

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

X Influencers as Informal Development Actors: Examining their Role in Mental Health Engagement and Help-Seeking Behaviours among UNN Students

Ifebunandu, Angela Chiemerie

ifebunanduangelachiemerie@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Social media influencers are increasingly serving as informal development actors, shaping attitudes and behaviours around sensitive issues like mental health. This study examined the role of X influencers in mental health engagement and help-seeking behaviours among students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). Specifically, it sought to identify the X influencers UNN students engage with for mental health-related content, assess the level of their engagement with such content, and determine the influence of these influencers on students' attitudes toward mental health support and professional help-seeking. Guided by Social Influence Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory and Health Belief Model, the study adopted a survey research design, with a population of 35,130 UNN students and a sample size of 380 determined using the Australian Calculator. Data were collected using a questionnaire containing both structured Likert-scale items and unstructured questions, and analysed using frequency tables, percentages, mean averages, and standard deviations. Findings revealed that UNN students engage more with locally grounded Nigerian influencers, such as Hauwa Ojeifo and Aproko Doctor, than with foreign voices; that students demonstrate a moderate, mostly passive level of engagement with influencer-driven mental health content; and that while influencers positively shape awareness and openness, they exert limited influence in reducing stigma or strongly motivating professional help-seeking. Recommendations included strengthening partnerships between advocacy groups and Nigerian influencers, encouraging influencers to adopt more interactive strategies, and linking influencer content with university counselling services. The study concludes that influencers can complement but not replace professional support in tackling mental health issues.

Keywords: X influencers, informal development actors, mental health engagement, help-seeking behaviour, UNN students, social influence theory

Introduction

Mental health has increasingly become a global health concern, with concrete implications for individual well-being, social cohesion, and national development. According to Patel et al. (2018), mental health conditions contribute substantially to the global burden of disease, demanding urgent and context-specific responses.

In many developing countries, however, mental health disorders remain little diagnosed and undertreated due to stigma, cultural misinterpretations, and limited access to care (World Health Organisation, 2022). In Nigeria, these challenges are exacerbated by a severe shortage of trained professionals and under-resourced healthcare systems, creating an environment where mental health needs often go unmet (Gureje et al., 2006). Among young people,

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

particularly university students, these structural and cultural constraints jostle with academic pressures, financial stress, and social transitions, making them especially vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and related disorders (Eisenberg et al., 2013).

The proliferation of digital platforms has, however, revolutionised the ways in which young people access health information and engage in mental health conversations. Twitter/X, with its immediacy, interactivity, and narrative-sharing capabilities, has become a prominent space for such dialogue (Papacharissi, 2015). Within this context, influencers with large followings and perceived credibility have assumed informal roles in health communication by sharing personal testimonies, creating awareness campaigns, and encouraging open conversations about mental health. For example, Nigerian X personalities such as Dr Chinonso Egemba (“Aproko Doctor”) and other mental health advocates frequently use the platform to discuss stress, depression, and coping strategies. Their practices can normalise discussions of psychological distress, reduce stigma, and even encourage followers to consider professional support (Naslund et al., 2016).

Beyond awareness, influencer-led advocacy can also shape perceptions of vulnerability and treatment efficacy. Chen and Wang (2021) demonstrate how social media-based interventions increase willingness to seek help by reshaping attitudes toward therapy and coping. Similarly, Arendt et al. (2020) highlight the “Papageno

effect,” where exposure to coping-focused narratives reduces suicidal ideation and promotes resilience among vulnerable groups. Yet, despite these benefits, concerns remain about the accuracy and credibility of influencer-driven content, particularly since many influencers lack formal training in mental health (Vraga & Bode, 2017).

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates X influencers as informal development actors, with a focus on their role in shaping mental health engagement and help-seeking behaviours among students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Statement of the Problem

Mental health challenges among young adults are increasingly gaining attention in Nigeria, yet the formal mental health care system remains under-resourced and stigmatised (Akintunde, 2023). In response, many young people are turning to social media platforms such as Twitter/X as an alternative space for mental health engagement. Influencers on these platforms, though largely informal and unregulated, are now functioning as accessible voices on mental well-being. Their tweets, threads, and personal testimonies often shape how young audiences understand mental health and whether they consider seeking help. However, the extent to which this informal influence translates into meaningful engagement or professional help-seeking behaviour remains unclear.

