SOCIAL MEDIA AS PANACEA FOR DEPRESSION MONGST MASS COMMUNICATION STUDENTS, FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC, ILARO

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Abstract

This study examined the spate of depressive tendencies amongst Mass Communication students of the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro with a view to finding out the role of social media in reducing it sting on the students. Survey method was adopted to garner responses on common triggers of depression amongst 161 students, out of 180 sample chosen. The study revealed that poverty and lack of companionship are the most prominent triggers of depression among the students. 54.7 per cent of the respondents struggle to sustain themselves on campus, which is a direct reflection that poverty is a prominent trigger amongst the group. 81.4 per cent of them extremely crave to have money, and 72 per cent want to be financially independent, while listening to music, browsing, chatting and posting on whatsApp are major activities through which they find an escape from depression. The study suggested tracking of students social media posts which are a window to their moods for early detection of depressive tendencies.

Keywords: Depression, **Social Media**, **Companionship**, **Suicide,**

Introduction

As traditional media continue to ebb low in demand due to ubiquity of alternative media – social media, consumption for digital media contents has kept rising amongst the growing global netizens. Besides quick access, cheap or free access to breaking news, saving and sharing contents with friends and followers, the digital media have somewhat relinquished content control power to media consumers cum users in that media audience can now control what content they consume, at what pace and time. The growth and dissemination of entertainment contents have also experienced unprecedented upward movement due to incursion of the internet into media industry that have ushered in series of social network sites (SNSs); this, coupled with the global popularity of handheld smart phones, which house panoply of social media applications, netizens now have the globe in their palms with access to all forms of media contents across international borders.

Various mobile music applications, such as YouTube, boomplay, Tidal, spotify, do not just make music available to the taste and pleasure of listeners, but they are a form of social communities where music lovers do follow themselves to share playlists, comment on songs and artistes. These applications has broken the geographical barriers that once limited popularity of local artistes to their locality. In fact, the internet and multimedia online media have hallmarked new trend of cross cultural society as an aftermath of the reality of global village.

In a recent study by PricewaterhouseCoopers0, published on October 30, Nigeria's consumer revenue in entertainment and media (E&M) will rank fourth as the fastest-growing country by 88 percent from 2022 to 2026. And just like many Nigerian comedians are wont to say – hardship will spur the talents in you to limelight, it is believed in this clime that humans tend to be latent and complacent when everything is smooth; no inspiration to strive for betterment. This idea has formed lyrical themes and expressed in many award winning songs from pop artistes with the *hustlers'* background. Many of the Gen-Zee artistes have expressed so many hurdles they crossed before getting into spotlight through music – Timaya (Inetimi Timaya Odon) portrayed as plantain hawker; Frank Edward also as plantain hawker; (Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun) Wizkid's Ojuelegba, chronicling hard life of an average mainland settlers; are few of the many music icons that have expressed relatable hustling experiences that resonate with many Nigerians. Besides drawing inspiration from music that resonate with personal experiences, the entertaining values of this musical pieces are cherished and relished by the listeners and or viewers (Usoro Glory 2022)

The internet is one of the latest in a series of technological breakthroughs in interpersonal communication that combines innovative features of its predecessors, such as bridging great distances and reaching a mass audience, with novel features such as relative anonymity and virtual platforms to meet others who share similar interests (Bargh &

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McKenna, 2004). These virtual platforms are called Social Media. The resolve by many global citizens to recline to social media for companionship and succor during the covid-19 sting in the year 2020 was noted through many sign ups on social media platforms like twitter, tiktok, instagram, facebook, reddit, etc. Besides companionships through interpersonal communication and group communication that transcends geographical borders, social media users seek validation for their postings from their followers in terms of likes, comments, shares and others expressed through many emoji's inherent in each of the platforms. (Gao J., Zheng P., Jia Y., Chen S., Dai J. 2020)

World Health Organization recognized two common mental disorders – depressive disorder and anxiety disorder, which impact on the mood or feelings of the affected persons. The symptoms could be severe or mild, long term or short-lived, depending on the contributory or palliatory conditions and environment per time. Globally, over 300 million people suffer from depression, estimated at 4.4% of the world's population. The number is growing from low-income countries, which is being triggered by poverty, unemployment, bad governance, insecurity, diseases, alcoholism and substance abuse. WHO Report (2017)

