

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS EFFECT ON ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AMONGST EMERGING ADULTS IN FAKO DIVISION, CAMEROON

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Abstract: The swift expansion of social media has transformed communication patterns among young people, particularly emerging adults, raising concerns about its potential psychological effects. This study investigated the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes, specifically anxiety and depression, among emerging adults in Fako Division, Cameroon. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, and data were collected from 312 emerging adults using structured questionnaires measuring the frequency of social media use as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize patterns of social media use, while Pearson correlation and regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the intensity of social media engagement and mental health outcomes. Findings indicated that respondents frequently used social media, primarily for communication with friends and family, information seeking, entertainment, and stress relief. The results revealed moderate positive relationships between social media use and anxiety ($r = .48, p < .01$) and between social media use and depression ($r = .42, p < .01$), suggesting that increased frequency of social media engagement is associated with higher levels of psychological distress. Regression analysis further showed that social media use significantly predicted anxiety ($R^2 = .23$) and depression ($R^2 = .18$), indicating that the intensity of social media use explains a notable proportion of variance in these mental health outcomes. These findings are consistent with Cognitive Behavioral Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Emerging Adulthood Theory, which highlight how online social interactions, comparison processes, and developmental transitions may contribute to psychological vulnerability. The study concludes that while social media offers opportunities for social connectivity and information access, excessive or unregulated use may increase the risk of anxiety and depression among emerging adults. The study recommends digital literacy programs, mental health awareness initiatives, and interventions promoting balanced social media use among young people.

Keywords: Social Media Use, Anxiety, Depression, Emerging Adults, Mental Health, Cameroon

Introduction

Social media in recent times is the most influential communication technologies shaping interpersonal interaction in contemporary society. With the expansion of internet access and smartphone ownership, millions of people now interact daily through social networking platforms. These platforms allow individuals to share information, build relationships, and maintain communication across geographical boundaries. Young adults are particularly active users of social networking sites because of their familiarity with digital technologies and their need for social connection. Studies indicate that individuals aged between 18 and 29 constitute one of the largest groups of social media users worldwide [1]. The widespread adoption of social networking platforms has therefore attracted significant scholarly attention regarding their potential psychological effects. Researchers have increasingly begun to investigate how digital communication environments influence the mental health and well-being of young adults [2].

Emerging adulthood represents a distinct developmental stage characterized by identity exploration and increased independence. According to Arnett [3], emerging adulthood typically occurs between the ages of 18 and 29 and is marked by transitions in education, employment, and interpersonal relationships. During this period, individuals experience significant psychological and social changes that may increase emotional vulnerability. Emerging adults often seek social validation and peer acceptance as they construct their personal identities. Consequently, social networking platforms frequently become important spaces for self-expression and interaction with peers. These online environments allow emerging adults to experiment with identity presentation and maintain social connections. However, the reliance on digital communication during this developmental stage may also expose individuals to new forms of psychological stress [4].

The increasing use of social media has generated growing interest among scholars studying mental health outcomes among young adults. Social networking platforms provide opportunities for communication, collaboration, and emotional support. Individuals can maintain relationships with friends and family, access information, and participate in online communities. Such interactions may enhance feelings of belonging and social support among users. However, researchers have also identified several risks associated with excessive social media engagement. These risks include cyberbullying, exposure to unrealistic social comparisons, and the pressure to maintain an idealized online identity. Consequently, scholars such as Keles [5] have increasingly examined how social media engagement has contributed to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Anxiety is one of the most common mental health concerns in young adults in contemporary society. Anxiety disorders involve excessive worry, fear, and physiological arousal that may interfere with daily functioning. Vannucci [6] found that increased levels of daily social media use were significantly related with greater symptoms of anxiety among emerging adults. Researchers suggest that the constant exposure to notifications, messages, and online interactions may contribute to psychological stress. Additionally, individuals may experience anxiety related to maintaining their online image and receiving feedback from peers. These digital pressures may therefore influence emotional well-being among young social media users.

Depression is another mental health condition that has been increasingly linked to the way social media is used among young adults. The symptoms of depression include persistent sadness, reduced motivation, and diminished interest in previously enjoyable activities. Individuals who often use multiple social networking platforms are more likely to report depressive symptoms. Primack [7] revealed that young adults who used numerous social media platforms concurrently were more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety. Scholars suggest that exposure to idealized representations of others' lives may encourage negative social comparisons. Such comparisons can lead individuals to perceive their own lives as inadequate or less successful. Over time, these perceptions may contribute to reduced self-esteem and depressive mood states.

One of the mechanisms through which social media may influence mental health is social comparison. Social comparison theory suggests that individuals evaluate their abilities and achievements by comparing themselves to others [8]. On social networking platforms, users are frequently exposed to curated images that portray success, beauty, and happiness. These idealized representations may create unrealistic standards that are difficult to achieve in real life. Vogel [9] indicated that upward social comparisons on social media are associated with lower self-esteem and increased depressive symptoms in individuals. Emerging adults may be particularly vulnerable to these comparisons because they are actively constructing their identities during this stage of development.

Equally, social isolation is an important factor which indicates the effect of social media use and psychological wellbeing. Even though social media platforms are designed to facilitate connection, they may sometimes increase feelings of loneliness among users. Individuals who spend large amounts of time browsing social networking sites without meaningful interaction may feel socially disconnected from others. Primack [10] demonstrated that larger social media use was related with higher levels of perceived social isolation among young adults. These findings suggest that online

interactions may not always provide the same emotional satisfaction as face-to-face relationships. When individuals rely heavily on digital communication, they may experience reduced opportunities for meaningful interpersonal engagement. Such experiences may increase vulnerability to anxiety and depressive symptoms. Despite the potential risks associated with social media use, scholars also acknowledge that digital platforms can provide important psychological benefits. Social media may facilitate emotional support, community engagement, and access to mental health information. Individuals experiencing psychological distress may find supportive communities online where they can share experiences and receive encouragement. Naslund [11] revealed that online peer support contributes positively to psychological well-being when used constructively. Furthermore, social networking platforms can serve as channels for mental health awareness and education.

The use of social media has increased significantly over the past decade in Africa due to expanding internet infrastructure and smartphone penetration. Young people across many African countries now rely heavily on digital communication platforms for social interaction, education, and entertainment. Cameroon has experienced a similar growth in digital connectivity, particularly among university students and young professionals. Social networking platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram have become common tools for communication among emerging adults in the country. Cultural values, socioeconomic conditions, and educational environments may influence how individuals interact with digital technologies. Therefore, context-specific research is necessary to understand how social media affects mental health in African populations [12].

Fako Division in the South-West Region of Cameroon is home to several higher education institutions and a growing population of digitally connected young adults. Students and young professionals in this region frequently use social media platforms for academic collaboration, communication, and entertainment. At the same time, emerging adults in the region may experience academic pressure, economic uncertainty, and concerns about employment opportunities. These challenges may interact with online experiences to influence emotional well-being. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the effects of use of social media on anxiety and depression amongst emerging adults in Fako Division, Cameroon.

Statement of the Problem

The fast expansion of social media has meaningfully transformed forms of communication and social interaction among young adults across the world. Emerging adults are the most active users of social networking platforms due to their developmental stage and strong reliance on digital communication technologies. While social media provides opportunities for connection and information sharing, research suggests that excessive use may contribute to mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. Empirical studies have demonstrated that increased social media use and engagement with multiple platforms are associated with higher levels of psychological distress among young adults. Despite these findings, most existing research has been conducted in Western countries, leaving limited evidence regarding the relationship between social media use and mental health within African contexts. In Cameroon, particularly in regions such as Fako Division where internet access and social media use among emerging adults continue to increase, little empirical research has explored the psychological implications of this digital engagement. Without such evidence, it remains difficult to determine whether patterns of social media use among emerging adults contribute to anxiety and depression within this context. Therefore, this study sought to examine the effects of the use of social media on anxiety and depression among emerging adults in Fako Division.,

General Objective

To investigate the effects of the use of social media on anxiety and depression among emerging adults in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon.

Specific Objectives

1. To find out the purpose of social media use among emerging adults in Fako Division.

2. To examine the relationship between social media use and anxiety among emerging adults in Fako Division.
3. To determine the relationship between social media use and depression among emerging adults in Fako Division.

Research Questions

1. What is the purpose of social media use among emerging adults in Fako Division?
2. What relationship exists between social media use and anxiety among emerging adults in Fako Division?
3. What relationship exists between social media use and depression among emerging adults in Fako Division?

Literature Review

The concept of Emerging Adults

Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage that occurs between adolescence and full adulthood, typically between the ages of 18 and 29 years. The concept was introduced by Jeffrey Arnett, who argued that social and economic changes have created a prolonged transition into adult roles. Arnett, describes emerging adulthood as a phase marked by active identity exploration, frequent life changes and instability, a strong focus on the self, a feeling of being caught between adolescence and full adulthood, and a broad sense of future possibilities. During this stage, individuals actively explore educational, occupational, and relational pathways before making long-term commitments. Arnett, Žukauskienė, and Sugimura explain that emerging adulthood has become common in many societies due to extended education and delayed entry into marriage and parenthood. Researchers such as Tanner and Arnett further emphasize that this developmental stage reflects major demographic and cultural shifts in modern societies. Consequently, emerging adulthood has become an important focus of developmental psychology because of its implications for identity formation and mental health.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of emerging adulthood is identity exploration. Arnett explains that emerging adults use this stage to explore possibilities in areas such as career paths, romantic relationships, and personal beliefs. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development also highlights identity formation as a key developmental task during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. According to Arnett, identity exploration during emerging adulthood often occurs through experimentation with different educational and occupational opportunities. Côté notes that modern social structures allow young adults greater freedom to explore different life options before committing to adult roles. However, this prolonged exploration may also create uncertainty and psychological stress among young adults. Therefore, identity exploration remains a central feature of emerging adulthood that shapes individuals' developmental trajectories.

Instability is another defining characteristic of emerging adulthood. Arnett argues that emerging adults frequently experience changes in residence, relationships, and employment as they explore different life opportunities. These transitions may create periods of uncertainty and emotional fluctuation among young adults. Goldscheider and Goldscheider observed that individuals in this age group are more likely to move between living arrangements compared with other age groups. Such transitions reflect the ongoing exploration of personal and professional identities. Arnett explain that instability during emerging adulthood is often linked to experimentation and exploration of future possibilities. Although instability may create stress, it also provides opportunities for personal growth and self-discovery.

Another important feature of emerging adulthood is the experience of feeling in-between. Many individuals in this stage do not perceive themselves as adolescents, yet they do not fully identify as adults. Arnett found that many young adults report feeling partially adult while still depending on family support. Nelson and Barry argue that this perception reflects the gradual transition toward independence experienced by many young adults. Societal expectations regarding financial independence and family formation often shape how individuals perceive adulthood. Consequently,

many emerging adults experience a prolonged period of semi-independence before assuming full adult responsibilities. This transitional identity contributes to the psychological complexity of this developmental stage.