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

While research has addressed social media's general role in mental health awareness, there is limited scholarly focus on the specific function of Twitter/X influencers as informal development actors (Owolabi, Lawrence, Falade, Ikeokwu, Aderounmu & Kelechi, 2024). These influencers are increasingly seen as public educators, peer supporters, or advocates. Yet, the impact of their messaging on help-seeking behaviour, especially in the context of Nigeria's mental health realities, has not been adequately investigated. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how Twitter/X influencers shape University of Nigeria, Nsukka students' mental health engagement and their willingness to seek appropriate support.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of X influencers as informal development actors in promoting mental health engagement and help-seeking behaviours among students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). This main objective is operationalised through the following specific objectives:

- To identify the X influencers that UNN students engage with for mental health-related content.
- To assess the level of engagement of UNN students with mental health content shared by X influencers.

- To determine the influence of X influencers on students' attitudes toward mental health support and professional help-seeking.

Literature Review

Social Media Influencers as Informal Development Actors

Social media influencers are increasingly recognised as important informal development actors who shape public discourse, mobilise communities, and influence behaviours outside formal institutional frameworks. Their ability to leverage popularity, authenticity, and parasocial connections makes them critical players in addressing social issues, including health and wellness. According to Abidin (2018), influencers function as digital opinion leaders who bridge the gap between formal communication structures and everyday audiences by tailoring information in relatable ways. Similarly, Carah and Brodmerkel (2021) argue that influencers often contribute to social development by fostering awareness and encouraging conversations around sensitive issues such as mental health, gender, and identity, even though they are not formally part of established health or development institutions.

In the mental health context, influencers' narratives, often built on self-disclosure and lived experiences, reduce stigma and normalise conversations that formal actors may struggle to penetrate due to cultural or structural barriers. Their roles as informal development actors, therefore, extend beyond awareness creation to

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

agenda setting and advocacy. This is particularly significant in developing contexts like Nigeria, where resource gaps and cultural stigma create barriers to formal engagement with mental health services. By leveraging digital platforms, influencers help stimulate discourse and community action in ways that complement formal health communication initiatives (Abidin, 2018; Carah & Brodmerkel, 2021).

Mental Health Engagement and Help-Seeking Behaviour

The concept of mental health engagement and help-seeking behaviour reflects the extent to which individuals interact with mental health issues, ranging from awareness and self-reflection to active steps toward treatment. Engagement involves activities such as sharing personal struggles, participating in mental health campaigns, or supporting peers, while help-seeking behaviour includes seeking assistance from formal services (psychologists, counsellors, psychiatrists) and informal networks (family, peers, or religious leaders). According to Rickwood et al. (2005), help-seeking is a process influenced by recognition of the problem, willingness to seek support, and accessibility of services. Eisenberg et al. (2013) further emphasise that university students are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges due to academic pressures, social transitions, and financial burdens, which shape both their engagement with mental health issues and their willingness to pursue support.

Stigma, cultural beliefs, and structural limitations often hinder help-seeking in developing contexts, leading to treatment gaps and worsening mental health conditions. However, exposure to relatable information and positive narratives, particularly through digital platforms, can foster openness and encourage young people to seek timely help (Rickwood et al., 2005; Eisenberg et al., 2013). This makes the study of engagement and help-seeking especially relevant for Nigerian university students, who may otherwise remain reluctant to access professional services despite high levels of need.

X as a Platform for Mental Health Communication

The social media platform X has emerged as a powerful platform for health communication, offering real-time interaction, broad reach, and unique features that facilitate dialogue on sensitive topics such as mental health. Papacharissi (2015) highlights that Twitter's affordances—hashtags, retweets, and threaded conversations—enable individuals and communities to share narratives, mobilise attention, and amplify issues beyond traditional media boundaries. Research by Naslund et al. (2016) further demonstrates that social media platforms, including Twitter, can promote mental health awareness by normalising conversations, reducing stigma, and connecting audiences to resources through peer-driven content.

Twitter provides a participatory environment where students are exposed to mental

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

health information from influencers, organisations, and peers. Its immediacy and interactivity allow for timely discussions around stress, depression, and coping, which can shape perceptions and behaviours. However, the same openness raises concerns about the credibility and accuracy of information shared, since not all influencers or users possess mental health expertise. Nonetheless, Twitter's role in mental health communication remains significant, particularly among young populations who rely heavily on digital spaces for information and peer support (Papacharissi, 2015; Naslund et al., 2016).

