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INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL CONTENT CONSUMPTION ON SELF-PERCEPTION AND SELF-ESTEEM OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of digital content consumption on self-perception and self-esteem among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining a structured questionnaire administered to 386 students with qualitative interviews conducted with 20 participants. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multivariate analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used for the interview responses. The findings revealed that most students spend four or more hours daily consuming digital content, primarily entertainment and educational materials. Statistical analysis shows that digital content consumption significantly influences self-perception and self-esteem. Qualitative findings indicated that students actively interpret and regulate digital media exposure, moderating its psychological effects. The study concluded that digital content consumption plays a notable role in shaping the self-perception and self-esteem of the students, and recommended digital literacy initiatives to promote healthier engagement with online media.

Keyword(s): Digital content consumption; Self-perception; Self-esteem; Undergraduate students

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies and social media platforms have transformed the ways university students interact with information, construct identities, and evaluate themselves psychologically. Across the globe, digital platforms provide unprecedented access to information, entertainment, and social engagement, shaping how individuals perceive and present themselves online (Boyd, 2021; Xiong & Zhou, 2025). In Nigeria, the rapid expansion of internet infrastructure and smartphone adoption has accelerated digital engagement among students, who are increasingly immersed in online content that influences learning, lifestyle, and self-concept (Olanrewaju and Hassan, 2023; Dada, 2025; Statista 2025). According to Mude and Undale (2023), social media has become much more than a social connection tool among the youths. Activities on the social media including the digital content, the magnitude of the accumulated information, entertainment, social interaction through social media, streaming services and mobile applications are not a choice anymore but rather a daily routine that defines academic work, social life, and personal leisure of the young generation (Ojo, & Adegbite, 2023; Onun, Akuto, James, & Iordaaah, 2023; Aroso, Asoh, Adebayo, Akeredolu, and Adebajji, 2025). These activities collectively constitute digital content consumption, which has become a dominant feature of information behaviour of students.

Digital content consumption extends beyond mere entertainment; it constitutes a form of information behaviour, wherein students actively seek, interpret, and internalise content from online sources. Students' engagement with digital platforms can also be viewed within the

context of information behaviour. Digital content consumption represents a form of information seeking and information interaction in digital environments (Zhao, Zhang, and Lee, 2022). Understanding how such interactions influence psychological constructs such as self-perception and self-esteem contributes to the broader field of Information Science as it sheds light on how digital information influences personal development, decision-making, and identity formation. Self-perception refers to the process through which individuals interpret and evaluate their personal characteristics, abilities, and social identities (Bem, 1967). This evaluation is often shaped through interactions with others and through feedback obtained from social environments (Aroso *et al*, 2025; Ogunseyi, Mutua, and Chen, 2025). In the contemporary digital era, online platforms have become powerful arenas where such evaluations occur. Studies suggest that students frequently compare their achievements, appearance, and lifestyle with those presented by peers or influencers on social media platforms (Alfonso-Fuertes, Álvarez-Mon, Sánchez del Hoyo, Ortega, Álvarez-Mon, & Molina-Ruiz, 2023; Agwu, Asatsa & Egunjobi, 2025; Ogunseyi, *et al*, 2025). These comparisons may significantly shape how students perceive their own abilities and social standing. Closely related to self-perception is self-esteem, which refers to an individual's overall sense of personal worth or value (Branden, 1990; Akintola, 2024; Nnamchi, Ike, Okafor, Ogba, Obunukwu, & Agu, 2024). High self-esteem is associated with confidence, resilience, and positive emotional well-being, whereas low self-esteem is often linked to feelings of inadequacy and psychological distress. Research suggests that digital media environments may influence self-esteem through processes of social comparison, social validation, and peer feedback (Chiaghana, Uchendu, & Obi, 2024; Nnamchi, 2024; Akinyede & Obosi, 2025). When students constantly encounter idealised portrayals of success, beauty, or popularity online, they may evaluate themselves negatively in comparison.

Previous studies on digital content consumption have documented the potential psychological consequences of excessive social media use, including social comparison, body dissatisfaction, and diminished self-esteem (Adeyemi & Olatunji, 2021; Agwu *et al*, 2025; Aroso *et al*, 2025). Nevertheless, most research has been conducted in Western contexts, with limited attention to the information literacy dynamics in African settings. Furthermore, studies often treat self-perception, and self-esteem as separate constructs, neglecting their interconnected nature in the digital environment. In addition, despite the growing body of research on digital content consumption, there remains a gap in empirical evidence on how digital content consumption affects self-perception, and self-esteem among Nigerian university students.

