Nocturnal Social Media Use and Sleep Quality Among Undergraduate Students in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The social media has become a major part of undergraduate students' everyday lives. However, using social networking platforms late at night may interfere with sleeping routines and contribute to poor sleep quality. This study examined the relationship between nocturnal social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in selected tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The study involved undergraduate students from Rivers State University and Madonna University. Of the 395 questionnaires administered obtained using proportionate purposive sampling technique, 360 valid responses were analyzed. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and Chi-square test using statistical significance assessed at the 0.05 level. The findings revealed that 146 respondents (40.6%) reported sleeping for 4–6 hours following prolonged social media use, while 64 (17.8%) reported sleeping for less than four hours. Regarding sleep quality after nighttime social media use, 158 respondents (43.9%) reported disrupted sleep, 96 (26.7%) reported intermittent sleep, 74 (20.6%) experienced difficulty sleeping, and 32 (8.8%) reported inability to sleep. The chi-square analysis showed a statistically significant association between social media use and sleep quality, $\chi^2(3) = 49.780$, $p < 0.001$ as well as was reported separately for Rivers State University and Madonna University. Nocturnal social media use was significantly associated with sleep quality among undergraduate students in the selected institutions. The findings highlight the importance of promoting responsible nighttime social media use and healthy sleeping habits among university students. However, the cross-sectional design does not establish that social media use directly causes poor sleep.

Keywords: Nocturnal social media use, sleep quality, undergraduate students, sleep duration, social media, Rivers State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The social media has become an important part of contemporary university life. Undergraduate students use platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok to communicate with friends, exchange academic information, follow current events and entertain themselves. These platforms provide valuable opportunities for learning and social interaction. Nevertheless, concerns have emerged about how prolonged engagement, particularly at night, may affect students' health and daily functioning.

Sleep is essential for physical restoration, memory consolidation, emotional regulation and effective cognitive functioning. University students need adequate sleep to support their academic activities and general wellbeing. However, academic pressure, social commitments, financial concerns and digital distractions may interfere with their sleeping routines.

One concern is the tendency of students to remain active on social media during hours intended for rest. A student may intend to check a message briefly but continue browsing videos, responding to comments or engaging in

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online conversations for much longer than expected. Notifications and the constant availability of new content can also encourage repeated checking, even after the student has gone to bed.

Research has increasingly examined the relationship between digital media use and sleep. A systematic review by Chadi et al. (2022) examined digital media use and sleep among adolescents and young adults, reporting associations between nighttime digital media use and poorer sleep outcomes. Similarly, Garett et al. (2018) found that more frequent late-night tweeting among undergraduate students was associated with lower self-reported sleep quality. These findings suggest that the timing and pattern of social media engagement may be as important as the overall amount of time spent online.

More recent evidence also supports the need for a careful examination of this relationship. Han et al. (2024), in an updated systematic review and meta-analysis, found an overall association between electronic media use and poorer sleep outcomes. Ahmed et al. (2024), however, highlighted that the relationship between social media use and sleep is complex, with findings differing according to the type and pattern of use. Together, these studies indicate that it is important to distinguish ordinary social media engagement from prolonged or problematic use.

The issue is relevant to Nigerian universities, where smartphones and online communication are widely integrated into students' academic and social activities. While social media offers opportunities for learning and connection, excessive nighttime engagement may compete with sleep and contribute to irregular sleeping schedules.

The study was developed to examine nocturnal social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in Rivers State, Nigeria using selected universities. Despite growing international interest in digital media and sleep, there remains a need for context-specific evidence from undergraduate populations in Nigeria. Examining this issue in Rivers State, provides useful information for student-health programmes and university-based health education.

This study therefore examined nocturnal social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in Rivers State University and Madonna University, all in the Southern part of Nigeria.