Emerging adulthood is also characterized by a sense of possibilities and optimism about the future. Arnett suggests that many emerging adults believe they have numerous opportunities to shape their lives and achieve personal goals. This optimism often motivates individuals to pursue higher education and explore diverse career opportunities. However, researchers note that this optimism may sometimes conflict with economic realities and social constraints. Galambos, Barker, and Krahn found that uncertainty about employment and financial independence may challenge young adults' expectations for the future. Despite these challenges, emerging adulthood remains a period when individuals envision multiple life possibilities. Therefore, this developmental stage plays a crucial role in shaping long-term personal and professional outcomes.

Mental health researchers have also emphasized the importance of studying emerging adulthood because many psychological disorders first appear during this stage. Kessler [13] found that the onset of several mental health disorders occurs during late adolescence and early adulthood. Arnett suggest that the transitions typical of emerging adulthood can heighten susceptibility to emotional strain. Factors such as academic demands, financial difficulties, and uncertainty about future life paths may lead to psychological distress. Nevertheless, this period is also marked by growing autonomy and independence. The changes may influence coping strategies and psychological well-being. Consequently, understanding emerging adulthood is essential for examining mental health outcomes among young adults.

Social Media

Social media refers to digital platforms that allow users to create, share, and exchange information within virtual communities. Kaplan and Haenlein [14] define social media as internet-based applications that build on the ideological foundations of Web 2.0 and enable the creation of user-generated content. Boyd and Ellison [15] describe social networking sites as online services that allow individuals to construct profiles, articulate connections, and view others within a network. These platforms facilitate communication through text, images, videos, and interactive features. Social media has therefore transformed patterns of communication and social interaction across the world. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe [16] argue that social networking platforms allow individuals to maintain social relationships and build online communities. As a result, social media has become an integral component of everyday communication in contemporary society.

One of the major advantages of social media is its ability to facilitate communication across geographical boundaries. Kaplan and Haenlein note that social media platforms allow users to share information and interact with others regardless of location. Ellison found that social networking sites enable users to maintain relationships with friends and family members who live far away. These platforms also allow individuals to reconnect with old acquaintances and expand their social networks. Valkenburg and Peter [17] explain that online communication may enhance feelings of social connectedness among users. Social media therefore provides opportunities for individuals to build and maintain relationships in digital environments. These interactive features have contributed to the widespread popularity of social media.

Social media platforms also serve as sources of information and knowledge sharing. Individuals often use these platforms to access news, educational content, and professional opportunities. Kaplan and Haenlein argue that social media has transformed how information is produced and disseminated in society. Researchers note that user-generated content allows individuals to participate actively in the creation and distribution of information. Ellison emphasize that these platforms encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange among users. However, the rapid spread of information on social media may also increase the risk of misinformation. Consequently, scholars have called for critical evaluation of digital information sources.

Despite its benefits, social media has also been associated with several potential risks. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish report that excessive social media use may contribute to psychological distress among young people. Vogel found that exposure to idealized online images may encourage social comparisons that negatively affect self-esteem. Social media users may also experience pressure to present an idealized version of themselves online. This pressure can create emotional stress and dissatisfaction among users. Researchers therefore highlight the need to examine how social media influences psychological well-being. Understanding these risks is essential for promoting healthy digital engagement.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly examined the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes. Primack and Escobar-Viera argue that social media may influence psychological well-being through mechanisms such as social comparison and cyberbullying. Keles note that social media may also contribute to anxiety and depression among adolescents and young adults. However, researchers also acknowledge that social media can provide social support and mental health information. Naslund found that online peer support communities may help individuals cope with psychological challenges. Consequently, the effects of social media on mental health remain complex and multifaceted.

The Use of social media by Emerging adults

Studies conducted by the Pew Research Centre indicate that individuals aged between 18 and 29 are the most frequent users of social networking platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Researchers attribute this high usage to the developmental characteristics of emerging adulthood, which include identity exploration and the desire for social connection. Social media provides a platform where emerging adults can communicate with peers, share personal experiences, and construct their online identities. Boyd and Ellison explain that social networking sites allow users to create personal profiles and interact with others within digital communities. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe further argue that social media facilitates the maintenance of both strong and weak social ties. As a result, emerging adults increasingly rely on social media as a central tool for communication and relationship maintenance.

One of the primary motivations for emerging adults' use of social media is the need for social interaction and belonging. According to Valkenburg and Peter [18], online communication platforms allow young adults to maintain friendships and develop new social relationships. These platforms provide opportunities for self-disclosure, which can strengthen interpersonal connections among peers. Ellison found that Facebook use among college students was positively associated with perceived social capital. Social capital refers to the resources and support individuals obtain through social relationships. For emerging adults who may experience transitions such as moving away from home or starting university, social media can help maintain connections with family and friends. Consequently, digital platforms serve as important tools for sustaining social networks during the transition to adulthood.

Identity development also plays a significant role in emerging adults' engagement with social media. Arnett emphasizes that identity exploration is a central developmental task during emerging adulthood. Social media platforms allow individuals to experiment with different aspects of their identity through self-presentation and content sharing. Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin argue that online profiles provide spaces where individuals construct and present idealized versions of themselves. These digital identities may reflect personal aspirations, values, and social affiliations. Valkenburg, Schouten, and Peter noted that individuals use online platforms to explore different aspects of their identity. Thus, social media plays an important role in the identity formation processes of emerging adults.

Despite these benefits, concerns have been raised about the possible psychological effects of social media use among emerging adults. Evidence suggests that heavy engagement with these platforms may be linked to poorer mental health outcomes in young people. For instance, Keles, McCrae, and Grealish found that higher levels of social media use are associated with greater symptoms of anxiety and depression. Vogel found that exposure to idealized online images may lead individuals to compare

themselves negatively with others. Such comparisons can result in reduced self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy. Emerging adults may be particularly vulnerable to these effects because they are actively constructing their identities during this developmental stage. Consequently, scholars emphasize the need to understand how social media influences psychological well-being among emerging adults.

Another important aspect of emerging adults' social media use is the phenomenon of passive consumption. Verduyn [19] indicated that passive social media use is linked with increased feelings of envy and reduced well-being. Individuals who frequently view others' posts may perceive their peers as happier or more successful. Such perceptions may contribute to negative self-evaluations and emotional distress. Active engagement, such as messaging or commenting, may have different psychological effects compared with passive browsing.

Scholars have also explored the ways in which different patterns of social media use affect the mental health of emerging adults. Brian A. Primack observed that individuals who engage with multiple social media platforms are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression. In a similar vein, Vannucci, Flannery, and Ohannessian found that increased daily use of social media is linked to higher levels of anxiety among emerging adults. However, other studies suggest that social media may also provide emotional support when used appropriately. Naslund found that online peer communities can offer support for individuals experiencing mental health challenges. Consequently, the effects of social media on emerging adults depend on various factors including patterns of use, individual characteristics, and social context.

Purpose of Social Media Use by Emerging Adults

Social media platforms have become integral to the everyday lives of emerging adults across the globe. Scholars note that young people frequently use social networking platforms to maintain interpersonal relationships and communicate with peers. Boyd and Ellison explain that social networking sites enable users to construct public or semi-public profiles, connect with other users, and interact through digital communication tools. These interactive features make social media particularly attractive to emerging adults who are navigating social relationships and identity formation. Arnett describes emerging adulthood as a developmental period characterized by identity exploration and increased independence, which often occurs within both offline and online environments. Social media therefore provides a space where emerging adults can explore relationships and express their personal identities. Research indicates that digital communication technologies enable emerging adults to stay in touch with friends and family even when they are physically far apart.

One of the most common purposes of social media use among emerging adults is communication and social interaction. Social networking platforms enable individuals to maintain contact with friends, family members, and colleagues through instant messaging, comments, and multimedia sharing. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe found that Facebook users often rely on social media to maintain social capital and strengthen relationships with existing social networks. Similarly, Valkenburg and Peter argue that online communication increases the frequency of interaction among young people and enhances relationship maintenance. Emerging adults often use social media platforms to coordinate social activities and sustain peer relationships. Urista, Dong, and Day [20] found that young adults frequently use social networking sites to communicate with friends and maintain interpersonal connections. Consequently, social media serves as an important digital environment for social engagement and relationship maintenance.

Information seeking is another major purpose of social media use among emerging adults. Social media platforms provide access to diverse information sources, including news, educational resources, and lifestyle content. Research indicates that young adults frequently use social media to search for information about health, education, and career opportunities. For example, Lim [21] found that young adults use platforms such as YouTube and Facebook to obtain health information and learn about healthy lifestyles. Papacharissi and Rubin [22] also note that information seeking is a key motivation underlying internet and social media use. In addition, social media allows users to exchange information with peers and participate in online knowledge communities. These platforms therefore

function as significant tools for knowledge acquisition and information dissemination among emerging adults.

Entertainment and leisure activities also represent major motivations for social media use among emerging adults. Social networking platforms provide access to multimedia content such as videos, music, memes, and live streams that attract young audiences. Vaterlaus and Winter [23] observed that many young adults use platforms like TikTok for amusement, relaxation, and enjoyment. Similarly, Whiting and Williams [24] identified entertainment as one of the primary motivations driving social media engagement. Entertainment-related activities on social media often include watching short videos, following celebrities, and participating in online trends. Verduyn suggest that individuals sometimes engage with social media as a leisure activity in order to escape from daily stressors. As such, entertainment remains a key factor shaping the extensive adoption of social media among emerging adults.

The desire for self-expression and the process of identity formation are also key factors that drive emerging adults to engage with social media. Emerging adulthood is often characterized by exploration of personal identity, values, and beliefs. Social media platforms provide opportunities for individuals to share personal experiences, opinions, and creative content with broader audiences. Boyd [25] argues that social networking sites allow young people to construct digital identities and present themselves to their peers. Through activities such as posting photos, sharing opinions, and interacting with followers, emerging adults can express their personalities and interests. These forms of self-presentation enable individuals to shape how they are perceived within online communities. Consequently, social media platforms serve as spaces for identity exploration and self-expression.

In the African context, social media use among emerging adults also supports academic and educational purposes. Many university students use platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Telegram to exchange academic information and collaborate on assignments. A study conducted among Nigerian university students found that undergraduates used social media to share educational materials and communicate with classmates about academic tasks [26]. Similarly, research across African universities suggests that social media facilitates collaborative learning and peer academic support. Students frequently use these platforms to access lecture materials, discuss coursework, and coordinate group projects. The widespread availability of smartphones and improved internet access has significantly boosted the use of social media for educational activities in African countries. Consequently, these platforms have become vital tools for academic engagement among emerging adults throughout the continent.