The study, therefore, examined the influence of digital content consumption on self-perception, and self-esteem among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the patterns and intensity of digital content consumption among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan.
2. Assess the influence of digital content consumption on self-perception among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan
3. Examine the influence of digital content consumption on self-esteem among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan.
4. Determine the impact of digital content consumption on the self-perception, and self-esteem of undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan

This study was significant because it extends the Information Science discourse by linking digital information consumption with identity and psychological theories such as Self-Discrepancy and Social Comparison theories and outcomes, providing evidence that informs digital literacy programmes, counselling services, and information management strategies in Nigerian universities. The study adopted the Self-Discrepancy Theory (SDT) developed by E.

Tory Higgins in 1987 and Social Comparison (SC) theory developed by Leon Festinger in 1954, to make inferences on how digital media exposures influence students' self-perception and self-esteem among undergraduate students in a Nigerian university. The self-discrepancy theory proposes that emotional discomfort arises when individuals perceive differences between their actual self and their ideal self (Higgins, 1987). Digital media environments often portray idealised lifestyles that may widen this perceived gap. The social comparison theory suggests that individuals evaluate their abilities and characteristics by comparing themselves with others (Liang, 2024). Social media platforms provide numerous opportunities for such comparisons through visible indicators of success, popularity and attractiveness.

The Social Comparison Theory holds that human beings possess a natural motivational propensity to compare themselves to others. This is quite common in the digital era and is often seen as a form of upward social comparison, as students would contrast their lives with the highly pictured lifestyles of other students, influencers, and celebrities (Williams, Pochipinski, MacDonald, & Caulfield, 2024; Diel, Crusius, Hofmann, and Friese, 2025). This procedure is usually destructive, as it draws a discrepancy existing between the real life of the student and the algorithmic order of things, oversimplified and clean of the internet. This is also explained by Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), according to which, people have more than one self-representation, namely, the actual, the ideal, and the ought self. A continued exposure to edited and idealised images may further increase the difference between the objective and ideal self of the student. When mentioned, they frequently result in the feelings of insufficiency, shame, and self-doubt and eventually hurt the self-esteem and create dissatisfaction with the body (Nikula, Kourti, and Papageorgiou, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding on the influence of digital content consumption on students' self-perception and esteem. The population comprised all undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan during the 2023/2024 academic session. Institutional records during the 2023/2024 academic session indicated a total undergraduate population of approximately 15,803 students. The sample size for the study was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula for finite populations:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error (0.05)

Using a population of 15,803 students, the calculated sample size was approximately 390. A sample of 386 students was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across faculties and academic levels in the university. A sample of 386 students participated in the survey through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring digital content consumption, self-perception, and self-esteem. Standardised scales were adapted to measure these constructs including Self-perception profile in college students (SPPCS), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Neemann & Harter, 1986; Cramer & Steinwert, 1998; Rosenberg, 1965; Sinclair et al., 2010).

In addition, 20 students were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to provide qualitative insights into their experiences with digital media. As part of the research ethics considered in this study, participation in the study was voluntary. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, no personally identifiable information was collected, and respondents could withdraw from the study at any time. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression. Qualitative interview responses were analysed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of respondents

The result in Table 1 showed the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Of the 386 respondents, 58% were female and 42% were male. The majority (93%) were aged between 16 and 25 years, while the remaining respondents were between 26 and 29 years. The result showed that majority (21.5%) of the students were in the faculty of Arts, followed by students (21.2%) in the faculty of Education. This showed that these faculties were more represented in the sample. The lowest participations were from the faculties of Social Science and Pharmacy 9.3% and 5.2% respectively. The level of study distribution indicates that majority (29.3%) of the respondents were 300 level students, followed by 400 and 200 level students with 28.5% and 25.6% respectively. This implies that the students who predominated in the study were within the mid and senior levels of their study. The result also showed that 1.3% of the students who participated in the study were 600 level students.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Respondent's Demographics	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	162	42.0
	Female	224	58.0
Age Group	16-20	161	41.7
	21-25	198	51.3
	26-29	27	7.0
	30 and above	0	0.0
Faculties	Science	54	14.0
	Social sciences	36	9.3
	Education	82	21.2
	Arts	83	21.5
	Agriculture	43	11.1
	Pharmacy	20	5.2
	Technology	68	17.6
Level of Study	100 Level	51	13.2
	200 Level	99	25.6
	300 Level	113	29.3
	400 Level	110	28.5
	500 Level	8	2.1
	600 Level	5	1.3

Patterns and intensity of digital content consumption among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan

i. Patterns of Digital Content Consumption

This was measured by the daily time respondents spent on social media. The findings indicated that the respondents generally had a high degree of online engagement. The result in Table 2

showed that the respondents had high intensity of social media usage. Many of the participants (42.0%) indicated that they spend a daily duration of over six hours on platforms that offer them social media services. This was followed by 28.8% of all respondents who spent four to six hours daily being exposed to digital material. Conversely, 25.1% of the people reported spending one to three hours a day, with only 4.1% of respondents reporting spending less than an hour a day browsing social media. The results show that a greater number of 70.8% participants took up at least four hours to consume digital content in a day. This implies that most undergraduate students involved in the study have been exposed to digital platforms immensely daily.