The growing use of social media has created new challenges for maintaining healthy sleeping habits among university students. Students may remain online late into the night to communicate with friends, follow trends, watch videos or participate in online discussions. When such activities extend into normal sleeping hours, they may be associated with delayed bedtimes, shorter sleep duration and interruptions to sleep which is a major challenge.

The findings from this study raise concerns about the sleep habits of undergraduate students in the selected institutions. Poor sleep may affect concentration, memory, classroom participation and emotional wellbeing. Nevertheless, not every student who uses social media at night will experience sleep difficulties as other factors may contribute to the observed patterns.

There is therefore a need to examine the association between nocturnal social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in Rivers State. Evidence from this study may help universities develop appropriate health education and sleep-hygiene interventions. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between nocturnal social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in Rivers State, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. This design enabled the collection of information about students' social media use and sleep-related experiences at a particular period. It was appropriate for describing reported sleep patterns and examining associations between the variables.

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Study Area

The study was conducted in Rivers State, Nigeria, among undergraduate students of Rivers State University and Madonna University. The two institutions formed the study setting for the study.

Study Population and Sample Size

The study reported a study population of 28,257 undergraduate students across the two institutions. A sample size of 395 was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula at a 0.05 level of precision.

$$n=N/1+N(e)^2 \quad (1)$$

where (n) represents the sample size, (N) represents the population, and (e) represents the level of precision. Using a population of 28,257 and a precision level of .05, the calculated sample size was approximately 395. A total of 395 questionnaires were administered. Of these, 360 valid responses were included in the analysis which signified the questionnaires returned. The analyzed responses comprised 203 students from Rivers State University and 157 students from Madonna University based on proportionate sampling employed. A total of 395 questionnaires were administered, and 360 valid questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed.

2.4 Research Question

Is there a significant association between social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

2.5 Research Hypothesis

Null hypothesis (H_o): There is no significant association between social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant association between social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

The sleep-related analysis was based on these 360 valid responses. The questionnaire distribution pattern is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution Pattern

S/N	Universities	No of Questionnaire Distributed	No of Copies Retrieved	Rejected/Abandoned Copies
1.	Undergraduate Students of Rivers State University	225	203	22
2.	Undergraduate Students of Madonna University,	170	157	13
	Total	**395**	**360**	**35**

Field Survey at RSU & MU, 2026.

Data Collection Instrument and Analysis

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed for the study. The instrument included questions relating to students' social media use nocturnally and different aspects of health behaviour. The section relevant

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to this article addressed sleep duration and sleep-quality experiences associated with prolonged or nighttime social media use.

Face and content validity were established. The draft questionnaire was examined for clarity, simplicity, appropriateness, and comprehensibility. Experts in public health, health education and promotion, and measurement and evaluation reviewed the instrument to determine whether the items adequately represented the study objectives and research questions. Recommendations from the experts were incorporated into the final questionnaire.

A pilot study was also conducted among undergraduate students from a comparable tertiary institution who were not included in the main study. Cronbach's alpha was specified as the measure of internal consistency, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize categorical responses, while means and standard deviations were reported for the sleep-related variables.

The Chi-square test was used to examine the association between social media use nocturnally and sleep quality. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < 0.05$. Results with p-values reported as 0.000 in the original statistical output are presented as $p < 0.001$.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences, Rivers State University, with ethical number RSU/FBMS/REC/26/482. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was maintained, and respondents were not personally identified in the dataset. The study involved questions relating to nocturnal social media use and sleep quality, hence ethical handling of such information is particularly important. Participants were provided with appropriate information about available counseling or mental-health services where participation raises concerns about psychological distress.

RESULTS

3.1 Research Question: Is there a significant association between social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?
This result is shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4 below.