Empirical Studies

Eze, U., & Chukwuma, F. (2021) conducted a study titled "The Role of Social Media Influencers in Shaping Mental Health Narratives among Nigerian Youths." The objective of the study was to determine how influencers on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram contribute to awareness, perception, and engagement with mental health issues among young Nigerians. The study adopted a survey design, distributing questionnaires to 400 undergraduates across three universities in South-East Nigeria. Findings revealed that a majority of students acknowledged influencers as their primary source of mental health information, especially through Twitter hashtags and Instagram stories. However, it was also found that misinformation occasionally distorted perceptions of mental health. The researchers recommended that influencers should partner with certified health professionals to ensure accuracy in content shared with their audiences.

Similarly, Okoro, J., & Musa, A. (2020) carried out a study titled "Twitter Discourse and Youth Mental Health Help-Seeking Behaviour in Nigerian Universities." The main objective was to examine how Twitter conversations affect the willingness of students to seek help for mental health concerns. Using a mixed-method design, the researchers combined content analysis of 2,000 mental health-related tweets with focus group discussions involving 60 university students in Lagos. Findings showed that Twitter amplified mental health awareness through campaigns such as #EndStigma and #MentalHealthNaija, which encouraged more students to open up about their

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

struggles. However, help-seeking was still constrained by fear of judgment offline. The study recommended that universities should create formal partnerships with mental health advocates on Twitter to extend online engagement into campus-based support services.

In the same vein, Adamu, L., & Ibrahim, M. (2019) examined “Social Media and Youth Perceptions of Depression and Anxiety in Northern Nigeria.” The objective was to investigate whether social media platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook, influenced how young people understood and engaged with issues of depression and anxiety. The study employed survey research with a sample size of 500 youths in Kaduna State. Findings indicated that exposure to influencer-driven content on mental health increased awareness and reduced stigma, but did not strongly translate to professional help-seeking. The researchers recommended continuous sensitisation campaigns led by trusted influencers in collaboration with NGOs to sustain awareness and bridge the gap between knowledge and action.

In another related study, Nwankwo, C., & Adeyemi, S. (2022) carried out research titled “Digital Advocacy and Mental Health: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Twitter Spaces among Nigerian Students.” The study aimed to assess whether Twitter Spaces hosted by influencers provided meaningful engagement and encouraged students to seek professional help. A qualitative methodology was adopted, involving in-depth interviews with 25 active participants in mental

health-themed Twitter Spaces across three Nigerian universities. Findings revealed that interactive sessions reduced feelings of isolation, empowered students to share experiences, and normalised therapy as an option. However, the study also highlighted challenges such as poor internet access and inconsistent moderation. The researchers recommended that stakeholders should support influencers with resources to organise regular, structured discussions on Twitter Spaces to sustain engagement.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded on the assumptions of the Social Influence Theory, the Health Belief Model (HBM), and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). The Social Influence Theory, propounded by Kelman (1958), explains how individuals' thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours are shaped by the presence or actions of others. The theory is anchored on three processes of influence: compliance, where individuals conform to gain rewards or avoid punishment; identification, where individuals adopt behaviours to establish or maintain a relationship with a person or group; and internalisation, where individuals accept influence because the ideas are congruent with their value system.

In relation to this study, influencers on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) function as opinion leaders who wield social influence over students. By sharing experiences, campaigns, or advocacy around mental health, they can reduce

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

stigma, create awareness, and encourage positive help-seeking attitudes. Students may comply with their suggestions due to their popularity, identify with their lifestyle, or internalise their messages when they align with personal values. Thus, the Social Influence Theory is relevant for understanding how influencers act as informal development actors in the mental health space.

The Health Belief Model (HBM) was developed by Rosenstock (1966) and later expanded by Becker and Maiman (1974). The model suggests that individuals' health-related behaviours are dependent on their perceptions of four key factors: susceptibility (belief about the risk of a condition), severity (belief about the seriousness of the condition), benefits (belief in the effectiveness of taking preventive action), and barriers (belief about obstacles to taking action). Additionally, the model delineates the role of cues to action (triggers that prompt behaviour) and self-efficacy (confidence in one's ability to act).

