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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LONELINESS, IDENTITY FORMATION, AND SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between loneliness, identity formation and social media addiction among undergraduate students, one hundred and Forty-Six (146) undergraduate students comprising of 44 males and 102 females with a mean age of 20.78 and S. D of 2.197 were drawn using multi-stage (cluster, simple random: by balloting and purposive) sampling techniques as participants from enugu state university of science and technology, enugu. The ulcla loneliness scale, ego identity process questionnaire and bergen social media addiction scale were used for data collection. The researcher adopted a correlational design, a Pearson Moment Coefficient correlation with the aid of the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 27. Findings revealed that loneliness r= .133 and identity formation r= .101 at p< .05 did not relate to social media addiction. Therapists should work with students to help them understand that as they grow older, there are specific tasks and responsibilities they need to address.

Keywords: *aloneness, identity crisis, loneliness, social media addiction*

Introduction

In today's world, social media addiction is prevalent among young people with many spending several hours a day scrolling through their social media feeds, this excessive use is often accompanied by feelings of loneliness, disconnection, and uncertainty about their identities, it is prevalent in our daily lives, changing how people communicate individually as well as professionally. The need of social media in the modern era has been phenomenally growing (Abbasi, 2019). Users are able to create individual public profiles, meet other people with common interests, and connect with real-life friends through the virtual communities in social networking sites (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). There are numerous active social media sites that encourage the development of social networking sites, particularly the more prominent ones like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Social media addiction, also known as problematic social media use or compulsive social networking, can be referred to as an excessive and compulsive engagement with social media platforms, leading to negative consequences in various areas of life (Obodo, 2024).

Individuals with social media addiction may experience withdrawal symptoms, difficulty controlling their usage, and prioritizing online interactions over real life activities (Kuff & Griffiths,2011). Social media addiction is the compulsive use of online social networking platforms to the extent that it interferes with daily activities and personal relationships. It involves a dependency on virtual interactions, often at the expense of real-life connections (Turkle, 2011). Social media addiction refers to the uncontrollable urge to engage with social networking sites, leading to excessive usage patterns that disrupt normal daily routines and interpersonal relationships (Twenge, 2017). Social media addiction, as conceptualized by Kuss & Griffiths (2017), encompasses addictive behaviours associated with social networking sites.

These behaviours include compulsive checking of information, spending excessive time on social media platform, and experiencing withdrawal symptoms offline. The negative consequences of social media addiction includes: low self-esteem and comparing oneself to others, increased isolation, and loneliness, fear of missing out and feeling excluded (FOMO), social anxiety and embarrassment. Studies have convincingly documented that social media addiction is common among university and college students and that this addiction is harmful to their mental health and academic performance (Berryman et al., 2018; Cain, 2018; Kircaburun et al., 2018). For instance, it may result in decreased academic performance due to distractions and procrastination caused by excessive social media use. Also, spending too much time on social media can disrupt student's ability to concentrate during lectures and study sessions, impacting their learning outcomes.

Symptoms of social media addiction may include being constantly preoccupied with social media, spending excessive time on it, feeling unable to control usage, experiencing anxiety or irritability when unable to access it, neglecting responsibilities and relationships because of it, using it as a way to escape problems, and compulsively checking for updates even in inappropriate situations and using it to create contents, etc. The common causes of social media addiction includes: lack of affection and group support, the need for validation, the need for a widespread of and growing social influence, the need to reaffirm group identity, personal gratification from social media use, using social media to get away from unpleasant realities (family conflict, poor romantic relationships, etc).

In understanding loneliness, we draw from the work of (Hawkley & Cacioppo 2010), who defined it as more than just physical isolation but as a subjective feeling of disconnection. Their research sheds light on how societal changes and technology can contribute to feelings of loneliness, even in a world where we are more connected than ever. Studies have that individuals who are lonely are more predisposed to consume social media, the more tendencies of being addictive to social media. Loneliness refers to the subjective feeling of being socially isolated or lacking companionship. It is characterized by a sense of emptiness or disconnection, even when surrounded by others (Obodo, 2024). Individuals experiencing loneliness may perceive a gap between the quality and quantity of their social relationships and their level of connection (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).Loneliness is a universal human experience(Rotenberg,1999) which speaks to our deep human need to connect with one another and the fundamental role fullfilling social and emotional relationships have for good human health and well-being.