Table 2: Rivers State University (RSU) – Influence of Social Media on Sleep Quality

Item	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Sleep duration after prolonged social media use	< 4 hours	38	18.1		
	4–6 hours	86	41.0		
	6–8 hours	68	32.4		
	> 8 hours	18	8.6		
Sleep quality after night use	Disrupted sleep	92	43.8	3.20	0.95
	Intermittent sleep	56	26.7		
	Difficulty sleeping	44	21.0		
	Inability to sleep	18	8.6		

Table 3: Madonna University – Influence of Social Media on Sleep Quality

Item	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Sleep duration after prolonged social media use	< 4 hours	26	17.3		
	4–6 hours	60	40.0		

	6–8 hours	50	33.3		
	> 8 hours	14	9.3		
Sleep quality after night use	Disrupted sleep	66	44.0	3.16	0.97
	Intermittent sleep	40	26.7		
	Difficulty sleeping	30	20.0		
	Inability to sleep	14	9.3		

Table 4: Combined Results (RSU + Madonna University) – Interpretable Summary

Item	Key Indicator	RSU (%)	Madonna (%)	Combined (%)	Interpretation
Sleep duration	< 6 hours	59.1	57.3	58.4	Majority experience reduced sleep duration
Sleep duration	≥ 6 hours	41.0	42.6	41.7	Fewer students maintain adequate sleep
Sleep quality	Disrupted/Intermittent	70.5	70.7	70.6	High prevalence of poor sleep quality
Severe sleep issues	Difficulty/Inability	29.6	29.3	29.5	Notable level of serious sleep disturbances

Tables 2, 3 and 4 reveal that most respondents in both Rivers State University and Madonna University experience reduced sleep duration following prolonged social media use. In RSU, 59.1% of respondents sleep less than six (6) hours, while Madonna University recorded 57.3%, giving a combined value of 58.4%. For sleep quality, 70.5% of RSU respondents and 70.7% of Madonna University respondents reported disrupted or intermittent sleep, resulting in a combined percentage of 70.6%. The mean values (RSU: M = 3.20, SD = 0.95; MU: M = 3.16, SD = 0.97) indicate a moderate level of sleep disturbance across both institutions. Overall, the results show a consistent pattern of reduced sleep duration and poor sleep quality among students in both universities.

3.2 Sleep Duration Following Prolonged Social Media Use

This assessment is showed in Table 5 below for the sleep duration and the frequency vis avis the percentage measures.

Table 5: Reported sleep duration following prolonged social media use (N = 360)

Sleep Duration	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
< 4 hours	64	17.8
4-6 Hours	146	40.6
6-8 Hours	118	32.8
> 8 Hours	32	8.8
Total	**360**	**100**

Table 5 shows that the largest proportion of respondents, 146 (40.6%), reported sleeping for 4–6 hours following prolonged social media use. Sixty-four respondents (17.8%) reported less than four hours of sleep, while 118 (32.8%) reported 6–8 hours. Only 32 respondents (8.8%) reported sleeping for more than eight hours. Taken together, 210 respondents (58.3%) reported sleeping for six hours or less, based on the published category counts. This finding suggests that relatively short sleep duration was common among the respondents, although the study design cannot establish that social media use was the sole reason.

Table 6: Reported sleep quality following nighttime social media use (N = 360)

Sleep-quality indicator	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Disrupted sleep	158	43.9

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Intermittent sleep	96	26.7
Difficulty sleeping	74	20.6
Inability to sleep	32	8.8
Total	**360**	**100**

As shown in Table 6, disrupted sleep was the most frequently reported experience, affecting 158 respondents (43.9%). A further 96 respondents (26.7%) reported intermittent sleep, while 74 (20.6%) experienced difficulty sleeping. Thirty-two respondents (8.8%) reported inability to sleep.

Together, disrupted and intermittent sleep accounted for 254 respondents (70.6%). This indicates that interruptions to sleep were commonly reported in the study population.