Nigeria is plagued with bad governance that is inadvertently contributing to the economic and social crises experienced by its people. Besides insecurity, unemployment, unavailability of or poor infrastructures, systemic break downs in academic calendars due to negligence of the federal government is a major concern for Nigerians. Many parents and guidance desire the financial prowess that would afford them the benefit to give their children and wards foreign tertiary education as do most politicians, who are indifferent to the plights of Nigerians stalled by the strike actions in educational systems. Jamilu, Aminu, Muazu, Suleiman (2017)

Obinna Okerekeocha (2022) reiterated that the *prowling* inflation in Nigeria's economy has brought harsh living realities for many, which has made entertainment a much-needed escape for millions across the country. In the face of frustrations, Nigerian polytechnic students are also resorting to various inordinate means of entertaining themselves or giving up on life as the case may be, safe some who are prove to be emotionally mature and balanced in the face of the hardship.

Statement of the Problem

Depressive and anxiety disorders are mental ailments that virtually everyone suffering from them in Nigeria do not open up to seek requisite medical / psychological helps, owing to the fact that the society tends to stigmatize *mental case* patients. The indices espoused by the World Health Organization (poverty, unemployment, live events such as deaths of loved ones caused by insecurity or accidents, relationship break up, physical illness and problems caused by alcohol and drug use) to contribute to depressive and anxiety disorders are much present in Nigeria and affect the largest chunk of its citizenry, most of whom have been swept bellow the middle class economic status by the depreciation of Naira in a highly dollarized economy.

The height of stigmatization causing depression sufferers to recline to their shell and suffer in silence often lead to seeking solace in what they believe they have control over, or whatever gives them respite from their tortuous mental state. Escapisms like playing games, watching movies/series, sleeping, over eating, daydreaming are a few ways sufferers of depressive and anxiety disorders find companionship. However, the seeming impersonal, yet personal interactions on social media on which and where taciturn introverts are becoming loquacious extroverts expressing their pains and passion without fear of virtual public scrutiny could be a way out of the quandary where *mental case* victims are covertly and overtly stigmatized in the physical public. Since social media users tend to follow their interests and feel comfortable where their opinions align with those of the majority, openness, leading to proper diagnosis of mental disorders would be achieved. This study is thus interested in investigating the contribution of various online media which consist in the various social media platforms in regards to stemming the tendencies and tides of depression amongst tertiary students in SW, Nigeria

Research Objectives

Central to this study is the determination of mitigating roles of social media platforms to depressive and anxiety tendencies and or disorders amongst universities and polytechnic students in southwest Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

i. To find out how prevalent depressive and anxiety disorder is among FPI students?
ii. To investigate the major causes of depression amongst FPI students
iii. To determine the common escapisms used by depressed students in FPI

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iv. To investigate social media role in mitigating depression amongst FPI students

Research Questions:

i. How prevalent is depression among FPI students?
ii. What are the major causes of depression amongst FPI students?
iii. What are the common escapes for depressed students in FPI?
iv. What role do social media play in mitigating depression amongst FPI students?

Empirical Review

According to the Pew Research Centre's study (2018); Teen Social Media and Technology, social media is nearly ubiquitous in the lives of American Teens. From the perspectives of most teens and many parents and educators, this is a good news; social media benefits adolescents and teens by helping them develop communication skills, make friends, and pursue areas of interest, and share thoughts and ideas.

Eugene Brusolovskiy, Greg Townley, Gretchen Snethen & Mark S. Salzer (2018); explored the use of social media platforms by individuals with Serious Mental Illness – SMI, to determine level of public / civic engagement and community participation by the patients. The survey study was based on two hundred and thirty two (232) individuals with SMI in 18 mental health organizations across United States of America. One third of the sample owned at least one social media account. Greater frequency, intensity and longevity of social media uses were associated with higher level of their participation in the community, and greater intensity of social media use was associated with positive civic. However, the study did not find significant association between social media uses and psychiatric symptoms and quality of life.

