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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF AGE, SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE AND MENTAL HEALTH: A CURSE OR A BLESSING

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Abstract

In recent time, plethora of events has shown mental health cases among undergraduates. Some of these include suicide intention, anxiety, depression, and sleeplessness. The mental health of undergraduates calls for concern which requires an investigative consideration of personal-social factors underpinning variance in mental health status. That is, a comparative analysis of age, social media exposure and mental health: A curse or blessing. This study adopted casual comparative design. A sample of 250 undergraduate students was randomly selected from the University of Ibadan. Two reliable measuring scales (Social media exposure; $\alpha = 0.77$, Mental health; $\alpha = 0.72$) were used for collection. T-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) used to analyse the data. The study discovered a significant difference in the mental health of undergraduates based on social media exposure ($t_{(248)} = 13.21$, $p < 0.05$, $\text{partial}\eta^2 = 0.08$). Participants with high social media exposure ($\bar{x} = 48.3$) had lower mental health than those with lower social media exposure ($\bar{x} = 35.2$). A significant difference in the mental health of undergraduates based on age; ($t_{(248)} = 44.43$, $p < 0.05$, $\text{partial}\eta^2 = 0.35$). It was further discovered that participants within the ages of 21 and 24 years ($\bar{x} = 34.4$) had higher mental health than those within the ages of 16 and 20 years ($\bar{x} = 29.5$). By implication, older undergraduates have better mental health than the younger ones. Based on findings, it was recommended that university managements should adjust their policy for admission arriving at the exposure of psychological instrument that can determine the intelligent level of the candidates to know their mental age and determine eligibility for admission; in order to ascertain that the candidate is mature enough to handle academic pressure.

Counselling psychology unit of the department are expected to champion this mental health screening and remediation within the university system. Also, undergraduate students are enjoined not to be committed to online friends so as to reduce negative feedbacks that come from online relationships.

Key words: Mental Health, Age, Social Media Exposure.

Introduction

Young adulthood is a key stage of establishing independent identity, making educational and vocational decisions and lifestyle choices as well as forming interpersonal relationships, therefore transition into adulthood is a period which is determined by many changes. All of these have major long-term influences on the individual, particularly in terms of factors that influence mental health and well-being.

Mental health is the state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and also make contributions to the community (WHO, 2005). Researchers have shown that young people's mental health is a key area of concern to which professionals and policy-makers must direct their attention. It is also stipulated that mental health of young adults have socio-economic influences (Coleman, Sykes and Groom, 2017).

Globally, up to 20% of young adults suffer from disabling mental health problems therefore, the prevalence of mental disorders among young adults has increased in the past 20–30 years and this has led to the global estimation of 71,000 young adults' annual suicide and up to 40 times as many suicide attempts. In the 21st century, the young adult has a lot of contenders like school, social media, social media discrimination, trauma, bullying, societal expectation, future ambition, responsibilities, self-esteem, and self-acceptance among others. The addition of mental health challenges to all these contenders and stressors can become burdensome. This can eventually lead to mental illness like depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia (Csillag, 2015; Craig, 2018).

The best path to lifelong wellness is one that starts with good mental health. Therefore, promoting mental wellbeing should be the main focus of every society, in order to derive mental health benefits

(Hendersqn, 2013). Mental health has numerous benefits, these includes resilience, positive wellbeing, self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism, a sense of mastery and coherence; ability to initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships and ability to cope with adversities among others. All these benefits are used as descriptors for positive mental health and well-being. These considerations have emerged from research indicating that a proportion of young people have had a positive life trajectory despite having faced diverse potentially harmful life experiences (Lehtinen 2008).

Mental health issues of young adults affect the whole society. Therefore, mental health challenges account for a large proportion of the disease burden among young people in the societies. Despite these facts, mental health problems in young adults tend to be less recognized (Hastrup, 2013).

Mental health challenges can have deteriorating effects on young people's social, intellectual and emotional development and consequently on their future; and at its worst, they can lead to loss of life. Also, it can have negative effects on family, friends and society at large.