Loneliness manifests in various ways, both physically and emotionally. Emotionally, it involves feelings of sadness, emptiness, or isolation, even when surrounded by others. There's often a deep longing for connection and meaningful relationships, yet a sense of inability to form or maintain them. Physically, loneliness can lead to symptoms such as fatigue, changes in appetite, sleep disturbances, headaches, or digestive issue. Individuals may also become more sensitive to rejection or criticism, and negative thought patterns like pessimism or rumination may develop. Some may seek distractions or engage in risky behaviors to cope with loneliness. Contributing factors to loneliness include situational variables, such as physical isolation, moving to a new location, and divorce. the death of someone significant in a person's life can also lead to feelings of loneliness. Additionally, it can be a symptom of a psychological disorder such as depression. Depression often causes people to withdrawal socially, which can lead to isolation. Research also suggests that loneliness can be a factor that contributes to symptoms of depression. Loneliness can also be attributed to internal factors such as low self-esteem. People who lack confidence in themselves often believe that they are unworthy of the

attention or regard of other people, which can lead to isolation and chronic loneliness. Personality factors may also play a role, introverts, for example, might be less likely to cultivate and seek social connections, which can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Experiencing loneliness can lead to feelings of sadness and dissatisfaction. It can also have physical implications, such as fatigue and overall diminished health. Loneliness can pose challenges in forming and maintaining meaningful relationships, and it can adversely affect one's overall well-being.

Identity Formation refers to the process through which individuals develop a sense of self and establish a coherent understanding of who they are, including their values, beliefs and goals (Obodo, 2024). Identity formation according to Erik Erikson (1950) is the process through which individuals develop a coherent sense of self by exploring and synthesizing various aspects of their identity. This involves navigating through identity crises and resolving conflicts between different roles and identities. James Marcia expanded upon Erikson's work in the 1960s and 1970s by introducing the concept of identity statuses, which describes different stages of identity development based on the presence of or absence of exploration and commitment in identity-relevant domains. The symptoms of identity formation could include confusion about values and goals, uncertainty in roles and responsibilities, self-doubt, low self-esteem, difficulty in decision making, social withdrawal, mood swings, impulsive behavior, challenges in forming intimate relationships, and existential concerns about life's meaning.

Identity formation is influenced by various factors such as family dynamics and peer relationships.
Family dynamics: The family environment, including parental attitudes, values, and communication patterns, plays a significant role in shaping individuals identity.
Peer Relationships. Interactions with peers, peer pressure, and group norms provide a social context for identity exploration and validation, influencing individual's self-concepts and behaviors, etc. Identity formation difficulties can have significant consequences that affect various aspects of an individual's life. Emotionally, these difficulties can lead to feelings of confusion, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with oneself. This emotional distress can spill over into personal relationships, making difficult to form meaningful connections with others. Career - wise, individuals may struggle to align their personal values and goals with chosen profession, leading to uncertainty and dissatisfaction in their careers. Low self-esteem always accompanies identity struggles, as individuals may doubt their worth and capabilities, impacting their confidence and general well-being.

Loneliness can lead individuals to seek validation and connection through social media platforms as a means of alleviating feelings of isolation. Hover, excessive reliance on social media for self-validation can hinder healthy identity formation. The curated nature of social media profiles may lead individuals to compare themselves to others and strive for an unrealistic standard of identity, potentially resulting in identity confusion and dissatisfaction. This reliance on social media for identity development can further exacerbate feelings of loneliness, creating a cycle of dependency on digital interactions rather than meaningful real-life connections, ultimately contributing to social media addiction. In conclusion, loneliness, identity formation, and social media addiction are connected in complicated ways. When people use social media, they might they might feel lonely because they see others portray and live "perfect lives" online. This can make them feel disconnected and unsure of themselves, they might also get addicted to social media while trying to feel connected and liked. This study explores how these three variables are connected and find ways to stop the cycle of loneliness

and confusion. We want to help people have healthier online habits, more real life connections, and a stronger sense of self.