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on **Uses and gratifications theory** (UGT). UGT is an audience-centric approach to understanding mass communication. It is an approach to which aims at demystifying why and how people actively seek out certain media to satisfy certain needs. In contrast to other media effect theories that probe what the media does to people, UGT centres on what people do with the media.

The kernel of UGT pivots around why people use media and for what purposes. The theory reckons that media audiences are deliberate media users who often select media to satisfy their needs per time. These needs include knowledge and relaxation, social interactions and companionship, diversion and escapisms.

Theory also assumes that media audience is not passive consumers of media contents. Rather, the audience has power over the content they consume in the media and assumes an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives.

Unlike other theoretical perspectives, UGT holds that audiences are responsible for choosing media to meet their desires and needs to achieve gratification.

The theory was first introduced **Elihu Katz** in early 1970s, which was the lone deviation from the contemporary theories that existed before it. Uses and Gratification Approach came up with the notion that people use the media to their benefit. Unlike other theories concerning media consumption, UGT gives the consumer power to discern what media they consume, with the assumption that the consumer has a clear intent of use and purpose.

Basic Assumptions:

- The audience is active and its media use is goal oriented
- The initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience member
- The media compete with other resources for need satisfaction
- People have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use.

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- Value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience.

Students and all adults alike choose their media spectrum like mobile phone, based on predetermined needs and wants. Mobile phones are the commonest and most used media gadgets among adults. Phones house many applications and with internet connectivity, they are a gateway to local, national and global interactions.

Methodology

This quantitative study adopted survey to gather responses to the pertinent research questions among 161 undergraduates of the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro. The sample consisted of students from the five schools with no recourse to rule of proportionality. Virtual questionnaire was adopted and distributed among the various platforms using snowball technique. The population for this study comprised of all the departments in the five schools of the Federal polytechnic, Ilaro, estimated to 7,600 students. The study sample was streamlined to one department in each school. Predetermined sample size set at 250 respondents, only 161 students from the selected depaertments filled the close-ended questionnaire. Thus, the analysis is based on 161 responses gleaned from the survey.
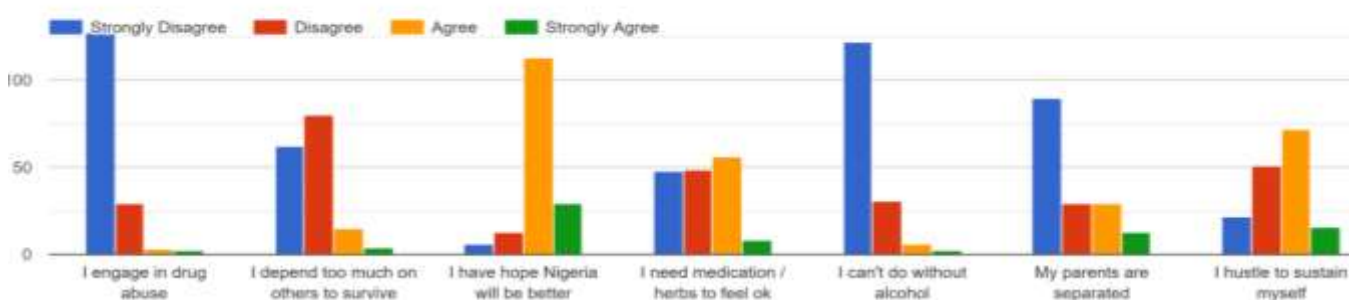
Data Presentation

Figure 1

From figure 1, 127 strongly disagree and 29 disagreed that they abuse drugs and substances, while 3 agreed and 2 strongly agreed that they abuse drugs and substances.

62 students and 80 students strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that they depend on others to survive, while 15 and 4 students agreed and strongly agreed they depend too much on others to survive.

113 and 29 students agreed and strongly agreed respectively that they have hope in Nigeria as a country, while 13 and 6 students disagreed and strongly disagreed with the notion that Nigeria would be better.