Statistically, it has been discovered that, the costs of mental illness among young adults is only 6% of on the health sector, while the other 94% is spread on other sectors (McDaid, 2018), therefore, mental health challenges could eventually affect every sector of the society on way or the other. For over a decade, researches has also revealed that there are close links between young adults and adult mental illness, therefore the presence of untreated mental health challenges during young adulthood may lead to up to 10 times higher costs during adulthood (Correl and Chris, 2018; Secher, 2014).

Mental health challenges need to be handled tactfully, by imploring some early intervention like resilience, available information and services. This is because the mental health of young adults, if not well managed can become mental illness. To ascertain this was (EUFAMI, 2018; Craig, 2018), stated that by age 24, 75% of young adults have mental health issues.

The use of social media is likened to the use of oxygen. Globally, every 60 seconds an estimated 156 million emails are sent, 3.8 million search requests are made on Google and two million minutes of calls are made via Skype, with the average internet user now spending

around 6 hours each day using internet-powered devices and services and much of this time is also spent on social media on sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp among others. Out of all these statistics, nearly 90% of the usage is done by the young adults (House of Common, 2019; Lenhart, 2015).

The complete dominance of the social media among young adults has had ripple effects across every area of their lives, from their social interactions to their mental health and their academic performance. Overall, social media use is associated with many benefits for young adults' health and development. These media use includes enhancing friendships and decreasing loneliness, by providing a way for young adults to experience connectedness and opportunities to learn from each other (Ito, 2008).

Most young adults use online networks to extend the friendships they already have from other areas of their life, such as school, religious organizations, sports and other local activities. Also, social media provides young adults an opportunity to share and discuss their taste in music, knowledge of television and movies, online videos/games, and other aspects of young adults culture (Szwedo, Mikami, and Allen, 2012).

Young adults look to social networks as a key source of information and advice in a critical developmental period with 57% of young adult social networkers saying they look to their online social network for advice (Nielsen, 2009). Young adults also use online searches to gain answers to many of their health concerns like dieting, physical fitness and sexual health (Lenhart, 2010).

While social media use is an integral part of the daily life of young adults, there are a number of risks associated with social media use, specifically, negative effects on mental health, cyber bullying, texting/sexting, dangers of sexual solicitation, and exposure to problematic and illegal content and privacy violations. Lack of sleep can negatively affect young adults' mood, ability to think, to react, to regulate their emotions, to learn and to get along with adults. This can lead to depression and eventual suicidal ideation (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, Bachman and Schulenberg, 2016).

Increased time on social media has had dramatic effects on young adults' behaviour, including risky social activities and mental health symptoms. However, displacement may account for these

effects. If social media replaces young adults involvement in negative activities and isolation, it can be blessing, however, if it replaces face-to-face interaction, socialization, healthy day-to-day habits, it can become a curse.

Age is the factor that could moderate the effects of social media exposure on mental health in this study. Age is conceptualized as the length of time that a person has lived or a thing has existed. The age of young adulthood is ages 16-24, and the transition into this period is determined by many changes. Young adults are in a key phase of establishing independent identity, making educational and vocational decisions and lifestyle choices as well as forming interpersonal relationships. All of these have major long-term influences on the individual, particularly in terms of factors that influence mental health and well-being.

Young people are especially at risk of creating vulnerabilities or developing mental health issues as they face many new pressures and challenges in their daily lives and this can trigger mental disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, bipolar among others (WHO 2001).

Mental health is supposed to be both the ultimate goal of public policy and what individuals strive for. In the current context of rapidly aging societies, mental health and socio-economic influences on health have risen to achieve importance within young adult health (Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield, and Dapretto, 2016).

Young adults' use of technology and social media is evolving at a rapid pace, with implications for their wellbeing and to understand this evolution includes awareness for types and use of social media and the impacts on wellbeing. However, social media are diverse and their effects on the wellbeing of young adults are an emerging focus for research, policy and service delivery.

Just as the social media landscape is constantly evolving, the habits and preferences of young adults also change; transformations in social media use take place as young adults get older, as particular platforms come in and out of favour and their unique circumstances shift over time (Holloway, 2014).