Statement of the problem
In recent years, the pervasive use of social media platforms has become a prominent aspect of modern communication and interaction. While social media use offers various benefits in terms of connectivity and information sharing, there is growing concern about the potential negative effects it may have on individual's mental health and well-being. Loneliness, as a prevalent and distressing emotional experience, has been linked to social media use. Despite its potential to facilitate social connections, social media can also contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation due to the lack of genuine, in-person interactions and the superficial nature of online relationships.

Moreover, social media platforms provide individuals with a platform to construct and present their identities, leading to concerns about the impact of social comparison and self-presentation on identity formation. The constant exposure to curated images and content on social media can influence individuals' perceptions of themselves and others, potentially leading to identity confusion, low self-esteem, and a distorted sense of self.

Additionally, the addictive nature of social media has raised concerns about the risk of developing problematic behaviours and dependency on digital platforms. Individuals may use social media as a coping mechanism for loneliness and social anxiety, leading to excessive use and compulsive behaviours that interfere with their daily responsibilities and relationships. Therefore, this study aims to explore the intricate relationship between loneliness, identity formation and social media addiction. By examining how these factors intersect and influence each other, the research seeks to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the negative impact of social media on mental health. Ultimately, this study aims to inform interventions and strategies that promote healthier patterns of social media use, support individuals in forming authentic identities, and enhance social connectedness in the digital age. Hence the research question:
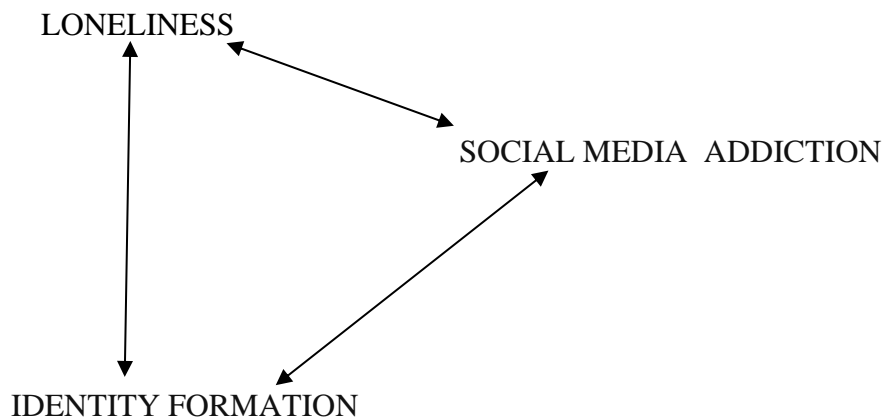
- Will loneliness significantly relate to social media addiction among undergraduate students?
- Will identity formation significantly relate to social media addiction among undergraduate students?

Purpose of the study
This study examined the relationship between loneliness, identity formation, and social media addiction among undergraduate students.

- To investigate whether there will be a relationship between loneliness and social media addiction among undergraduates.
- To explore whether there will be a relationship between identity formation and social media addiction among undergraduates.

Conceptual framework:

LONELINESS

SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

IDENTITY FORMATION

Fig 1: This diagram illustrates the relationships between loneliness, identity formation and social media addiction among undergraduates students.

Theoretical Framework

Among the various theories discussed, the cognitive-behavioural theory by Young (1990) appears to be the most suitable for this study, the relationship between loneliness, identity formation, and social media addiction among undergraduates, the cognitive-behavioral theory holds in its simplest form. Cognitive-behavioural theory (1990) says that our problems often come from negative thoughts and behaviours. It looks at how our thoughts and actions affects each other and our feelings. When it comes to social media addiction, cognitive-behavioural theory (1990s) explains how negative thoughts and actions can make people use social media too much. People who feel lonely often think that online interactions can replace real-life connections. This can lead them to spend a lot of time on social media to feel less lonely. This temporary feeling of connection makes them want to use social media even more, creating a cycle of dependence. During the time when people are figuring out who they are, especially teenagers, they look for validation and feedback to build their self-identity. Social media gives them a big audience for this.