48 and 49 students strongly disagreed and disagreed they need medication/herbs to feel healthy, while 56 and 8 agreed and strongly agreed respectively they need medication/herbs to make them feel healthy.

122 and 31 students strongly disagreed and disagreed that they could not do without alcohol, while 6 and 2 students agreed and strongly agreed that they could not survive a day without alcohol.

13 and 29 students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that their parents are separated, while 90 and 29 students strongly disagreed and disagreed that their parents are separated.

72 and 16 students agreed and strongly agreed respectively that they hustle on their own to survive on campus, while 51 and 22 disagreed and strongly disagreed that they are self-sustaining on campus.

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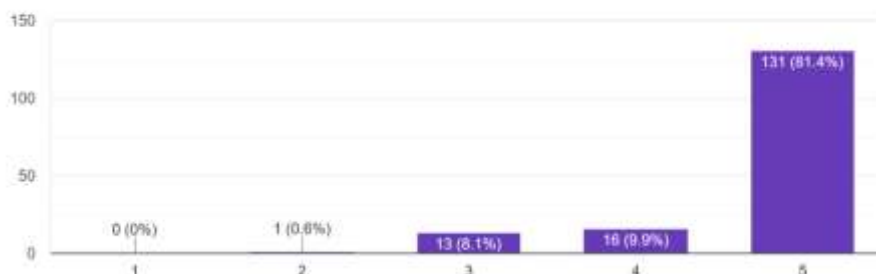
How much do you want money?
161 responses

Figure 2

From figure 2, 131 students, which represents 81.4 per cent desire to be rich to the greatest extent, followed by 16 students, representing 9.9 per cent, 13 students, representing 8.1 per cent and 1 students – 0.6 per cent respectively.

How much do you want to be in relationship?
161 responses
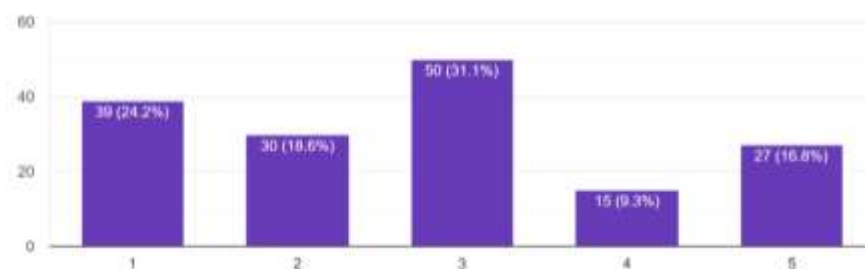
Figure 3

Figure 3 shows extent (on a scale of 1-5) of the desire of the students to be in relationship with opposite sex; 24.2 per cent of the students least desire companionship of opposite sex, followed by 18.6 per cent, and 31.1 per cent right in the middle of the scale; 9.3 per cent chose 4 on the scale, while 16.8 per cent extremely want to be in a relationship with the opposite sex.
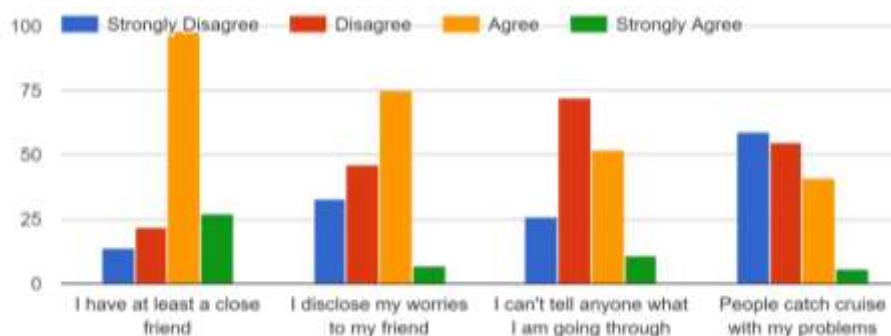
How much do you want to be independent
161 responses

Figure 4

Figure 4 shows the degree of desire of the student to be independent. 72 per cent of the students extremely want to be independent, followed by 13 per cent less on scale and 11.8 per cent less on scale.