Social media practices are shaped by the personal and social circumstances of young adults, the particular social media they use, the activities they engage in and the people they interact with present unique sets of opportunities, risks and benefits for wellbeing. Therefore,

usage of social media can affect the mental health of young adults like two sides of a coin, either as a blessing or a curse; hence the need for this study, to enable proffering of solution without interfering with the mental health of the young adults.

Purpose of the study

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which age and social media exposure predicts the mental health of young adults. Specifically, it;

1. Investigate the relationship between age, social media exposure and young adults' mental health.
2. Determined the joint contribution of age and social media exposure on young adults' mental health.
3. Examine the relative contribution of age and social media exposure on young adults' mental health.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the mental health of undergraduates based on age
2. There is no significant difference in the mental health of undergraduates based on social media exposure.
3. There is no interaction effect of social media exposure and age on undergraduates mental health

Methodology

This chapter presents the procedure that will be adopted in carrying out the study. This includes; Research design, variables for the study, target population, sampling procedure and sample, instrumentation, data collection and analysis procedures.

Design

This study adopted causal comparative design. This design is appropriate because the researcher was interested in investigating the effects of the independent and moderating variables on the young adults' mental health.

Population

The population for this study consists of a sample of 250 undergraduate students, which were randomly selected from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The simple random sampling techniques will be used to select 250 participants from the University of Ibadan. The participants will be young adult undergraduate. This was used as the representative of the population.

Research Instrument

Questionnaire was used for data collection because of the literacy level of the population. The adaptation was made after extensive review of literature. The scale were piloted before the administration to certify that the scale are fit and does not have irrelevant items.

Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS),

14 items mental health scale was developed by Tennant, Hiller, Fishwick, Platt, Joseph, Weich, and Stewart-Brown, (2007). It measures the mental health state of young adults. A sample of the items reads; "I've been feeling optimistic about the future", "I've been feeling close to other people". It is rated on 5-point response format, ranging 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree 3= Neutral, 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree

Social media exposure Scale

24 items social media usage scale was developed by Gupta and Bashir (2018). It measures the social media exposure of the young adults. A sample of the items reads; "I use social networking sites to get relief from academic stress" "While using social networking sites it is difficult for me to concentrate on my studies" It is rated on 5-point response format, ranging 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree 3= Neutral, 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree

Procedure for data Collection

Copies of questionnaires were administered to the participants in the University of Ibadan. The participants were assured of confidentiality of

their responses. About 250 questionnaires were administered, and returned. These were scored and the data obtained were subjected to data analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The data was collected and T-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyse the data and to test the three research questions at 0.05 significant level, afterwards the results obtained was interpreted.

Results

This chapter presents various findings derived from the study. The following results presented are based on the hypothesis raised, which the study has sought to answer.

H₀1: There is no significant difference in the mental health of undergraduates based on age

Table 1: F-test summary showing the difference in mental health of undergraduates based on age

Variables	N	Mean	St.Dev	Sum of Square	df	Mean of Square	F	Sig	η^2
below 18years	87	38.8621	6.52931	16.922	2	8.461			.0010
18 to 21 years	46	38.2609	10.54606	16657.078	247	67.438	.125	.882	
21 to 24 years	117	38.9658	8.29721	16674.000	249				
Total	250	38.8000	8.18314						

Table 1 reveals that there is no significant difference in mental health based on age; $F(2,247) = .125$, $p > 0.05$, $\eta^2 = .0010$. Thus, the null hypothesis was no rejected.

H₀2: There is no significant difference in the mental health of undergraduates based on social media exposure.

Table 2: t-test summary showing the differences in mental health based on social media exposure

Variables	Social Media Exposure	N	Mean	Std.Dev	df	t	P-value	η^2
Mental Health	High	116	35.6293	9.58761	248	-5.878	< 0.05	0.021
	Low	134	41.5448	5.43397				

Table 2 revealed that there is a significant difference in mental health between those with low and high social media exposure; $t(248) = 5.878$, $p < 0.05$, therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The table further revealed that participants with low social media exposure (mean = 41.55) had higher mental health compared to those with those with high social media exposure (mean = 35.63). Size of effect ($\eta^2 = 0.021$) shows that level of social media exposure accounted for 2.1% variance in mental health.