The mean sleep-duration score was 2.33 (SD = 0.87), while the mean sleep-quality score was 3.18 (SD = 0.96). Because the complete scoring definitions are not reproduced here, these means should be interpreted according to the original questionnaire's coding scheme rather than as standardized clinical sleep scores. Institution-Based comparison for students from both institutions reported similar patterns of sleep duration and sleep quality. At Rivers State University, 38 respondents (18.1%) reported less than four hours of sleep, 86 (41.0%) reported 4–6 hours, 68 (32.4%) reported 6–8 hours and 18 (8.5%) reported more than 8 hours. At Madonna University, 26 respondents (17.3%) reported less than four hours of sleep, 60 (40.0%) reported 4–6 hours, 50 (33.3%) reported 6–8 hours and 14 (9.3%) reported more than 8 hours. The mean sleep-quality score was 3.20 (SD = 0.95) at Rivers State University and 3.16 (SD = 0.97) at Madonna University. These descriptive results suggest broadly comparable reported sleep-quality patterns across the two institutions. The Test of Hypothesis for association between social media use and sleep quality is showed below (Table 7).

Table 7: Hypothesis for association between social media use and sleep quality

Study Population	**χ^2|**	**df**	**p-value**	**Decision**
Combined Sample	49.78	3	<0.001|	Reject H_0
Rivers State University	29.670	3	<0.001|	Reject H_0
Madonna University	20.110	3	0.001|	Reject H_o

The combined chi-square analysis showed a statistically significant association between social media use and sleep quality, χ^2 (3) = 49.780, $p < 0.001$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

The institution-specific results were also statistically significant. Rivers State University recorded $\chi^2(3) = 29.670$, $p < 0.001$, while Madonna University recorded $\chi^2(3) = 20.110$, $p = 0.001$.

These findings indicate that the observed association was present in both institutions. However, the chi-square results do not but on their own, establish the strength of the association or demonstrate a causal relationship.

DISCUSSION

This study examined nocturnal social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in Rivers State using Rivers State University and Madonna University all in the Southern Part of Nigeria. The findings revealed that short sleep duration and sleep interruptions were common among respondents. More importantly, the statistical analysis demonstrated a significant association between social media use and sleep quality in the combined sample and in each of the two institutions. The finding that 40.6% of respondents reported 4–6 hours of sleep, while 17.8% reported less than four hours, raises concerns about students' sleeping routines. Although the study did not establish the clinical adequacy of each respondent's sleep, these figures suggest that many students reported relatively short sleep duration following prolonged social media use.
The sleep-quality findings reinforce this concern. Disrupted sleep was reported by 43.9% of respondents, while another 26.7% experienced intermittent sleep. These patterns are consistent with the possibility that nighttime social media engagement may compete with normal sleeping routines. One possible explanation is delayed bedtime. Students who continue browsing social media or responding to messages late at night may postpone sleep beyond their intended bedtime. Notifications, online conversations and the continuous availability of new

content may also make it difficult for some users to disengage. However, these mechanisms were not separately measured in the present study and should therefore be understood as possible explanations rather than demonstrated findings. The results are broadly consistent with Garett et al. (2018), who reported that more frequent late-night social media activity was associated with lower sleep quality among undergraduate students. The findings also align with the systematic review by Chadi et al. (2022), which identified associations between nighttime digital media use and poorer sleep outcomes among young people. Han et al. (2024) similarly found an overall association between electronic media use and poorer sleep quality. Nevertheless, the evidence is not entirely uniform. Ahmed et al. (2024) reported that ordinary social media use and problematic social media use did not show identical relationships with sleep outcomes. This distinction is important because the amount of time spent online may not fully explain sleep difficulties; timing, compulsive use, the content encountered and individual circumstances may also matter. The study by Lee and Bae (2025) focused on evaluating the impact of a combination of social media stress and sleep disturbances on suicide ideation among tertiary students in South Korea. In quantitative findings, there was a significant association between high social media stress scores and poor sleep quality with suicidal ideation ($p < 0.01$) as supported by this study. In the qualitative interviews, the participants indicated that they are distressed by various factors including social comparisons, fear of missing out (FOMO) and notifications which affect their sleeping. Sez and Rivera (2024) examined the effect of cybervictimization on social media sites among emerging adults and students enrolled in college in relation to suicide risk. Similarly, the results showed that participants experiencing cybervictimization had higher psychological distress and suicidal ideation compared to those without any such experience ($p < 0.001$). By implication, cybervictimization on social media was found to be a significant factor in developing suicidal ideations and should be addressed immediately within student mental health programs. Similar studies were carried out which gave correspondingly supportive evidences to the nocturnal influence of social media implications on undergraduate students on several factors such as food and selection behaviour, food choices and consumption patterns, dietary decisions etc in various parts of the world which were in consonance with the findings to this study (Adeyemi et al., 2021; Alabi et al., 2024; Brautsch et al., 2023; Diane et al., 2023; Keles et al., 2020; Law et al., 2023; Mburu et al., 2024; Nyaanga & Mbirithi, 2024; Offor et al., 2024; Okoruwa et al., 2025; Tan et al., 2024; Oladosu et al., 2025; Singh & Singh., 2025; Umennuihe et al., 2024).