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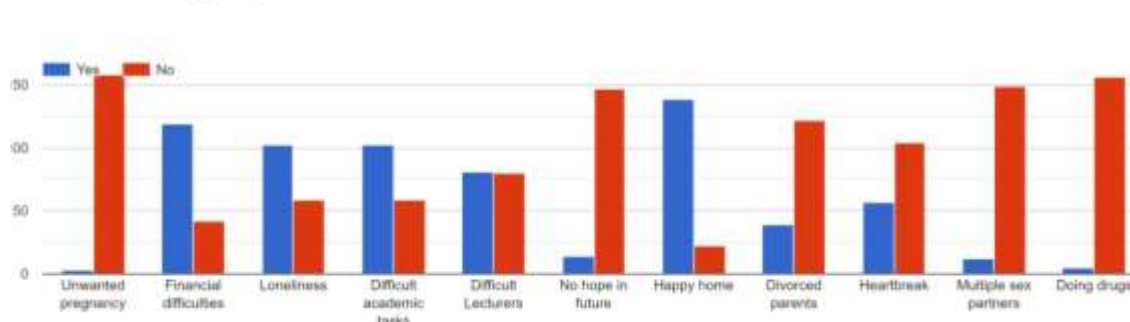
Figure 5

From figure 5, 98 and 27 students agreed and strongly agreed respectively to have close friend whom they talk to daily, while 22 and 14 students disagreed and strongly disagreed they have close friends they talk to daily.

75 and 7 students agreed and strongly agreed they confide in their friends, while 46 and 33 disagreed and strongly disagreed they disclose their worries to their friends.

52 and 11 agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that they cannot tell anyone what they are going through, while 72 and 26 students disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement.
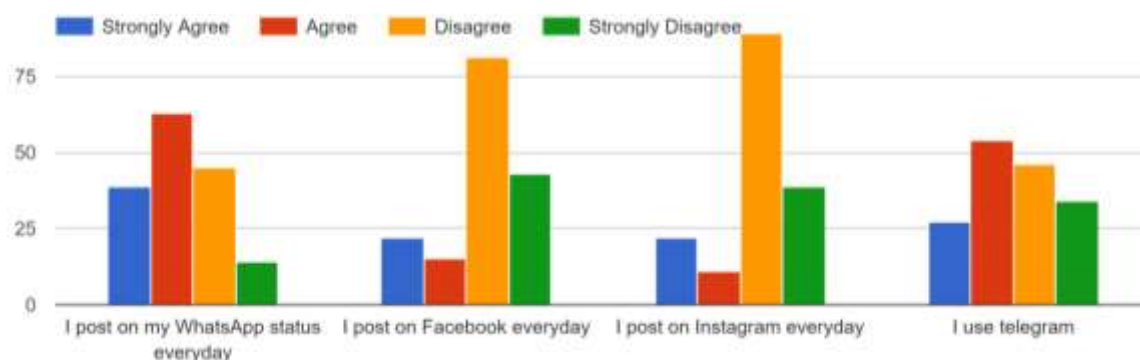
41 and 6 students agreed and strongly agreed respectively that others make jest of them when in problems, 55 and 59 disagreed and strongly disagreed with the notion.

Figure 6

Figure 6 shows derivative factors of depression as espoused by World Health Organization. 120 students out of 161 experience financial difficulties, 103 out of 161 experience loneliness, 103 experience difficult academic tasks, parents of 39 of the respondents are divorced, 58 of the sampled students experienced heartbreak from break up, 12 of them claim to have multiple sex partners, while 5 out of 161 said they do drugs.
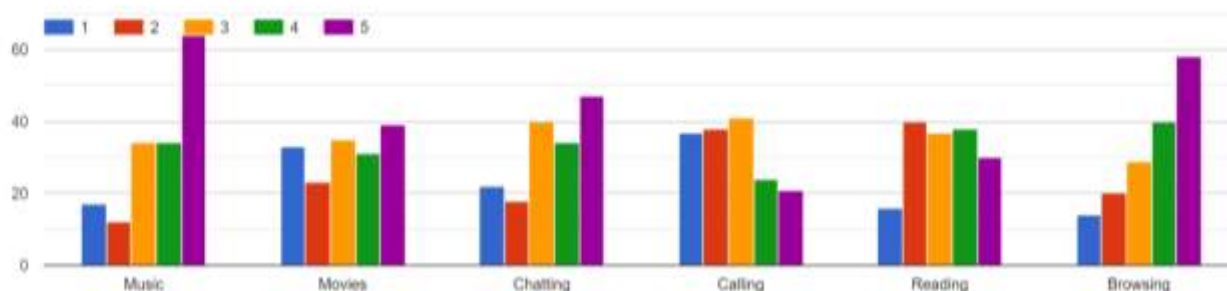
Figure 7