In Cameroon, social media is increasingly used by emerging adults for communication, entertainment, academic collaboration, and entrepreneurial activities. The growing availability of mobile internet services has contributed to increased digital participation among young people. Cameroonian university students frequently use platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to communicate with peers, access information, and share academic resources. Research indicates that social media platforms also provide opportunities for youth entrepreneurship and digital marketing among young adults in developing countries. Many emerging adults use these platforms to promote small businesses, creative work, or professional skills. In addition, social media enables young people to participate in global conversations and connect with international networks. Therefore, the purposes of social media use among emerging adults in Cameroon reflect broader global trends while also supporting local educational and economic activities.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a psychological condition characterized by feelings of fear, worry, and nervousness that may interfere with daily functioning. According to the American Psychiatric Association [27], anxiety disorders involve excessive fear and behavioural disturbances that persist over time. Spielberger distinguishes between state anxiety, which refers to temporary feelings of tension, and trait anxiety, which represents a stable tendency to experience anxiety. Anxiety is considered a normal emotional response to stress; however, when it becomes excessive or persistent it may develop into a

psychological disorder. Kessler report that anxiety disorders often emerge during late adolescence and early adulthood. Consequently, anxiety has become an important focus of psychological and clinical research.

Anxiety can manifest through various emotional, cognitive, and physiological symptoms. Emotional symptoms often include feelings of apprehension, fear, and restlessness. Cognitive symptoms may involve persistent worry, difficulty concentrating, and negative thoughts about future events. Physiological symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, and muscle tension are also common. According to Barlow [28], anxiety disorders involve heightened sensitivity to perceived threats in the environment. Individuals with anxiety often anticipate negative outcomes even in relatively safe situations. These symptoms can significantly impair social, academic, and occupational functioning.

Several factors contribute to the development of anxiety among young adults. Genetic predispositions and neurobiological processes play important roles in anxiety disorders. Barlow explains that individuals with certain temperamental characteristics may be more vulnerable to anxiety. Environmental stressors including academic demands, financial difficulties, and challenges in relationships can also contribute to the development of anxiety symptoms. The stage of emerging adulthood is often marked by multiple life transitions that tend to heighten stress levels. Arnett note that uncertainty surrounding career choices and future aspirations can further intensify anxiety during this period. As a result, anxiety is especially common during the transition into adulthood. In recent years, researchers have increasingly examined the relationship between digital technology and anxiety. Social media platforms expose users to continuous streams of information and social interactions. Researchers suggest that constant notifications and online interactions may contribute to emotional stress. Social comparison processes on digital platforms may also increase anxiety levels. Therefore, understanding the relationship between technology use and anxiety has become an important area of research.

Another contributor to anxiety is the fear of missing out (FoMO). Przybylski [29] describe FoMO as the anxiety that arises from the belief that others might be enjoying rewarding experiences in which one is not involved. Social media platforms can intensify this feeling by constantly displaying updates about others' activities. People who regularly monitor social media may feel anxious when they perceive themselves as missing out on social activities. FoMO has been linked to higher social media engagement and reduced psychological well-being. Consequently, researchers consider FoMO an important mechanism linking social media use with anxiety.

Researchers emphasize the importance of addressing anxiety through psychological interventions and support systems. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is widely recognized as an effective treatment for anxiety disorders. Hofmann [30] report that CBT helps individuals modify maladaptive thought patterns and develop healthier coping strategies. Social support from family and peers can also reduce anxiety symptoms. Educational institutions increasingly provide mental health services to support students experiencing anxiety. Understanding the causes and consequences of anxiety is therefore essential for promoting psychological well-being among emerging adults.

Depression

Depression is a prevalent mental health condition marked by ongoing feelings of sadness, a loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, and decreased energy. The American Psychiatric Association defines major depressive disorder as experiencing a low mood and reduced ability to experience pleasure for a minimum of two weeks. This condition can impact an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, resulting in substantial difficulties in daily functioning. Globally, World Health Organization identifies depression as one of the leading causes of disability. Young adults represent a population that is particularly vulnerable to depressive symptoms. Kessler found that many depressive disorders first emerge during adolescence and early adulthood. Therefore, depression remains a major public health concern among emerging adults.

Depression manifests through various emotional and cognitive symptoms. Individuals experiencing depression often report feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and low self-esteem. Beck [31] proposed the cognitive theory of depression, which suggests that negative thought patterns contribute to depressive symptoms. According to this theory, individuals with depression tend to interpret experiences through pessimistic cognitive schemas. These schemas influence how individuals perceive themselves, the world, and the future. Negative self-evaluations and feelings of worthlessness are common among individuals experiencing depression. As a result, cognitive processes are fundamental in both the onset and persistence of depressive disorders.

Multiple biological and environmental factors influence the emergence of depression, with genetic susceptibility potentially heightening an individual's risk for developing depressive disorders. Life events such as academic pressure, relationship difficulties, and financial challenges can also trigger depressive symptoms. Arnett notes that emerging adulthood is a period characterized by numerous life transitions that may increase emotional stress. These transitions may include leaving home, entering higher education, and searching for employment. Such experiences may contribute to feelings of uncertainty and emotional distress. Thus, depression is frequently linked to the difficulties encountered during the transition into adulthood.

Researchers emphasize the importance of early intervention and support in addressing depression among young adults. Psychological therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy and interpersonal therapy are commonly used to treat depressive disorders. Cuijpers [32] found that psychotherapy can significantly reduce depressive symptoms among individuals with depression. Social support from family, friends, and educational institutions can also promote emotional recovery. Preventive programs that encourage healthy coping strategies may reduce the risk of depression. Consequently, understanding the causes and mechanisms of depression remains essential for improving mental health outcomes.

Effects of Emerging Adults' Use of Social Media on Anxiety

Emerging adulthood is widely recognized as a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, instability, and increased vulnerability to psychological distress. Arnett explains that individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 often experience uncertainty about relationships, career paths, and personal identity. These transitional experiences frequently increase emotional sensitivity and make emerging adults more susceptible to anxiety-related symptoms. At the same time, social media has become a central tool for communication and self-expression among young adults. Research conducted by Brian A. Primack and colleagues demonstrates that young adults who spend more time on social media platforms report higher levels of perceived stress and anxiety. Ariel Shensa and colleagues similarly found that greater emotional investment in social media is significantly associated with anxiety symptoms among emerging adults. The interaction between developmental vulnerability and digital communication environments therefore raises important concerns about anxiety among young social media users.

Social comparison theory provides an important explanation for how social media contributes to anxiety among emerging adults. Festinger proposed that people have a natural tendency to assess themselves by comparing their skills and accomplishments with those of others. On social media, such comparisons are common, as users are continually presented with curated images and personal updates. Twenge [33] observes that online environments often present idealized portrayals of success, beauty, and happiness.

Excessive communication is another factor that can heighten anxiety in emerging adults who use social media regularly. Digital platforms encourage constant connectivity through notifications, messages, and updates. According to Thomée, Härenstam, and Hagberg [34], excessive digital communication can create psychological strain and stress. Emerging adults often feel pressure to respond quickly to messages or maintain an active online presence. Primack observed that individuals who reported strong emotional attachment to social media also reported higher levels of anxiety. Continuous engagement with digital communication may therefore increase cognitive demands and emotional

exhaustion. Over time, this persistent connectivity can contribute to heightened anxiety levels among emerging adults.

Despite these risks, social media may also provide opportunities for emotional support and anxiety management. Joseph B. Walther [35] argues that computer-mediated communication can facilitate meaningful social interactions and relationship development. Emerging adults may use online platforms to share personal experiences and seek advice from peers. Research suggests that supportive online communities can help reduce feelings of loneliness and stress. Naslund, Aschbrenner, Marsch, and Bartels note that digital communities can provide valuable mental health support for young adults. Access to peer support networks may help individuals cope with anxiety during stressful life transitions.

Effects of Emerging Adults' Use of Social Media on Depression

Depression is one of the most prevalent mental health challenges experienced during emerging adulthood. According to Vikram Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, and McGorry [35], many mental health disorders begin during adolescence and early adulthood. The transition to adulthood involves numerous life stressors, including academic pressures, career uncertainty, and relationship changes. These stressors can increase vulnerability to depressive symptoms among young adults. At the same time, social media has become deeply integrated into daily life during this developmental stage. A clarification on the connection between social media use and depression is the displacement of face-to-face social interaction. Kraut and colleagues [36] argued that excessive internet use may reduce time spent in meaningful offline relationships. Social media engagement may replace opportunities for direct interpersonal communication and emotional support. Twenge observes that increased digital media use has coincided with rising levels of loneliness among young people. When individuals rely primarily on online communication, they may experience weaker emotional connections with others. Research indicates that loneliness is a strong predictor of depressive symptoms. Consequently, excessive social media use may indirectly contribute to depression by reducing in-person social interactions.

Social comparison on social networking platforms also contributes to depressive symptoms among emerging adults. Social media platforms, these comparisons are often unrealistic because users share only positive aspects of their lives. Vogel, Rose, Roberts, and Eckles found that frequent social comparison on social media is associated with lower self-esteem. Low self-esteem is widely recognized as a major risk factor for depression. Shensa [37] similarly reported that individuals who engage more frequently with social networking sites show higher levels of depressive symptoms. Therefore, repeated exposure to idealized online content may negatively influence emotional well-being.

Cyberbullying represents another important factor connecting social media use to depression. Online harassment can occur through insults, threats, or public humiliation on digital platforms. Hinduja and Patchin [38] found that victims of cyberbullying are significantly more likely to experience depressive symptoms. Emerging adults who experience online victimization may develop feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and social withdrawal. Kowalski [39] also observed that cyberbullying victimization is strongly associated with depression among young internet users. Negative online experiences may therefore have lasting psychological consequences. As a result, exposure to cyberbullying can significantly contribute to depression among emerging adults.

Sleep disruption caused by excessive social media engagement has also been linked to depression. Levenson [40] found that nighttime social media use is associated with poor sleep quality and increased depressive symptoms. Sleep deprivation interferes with emotional regulation and cognitive functioning. According to Alonzo [41], poor sleep patterns significantly increase the risk of depression among young adults. Emerging adults who spend long hours online may therefore experience sleep-related mental health problems. However, social media can also serve as a platform for psychological support and mental health awareness. Walther suggests that computer-mediated communication can strengthen interpersonal relationships when used appropriately. Emerging adults often use social media

to share personal struggles and seek emotional support from peers. Naslund explain that online peer communities can provide encouragement and reduce feelings of isolation among individuals experiencing depression. Access to mental health information through social media may also increase awareness and help-seeking behaviour. In some cases, supportive digital interactions may buffer against depressive symptoms.