Within the context of this study, influencers' posts, campaigns, and advocacy on X serve as cues to action that can motivate students to pay attention to their mental health and seek professional help. For example, when an influencer shares stories of coping with depression or the benefits of therapy, students may begin to perceive mental health as serious, recognise their own vulnerability, and feel encouraged to seek help despite existing barriers such as stigma or lack of resources. Therefore, the HBM provides a useful framework for understanding how influencer-

driven messages translate into actual help-seeking behaviour among UNN students.

Likewise, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). Unlike other media theories that focus on what media do to people, UGT focuses on what people do with media. The theory assumes that media users are active participants who consume content to satisfy specific needs such as information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment.

Applying this to the present study, UNN students may engage with influencers on X to meet their psychological and social needs regarding mental health. Some may follow influencers for information about coping mechanisms or therapy resources, others for social interaction through shared experiences, while others may seek identity reinforcement, finding reassurance in influencers who openly discuss mental health challenges. In this way, UGT helps explain why students turn to influencers in the first place and how their engagement aligns with broader mental health awareness and help-seeking behaviour.

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study to obtain the views of undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, on the research problem. The population of the study consisted of all undergraduate students in the university, totalling 35,130 according to the Academic Planning Unit (2024). Based on this

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

population, the Australian Calculator was used to determine a sample size of 380 respondents. This was calculated using a population proportion of 50%, a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. A questionnaire containing both structured Likert-scale statements and unstructured items was used as the instrument for data collection.

A proportionate sampling technique was employed to ensure fair representation of students across the various faculties. Out of the sample size of 380, the distribution across the ten faculties was as follows: Agriculture (33), Arts (57), Biological Sciences (62), Education (45), Engineering (34), Pharmaceutical Sciences (15), Social Sciences (56), Veterinary Medicine (41), Physical Sciences (30), and Vocational and Technical Education (8). This ensured that larger faculties contributed more respondents to the sample in line with their student population, while smaller faculties contributed proportionately fewer respondents. Within each faculty, respondents were randomly selected to guarantee fairness and minimise bias in the selection process. The method of analysis involved frequency tables and percentages, as well as mean averages and standard deviations, with a decision rule that statements with mean values of 2.5 and above were accepted, while those below 2.5 were rejected.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Engagement with Mental-Health Influencers on X (Select all that apply)

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

Influencer/Source	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Hauwa Ojeifo (@Hauwa_Ojeifo)	228	29.0
Aproko Doctor (@aproko_doctor)	192	24.4
Sheifunmi Yusuf (@sheifunmi)	141	17.9
@JayShetty)	103	13.1
Other (specify)	122	15.5
Total (multiple response)	786	100.0

relatively low engagement with Sheifunmi Yusuf and especially the foreign influencer (@jayshetty) highlights a preference and interest for Nigerian advocates whose experiences are relatable.

Table 1 suggests that Hauwa Ojeifo is the most engaged mental-health influencer among UNN students (29.0%), trailed by Aproko Doctor (24.4%), showing that locally grounded voices resonate more strongly than international ones. The

Table 2: Level of Engagement with Mental-Health Content from X Influencers (N =380)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean (SD)	Decision
I frequently view mental-health posts from X influencers I follow	102	136	92	50	2.77(1.05)	Accepted
I like, repost, or comment on mental-health posts shared by X influencers	87	122	104	67	2.63(1.07)	Accepted
I save or bookmark mental-health posts from X influencers for later reference	74	109	121	76	2.51(1.08)	Accepted
I act on calls-to-action in these posts (e.g., completing quizzes, using tips, visiting links)	69	94	131	86	2.40(1.06)	Rejected
I share mental-health posts from X influencers with friends or course groups	83	118	107	72	2.61(1.07)	Accepted
Cumulative Mean					2.58	

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

Table 2 shows a moderate level of engagement with mental-health content from X influencers (Cumulative Mean = 2.58). Students seem to consume and periodically interact with posts, but active behaviours such as bookmarking

or following calls-to-action remain relatively low. This indicates that while influencers succeed in attracting attention, they are less effective at driving sustained or deeper forms of engagement.