However, constantly comparing themselves to others and needing online validation can lead to thoughts like, "I am only valuable if I get likes and comments." These thoughts can make them post more and carefully create their online image, leading to social media addiction. Cognitive-behavioural theory (1990s) explains how loneliness and identity formation are linked to social media addiction. Lonely people use social media to feel connected and validated. This makes them believe that social media helps them cope, leading to more use. Teenagers, in particular, use social media to explore and confirm their identities. Positive feedback from social media makes this behaviour a habit. These patterns of thoughts and behaviours strengthen each other making the reliance on social media even stronger. Cognitive-behavioural theory suggests ways to break this cycle. Cognitive restructuring involves changing negative thoughts about social media and its role in dealing with loneliness or shaping identity. Behavioural interventions focus on developing healthier ways to cope with loneliness and more balanced ways to explore identity that don't depend so much on social media. In summary, while other theories provide valuable insights, cognitive-behavioral theory stands out for its practical framework in understanding how negative thoughts and behaviours related to loneliness and identity formation contribute to social media addiction. By implementing cognitive-behavioural strategies, individuals can mitigate the negative impacts of social media addiction and foster healthier online habits.

Social Media Addiction and Loneliness

Wang et al. (2022) conducted a comprehensive study examining the motivations behind social media use among lonely individuals. They found that lonely people often use social media as a coping mechanism to deal with their isolation. The study revealed that the immediate gratification from online interactions can create a dependency, as individuals increasingly rely on social media to meet their social needs.

Twenge and Campbell (2022), explored the psychological impacts of social media use on lonely individuals. They discovered that the need for social validation and reassurance drives lonely individuals to engage more frequently with social media. The study indicated that this need for validation leads to addictive behaviours, as individuals continually seek likes, comments, and other forms of online affirmation.

Roberts et al. (2022), further investigated the relationship between loneliness and social media addiction. Their findings suggest that lonely individuals are more prone to developing addictive patterns due to their heightened need for their social interaction. This study emphasized that the more lonely a person feels, the more likely they are to use social media excessively in an attempt to alleviate their loneliness.

In a study by Vogel et al. (2022), researchers examined how social media use impacts feelings of loneliness; they found out that while social media can provide a temporary sense of connection, it often exacerbates feelings of loneliness in the long run. The study showed that excessive use of social media could lead to increased feelings of isolation and depression, creating a vicious cycle where individuals use social media more to combat these negative feelings, thereby deepening their addiction.

A study by Baker and Algorta, 2016, found a strong positive correlation between loneliness and social media addiction. Their research showed that individuals who feel lonely are more likely to use social media excessively, seeking to fill the void left by a lack of real-life social interactions. This behavior often leads to a cycle of dependency, where the temporary relief provided by social media interactions reinforces continued use.

Social Media Addiction and Identity Formation

Michikyan et al. (2024), conducted a study that examined how adolescents use social media for identity formation. The findings indicated that social media serves as a significant space for adolescents to experiment with identities and receive feedback from peers. This process of exploration and validation can lead to increased social media use. The study suggested that while this can be beneficial for identity development, it may also foster addictive behaviors if individuals rely excessively on social media for validation.

Lup et al. (2023), extended this research by exploring the impact of social media on identity formation and its link to addiction. They found that the pressure to present an idealized version of oneself on social media can lead to identity confusion and stress. Adolescents who experience these pressures may turn to social media more frequently, seeking affirmation and validation. This behaviour can become habitual, contributing to social media addiction.

Barthorpe et al. (2023), investigated the role of comparison on social media and its effects on identity development; this study revealed that constant comparison with peers on social media platforms can negatively impact on self-esteem and identity development. This comparison often leads to a desire for social validation, reinforcing addictive behaviours as individuals strive to align their self-perception with their online persona. The research highlighted that

individuals who frequently compare themselves to others are more likely to develop addictive patterns of use.

Yang and Brown (2016), explored the relationship between social media use, identity formation, and self-esteem among young adults. They found that excessive social media use can undermine self-esteem and lead to identity issues. The need to maintain a favorable online image can cause stress and anxiety, which in turn can drive individuals to use social media compulsively in an attempt to manage these negative emotions.

