modern century will need to behave like modern people at any cost even though it means selling their body or doing all sort of dirty things’ You get worried when you hear things like this because it leads to damage. They will say ‘we all die here’ It is funny, but at the same time worrying” INT4 and INT1

Speaking further INT3 and INT8 noted that:

“Yea, they are really opening up to us during sessions maybe because of the trust they have for us as healthcare providers. In some of their conversations they will tell you they feel the pressure but because of some of their mates indulge they tend to be motivated and want to follow suit no matter the distress to be experienced”

Additionally, INT10 and INT6 observed that

“Oh yes, some of them claim to be well entertain when they are on these platforms. That sometime their worries go temporarily when they visit the platforms because they tend to enjoy the lifestyle of these people they see online”

“They claim they build themselves through these platforms by looking at their idols they tend develop the carriage of these people they see on the platforms. Like one said ‘honestly, my view of life change when I started following some of these influencers. One does not need to suffer in this life’ Well, I feel some of them are too young that is why they are easily swayed by what they see on these platforms even though most times they are not real because they want you to see what you want to see.” INT 2 and INT5

From the above responses from the interview participants you could see where social media appeared to be a contributing factor in a young woman’s psychological distress and how they typically talk about their experiences on these platforms during therapy.

Coping Mechanisms and Support

The researcher asked these questions “what coping strategies or interventions have you found effective for clients negatively affected by social media content? Do you encourage social media literacy or boundaries as part of therapy? If so, how?” These questions are to find out the views of health experts concerning the subject under investigation. Having asked these questions the interviewees responded that:

“To overcome these things, one needs to be intentional about them. You have to take control and don't allow what you see take control of you. Yea, I think this strategy will help young women cope” INT 2 and INT7

On the other hand, INT1 and INT3 noted that:

“One of the coping strategies is limit screen time. When one limits the amount of time spent on these platforms, it will go a long way in limiting their influence on one. Yea, limiting screen time will help.”

Further responses from INT8 and INT5 pointed that:

“What about teaching young girls at early stage to see smart devices as a learning tool instead of a device for entertainment purposes only? This will help them control the level of influence it has. By teaching them you tend to expose them that some of the things on social media are not real and as such should not put them under unnecessary pressure.”

“Young women need to set their priority right doing so will guide them against unnecessary influence of social media on their lifestyle.” INT10

Furthermore,

“They have to know they are not in competition with anyone. Having this at the back of your mind will take a lot of pressure off your shoulders. Those you are competing with are not real so why kill yourself. So, self-awareness will help you stay off pressure. It is competition that brings pressure which leads to mental health issues.” INT9 and INT4

“I think installing these applications that regulate the time you spend on social media will help greatly. Once you reach your limit it logs you out automatically until other times. Such technology will help reduce the amount of time you are spending on some of these social media handles like TikTok and Instagram.” INT6.

Previous studies agreed that be cautious of time spent online and the quality of content (Nienstedt et. al., 2023) and seeking help from an expert (Lahti et al., 2024) is proven to minimize the harmful effects of TikTok and Instagram contents on users.

Broader Reflections and Recommendations

The researcher asked these questions “what would you recommend to parents, educators, or policymakers concerned about the influence of these platforms on young women? Are there any positive psychological effects you've observed from young women engaging with TikTok or Instagram lifestyle content?” These questions are to find out the views of health experts concerning the subject under investigation. Having asked these questions the interviewees responded that:

“Parents should watch their wards closely especially now the craze of getting rich quick and fame. Parents have great role to play in molding the girl child.”INT1

“Efforts should be made to limit the volume of sexual and other irrelevant contents promoted on these platforms because for me it makes no meaning. Policymakers should look into it.” INT3 and INT4

Furthermore,

“Young women having signs of mental health issues should not hesitate to see therapist so that they can be helped quickly.” INT2 and INT5

“Patients should not depend solely on the opinion of one care provider even though they feel comfortable talking with them during session. They should also seek help from other people capable of helping them genuinely.” INT6 and INT7

INT9 and INT10 noted that:

“TikTok and Instagram content creation have removed boredom from some young women who have use the platforms as a source of livelihood. Yes, those in this category have in one way or the other benefited from the platforms.”

“For some who have used the platform wisely they have become financially independent and you know situation like this use to boost morale” INT8

From the above responses from the interview participants you could see some of the recommendations to parents, educators, or policymakers concerned about the influence of these platforms on young women and some of the positive psychological effects observed from young women engaging with TikTok or Instagram lifestyle content.

Summary of Findings

1. The study revealed that young women in Southeast Nigeria, particularly those active on TikTok and Instagram, are heavily influenced by the idealized contents they encounter on these platforms. This exposure leads to negative psychological outcomes, such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and body image concerns and the pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards and lifestyle expectations from influencers contributes to these mental health issues.
2. Psychotherapists highlighted that while young women are aware of the pressure social media places on them, many still struggle to manage the associated stress. Effective coping strategies suggested include limiting screen time, promoting self-awareness, and educating young women on the non-reality of much of the content they view. There is also a call for greater mental health support and intervention to address the negative effects of social media exposure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing the mental health implications of social media use requires a multifaceted approach, including education, professional support, and awareness. By implementing strategies to promote healthy engagement with social media, young women in Southeast Nigeria can better cope with the pressures of social comparison and develop more balanced self-perceptions.

Recommendations

1. Social media platforms should focus on promoting realistic and diverse content to help young women manage expectations and reduce the pressure to conform to idealized portrayals of beauty and success. Additionally, education on the curated nature of social media can help users critically engage with the content they consume.
2. It is essential to encourage young women who experience psychological distress due to social media exposure to seek professional help. Training therapists to address social media's effects on mental health during sessions and creating safe spaces for open discussions can help mitigate these effects.

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