Table 3: Influence of X Influencers on Attitudes and Help-Seeking (N = 380)

Item	SA	A	D	S D	Mean (SD)	Decision
Content from X influencers has made me view mental health as important to academic success	111	132	89	48	2.82 (1.04)	Accepted
X influencers have increased my willingness to talk about mental-health concerns	97	124	101	58	2.67 (1.06)	Accepted
Posts from X influencers have encouraged me to consider seeking professional help if needed	84	118	110	68	2.55 (1.07)	Accepted
I feel more confident identifying credible mental-health resources because of X influencer posts	89	121	105	65	2.61 (1.06)	Accepted
X influencer content has reduced my hesitation or stigma about using counselling or support services	77	115	115	73	2.47 (1.08)	Rejected
Cumulative Mean	2.62					

Table 3 indicates that X influencers exert a moderate influence on students’ attitudes toward mental health and help-seeking (Cumulative Mean = 2.62). While many respondents acknowledged that influencer content helps them see mental health as important and encourages conversations, fewer students reported that it directly reduced stigma or strongly motivated professional help-

seeking. This suggests that while influencers can spark awareness and dialogue, more structured support systems are needed to translate awareness into sustained behavioral change.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: Which X influencers do UNN students engage with for mental health-related content?

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

The answer to this research question is provided in the analysis in Table 1, which shows that Hauwa Ojeifo (38.3%) and Aproko Doctor (34.2%) were the most engaged influencers among UNN students, while Sheifunmi Yusuf and the foreign influencer had considerably lower engagement. This suggests that the mental-health advocacy space in Nigeria is primarily shaped by homegrown voices with established credibility and cultural relevance. This further implies that Nigerian students prefer influencers who share relatable narratives and contextualized solutions. This follows the assumptions of the Social Influence Theory, which posits that individuals are more likely to be influenced by people they perceive as credible, trustworthy, and socially proximate.

This finding is also in tandem with those of Eze and Chukwuma (2021), who observed that Nigerian students largely relied on local influencers through Twitter hashtags and Instagram stories for mental-health narratives. Similarly, the present study shows that figures like Ojeifo and Aproko Doctor have become trusted sources for mental-health content, reinforcing their

social capital within Nigerian youth networks. However, as Eze and Chukwuma cautioned, the concentration of influence among a few voices could expose students to occasional misinformation. Therefore, while the high percentages of engagement affirm the relevance of Nigerian influencers, the finding underscores the importance of collaborations with mental-health professionals to ensure accuracy and sustainability of influence.

Research Question Two: What is the level of engagement of UNN students with mental health content shared by X influencers?

Table 2 answered this research question showing that student engagement with X influencer content was moderate overall (Grand mean = 2.58). While viewing and liking posts were common, more proactive behaviours such as acting on calls-to-action or saving posts scored below average. This implies that while influencers effectively capture attention and spark initial interaction, deeper engagement that could lead to behavioural change remains limited. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, this pattern reflects students' tendency to consume content mainly for information and entertainment, without necessarily

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

translating their engagement into long-term mental-health practices.

This finding agrees with Adamu and Ibrahim (2019), who revealed that social media exposure increased awareness and reduced stigma about depression and anxiety but rarely translated into actual professional help-seeking. Similarly, the moderate engagement in this study highlights the difference that exists between awareness and action among UNN students. The implication is that while influencers succeed in drawing attention to mental health, a stronger institutional framework may be required to complement online engagement with offline resources such as counseling units and peer-support systems.

Research Question Three: How do X influencers influence students' attitudes toward mental health support and professional help-seeking?

The results in Table 3 showed a grand mean of 2.62, indicating that influencers moderately shaped students' attitudes toward mental-health support and help-seeking. This suggests that influencers are effective in reframing perceptions and reducing stigma but less successful in directly motivating students to access

professional care. The finding is in consonance with the Health Belief Model, which emphasizes that perceived benefits (reduced stigma) and cues to action (influencer advocacy) are not always sufficient to overcome perceived barriers, such as fear of judgment or lack of services.

This finding supports Okoro and Musa (2020), who reported that while Twitter campaigns like #EndStigma encouraged openness, help-seeking remained constrained offline. The implication of the present finding is that influencers are vital in initiating attitude change, but they cannot independently drive behavioral transformation. Instead, collaborative partnerships between influencers, universities, and NGOs are necessary to reinforce online influence with tangible, supportive offline structures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The overall picture that emerges from this study is that while X influencers hold considerable potential as informal development actors in student mental health, their impact is maximized only when supported by intentional collaboration with institutions and enhanced engagement strategies.

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

This suggests that digital advocacy alone cannot adequately address the complexities of mental-health challenges, but it can serve as a vital entry point for awareness and dialogue when strategically complemented by structured support systems. By building a bridge between online influence and offline professional care, stakeholders can transform the reach of influencers into sustainable behavioural change.