The present study contributes context-specific evidence from two Nigerian universities. The similar descriptive patterns in Rivers State University and Madonna University suggest that the reported sleep concerns were not limited to one institution. Nevertheless, the study did not establish whether the relationship differed significantly between the institutions, and the observed similarity should not be interpreted as proof of equivalence. The findings also have implications for student health education. Moreno et al. (2024) was to understand the effects of various kinds of content on the tendency of suicidal ideation amongst the population of undergraduate students at US universities. It was found out that the exposure to the distressing content (violence, self-harm, etc.) had significant effects on increased suicidal ideation ($p < 0.01$). Adejumo and Nwankwo (2024) carried out research about the relationship between social media involvement and suicide ideation among undergraduates in the southwestern universities of Nigeria. It was found that students who experienced frequent negative online experiences were highly likely to have suicidal thoughts (22.18, $p < 0.001$). Universities could incorporate sleep hygiene into orientation programmes, student counselling and campus health campaigns. Students may benefit from establishing consistent bedtimes, reducing notifications at night and avoiding prolonged social media engagement immediately before sleep. Such measures should be promoted as practical health strategies rather than as proof that social media is inherently harmful.

CONCLUSION

This study examined nocturnal social media use and sleep quality among undergraduate students in Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings showed that short sleep duration and sleep interruptions were commonly reported among respondents. A statistically significant association between social media use and sleep quality was observed in the combined sample and in both participating institutions. The findings highlight the importance of healthy digital habits and sleep hygiene among university students. However, because the study was cross-sectional, the results should be interpreted as evidence of an association rather than proof that nocturnal social media use directly causes poor sleep. Universities, student-health services and health educators should consider incorporating sleep education and responsible nighttime technology use into student-wellbeing programmes.

Further research is needed to clarify the direction of the relationship and identify the factors that may increase or reduce the risk of sleep difficulties. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Sleep-health education: Universities should provide information on the importance of adequate sleep and the possible relationship between late-night social media engagement and sleep difficulties.

Healthy digital routines: Students should be encouraged to establish consistent bedtimes, reduce unnecessary nighttime notifications and avoid prolonged browsing when preparing to sleep.

Campus health promotion: University health centres and counselling units should include sleep hygiene and digital wellbeing in health campaigns and student orientation programmes.

Responsible social media use: Students should be encouraged to use social media in ways that support rather than interfere with rest, academic responsibilities and general wellbeing.

Further research: Future studies should use validated sleep-quality measures, assess nighttime social media use more precisely and account for potential confounding variables.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The cross-sectional survey design limits causal interpretation. The study relied on self-reported responses and was restricted to two selected universities. In addition, the available analysis does not establish the contribution of other factors that may affect sleep. The questionnaire's sleep-quality scoring and psychometric properties should be fully documented in the final manuscript.

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