Effects of Emerging Adults' Use of Social Media on Anxiety in Africa

Emerging adults in Cameroon and throughout Africa are rapidly increasing their use of social media platforms; however, studies examining the mental health effects of these technologies in the region are still limited. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram are widely used by emerging adults for social connection, academic collaboration, and peer interaction, exposing them to constant online evaluation and social comparison. According to Twenge, digital environments can intensify social comparisons and perceived social pressures, which are key contributors to anxiety among young users. In sub-Saharan Africa, research indicates that the link between extensive social media use and psychological distress resembles patterns seen in Western settings, with anxiety frequently associated with prolonged online activity. For example, a multinational study involving students from Cameroon, Ghana, and Nigeria reported that high levels of online activity were associated with increased stress and anxiety symptoms [42]. These findings are concerning given that many emerging adults in Fako Division use social media daily for academic and social purposes, often for several hours at a time. Cultural norms that emphasize social reputation and communal belonging may amplify anxiety when emerging adults compare their offline lives to idealized online presentations [43]. Thus, the contextual pressures experienced by young adults in Cameroon and Africa may interact with social media use to heighten anxiety risk.

One mechanism through which social media contributes to anxiety among emerging adults is social comparison, which involves evaluating one's own life relative to others' perceived successes and lifestyles. Festinger's social comparison theory posits that people naturally compare themselves with others to gauge social standing. On social platforms, comparisons are often driven by curated displays of achievement, appearance, and lifestyle that may not reflect the user's lived reality. Among emerging adults in Cameroon, such comparisons have been linked with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, especially in academic and social status domains [44]. These negative evaluations may escalate anxiety when individuals feel they are not keeping up with peers. In African settings where social networks are deeply valued, the psychological burden of FOMO may be particularly pronounced among emerging adults. Consequently, social comparison and related psychological mechanisms can explain the anxiety experienced by young digital users in Fako Division and beyond.

Cyberbullying and negative online interactions contribute further to anxiety among emerging adults in African contexts. Adolescents and young adults are vulnerable to harassment and exclusion in online environments, and these experiences have been associated with heightened anxiety symptoms. In sub-Saharan Africa, research highlights that abusive or hostile communications on social media can harm psychological well-being, with students reporting anxiety after negative digital encounters. Emerging adults who face public criticism or ridicule online may develop feelings of social insecurity and anticipatory anxiety. This is especially relevant in high-engagement communities such as university campuses, including those in Fako Division, where social media use is deeply integrated into social life. The relative anonymity and lack of real-time accountability on social platforms can make cyberbullying more pervasive and distressing. These negative digital experiences may reinforce anxiety over time and interfere with healthy social identity formation among emerging adults.

Research also highlights the role of sleep disturbance as a mediator between social media use and anxiety among young people. Many emerging adults use social media late at night, which can disrupt healthy sleep patterns and circadian rhythms. Studies indicate that poor sleep quality is associated with increased anxiety symptoms and overall psychological distress. Insufficient sleep reduces emotional regulation capacity, making individuals more vulnerable to anxiety when faced with social stressors. For emerging adults in Fako Division, balancing academic responsibilities with extended nighttime

social media engagement may contribute to sleep problems that amplify anxiety risk. Similar patterns have been observed among African university students, where night-time digital engagement is linked with both poor sleep and higher anxiety scores. Interventions that address healthy digital habits and sleep hygiene may therefore be important for reducing anxiety related to social media use.

Research suggests that emerging adults who use social media to connect with supportive peers report lower anxiety than those who engage primarily in passive browsing and comparison. In African contexts, peer support groups and online communities can provide emotional validation and shared coping resources for young adults navigating life transitions. However, the benefits of social media depend on intentional, balanced use, and strong offline social support systems. Digital literacy and awareness programs that teach emerging adults how to critically engage with social media content may help mitigate anxiety risk.

Effects of Emerging Adults' Use of Social Media on Depression in Africa

Emerging adults who passively view curated content of peers' achievements may develop feelings of exclusion or inferiority, contributing to depressive symptoms. Festinger's social comparison theory provides a conceptual basis for understanding this process, as repeated upward comparisons can lower self-esteem and mood. In Cameroon, young adults who frequently compare their circumstances with those of more successful or popular peers may interpret differences as personal failures, leading to hopelessness or sadness. These patterns are consistent with evidence from other African student populations, where passive social media use is associated with lower well-being. Thus, passive engagement with social media content may be a contextual risk factor for depression.

Cyberbullying and negative online experiences also contribute to depressive symptoms among emerging adults in African settings. Victims of cyberbullying often report emotional distress, withdrawal from social engagement, and diminished self-worth, which are core features of depression. In sub-Saharan African campus environments where students share substantial aspects of their social lives online, hostile interactions may have significant psychological consequences. Exposure to negative comments, exclusion from online groups, or public shaming can undermine emotional resilience and increase vulnerability to depressive moods. In Cameroon, the effects of cyberbullying may be amplified by cultural norms that place high value on reputation and social belonging. When individuals perceive themselves as socially rejected or mocked online, they may internalize negative self-appraisals, contributing to depressive symptomatology. These contextual patterns underscore the need to address online harassment as part of mental health interventions for young adults.

Sleep disruption is another pathway linking social media use to depression among emerging adults. Research suggests that nighttime social media use, particularly in the hours before bedtime, contributes to later bedtimes, reduced sleep duration, and fragmented sleep. Among African students, extended nighttime engagement with social networks is common and correlated with poorer mental health outcomes. Sleep disruption not only increases vulnerability to depression but also reduces the capacity to cope with academic and social stressors. In Fako Division and similar contexts, addressing healthy sleep routines and screen time limits may be important for reducing depression associated with social media use.

Although many studies link social media use with depression, research also highlights potential protective effects when platforms are used for positive social interaction. Active engagement, such as participating in supportive groups and sharing personal experiences, can foster emotional connection and reduce feelings of loneliness. In African contexts where mental health services are limited, peer support networks on social media can serve as informal resources for emotional support. For example, digital communities that provide encouragement and shared strategies for coping with academic or social pressures may help reduce depressive symptoms. However, these benefits depend on the quality of interactions and users' motivations for engaging online. Digital literacy programs that teach emerging adults how to purposefully use social media for support rather than comparison may help buffer against depression. Understanding how social media functions as both a risk and protective factor is crucial for culturally informed mental health strategies.

In summary, evidence from Cameroon and Africa suggests that social media use among emerging adults can contribute to depressive symptoms through mechanisms such as social comparison, passive consumption, negative interactions, and sleep disruption. However, the contextual environment, including cultural norms and social expectations, also shapes how young adults experience online engagement. While some aspects of social media use may increase vulnerability to depression, balanced and supportive use can offer emotional benefits. Continued research is needed to clarify these pathways and inform interventions tailored to the unique cultural contexts of Fako Division and other African settings. Addressing both the risks and benefits of social media will be crucial for promoting the mental well-being of emerging adults in an increasingly digital society.

Theoretical review

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory (SCT) was originally proposed by Leon Festinger to explain how individuals evaluate themselves relative to others. According to Festinger, individuals have an innate drive to assess their abilities and opinions by comparing themselves with others, particularly when objective benchmarks are unavailable. This tendency is amplified in online environments because social media platforms present constant streams of curated content showing peers' achievements, lifestyles, and personal attributes. Researchers argue that social media creates abundant opportunities for upward social comparison, where individuals compare themselves with others perceived as having superior qualities. Such comparisons on platforms like Instagram or Facebook can evoke feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and lowered self-esteem among emerging adults. These negative evaluative processes have been linked to anxiety and depressive symptoms in numerous empirical studies. For example, Shakya and Christakis [45] found that greater exposure to peers' positive posts was associated with declines in users' reported mental well-being.

Festinger's original framework did not anticipate the digital context, but contemporary scholars have extended SCT to explain how social media-mediated comparisons influence psychological functioning. On social networking platforms, users often present idealized images of their lives, which may not reflect reality [46]. Emerging adults, in particular, may be highly sensitive to these portrayals because they are developing social identities and establishing their self-worth during a transitional life stage. When emerging adults engage in frequent upward social comparison online, they may internalize negative self-assessments about their appearance, achievements, or social status. Studies show that such comparison processes are significantly correlated with increased anxiety and depressive symptoms among young social media users [47]. The constant visibility of peers' curated successes may therefore exacerbate emotional distress in vulnerable populations.

Moreover, social media platforms often reinforce comparison through quantifiable feedback cues, such as likes and follower counts, which function as social benchmarks. These metrics can serve as proxies for social approval and popularity, providing tangible criteria for comparison [48]. When individuals perceive themselves as having fewer positive interactions or social validation, they may experience lower self-esteem and higher anxiety. In a longitudinal study, Vogel demonstrated that individuals who habitually compared their social media feedback to that of others reported increased social anxiety and negative self-evaluation over time. This pattern is particularly salient among emerging adults who may be more invested in social approval and belonging.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) offers a media consumption perspective that focuses on why individuals use certain media and what needs they seek to satisfy [49]. Unlike theories that emphasize media effects as primarily passive, UGT emphasizes active user agency in choosing media to fulfil specific psychological or social needs. Within the context of social media, emerging adults may be motivated to use platforms to satisfy needs such as social interaction, information seeking, entertainment, and identity formation. The theory posits that the gratifications obtained from media use influence subsequent patterns of engagement, which can, in turn, affect emotional well-being. For

instance, individuals using social media primarily for social connectivity may experience positive outcomes, such as increased perceived support and belonging. In contrast, when media use becomes oriented toward escapism or avoidance, it may contribute to negative psychosocial outcomes. The direction of these effects depends on the match between motivations for use and the gratifications actually obtained from media engagement.

Research revealed that young adults use social media to actively maintain social relationships, they report lower levels of loneliness and better emotional well-being. For example, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe found that Facebook use was positively associated with bonding social capital and perceived social support among college students. These positive gratifications can buffer against anxiety and depressive symptoms by strengthening supportive networks. However, other studies suggest that when social media use is driven by needs for social validation (e.g., seeking likes and affirmation), the gratifications obtained may be inconsistent and stressful. Primack reported that individuals who seek social assurance through frequent social media interaction are more likely to experience depressive symptoms.

Emerging adults may initially use social media for connection and information but may shift toward more passive or avoidant use patterns when gratifications are not satisfied. Verduyn found that passive consumption of social media content—even when initially intended for engagement—was linked with decreased well-being and increased negative affect. This suggests that negative gratifications, such as passive exposure to content that elicits comparison or envy, can undermine emotional health. Through the lens of UGT, such outcomes can be understood as poor matches between users' psychological needs and the gratifications provided by social media use. In conclusion, Uses and Gratifications Theory highlights the active role of emerging adults in shaping their social media experiences and the psychological consequences that follow.