Figure 7 shows students use of certain social media applications. 45 and 14 students post on whatsApp daily, while 63 and 39 students disagreed and strongly disagreed on posting daily on whatsApp.

15 and 22 students agreed to posting on facebook daily, while 81 and 43 disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement.

89 and 39 students disagreed and strongly disagreed they post on instagram daily, while 11 and 22 students agreed t strongly agreed respectively to the statement.

46 and 34 students disagreed and strongly disagreed they use telegram, while 54 and 27 students agreed and strongly agreed they use telegram.

Figure 8

Figure 8 shows usages of mobile phones amongst the studied students. Music, browsing, chatting, movies have the highest ratings. Reading and calling are rated 4ᵗʰ and 5ᵗʰ respectively on the scale of 1 to 5.
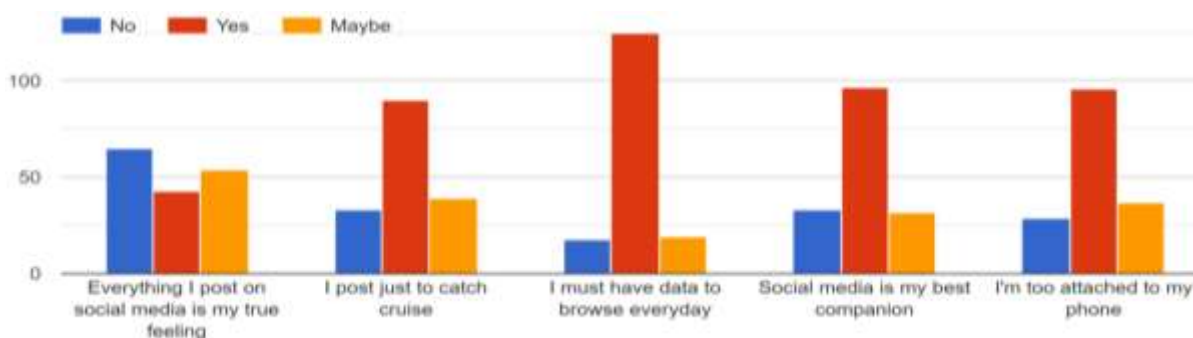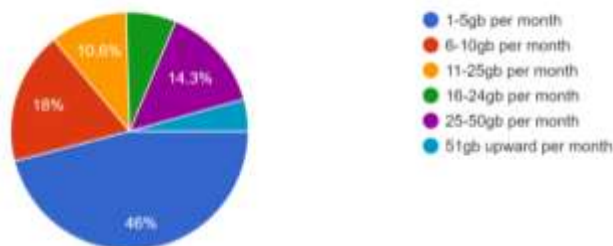
Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 10 shows mobile data consumptions amongst the studied sample. 46 per cent of the students use between 1gg to 5gg of data monthly, 18 per cent use between 6gg to 10gg monthly, 10.6 per cent use between 11gg and 25gg monthly, 6.8 per cent use between 16gg and 24gg monthly, and 14.3 use between 25gg to 50gg monthly.
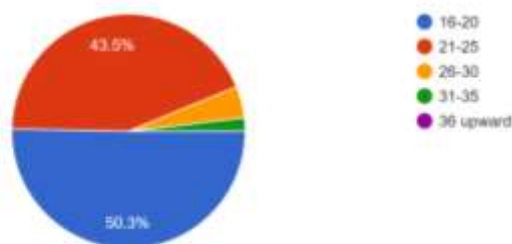

Figure 11

Figure 11 shows the age distributions of the respondents. 50.3 per cent of them are within 16-20 age bracket, 43.5 per cent fall within 21-25 age bracket, 4.3 per cent are aged between 26-30, while 1.9 per cent are aged between 31 and 35 years.