Hypotheses
The following hypotheses were tested:
- There will be a relationship between loneliness and social media addiction.
- There will be a relationship between identity formation and social media addiction.

Method
Participants
One hundred and Forty-Six (146) undergraduate students comprising of 44 males and 102 females with a mean age of 20.78 and S. D of 2.197 were drawn using multi-stage (cluster, simple random: by balloting and purposive) sampling techniques on participants from Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu State. The students were clustered according to their faculties, simple random: balloting was used to pick the faculties/departments, while purposive sampling techniques were used to select the participants, from Applied Natural Sciences thirty (30), from the faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resource Management twenty-eight (28), from Environmental sciences twenty-seven (27), from Engineering twenty-nine (29) and from Law thirty-two (32).

Instruments
A questionnaire comprising demographic information and three (3) instruments were used in this study, and the instruments are;
  I.   The ULCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell & Cutrona, 1978),
 II.   Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Ballistreri et al., 1986), and
III.   Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (Andreassean et al, 2016).

ULCLA Loneliness Scale (Peplau, Russell & Cutrona, 1978)
The ULCLA Loneliness scale, developed by Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1978), is a widely used tool for assessing subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation, with its various versions –original (1978), revised (1980), and the third version (1996)-consisting of 12 items measured on a 4-point Likert scale where higher scores indicate greater levels of loneliness. It has demonstrated high internal consistency, strong test-retest reliability, and good convergent and discriminant validity, correlating well with other measures if loneliness and related constructs. The scale is used extensively in psychological and sociological research, clinical assessments, and large-scale population studies to examine the prevalence and impact of loneliness on mental and physical health. Typically administered as a self-report questionnaire, it can also be conducted through structured interviews, though it relies on self-perception and may be influenced by cultural differences and situational factors. Despite these limitations, the ULCLA Loneliness Scale is respected for its reliability and validity in various contexts.

Researchers utilize the ULCLA Loneliness scale in studies investigating loneliness prevalence, its impact on mental health, social behaviours, and overall quality of life. Clinicians also employ it to assess loneliness as a potential risk factor for conditions like depression and

anxiety. Scores on the range from 20 to 80, with higher scores indicating greater levels of loneliness. These scores help categorize individuals into different severity levels of loneliness, aiding researchers and clinicians in interpreting results and identifying interventions. Beyond its direct applications, the ULCLA Loneliness Scale has been pivotal in uncovering factors associated with loneliness, such as social support availability, relationship quality, and demographic variables. Its widespread adoption underscores its significance n advancing our understanding of loneliness as a complex emotional and social phenomenon. The researchers carried out a pilot study with 30 students drawn from university of Nigeria, Enugu campus, with the aid of purposive sampling techniques, which yielded a Cronbach alpha of .863

Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Ballisteri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1986)

The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), was developed by Ballisteri, Busch-Rossnagel, and Geinsinger (1986), drawing upon Erikson's psychosocial theory of development. Erikson proposed that individuals navigate through stages of psychosocial development, with adolescence and emerging adulthood being pivotal for the formation of a stable sense of self. The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire operationalizes Erikson's concepts into measurable dimensions that capture the dynamic process of identity exploration and commitment. At its core, the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire employs a Likert scale format to assess two primary dimensions: exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to the active exploration of various roles, beliefs, and life directions. It measures the extent to which individual engage in introspection, experimentation, and consideration of different options. Commitment, on the other hand, assesses the strength and certainty of commitments made to specific duties, values, or goals. High commitment reflects a firm decision and internalization of chosen identities, while low commitment suggests ongoing exploration or uncertainty. The questionnaire has been extensively validated across different populations, demonstrating strong psychometric properties such as reliability and validity. Researchers utilize the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire to investigate how identity processes influence psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, educational attainment, career choices, and overall life satisfaction. Its adaptability across cultures allows for cross-cultural comparisons, revealing insights into how identity development varies across different societal contexts. In clinical practice, the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire serves as a valuable tool for assessing identity statuses and identifying potential identity conflicts or crises. Psychologists and counsellors use it to guide interventions aimed at supporting clients' healthy identity development, resolving identity-related issues, and enhancing self-understanding. Its longitudinal application enables researchers to track changes in identity status over time, providing a developmental perspective on how individuals' identities evolve in response to life experiences and transitions.