On this basis, the following recommendations have been provided:

- Mental-health advocacy groups at UNN should prioritize partnerships with Nigerian X influencers by providing training and resources to amplify culturally relevant messages, since it was found that students prefer locally grounded voices over foreign ones.
- X influencers should design more interactive and participatory campaigns, such as Q\&A sessions, polls, and challenges, to foster deeper student engagement, since it was

discovered that their content currently attracts mostly passive interaction.

- Mental health counseling centres should collaborate with trusted X influencers to integrate professional support links and referral pathways into influencer content, since it was found that influencers have limited effect on encouraging professional help-seeking.

References

- Abidin, C. (2018). Internet celebrity: Understanding fame online. *Emerald Publishing*.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/9781787560799>
- Adamu, L., & Ibrahim, M. (2019). Social media and youth perceptions of depression and anxiety in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Media and Mental Health Studies*, 5(2), 44–59.
- Afolabi, A. O. (2018). Digital literacy and social media engagement among Nigerian university students: Implications for online health communication. *Nigerian Journal of Communication Research*, 15(2), 234–251.
- Arendt, F., Scherr, S., & Romer, D. (2020). Effects of exposure to self-harm on social media: Evidence for a papageno effect among adolescents. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 25(5), 378–395.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmaa014>
- Carah, N., & Brodmerkel, S. (2021). Brand machines, sensory media and calculative culture. *Palgrave Macmillan*.

X INFLUENCERS AS INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH ENGAGEMENT AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNN STUDENTS

- <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68371-2>
- Chen, L., & Wang, Y. (2021). Social media mental health campaigns and help-seeking intentions among young adults: A longitudinal study. *Digital Health*, 7, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20552076211025831>
- Eisenberg, D., Hunt, J., & Speer, N. (2013). Mental health in American colleges and universities: Variation across student subgroups and across campuses. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 201(1), 60–67. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0b013e31827ab077>
- Eze, U., & Chukwuma, F. (2021). The role of social media influencers in shaping mental health narratives among Nigerian youths. *Nigerian Journal of Communication Research*, 13(1), 88–104.
- Gureje, O., Lasebikan, V. O., Kola, L., & Makanjuola, V. A. (2006). Lifetime and 12-month prevalence of mental disorders in the Nigerian Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 188(5), 465-471. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.188.5.465>
- Naslund, J. A., Aschbrenner, K. A., Barre, L., & Bartels, S. J. (2016). Feasibility of popular m-health technologies for activity tracking among individuals with serious mental illness. *Telemedicine and e-Health*, 22(9), 733–739. <https://doi.org/10.1089/tmj.2015.0105>
- Naslund, J. A., Bondre, A., Torous, J., & Aschbrenner, K. A. (2016). Social media and mental health: Benefits, risks, and opportunities for research and practice. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, 5(3), 245-257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-020-00134-x>
- Nwankwo, C., & Adeyemi, S. (2022). Digital advocacy and mental health: Evaluating the effectiveness of Twitter Spaces among Nigerian students. *African Journal of Digital Communication*, 4(3), 115–130.
- Okoro, J., & Musa, A. (2020). Twitter discourse and youth mental health help-seeking behaviour in Nigerian universities. *Journal of Social Media & Society*, 9(4), 201–219.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/978019999736.001.0001>
- Patel, V., Saxena, S., Lund, C., Thornicroft, G., Baingana, F., Bolton, P., Chisholm, D., Collins, P. Y., Cooper, J. L., Eaton, J., Herrman, H., Herzallah, M. M., Huang, Y., Jordans, M. J. D., Kleinman, A., Medina-Mora, M. E., Morgan, E., Niaz, U., Omigbodun, O., ... Unützer, J. (2018). The Lancet Commission on global mental health and sustainable development. *The Lancet*, 392(10157), 1553-1598. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31612-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31612-X)
- Rickwood, D., Deane, F. P., Wilson, C. J., & Ciarrochi, J. (2005). Young people’s help-seeking for mental health problems. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 4(3), 218–251. <https://doi.org/10.5172/jamh.4.3.218>
- Vraga, E. K., & Bode, L. (2017). Using expert sources to correct health misinformation in social media. *Science Communication*, 39(5), 621-645. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547017731776>
- World Health Organization. (2022). **World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338>