Table 2: Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media

Time spent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	16	4.1
1-3 hours	97	25.1
4-6 hours	111	28.8
More than 6 hours	162	42.0
Total	386	100.0

Besides the time spent online, the frequency of consumption of digital contents was also studied. The result in Table 3 indicated that 69.7% of the participants listened to and watched digital content every day, whereas 22.8% used digital content three to five times per week. A far lesser percentage of the respondents described consuming digital content once a week (3.6%) or once now and then (3.9%). The frequency and intensity of digital content consumption were high among the respondents, and this rate implies that digital media constitute a central constituent of the daily activities of the lives of undergraduate students. This degree of involvement would offer a solid empirical foundation to understand the effect of the consumption of digital content on self-perception, and self-esteem among undergraduate students.

Table 3: Digital Content Consumption

Time spent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Rarely	15	3.9
Once a week	14	3.6
3-5 times per week	88	22.8
Daily	269	69.7
Total	386	100.0

ii. Types of digital content most commonly consumed by undergraduate students

Table 4 highlighted the most common types of digital content consumed by the students. The findings indicated that entertainment (comedy, music, drama) had the highest consumption with 76.9% of students consuming the same. This was succeeded by academic or educational contents (61.0%), followed by IT-related content (60.8%). It is worth noting that fashion and beauty (59.5%) and fitness and bodybuilding (47.3%) had high engagement as well as lifetime-related content. Political (31.4%) and food (31.9%) were under-consumed categories. This implies that to the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan, the internet is a two-way street that, as much as it is used both as source of entertainment and a learning tool that is crucial in academics and technical (IT) studies.

Another major cluster of responses was around educative and informative material. Some respondents mentioned that they mostly consume content about their major or career in engineering, research, energy, automobile engineering, technology, and cryptocurrency. Others talked about politics, government policies, international news, religion, and international or Nigerian news. This showed that for some students, social media is a learning tool as well as a source of information, not only entertainment. There was also a noticeable emphasis on creative and lifestyle-related content. The mentioned ones were fashion, skincare, beauty, video editing, food (bakery, cakes, pastries, and cooking tips such as Akara), travel, wildlife, and animals. Others described their interaction as reliant upon the recommendations made by the algorithm on any particular day, which illustrated how the algorithms on platforms determine the exposure to content and interests.

Influence of digital content consumption on self-perception among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan

The result in Table 5 showed the relationship between digital content consumption and self-perception among undergraduate students. The result showed a moderate, positive and significant correlation between digital content consumption and self-perception ($r = .417$, $N = 386$, $p < .01$). This implies that higher levels of digital content consumption are associated with higher levels of social comparison tendencies among students. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .174$) suggested that digital content consumption accounted for approximately 17.4% of the variance in self-perception.

Table 5: Relationship between digital content consumption and self-perception of undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan

Variables	Self-perception	Digital content consumption	Sig (2-tailed)
Self-perception	1		
Digital content consumption	0.417	1	<0.001

In addition, the qualitative result in Figure 2 showed that a strong influence of digital content consumption on self-perception. Most respondents admitted that social media has a strong influence on their self-image, and this was caused by the process of comparison with the achievements, lifestyles, or the so-called perfect lives of other people, which led to feelings of insufficiency, demoralisation, or the desire to be like other people. To these people, the materials on the internet have a negative influence on self-esteem, particularly where success, wealth and advancement are being constantly emphasised. Nevertheless, coping strategies, including converting these feelings into motivation, implementing checks and balances, or simply reinterpreting comparisons consciously as inspiration, not discouragement, were also described in a variety of ways.

The result in Table 8 showed that digital content consumption has varying impacts across these variables. Digital content consumption was found to have a significant effect on self-perception ($F(1, 384) = 80.837, p < 0.001, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = 0.174$), explaining 17.4% of the variance in self-perception. This implies that students who consume more digital content are likely to experience changes in how they perceive themselves, suggesting a strong influence of digital content consumption on self-perception. Similarly, digital content consumption had a significant effect on self-esteem ($F(1, 384) = 21.402, p < 0.001, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = 0.053$), accounting for 5.3% of the variance. This implies that higher levels of digital content consumption predict small but meaningful differences in students' self-esteem, reflecting a modest yet notable impact.