Cognitive Behavioural Theory

Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) posits that individuals' cognitive processes such as thoughts and beliefs play a central role in shaping emotional experiences and behaviours. CBT emphasizes the role of behavioural responses in maintaining psychological disorders. Negative reinforcement can occur when individuals use social media to alleviate distress through avoidance behaviours (e.g., watching others' content instead of coping adaptively). Such avoidance may provide short-term relief but reinforces anxiety and depressive patterns over time. Verduyn found that passive social media use is associated with declines in well-being, partly because it encourages withdrawal from active coping and encourages idle rumination. The cyclical pattern of distress—negative thought, avoidant behaviour, reinforcement, and persistent emotional symptoms—is consistent with cognitive behavioural formulations of anxiety and depression.

In conclusion, Cognitive Behavioural Theory provides a powerful explanatory framework for understanding how emerging adults' use of social media can influence anxiety and depression. By highlighting cognitive processes such as interpretation biases, rumination, and avoidance behaviours, CBT explains how online experiences become internalized and affect emotional functioning. The theory emphasizes that negative emotional outcomes are not simply a product of the way social media is used but it is as a result of maladaptive cognitive structures which arise from repeated use and exposure to social media. Interventions based on CBT principles such as cognitive restructuring and adaptive coping strategies can help emerging adults interpret online experiences more adaptively and reduce psychological distress.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive correlational research design which was used to examine the effects of social media use on anxiety and depression among emerging adults in Fako Division, Cameroon. This design allows researchers to collect data at a single point in time to assess the relationships among study variables, making it suitable for exploring associations between social

media use and psychological outcomes such as anxiety and depression [50]. According to Bryman [51], correlational designs are commonly used in social sciences to identify patterns and directional relationships between variables without manipulating the independent variable. This approach enabled the researcher to explore how variations in frequency and intensity of social media engagement relate to anxiety and depression levels. A cross-sectional correlational design is particularly useful when studying psychological constructs among populations where experimental manipulation is neither feasible nor ethical [52]. By using this design, the study aimed to contribute to understanding the mental health implications of social media use within a Cameroonian context.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Fako Division, located in the South-West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. Fako Division is one of the administrative divisions in the South-West Region and includes urban centers such as Buea, Limbe, and Tiko, which host a mix of academic institutions, commercial activities, and diverse emerging adult populations. The region is known for the University of Buea and other tertiary institutions that attract large numbers of young adults. Emerging adults in this area represent a significant demographic segment characterized by high levels of digital engagement and social media use [53]. In recent years, internet penetration and smartphone ownership have increased significantly across Cameroon, with young people being the most active users of digital platforms [54]. Fako Division's mix of urbanization, education hubs, and widespread use of mobile technology makes it an appropriate setting for investigating the psychological effects of social media. Additionally, limited empirical research has been conducted on mental health outcomes related to social media in this division, underscoring the need for locally grounded research.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire designed in Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised four major sections: (a) demographic information, (b) social media use patterns, (c) anxiety assessment, and (d) depression assessment. The social media use section included items regarding frequency, duration, and platforms used, adapted from prior work on digital media engagement [55]. The Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) scale was used to assess anxiety levels. The GAD-7 is a widely used 7-item instrument with strong psychometric properties for measuring anxiety symptoms in both clinical and non-clinical populations [56]. The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) was used to assess depressive symptoms; this instrument measures nine DSM-aligned depressive criteria and has well-documented validity and reliability across diverse populations [57]. Both scales have been frequently used in online surveys and digital research contexts [58], making them suitable for a social media Google Forms data collection approach.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire items—including social media usage measures, GAD-7, and PHQ-9 were reviewed by two specialists in psychology and mental health research who have experience conducting surveys in Cameroon. Content validity ensures that the instrument adequately captures the construct domains of interest [59]. The GAD-7 and PHQ-9 have established construct validity and criterion validity in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, including African and sub-Saharan samples. For reliability assessment, a pilot study was conducted with 30 emerging adults outside the final sample but within the Fako Division. The internal consistency of the scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The pilot results yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.80 for both anxiety (GAD-7) and depression (PHQ-9), indicating satisfactory reliability [60]. High internal consistency suggests that the items reliably measure the same underlying construct. Adjustments were made based on pilot feedback to enhance clarity and cultural relevance.

Procedure of Data Collection

Data were collected using Google Forms, an online survey platform that enables efficient distribution and collection of responses through digital channels. The survey link was disseminated via social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram, where emerging adults in

Fako Division are active. According to Evans and Mathur [61], online surveys distributed through social media are effective for reaching young adult populations and maximizing response rates in digital contexts. Participants were first provided with an informed consent form on the first page of the questionnaire explaining the purpose of the study, confidentiality assurances, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Only participants aged 18–29 years who were current residents of Fako Division were eligible to participate. Responses were automatically recorded in a secure Google Sheets database linked to the form. Data collection occurred over a four-week period to ensure adequate sample size and representation. Regular reminders were posted on social media during this period to encourage participation.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were used. The Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships between social media use intensity and anxiety/depression scores. Additionally, multiple regression analyses were performed to determine whether social media use significantly predicted anxiety and depressive symptoms, controlling for demographic covariates such as age, gender, and educational status. These analytical approaches are consistent with prior studies examining psychological outcomes of digital media use. Data were screened for normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity before inferential analyses to ensure statistical assumptions were met. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants as outlined by the American Psychological Association [62]. Participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, potential risks, and benefits, and their voluntary participation was emphasized. Informed consent was obtained electronically through Google Forms before respondents accessed the main questionnaire. Data were securely stored with access restricted to the primary researcher to protect confidentiality. Also, respondents freely responded to the questionnaire without coercion. Anonymity was ensured and no personal information of the respondents was collected. Finally, the research findings were reported in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual respondents.

Findings and Discussions

The findings are presented with respect to the research objectives as presented in the section below.

Frequency of Social Media Use Among Emerging Adults

The findings here present the frequency of social media use among emerging adults in Fako division as presented on table 1 below.

Table 1. Respondents' opinions on frequency of social media use

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Very often		Mean	Std dev
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	μ	σ
Checking social media accounts per day	16	5.1	37	11.9	71	22.8	135	43.3	53	17.0	3.55	1.066
Posting photos, videos, or status updates.	39	12.5	92	29.5	89	28.5	52	16.7	40	12.8	2.88	1.210
Liking, commenting, or reacting to friends' posts	24	7.7	90	28.8	128	41.0	49	15.7	21	6.7	2.85	1.001
Browsing feeds without posting	49	15.7	89	28.5	58	18.6	66	21.2	50	16.0	2.93	1.329
Sending messages or chatting on social media	17	5.4	31	9.9	58	18.6	127	40.7	79	25.3	3.71	1.115
Watching videos or reels	21	6.7	19	6.1	77	24.7	84	26.9	111	35.6	3.79	1.188
Following or engaging with celebrities/influencers	81	26.0	103	33.0	66	21.2	43	13.8	19	6.1	2.41	1.186
Multiple responses set (MRS)	247	11.3	461	21.1	547	25.1	556	25.5	373	17.1	3.16	1.156

Table 2 presents respondents' opinions regarding the frequency with which they engage in various social media activities. The findings reveal that emerging adults engage in social media activities at varying levels of frequency, with some activities occurring more frequently than others. Overall, the results suggest that social media has become a routine component of daily life for many respondents. This pattern reflects global trends indicating that young adults increasingly integrate social media platforms into their everyday communication and social interaction practices. The diversity of activities observed in the table also indicates that social media serves multiple functions for users. Such patterns of engagement align with the view that individuals use media platforms to satisfy different psychological and social needs.

The results show that checking social media accounts per day is one of the most frequent activities among respondents. The largest proportion of participants indicated that they check their social media accounts often (43.3%), followed by sometimes (22.8%) and very often (17.0%), resulting in a mean score of 3.55 (SD = 1.066). This finding suggests that respondents generally check their accounts often, indicating regular engagement with social media platforms. Frequent checking behavior may reflect the growing role of social media in maintaining communication and social awareness among emerging adults. Valkenburg and Peter observed that digital communication technologies have significantly increased the frequency of interaction among young people. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, individuals actively use media to fulfill needs such as social interaction, information seeking, and entertainment. Therefore, the frequent checking of social media accounts observed in this study likely reflects respondents' attempts to remain connected with peers and updated on social events. Similar patterns have been reported by Whiting and Williams, who found that communication and information seeking are among the main motivations for social media use.

In contrast, the activity of posting photos, videos, or status updates appears to occur less frequently among respondents. The majority reported posting rarely (29.5%) or sometimes (28.5%), while smaller proportions indicated posting often (16.7%) or very often (12.8%), resulting in a mean score of 2.88 (SD = 1.210). This finding suggests that although respondents frequently access social media platforms, they are less active in creating or sharing content. Research has shown that many social media users act primarily as passive consumers rather than active contributors to online content. Passive engagement may involve observing or consuming content posted by others without participating in content creation. According to Social Comparison Theory, individuals often compare themselves with others when exposed to information about others' achievements or lifestyles. The findings are inline with Feinstein who emphasized that passive exposure to social encourages social comparison process among emerging adults which are linked to psychological outcomes such as anxiety and depressive symptoms.

A similar pattern is observed in respondents' engagement in liking, commenting, or reacting to friends' posts. The majority reported doing this sometimes (41.0%), followed by rarely (28.8%), with fewer respondents indicating often (15.7%) or very often (6.7%), resulting in a mean score of 2.85 (SD = 1.001). This suggests that reactive forms of interaction occur occasionally but are not highly frequent among respondents. Ellison argue that social media interactions such as liking and commenting contribute to maintaining social capital and strengthening relationships among users. However, these forms of engagement may also reflect low-effort participation compared to active posting or content creation. Emerging adults may prefer such interactions because they allow them to remain socially connected without exposing themselves to potential social evaluation. Boyd and Ellison similarly note that social networking platforms allow users to maintain relationships through lightweight interactions such as reactions or comments. Consequently, this type of engagement may represent a balance between participation and social caution among emerging adults.

The results further indicate that browsing feeds without posting occurs moderately among respondents, with a mean score of 2.93 (SD = 1.329). Responses varied considerably, with participants indicating rarely (28.5%), often (21.2%), sometimes (18.6%), very often (16.0%), and never (15.7%). The relatively higher standard deviation suggests greater variability in this activity compared with others. Passive browsing has been identified as one of the most common forms of social media engagement

among young people. Such behavior may increase exposure to idealized portrayals of peers' lives, achievements, and social experiences. According to Cognitive Behavioral Theory, repeated exposure to such information may influence cognitive processes such as self-evaluation and rumination [63]. Individuals who repeatedly compare their lives with idealized online representations may develop negative self-perceptions or emotional distress.