Discussions

On prevalence of depression and anxiety disorder amongst students, using the W.H.O metrics, which presume that a low-income country like Nigeria, has triggers that aggravate the tendencies for depression and anxiety disorder, the study shows that, of the listed triggers - poverty, unemployment, bad governance, insecurity, diseases, alcoholism and substance abuse, the studied sample only experience hard life to survive on campus, and manageable health issues

that compel them to depend on medications and herbs. In figure 1, 54.7 per cent of the respondents struggle to sustain themselves on campus, which is a direct reflection that poverty is a prominent trigger amongst the group. To support this, in figure 2, 81.4 per cent of them extremely crave to have money, and 72 per cent as shown in figure 4, want to be financially independent by engaging in lucrative employment, which is in meagre supplies to graduates let alone undergraduates in Nigeria.

As to the major cause of depression amongst students, the study explored the propensity of students' desire for companianship (platonic and sexual), money and independence. Figure 6 shows 74.5 per cent of the students experience financial difficulties corroborating their resort to hustle to survive by themselves on campus, which also makes them to crave independence as undergrads. 64 per cent of the respondents also experience loneliness, while 36 claim to suffer heartbreaks from relationships. Poverty viz-a-viz, financial difficulties, loneliness and heartbreak are derivatives of insecurity as espoused by WHO. Figure 5 also shows that majority of the students do not freely disclose their worries to whom they call friends as others often catch fun out their problems, which make the respondents to prefer to keep to themselves rather than sharing their worries and anxieties.

Figure 6 shows that only 3.1 per cent of the studied sample resulted to doing drugs as a form of escapism from depressive tendencies; instead, majority of the students, as shown in figure 7, spend time catching fun on facebook, whatsApp, instagram, telegram and the like. This is a major reason why 36.4 per cent of them in figure 9, still consume internet data from 11gg to 51gg upward monthly, despite the level of financial difficulties experienced amongst the group.

On the specific role of social media in mitigating depression among students, the study found that Music, Browsing, Chatting and Movies respectively take the front burner as shown in figure, followed by reading and calling respectively. Figure shows how glued the students are to their phone that compels 77.6 per cent of the respondents to have mobile date always so they can keep their best companion, social media, alive. 40.4 per cent of them even claim to broadcast contents that do not reflect their true feelings, and 56 per cent said they post just to catch fun. In the absence of surplus data to browse without restriction, majority of them likely resort to listening to music offline – which often reflect their mood – while they also screenshot their music details to post on whatsApp status for subtle disclosure of what they feel, crave or going through per time. This coincides with the findings of Eugene Brusolovskiy, Greg Townley, Gretchen Snethen & Mark S. Salzer (2018) that long use of social media is capable of restoring mental stability to depressed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As the trendy nomenclatures of stressors (like shege and wahala – as in trougle; a lot, as in everybody is going through a lot; sapa – pennilessness) continue to amass more comic reactions than solutions from all spheres of our Nigerian life, it is daunting to know that many students are continue to suffer from these factors on campus, and still without someone to talk to to maintain their mental health – as other seem to catch fun in people's plights. Many of them have resorted to having companionship in social media where they most of them often express what they do not feel in order to keep up witth the social demands. Music, the major mood determiner of students' mood is subscribed to by many of them which they often share on social media – it is therefore recommended that DSA should mount mechanism to monitor students' whatsApp status for ealy detection of depressive students.

Social media is the main escape students have from depression – this is indicative in their mobile data consumption monthly despite the financial difficulties experienced by the students. Social media as an unfettered escape from depression is slanting towards addiction which mobile network operators are now using to bait students to buy larger data for more bonuses. Gainful use of social media is recommended in order to solve student's financial difficulties, while also making them entrepreneurs who can leverage the digital economy to theor personal benefits by venturing into affiliate marketing – while *catching cruise*

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