Table 8: Between-Subjects Effects of Digital Content Consumption on Individual Outcomes

Dependent variables	F	Df	Sig.	Partial η^2	Interpretation
Self-Perception	80.837	1, 384	<0.001	0.174	Significant effect. Digital content consumption explains 17.4% of the variance in self-perception. Higher consumption is associated with changes in self-perception.
Self-Esteem	21.402	1, 384	<0.001	0.053	Significant effect. Digital content consumption explains 5.3% of the variance in self-esteem. Higher consumption predicts small but meaningful differences in self-esteem.

According to the thematic analysis of the interview findings, the consumption of digital content has a multidimensional, non-uniform influence on the self-perception, and self-esteem of undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan. The effect of digital content was not created in one way or another, but rather through personal interpretation, type of content, individual discipline and self-control measures.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed a significant influence of digital content consumption on self-perception among undergraduate students at the university of Ibadan, Nigeria. The findings aligned with the research carried out by Ogunseyi *et al* (2025) that female undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria had high rates of satisfaction neither with body size nor with their skin colour despite the high levels of social media usage. Ogunseyi *et al.* (2025) explained this with high cultural identity, opposition to the westernised ideals of beauty and a high degree of personal confidence in the chosen group, who were female students in Nigeria. This stance was supported by the qualitative results of the current research, as some interview participants said there was no strong influence of digital content on their self-perception. Rather, respondents said they had deliberately curated their content and resisted the situation through personal resilience to protect themselves. In addition, the study found a negative correlation between the digital content consumption and self-esteem which coincides with Akinyede and Obosi's (2025) findings. They demonstrated in their study of secondary school students in Abeokuta that increased social media usage was also correlated with lower self-esteem. In the same fashion, both the quantitative findings of this study demonstrated that there was a significant negative

dependency between consumption of digital content and self-esteem, whilst qualitative results presented the feeling of inadequacies and emotional distractions caused by social comparisons on the internet. These similar results indicated that prolonged online interactions can impair self-esteem with the help of constant comparison, validation-seeking, and social pressure among the more vulnerable and younger generations.

Additional implications of self-concept consequences are further explained by the study of Aroso *et al.* (2025), which found positive self-esteem as some of the most potent predictors of psychological well-being among female undergraduates in Ekiti State. Their study was significant in terms of offering contextual background to the present study on the critical nature of self-esteem as a construct of psychology. Although the self-esteem of students was negatively affected by the digital content consumption in the current research, the qualitative results indicated that students who were able to manage their digital usage and utilise positive self-perception were less prone to emotional instability. This supported the claim that digital exposure reduction should not be viewed as the basis of the interventions to improve the well-being of undergraduates, but instead, improving self-esteem and becoming digitally literate.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the influence of digital content consumption on self-perception, and self-esteem of undergraduate students at the university of Ibadan, Nigeria. The findings revealed that digital platforms have become deeply embedded in the daily lives of the students, serving as major sources of information, social interaction, and identity expression. As such, digital content consumption constitutes a significant dimension of contemporary information behaviour among university students. The results demonstrated that digital content consumption has a moderate and statistically significant relationship with self-perception, indicating that exposure to online content plays an important role on how students evaluate their abilities, achievements, and social identities. In addition, the study found that digital media engagement significantly predicts self-esteem, although the strength of this relationship was relatively modest, suggesting that self-esteem was influenced by a broader range of social and personal factors. The study contributes to the fields of Information Science and Psychology by demonstrating that digital content consumption is not merely a technological or social phenomenon but also an information behaviour process with psychological implications. By linking digital information engagement to self-concept, the study expands the scope of Information Science research to include the psychological outcomes of information use in digital environments.

Hence, the study concludes that digital content consumption has a significant influence on self-perception, and self-esteem of undergraduate students at the university of Ibadan, Nigeria. The study recommends that Universities should incorporate digital and information literacy programmes into their curricula and orientation activities. In addition, University libraries should play a more active role in promoting responsible information use by organising workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns on digital information behaviour, media literacy, and online well-being. Higher education institutions should strengthen counselling services to address issues related to self-esteem, identity development, and digital stress. Future studies should explore additional variables such as gender differences, socio-economic background, body image, and personality traits in order to better understand the complex relationship between digital content consumption and psychological well-being.

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