Educationally, the Ego Process Identity Questionnaire informs studies on academic achievement, vocational decision-making and identity-related challenges among students and young adults. It is theory-driven; aligning closely with Erikson's psychosocial stages, and has been adapted to explore identity issues specific to diverse populations, including gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. The researchers carried out a pilot study with 30 students drawn from university of Nigeria, Enugu campus, with the aid of purposive sampling techniques, which yielded a Cronbach alpha of .902

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (Andreassen, et al., 2016)
The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) was developed by Andreassen and colleagues (2016), to measure the extent of social media addiction, characterized by excessive,

compulsive use of social media platforms that interferes with daily life and functioning. This scale was created to provide a reliable and valid measure of social media addiction, based on the core components of addiction, including salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse, which are adapted from general addiction theories to fit the contexts of social media use. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale consists of six items, each corresponding to one of the core addiction components. Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very rarely) to 5 (very often). The items includes; you spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning to use it, You feel an urge to use social media more and more, you use social media to forget about personal problems, you have tried to cut down o the use of social media without success, you become restless or troubled if you are prohibited from using social media, you use social media so much that it has had a negative impact on your job/studies. The total score is calculated by summing the responses to the six items, with the higher scores indicating a higher level of social media addiction. A cut-off score can be used to identify individuals who may be at risk of social media addiction. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale has demonstrated good psychometric properties, including high internal consistency, reliability, and validity across different cultural context. It has been used in numerous studies to explore the prevalence and impact of social media addiction.

Researchers and clinicians use the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale to assess social media addiction in various populations, including adolescents, young adults, and adults. It helps identify individuals who may benefit from interventions to reduce their excessive social media use. The scale also aids in understanding the psychological and behavioural correlates of social media addiction, such as its relationship with mental health issues, academic performance, and social interactions. Overall, the Bergen Social Media Scale provides a concise and effective tool for measuring social media addiction, contributing to research and clinical practice by offering insights into patterns and consequences of problematic social media use. The researchers carried out a pilot study with 30 students drawn from university of Nigeria, Enugu campus, with the aid of purposive sampling techniques, which yielded a Cronbach alpha of .859

Procedure
Undergraduate students were drawn as participants from five faculties in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) using multi-stage sampling (cluster, simple random: by balloting, and purposive) techniques for this study. The students were clustered according to their faculties, simple random: balloting was used to pick the faculties, while purposive sampling techniques were used to draw students from the five selected faculties. The researcher employed the research assistants, who are faculty-student executives from the selected faculties, to help distribute and retrieve the questionnaire. One hundred and fifty-seven (157) questionnaires were distributed; one hundred and fifty-three (153) were returned. Among the returning ones, five (5) bear multiple initials and the other two (2) were not properly responded to, which makes the numbers properly responded to be one hundred and forty-six (146), which were used for data analysis.

Design/statistics
The research adopted a correlational design because the researcher is investigating the relationship between loneliness, identity formation and social media addiction. Hence a Pearson Moment Coefficient correlation with the aid of the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 27 was used for data analysis.

Result

Table I: descriptive and correlation statistics on the loneliness and ego identity process as a correlate of social media addiction

S/N	Variables	M	S. D	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Social media addiction	34.87	9.508	1	.101	.133	.062	.143	.064
2	Identity formation	55.23	11.54		1	-.082	.120	.292**	-.092
3	Loneliness	28.13	7.573			1	-.141	.221**	-.101
4	Age	20.78	2.197				1	-.036	.011
5	Gender	1.88	.321					1	-.134
6	marital status	1.18	.478						1

At $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Table I above shows that loneliness r= .133 and identity formation r= .101 at p< .05 did not relate to social media addiction. Identity formation r= .292** and loneliness r= .221** at p< .01 positively relates to gender, this means that the presence of gender will cause the presence of both ego identity process and loneliness among undergraduate students. Loneliness r= -.082 did not relate to identity formation.