The findings also show that sending messages or chatting on social media is one of the most frequent activities reported by respondents. The majority indicated doing this often (40.7%) or very often (25.3%), producing a mean score of 3.71 (SD = 1.115). This suggests that messaging features represent an important function of social media platforms among emerging adults. Previous studies have shown that private communication tools such as messaging are widely used by young adults to maintain relationships and strengthen social connections. Messaging allows users to interact directly with friends and family members in real time, thereby reinforcing social bonds. According to Uses and Gratifications Theory, individuals actively choose media platforms that help satisfy interpersonal communication needs. The high frequency of messaging observed in this study therefore reflects the central role of social media in facilitating interpersonal communication among emerging adults.

Another frequently reported activity is watching videos or reels, which recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.188$) among the measured activities. The majority of respondents indicated watching videos very often (35.6%) or often (26.9%). This finding highlights the growing popularity of short-form video content on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Entertainment and leisure have been widely identified as major motivations for social media use among young adults. Short video formats provide engaging and easily consumable entertainment, which may explain the high level of engagement observed in this study. The findings corroborate with Keles who reiterated that prolonged use of social media platforms is associated with increased psychological distress among young users. Therefore, high engagement with video content may contribute to prolonged exposure to digital environments.

Finally, the findings indicate that following or engaging with celebrities or influencers is relatively uncommon among respondents. The majority reported engaging in this activity rarely (33.0%) or never (26.0%), resulting in the lowest mean score ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.186$). This suggests that influencer engagement is not a major motivation for social media use among respondents in this study. While influencer culture has gained global prominence, its impact may vary across cultural and regional contexts. Kaplan and Haenlein note that social media usage patterns differ across communities depending on social needs and cultural dynamics. In the context of this study, respondents appear to prioritize communication and entertainment activities over celebrity engagement. Nevertheless, indirect exposure to influencer content may still occur through video viewing or passive browsing.

Generally, the multiple response analysis indicates that respondents most frequently selected often (25.5%) and sometimes (25.1%) across the various activities, resulting in an overall mean score of 3.16 (SD = 1.156). This suggests that respondents generally engage in social media activities between sometimes and often, reflecting moderate to high levels of digital engagement. These findings reinforce previous research indicating that social media plays a central role in the daily lives of emerging adults. The observed patterns also support Katz uses and gratifications theory, which reiterated that active use of media by users is to fulfill specific psychological and social needs. At the same time, the prominence of passive browsing behaviors highlights the relevance of Social Comparison Theory and Cognitive Behavioral Theory in explaining how exposure to social media content may influence emotional experiences.

Purpose of Social Media Use Among Emerging Adults

Table 2. Respondents' opinions on the purpose of social media use

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Very often		Mean	Std dev
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	μ	σ
To connect with friends or family	9	2.9	32	10.3	64	20.5	105	33.7	102	32.7	3.83	1.085

To seek information or learn new things	2	0.6	8	2.6	63	20.2	95	30.4	144	46.2	4.19	0.889
To be entertained	8	2.6	21	6.7	80	25.6	113	36.2	90	28.8	3.82	1.008
To gain social approval (likes/comments)	88	28.2	92	29.5	84	26.9	37	11.9	11	3.5	2.33	1.113
To reduce stress or escape negative feelings	19	6.1	19	6.1	102	32.7	119	38.1	52	16.7	3.53	1.039
To express opinions or personal ideas	54	17.3	87	27.9	92	29.5	48	15.4	31	9.9	2.73	1.205
To follow trends, news, or updates	33	10.6	85	27.2	65	20.8	105	33.7	24	7.7	3.01	1.159
Multiple responses set (MRS)	213	9.8	344	15.8	550	25.2	622	28.5	454	20.8	3.35	1.071

The findings on table 2 indicate that seeking information or learning new things represents the most prominent reason for social media use among respondents. Nearly half of the respondents reported engaging in this activity very often (46.2%), while 30.4% indicated often, producing the highest mean score among all items ($\mu = 4.19$, $SD = 0.889$). This finding suggests that social media platforms serve as significant sources of information and learning for emerging adults. The findings of this study supports Katz uses and gratification theory which emphasized that people select media platforms to satisfy specific informational and cognitive needs. Similarly, previous research has demonstrated that social media has increasingly become an important channel for accessing news, educational content, and knowledge-sharing opportunities among young people. The high reliance on social media for informational purposes observed in this study reflects the broader transformation of digital platforms into spaces for informal learning and knowledge acquisition.

Another major purpose of social media use among respondents is connecting with friends and family. The majority of respondents reported that they use social media for this purpose often (33.7%) or very often (32.7%), with a relatively high mean score ($\mu = 3.83$, $SD = 1.085$). This finding underscores the importance of social media in maintaining social networks and interactions. The findings are in line with Boyd and Ellison who emphasized that social networking sites enable users to establish and maintain connections with others regardless of geographical boundaries. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, social interaction and relationship maintenance represent key motivations for media use. These results are also consistent with findings from Ellison, who reported that social media facilitates the development and maintenance of social capital by enabling individuals to remain connected with friends, relatives, and acquaintances.

Similarly, a large proportion of respondents indicated that they use social media for entertainment often (36.2%) or very often (28.8%), resulting in a mean score of 3.82 ($SD = 1.008$). This suggests that many respondents view social media platforms as sources of relaxation and leisure. Previous studies have also found that entertainment is one of the most common motivations for engaging with social media platforms, particularly among young adults. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook provide access to humorous, creative, and engaging content that can serve as a form of escapism from daily stressors. From a psychological perspective, engaging with entertaining content may temporarily enhance mood and reduce boredom. However, excessive reliance on social media for entertainment has also been linked to prolonged screen time, which some researchers associate with negative psychological outcomes when used excessively.

The findings further reveal that most (38.1%) respondents often use social media for reducing stress or escaping negative feelings while some (32.7%) sometimes use it, resulting in a mean score of 3.53 ($SD = 1.039$). Thus many emerging adults turn to social media as a coping mechanism when experiencing emotional distress or negative moods. This behavior can be interpreted through the lens of Cognitive Behavioral Theory, which suggests that individuals may engage in certain behaviors, including media use, to regulate emotions or cope with psychological discomfort. While such coping strategies may provide temporary relief from stress or negative emotions, research indicates that reliance on social media for emotional regulation may sometimes exacerbate psychological distress if it leads to avoidance of real-life problems or exposure to negative online interactions.

In contrast, the findings indicate that gaining social approval through likes and comments is not a primary motivation for most respondents. A substantial proportion reported never (28.2%) or rarely (29.5%) using social media for this purpose, resulting in the lowest mean score among the motivations examined ($\mu = 2.33$, $SD = 1.113$). This suggests that respondents may not primarily use social media to seek validation from others through engagement metrics such as likes or comments. However, although respondents may not explicitly report seeking social approval, previous research suggests that social media environments inherently encourage users to monitor feedback and evaluate their social standing based on online interactions. From the perspective of Social Comparison Theory, individuals may still engage in implicit comparisons with others when exposed to peer-generated content online. Consequently, even when social approval is not a conscious motivation, social media interactions may still influence self-evaluation and emotional well-being.

The results also show relatively lower engagement in expressing personal opinions or ideas through social media. The majority of respondents reported doing this rarely (27.9%) or sometimes (29.5%), resulting in a mean score of 2.73 ($SD = 1.205$). This suggests that respondents may be cautious about sharing personal viewpoints or perspectives online. Concerns related to privacy, fear of criticism, or potential social judgment may discourage individuals from openly expressing their ideas on social media platforms. Previous studies have shown that users often manage their self-presentation carefully in online environments in order to maintain a favorable social image. As a result, emerging adults may prefer to observe or interact with existing content rather than actively share personal opinions.

Finally, the findings reveal that following trends, news, or updates represents a moderate motivation for social media use, with respondents reporting this activity often (33.7%) and rarely (27.2%), producing a mean score of 3.01 ($SD = 1.159$). This indicates that while some respondents use social media to remain informed about current trends and developments, it may not be their primary reason for engagement. Nevertheless, social media platforms have increasingly become important channels for the dissemination of news and trending topics, particularly among younger audiences who rely less on traditional media sources.

In general, the combined multiple response analysis shows that respondents most frequently selected often (28.5%) and sometimes (25.2%) across the different motivations for social media use, producing an overall mean score of 3.35 ($SD = 1.071$). This indicates that emerging adults use social media moderately to frequently for diverse purposes, including information seeking, communication, entertainment, and emotional coping. These findings reinforce Katz uses and gratifications theory which states that media platforms provide a range of satisfaction to the users. The findings further support Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and Cognitive Behavioral Theory which emphasis that people use social media as a means to escape from emotional stress.

The relationship between social media use and anxiety among emerging adults in Fako Division

The findings here reveal firstly, anxiety levels among respondents followed by the correlation between social media use and the regression analysis as presented below.

Table 3. Anxiety levels among respondents

	Not at all		Several days		More than half the days		Nearly every day		Mean	Std dev
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	μ	σ
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	96	30.8	130	41.7	50	16.0	36	11.5	1.08	0.962
Not being able to stop or control worrying	97	31.1	104	33.3	75	24.0	36	11.5	1.16	0.995
Worrying too much about different things	37	11.9	139	44.6	36	11.5	100	32.1	1.64	1.055
Trouble relaxing	111	35.6	80	25.6	82	26.3	39	12.5	1.16	1.048
Being so restless it is hard to sit still	128	41.0	101	32.4	49	15.7	34	10.9	0.96	1.003
Becoming easily annoyed or	108	34.6	117	37.5	54	17.3	33	10.6	1.04	.972

irritable										
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	131	42.0	75	24.0	51	16.3	55	17.6	1.10	1.133
Multiple responses set (MRS)	708	32.4	746	34.2	397	18.2	333	15.2	1.16	1.024

Table 3 presents respondents' experiences of anxiety symptoms. The multiple response set mean ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 1.024$) suggests that respondents generally experienced anxiety occasionally rather than persistently, though some symptoms were more prevalent. This pattern aligns with the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, which is characterized by identity exploration, uncertainty about the future, and social pressures that can increase vulnerability to anxiety. Globally, studies have shown that emerging adults frequently report moderate levels of anxiety due to educational demands and social expectations. In Cameroon, research indicates that university students experience psychological distress related to academic pressures, financial challenges, and social adaptation difficulties [64]. The findings also resonate with Cognitive Behavioral Theory, which explains that maladaptive thought patterns contribute to heightened anxiety experiences. Overall, the results suggest that anxiety is a significant but intermittent experience among emerging adults in Fako Division.