H03: There is no interaction effect of social media exposure and age on undergraduates' mental health

Table 3: Summary of 2x3 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the interaction effect of social media and age on undergraduates' mental health

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3067.914 ^a	5	613.583	11.003	.000	.184
Intercept	303380.850	1	303380.850	5440.575	.000	.957
SocialMediaExposure	1977.476	1	1977.476	35.462	.000	.127
Age	72.344	2	36.172	.649	.524	.005

SocialMediaExposure * Age	796.032	2	398.016	7.138	.001	.055
Error	13606.086	244	55.763			
Total	393034.000	250				
Corrected Total	16674.000	249				

R Squared = .184 (Adjusted R squared = .167

*Significant at 0.05

Table 3 reveals that there was a significant interaction effect of social media and age on undergraduates' mental health; $F_{(2, 244)} = 7.138$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.055$. Hence the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore social media and age together had significant effect on the mental health of undergraduates. Size of effect of the interaction of social media and age accounted for 5.5% ($\eta^2 = 0.055$) change in undergraduates' mental health. For further justification on the margin of difference between the groups, a pair-wise comparison using adjusted bonferonni was computed and the result is shown in table 4.

Discussion of Findings

The first research question examined the relationship between the moderating variable (age) and the dependent variable (mental health). It was discovered that the participants within the ages of 21 and 24 years ($\bar{x} = 34.4$) had higher mental health than those within the ages of 16 and 20 years ($\bar{x} = 29.5$). By implication, older undergraduates have better mental health than the younger ones. The result of this study is in support of Coleman, Sykes and Groom, (2017) researches, which showed that young people's mental health is a key area of concern.

This is a justification that young adult mental health should be of concern to professionals and policy-makers. More so, the outcome of this study support the WHO (2005) who found that globally, up to 20% of young adults suffer from disabling mental health problems.

Also, the result of this study supports the conclusion of Correl and Chris, (2018) which revealed that there are close links between young adults and adult mental illness and the presence of untreated mental health challenges during young adulthood may lead to up to 10 times higher costs during adulthood.

The second research question examined the relationship between independent variable (social media) and the dependent variable (mental health). The study discovered a significant difference in the mental health of undergraduates based on social media exposure ($t_{(248)} = 13.21$, $p < 0.05$, $\text{partial}\eta^2 = 0.08$). Participants with high social media exposure ($\bar{x} = 48.3$) had lower mental health than those with lower social media exposure ($\bar{x} = 35.2$).

The result is in support of House of Common, (2019), which estimated that young adults use nearly 90% of the global social media usage estimation. Also, it affirmed the claim of Lenhart, (2015) that the complete dominance of the social media among young adults has had ripple effects across every area of their lives, from their social interactions to their mental health and their academic performance.

The third research question examine the interactive effects of Independent variable (social media exposure) and moderating variable (age) on the dependent variable (mental health) of undergraduate. The study discovered a significant interactive effect of social media exposure and age on undergraduate mental health. The result is in support of Holloway (2014), who is of the opinion that young adults' use of technology and social media has implications for their mental health.

Conclusion

This study investigated age and social media as a curse or blessing for the mental health of the young adults. It was discovered that young adults within the ages of 21 and 24 had higher mental health than those within the ages of 16 and 20 years. By implication, older undergraduates have better mental health than the younger ones, and they were able to derive benefits from social media without it having negative effects on their mental health, and this is a blessing. However, it was discovered that young adults with-in the age ranges of 16-20, with high exposure to social media are at the risk of negative social media effects and lower mental health and this is a curse.

Recommendations

Based on findings, it was recommended that university managements should adjust their policy for admission arriving at the exposure of psychological instrument that can determine the intelligent level of the candidates to know their mental age and determine eligibility for admission; in order to ascertain that the candidate is mature enough to handle academic pressure. Counselling psychology unit of the department are expected to champion this mental health screening and remediation within the university system. Also, undergraduate students are enjoined not to be committed to online friends so as to reduce negative feedbacks that come from online relationships and also to reduce the time spent on social media.

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