Discussion

The first hypothesis tested stated that loneliness will significantly relate to social media addiction was not confirmed, hence the hypothesis was rejected. The results of the study indicate that loneliness did not play a role in social media addiction among undergraduate students, it is not the sole determining factor. The study did not examine other potential influencers such as self-esteem and psychological well-being, both of which may significantly contribute to students' addiction to the internet. This suggests that there are multiple complex factors at play and that loneliness alone may not be the primary driver of excessive internet usage among students. The study's findings indicate that there is no substantial connection between feelings of loneliness and addiction to social media. This suggests that one's experience of loneliness does not consistently lead to social media addiction, and vice versa.

The result obtained was incongruity with the findings of Roberts et al. (2022) who found out in their study that the lonelier a student is, the more likely they tend to be addicted to social media. But this study outcome indicated a negative result, many factors might have contributed to the divergent result obtained. One such reason is cultural variation, the cited author used a foreign culture. Different instruments used, and other factors.

The second hypothesis tested which stated that identity formation will significantly relate to social media addiction was not confirmed, hence the hypothesis was rejected. The results of the study show that there is no significant relationship between identity formation and social media addiction. This means that the process of forming one's identity does not have a direct impact on the level of addiction to social media. It suggests that factors other than identity formation could be influencing the variance in social media addiction among students, factors that were not explored in this particular study.

The findings are not incongruity with the study of Michikyan et al. (2024) which postulated that the student process of forming an identity can contribute to them being addicted to social media. But the results from this study indicated a negative result from the cited author, some factors might be responsible for the divergent result obtained. One of such factor is the cultural variation, the cited author used a different culture from the one used by this study. A different instruments and other factors.

Implications of the findings

The findings are in agreement with cognitive-behavioural theory (Young, 1990), which was adopted as the theoretical framework because it holds in its simplest form and postulates that students' problems often come from negative thoughts and behaviours. It looks at how their thoughts and actions affect each other and our feelings. When it comes to social media addiction, cognitive-behavioural theory (1990) explains how negative thoughts and actions can make people use social media too much. People who feel lonely often think that online interactions can replace real-life connections. This can lead them to spend a lot of time on social media to feel less lonely. Though social media alone is not enough to take care of the loneliness issue.

The results from this study were not in line with the empirical work reviewed like the study of Roberts et al. (2022), Lup et al. (2023), who found that loneliness, identity formation and social media addiction are related. However, the findings from this study have added to the literature that can be cited by future researcher.

The research findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between loneliness, identity formation, and social media addiction. However, the study shows a positive correlation between age and both identity formation and loneliness. This suggests that as individuals' age, their sense of identity and feelings of loneliness may change. Therapists should work with students to help them understand that as they grow older, there are specific tasks and responsibilities they need to address. Failing to do so could lead to negative events or outcomes. Parents and caregivers need to foster an appreciation for the ageing process and the advantages that come with it. This can help students focus their energy in a positive direction.

Limitations of the study
Some factors worked against this study, one of such is the sampled population. Sampling only one institution during exam reduces the numbers of participants, more students would have participated assuming more than one university was sampled.

The sampling techniques also affected the numbers of participants, the more students would have been sampled assuming a suitable sampling techniques was adopted.

Some demographic variable were left unanswered by the participants which led to the researcher not including the outcome in the study, demographic such as religious affiliation, parental working status, etc. These control variables would have helped to give this study direction.

Suggestion for further study
Future researcher should consider sampling population from different institution and also to consider carrying this study outside examination period, this will give student opportunity to participate in the research.

A suitable sampling technique should be considered by future researcher, because this will give room for the selection of larger population.

The future researcher should consider to arrange the demographic variables in such a way that the participants will not leave them unattended to.

Summary and conclusion
The study investigated the relationship between loneliness, identity formation and social media addiction, findings revealed that there was no relationship between the tested variables, but age shows a positive relationship to loneliness and identity formation. Therefore, therapists should

work with students to help them understand that as they grow older, there are specific tasks and responsibilities they need to address. Failing to do so could lead to negative events or outcomes.

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