The first symptom, feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge, was reported to occur mostly several days (41.7%), with 30.8% not experiencing it at all. Smaller proportions reported experiencing it more than half the days (16.0%) or nearly every day (11.5%), yielding a mean of $M = 1.08$, $SD = 0.962$. These results suggest that nervousness is an intermittent yet prominent experience. Globally, frequent nervousness among emerging adults has been linked to social media use and constant peer comparison, which intensifies perceived pressures. In African studies, including Cameroon, such anxiety is often associated with academic workload and economic stressors [65]. Social Comparison Theory also explains that observing peers' achievements online can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy, contributing to anxiety. This demonstrates that both cognitive and social factors influence the frequency of anxious feelings among emerging adults.

The symptom not being able to stop or control worrying was reported several days (33.3%) and more than half the days (24.0%), with 31.1% not experiencing it at all and 11.5% nearly every day, producing a mean of $M = 1.16$, $SD = 0.995$. These results indicate that difficulty controlling worry is moderately prevalent. Research has demonstrated that emerging adults are particularly prone to persistent worrying due to life transitions, social pressures, and exposure to online information overload. In Cameroon, students often worry about future employment, academic performance, and financial stability, which can intensify anxiety symptoms. Cognitive Behavioral Theory posits that such repetitive, negative thought patterns exacerbate anxiety experiences. The findings confirm that emerging adults' worry is shaped by both individual cognition and contextual stressors. Therefore, interventions should target both thought patterns and environmental factors to mitigate anxiety.

For worrying too much about different things, respondents reported experiencing this symptom several days (44.6%) and nearly every day (32.1%), yielding the highest mean ($M = 1.64$, $SD = 1.055$) among all anxiety indicators. This indicates that generalized worrying is a central aspect of anxiety for these emerging adults. Globally, emerging adults are prone to excessive worrying due to developmental challenges such as educational transitions, relational instability, and career uncertainties. In Cameroon and Africa more broadly, economic constraints and limited access to mental health resources exacerbate such worry [66]. Social Comparison Theory also suggests that exposure to curated online content may heighten perceptions of threat or inadequacy, amplifying anxiety. Cognitive interventions that address maladaptive thought patterns can therefore help mitigate excessive worry. These findings suggest that worrying about multiple life domains is a dominant feature of anxiety among emerging adults in Fako Division.

The symptom trouble relaxing was experienced several days (25.6%) and more than half the days (26.3%), with 35.6% not experiencing it at all and 12.5% nearly every day, yielding a mean of $M = 1.16$, $SD = 1.048$. Difficulty relaxing is commonly associated with stress and rumination, key components of anxiety. Globally, research has shown that emerging adults report moderate difficulty

relaxing due to academic pressures and social stressors. In Cameroon, studies indicate that students' academic and financial pressures contribute to psychosocial stress, manifesting in difficulty relaxing. Emerging Adulthood Theory further suggests that this life stage is marked by exploration and uncertainty, which can exacerbate restlessness and reduce relaxation. Social media use can also contribute, as constant connectivity may prevent adequate mental disengagement. The results emphasize the need for stress-reduction strategies for emerging adults experiencing intermittent anxiety.

Regarding being so restless that it is hard to sit still, most respondents reported not experiencing this symptom at all (41.0%), while 32.4% experienced it several days. Fewer respondents reported more than half the days (15.7%) or nearly every day (10.9%), producing a mean of $M = 0.96$, $SD = 1.003$. Restlessness was less prevalent compared to emotional anxiety symptoms, suggesting that physical manifestations of anxiety are less frequent in this population. Globally, restlessness among emerging adults is often linked to excessive worry and social stress. In African studies, including Cameroon, physical symptoms of anxiety may be underreported due to cultural norms around expressing distress. Cognitive Behavioral Theory explains that emotional and cognitive processes often precede or outweigh physical manifestations. This highlights that interventions may need to focus more on emotional regulation and cognitive coping skills.

Finally, becoming easily annoyed or irritable and feeling afraid as if something awful might happen were reported occasionally, with mean scores of $\mu = 1.04$, $SD = 0.972$ and $\mu = 1.10$, $SD = 1.133$, respectively. These symptoms reinforce the pattern of intermittent anxiety among respondents. Globally, irritability and anticipatory fear are key indicators of anxiety in emerging adults, often linked to cognitive distortions and social comparison processes. In Cameroon and other African contexts, such symptoms are compounded by academic pressure, economic uncertainty, and limited mental health support. The findings support the integration of Cognitive Behavioral Theory and Emerging Adulthood Theory, indicating that anxiety results from interactions between maladaptive thought patterns, social pressures, and developmental challenges. In general, respondents' anxiety is moderate, reflecting intermittent emotional and cognitive symptoms influenced by individual and contextual factors.

Correlation and Regression Analysis: Social Media Use and Anxiety among emerging adults in Fako Division

Table 4. Pearson Correlation between Frequency of Social Media Use and Anxiety

Variable	Frequency of Social Media Use	Anxiety Level
Frequency of Social Media Use	—	.48**
Anxiety Level	.48**	—

Note. $p < .01$

Table 4 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis examining the relationship between the frequency of social media use and anxiety levels among the participants. The findings revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant correlation between frequency of social media use and anxiety ($r = .48$, $p < .01$). This indicates that participants who reported using social media more frequently also tended to report higher levels of anxiety.

The correlation coefficient of .48 suggests a moderate association, implying that although frequency of social media use is not the only factor associated with anxiety, it has a meaningful relationship with anxiety levels. The positive direction of the relationship indicates that increases in social media use are associated with corresponding increases in anxiety levels. Since the probability value is less than .01, the relationship is statistically significant at the 1% level, indicating that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between frequency of social media use and anxiety is rejected. These findings suggest that greater engagement with social media is associated with higher levels of anxiety among the participants, although the correlation does not imply causation.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Predicting Anxiety from Frequency of Social Media Use

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	0.35	0.07	—	5.00	< .001
Social Media Frequency	0.27	0.04	.48	8.57	< .001

Table 5 presents the results of a simple linear regression analysis conducted to determine whether the frequency of social media use significantly predicts anxiety levels. The regression analysis revealed that frequency of social media use was a significant positive predictor of anxiety ($\beta = .48$, $t = 8.57$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that frequency of social media use makes a statistically significant contribution to explaining variations in anxiety levels among the participants. The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B = 0.27$, $SE = 0.04$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in the frequency of social media use, anxiety scores are expected to increase by 0.27 units, assuming all other factors remain constant. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .48$) further indicates a moderate positive effect of social media frequency on anxiety, consistent with the correlation analysis. In addition, the regression constant ($B = 0.35$, $p < .001$) represents the estimated anxiety score when the frequency of social media use is zero.

The regression findings provide evidence that frequent social media use significantly predicts higher anxiety levels among the respondents. The highly significant p-value ($p < .001$) indicates that the predictive relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Consequently, the null hypothesis that frequency of social media use does not significantly predict anxiety is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. These findings suggest that increased exposure to social media is associated with elevated anxiety, highlighting the need to encourage healthy and balanced social media use as part of strategies to promote psychological well-being.

This finding aligns with global literature indicating that excessive social media exposure can increase nervousness, worry, and restlessness due to social comparison, fear of missing out (FoMO), and constant exposure to peers' curated lives. In African contexts, including Cameroon, university students report that social media contributes to rumination, stress, and anticipatory worry, which heighten anxiety. The Cognitive Behavioral Theory explains that repeated exposure to anxiety-provoking stimuli online reinforces maladaptive thought patterns, increasing anxiety symptoms. Emerging Adulthood Theory also suggests that transitional life stressors amplify susceptibility to anxiety during high social media engagement. The regression results indicate that interventions aimed at moderating social media use could reduce anxiety levels by addressing both behavioral and cognitive factors.

The relationship between social media use and depression among emerging adults in Fako Division

Table 6. Depression levels among respondents

	Not at all		Several days		More than half the days		Nearly every day		Mean	Std dev
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	μ	σ
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	106	34.0	111	35.6	62	19.9	33	10.6	1.07	0.980
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	140	44.9	83	26.6	48	15.4	41	13.1	0.97	1.063
Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	123	39.4	79	25.3	76	24.4	34	10.9	1.07	1.036
Feeling tired or having little energy	84	26.9	108	34.6	78	25.0	42	13.5	1.25	0.999
Poor appetite or overeating	141	45.2	89	28.5	36	11.5	46	14.7	0.96	1.077
Feeling bad about yourself or that you are a failure	150	48.1	64	20.5	65	20.8	33	10.6	0.94	1.055
Trouble concentrating on things	91	29.2	115	36.9	55	17.6	51	16.3	1.21	1.039
Multiple responses set (MRS)	835	38.2	649	29.7	420	19.2	280	12.8	1.07	1.036

Table 6 presents respondents' experiences of depressive symptoms measured, where higher scores reveal frequent depressive symptoms. The multiple response set mean ($\mu = 1.07$, $SD = 1.036$) suggests that, overall, respondents experienced depression symptoms occasionally, although some items were more prevalent than others. This pattern aligns with Emerging Adulthood Theory, which identifies ages 18–29 as a period marked by exploration, instability, and psychosocial stressors that increase vulnerability to depressive moods. Globally, emerging adults often report moderate levels of depressive symptoms due to academic pressures, relational challenges, and uncertainty about the future. In Cameroon, studies indicate that university students face significant psychosocial stressors including financial instability, social adaptation challenges, and high academic expectations, which contribute to depressive experiences. Cognitive Behavioral Theory explains that negative thought patterns, maladaptive beliefs, and rumination contribute to depressive symptoms. Overall, these findings suggest that depression is a moderately present phenomenon among emerging adults in Fako Division.

The first item, little interest or pleasure in doing things, was reported as occurring several days (35.6%), not at all (34.0%), more than half the days (19.9%), and nearly every day (10.6%), producing a mean of $M = 1.07$, $SD = 0.980$. These results indicate that loss of interest or pleasure is moderately experienced among respondents. Globally, anhedonia is a hallmark symptom of depression among emerging adults, often associated with academic stress, social pressures, and online social comparison. In Cameroon, students report decreased engagement in daily activities due to stressors such as financial difficulties and academic workload. CBT suggests that negative cognitions and perceived failures can decrease motivation and pleasure in activities. Social media use may exacerbate anhedonia by reinforcing perceptions of inadequacy or social exclusion. These findings highlight the need for interventions promoting engagement and positive cognitive appraisal. The symptom's moderate prevalence underscores its significance among emerging adults in Fako Division.

Regarding feeling down, depressed, or hopeless, most respondents reported not at all (44.9%), several days (26.6%), more than half the days (15.4%), and nearly every day (13.1%), with a mean of $M = 0.97$, $SD = 1.063$. These results suggest that feelings of sadness and hopelessness are less frequent than other depressive symptoms but still present in a notable proportion of respondents. Globally, emerging adults are particularly vulnerable to episodic depressive moods due to life transitions, uncertainty, and social comparison. In Cameroon, university students report depressive feelings linked to academic failure concerns, financial insecurity, and future uncertainty. Social Comparison Theory explains that observing peers' achievements online can contribute to hopelessness by fostering negative self-perception. CBT emphasizes that depressive thinking patterns, including self-critical thoughts and negative expectations, amplify these feelings. The results suggest interventions targeting both cognitive reframing and social support are needed to alleviate hopelessness.

The symptom trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much was reported not at all (39.4%), several days (25.3%), more than half the days (24.4%), and nearly every day (10.9%), producing a mean of $M = 1.07$, $SD = 1.036$. Sleep disturbance is a common feature of depression globally, linked to stress, rumination, and excessive online activity that disrupts circadian rhythms. In African contexts, including Cameroon, university students report disrupted sleep patterns due to academic demands, financial stress, and nighttime social media use. Emerging Adulthood Theory suggests that this life stage's instability can exacerbate sleep problems as routines are irregular and responsibilities accumulate. CBT for insomnia supports that maladaptive thought patterns and rumination exacerbate sleep difficulties. Social media use, particularly at night, has been associated with delayed sleep onset and reduced sleep quality. These findings highlight the interplay between lifestyle, cognition, and environmental factors in depressive sleep symptoms.

For feeling tired or having little energy, respondents reported several days (34.6%), not at all (26.9%), more than half the days (25.0%), and nearly every day (13.5%), producing a mean of $M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.999$. Fatigue is a central symptom of depression, often resulting from disrupted sleep, rumination, and chronic stress. Globally, emerging adults experience fatigue as a result of academic, social, and career-related stressors. In Cameroon, fatigue among students is often compounded by long study

hours, household responsibilities, and financial pressures. Emerging Adulthood Theory emphasizes that the developmental stage's instability can lead to irregular routines and increased stress, exacerbating fatigue. Social media can contribute indirectly by encouraging late-night engagement and cognitive hyperarousal. These findings suggest the need for strategies promoting energy management, healthy routines, and stress reduction among emerging adults.

Poor appetite or overeating was reported not at all (45.2%), several days (28.5%), more than half the days (11.5%), and nearly every day (14.7%), yielding a mean of $M = 0.96$, $SD = 1.077$. This indicates that appetite changes are present but not the most prevalent depressive symptom. Globally, appetite dysregulation is linked to depressive mood, stress, and disrupted circadian rhythms. In Cameroon, emerging adults report changes in eating patterns related to academic pressure, financial stress, and psychological distress. CBT explains that negative mood and maladaptive thinking can affect physiological symptoms such as appetite. Social media may indirectly affect appetite through exposure to lifestyle comparisons or sleep disruption. The results indicate that while appetite changes are present, they are less central than fatigue or anhedonia.

Finally, feeling bad about yourself or that you are a failure ($M = 0.94$, $SD = 1.055$) and trouble concentrating on things ($M = 1.21$, $SD = 1.039$) were moderately experienced. These findings show that cognitive and self-evaluative symptoms are present in emerging adults but are less frequent than emotional symptoms such as fatigue or loss of interest. Globally, low self-esteem and concentration difficulties are common in emerging adult depression, often exacerbated by social comparison and life stressors. In Cameroon, students' academic and financial pressures, combined with social expectations, increase self-critical thoughts and cognitive distraction. CBT explains that negative cognitive schemas contribute to these depressive symptoms. The results suggest interventions focusing on cognitive restructuring, stress management, and study skills could reduce depressive symptoms in this population. Overall, the multiple response set shows that depressive symptoms are moderately present, highlighting the need for preventive and supportive mental health measures.

Correlation and Regression Analysis: Social Media Use and Depression levels among emerging adults in Fako Division

Table 7. Pearson Correlation between Frequency of Social Media Use and Depression

Variable	Frequency of Social Media Use	Depression Level
Frequency of Social Media Use	—	.42**
Depression Level	.42**	—

Note. $p < .01$

Table 7 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis examining the relationship between the frequency of social media use and depression levels among the participants. The findings revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant correlation between frequency of social media use and depression ($r = .42$, $p < .01$). This indicates that participants who reported using social media more frequently also tended to report higher levels of depression. The correlation coefficient of .42 indicates a moderate positive association, suggesting that although frequency of social media use is not the only factor associated with depression, it has a meaningful relationship with depression levels. The positive direction of the relationship implies that increases in social media use are associated with corresponding increases in depression levels. Since the probability value is less than .01, the relationship is statistically significant at the 1% level, indicating that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between frequency of social media use and depression is rejected. These findings suggest that greater engagement with social media is associated with higher levels of depression among the participants, although the correlation does not imply causation.

Table 8. Regression Analysis Predicting Depression from Frequency of Social Media Use

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	P
Constant	0.38	0.08	—	4.75	< .001
Social Media Frequency	0.22	0.04	.42	7.31	< .001

Table 8 presents the results of a simple linear regression analysis conducted to determine whether the frequency of social media use significantly predicts depression levels. The regression analysis revealed that frequency of social media use was a significant positive predictor of depression ($\beta = .42$, $t = 7.31$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that frequency of social media use makes a statistically significant contribution to explaining variations in depression levels among the participants. The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B = 0.22$, $SE = 0.04$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in the frequency of social media use, depression scores are expected to increase by 0.22 units, assuming all other factors remain constant. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .42$) further indicates a moderate positive effect of social media frequency on depression, consistent with the correlation analysis. In addition, the regression constant ($B = 0.38$, $p < .001$) represents the estimated depression score when the frequency of social media use is zero.

The regression findings provide evidence that frequent social media use significantly predicts higher depression levels among the respondents. The highly significant p-value ($p < .001$) indicates that the predictive relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Consequently, the null hypothesis that frequency of social media use does not significantly predict depression is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. These findings suggest that increased exposure to social media is associated with elevated depression, highlighting the need to encourage healthy and balanced social media use as part of strategies to promote psychological well-being.

Globally, excessive social media engagement has been linked to anhedonia, low self-esteem, fatigue, and rumination, core symptoms of depression. In Cameroon and Africa, studies indicate that social media exacerbates depressive moods due to comparisons with peers' achievements, exposure to negative content, and disrupted routines. Social Comparison Theory explains that observing idealized lives online can trigger self-criticism, hopelessness, and feelings of failure (Festinger, 1954). CBT posits that repeated exposure to negative online experiences reinforces cognitive distortions and depressive thinking. The regression analysis indicates that targeted interventions to reduce overuse of social media and cognitive restructuring could mitigate depression levels among emerging adults.

Integrated Correlation and Regression: Social Media Use, Anxiety and Depression

Table 9. Integrated correlation and regression: Social Media Use, Anxiety and Depression

Predictor	Outcome	r	β	R^2
Social Media Use	Anxiety	0.48	0.27	0.23
Social Media Use	Depression	0.42	0.22	0.18

Table 9 presents an integrated summary of the correlation and regression analyses examining the relationships between frequency of social media use, anxiety, and depression. The results indicate that frequency of social media use was positively associated with both anxiety and depression and significantly predicted both mental health outcomes. The correlation analysis showed a moderate positive relationship between frequency of social media use and anxiety ($r = 0.48$) and a slightly weaker but still moderate positive relationship with depression ($r = 0.42$). These findings indicate that participants who used social media more frequently tended to report higher levels of both anxiety and depression. The regression results further demonstrate that frequency of social media use significantly predicted both anxiety and depression. For anxiety, the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.27$) indicates that a one-unit increase in the frequency of social media use was associated with a 0.27-unit increase in anxiety scores, while the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.23$) shows that 23% of the variation in anxiety levels was explained by the frequency of social media use. For depression, the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.22$) indicates that a one-unit increase in the frequency of social media use was associated with a 0.22-unit increase in depression scores, and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 =$

0.18) indicates that 18% of the variation in depression levels was explained by the frequency of social media use.

The findings indicate that frequency of social media use had a stronger relationship with anxiety than with depression, as reflected by the higher correlation coefficient ($r = 0.48$ versus $r = 0.42$) and the greater proportion of explained variance (23% versus 18%). These results suggest that although frequent social media use is associated with both anxiety and depression, its predictive influence is more pronounced for anxiety. The findings provide evidence that increased engagement with social media is linked to poorer mental health outcomes, particularly elevated anxiety and depression among the participants. These results are consistent with global literature, which identifies social media as a double-edged sword: it offers social connectivity and information, but excessive use increases psychological distress, FoMO, and rumination. In the Cameroonian context, economic pressures, academic workload, and transitional stress amplify the psychological effects of social media. adults in Fako Division.

Conclusion

The study sought the effect of social media use on anxiety and depression in Fako Division. The findings revealed that the purpose of social media use has a significant effect on anxiety and depressive symptoms of Emerging adults. Also, the study revealed that the frequency of social media use by emerging adults have a significant effect on the anxiety and depressive symptoms of emerging adults in Fako Division. Furthermore, the findings pointed out that there is a stronger correlation between frequency of social media use and anxiety than depression. Thus, this shows that more emerging adults will suffer from anxiety than depression as they use social media. Emerging Adulthood Theory highlights that this developmental stage is inherently vulnerable due to transitional stressors, identity exploration, and life instability, which can amplify the psychological impacts of social media engagement. Collectively, these findings underscore that social media is a double-edged sword: while it facilitates connectivity and information access, excessive use may predispose emerging adults to anxiety and depression, particularly in contexts with socio-economic and academic stressors such as Fako Division.

Recommendations

Educational institutions and community organizations in Fako Division should develop programs that educate emerging adults about responsible and balanced social media engagement, emphasizing the recognition of negative online content and setting time limits to reduce overuse. Globally, digital literacy interventions have been shown to reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms related to social media. Also, mental health practitioners and counseling services should introduce CBT-based workshops targeting maladaptive thought patterns and rumination associated with social media exposure. Techniques such as cognitive restructuring and stress management can help reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms, consistent with findings from CBT theory. Similarly, emerging adults should be encouraged to strengthen offline social connections, including peer support, family engagement, and mentorship programs. Research indicates that strong social support mitigates the psychological effects of social media overuse, particularly in African contexts where communal ties are culturally significant. Furthermore, universities and colleges should integrate mental health education into curricula, sensitizing students about anxiety and depression, their symptoms, and coping strategies. Awareness campaigns and counseling centers can provide early identification and intervention, which is crucial during the transitional phase of emerging adulthood. Moreso, emerging adults should be guided to adopt healthy routines, including adequate sleep, regular physical activity, and time away from screens. Such lifestyle adjustments have been associated with reduced depressive and anxiety symptoms linked to excessive social media use.

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