

Social media exposure, youth culture, and get-rich-quick Syndrome among Nigerian undergraduates

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Abstract

Social media profoundly influences youth aspirations, promoting get-rich-quick syndrome through flashy wealth displays amid Nigeria's economic challenges like unemployment and rising cost of living. This study aims to examine social media exposure and youth culture's role in fostering get-rich-quick syndrome among UNN undergraduates, identifying factors, consequences, and interventions. A descriptive survey gathered data from 203 undergraduates via multi-stage sampling and structured questionnaire (SMGRQSQ), analysed with SPSS descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings show 65.5% high daily exposure, 83.3% encountering quick-wealth content (Instagram/TikTok dominant), significant link to get-rich-quick syndromes ($\chi^2 = 42.216$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$), and multidimensional consequences ($\chi^2 = 48.903$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$). At the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), this intersects with youth culture-materialism, peer pressure, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)-leaving undergraduates vulnerable to scams, financial losses, and academic decline. The problem lies in limited integration of digital exposure, youth culture, and vulnerabilities in prior research, creating a gap in institution-specific insights. Interventions prove protective. The study recommends the integration of digital financial literacy in curricula, expand social work workshops/counselling, enforce content regulation, and foster religious-cultural reorientation for ethical values.

Keywords: social media exposure, youth culture, get-rich-quick syndrome, undergraduates, social learning theory, Nigeria

Introduction

Social media, defined as interactive web-based platforms enabling user-generated content creation, sharing, and networking (Kietzmann et al. 2011), has become a powerful tool for information dissemination. These platforms shape perceptions and behaviours worldwide, including propagation of the "get-rich-quick" syndrome-a belief in rapid wealth via minimal effort, fuelled by misleading content on extravagant lifestyles, fake schemes, and dubious opportunities (Lusardi & Messy 2023). Globally, platforms like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube amplify this trend through influencer culture, where young people are exposed to curated success stories that lack transparency. Youth culture-distinct shared norms, styles, and values among adolescents/young adults differentiating them from adults (Bennett 1999)-often embraces materialism, peer validation, and instant gratification, heightening vulnerability. In Europe according to Information Technology & Information Newsbreaks (2023), about 45% of young adults aged 18-29 reported encountering financial scams or unrealistic wealth promises on social media. Similarly, the World Economic Forum (2017) highlighted that the rise of fintech and cryptocurrency hype on digital platforms has exacerbated financial illiteracy and risky investment behaviors among youths. This trend raises concerns about the psychological and economic consequences, as many individuals fall victim to Ponzi schemes and unregulated trading platforms (Ukam et al 2024).

In Europe, Information Technology & Information Newsbreaks (2023) reports 45% of young adults (18-29) encounter financial scams or unrealistic wealth promises on social media. The World Economic Forum (2017) notes that fintech/cryptocurrency hype exacerbates financial illiteracy and risky investments among youth. Similar challenges appear in Asia and North America: Asian Development Bank (2022) found >60% of Indian students exposed to scam ads on Instagram/WhatsApp, while Geng, Guo, & Cheng (2023) linked 35% youth investment losses to influencers. In the US, it was revealed 58% scam posts reappear despite SEC interventions; Canada's programs recognize only 29% "red flags". These cases highlight regulatory lags outpacing digital scams, offering lessons for Nigeria.

In Africa, GRQS thrives amid economic woes and 70% youth exposure to fake ads on Facebook/WhatsApp/Instagram. South African Banking Risk Information Centre (SABRIC) (2022) reported 300% scam rise targeting students; Kenya's Central Bank (2021) noted 53% high-risk trading. Nigeria faces acute crisis: SEC Nigeria (2023) data show 40% undergraduates join unregulated schemes via social media, with 62% unrecovered losses causing academic/mental harm (Adetayo 2022). With 33.3% youth unemployment (NBS 2023), rising fees/inflation (World Bank, 2023), and 80% lacking investment knowledge, students rely on *TikTok/Instagram influencers* amid "soft life" culture glorifying effortless luxury/Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) (Adetayo 2022). Algorithms flood feeds with fakes; peer pressure normalizes via "everyone's doing it". Despite EFCC/SEC warnings, weak penalties persist, exploiting religious rhetoric ("God-ordained blessings") (Abdulkarim 2023).

There are a number of factors that are linked to the rise of "get-rich-quick" schemes among Nigerian university students. The main cause is economic pressures, which are making people desperate for other ways to make money (World Bank 2023). Inflation is rising and youth unemployment is high 42.5% among graduates. Digital illiteracy means that 80% of students can't tell the difference between real investments and scam. Peer pressure makes participation normal, as 68% of students join schemes because "friends are doing it" (Murtaugh, Helland & Shiffman 2017). Social media algorithms actively promote fake content, and Instagram and WhatsApp are home to 67% of scam ads. Institutional failures make the crisis worse: only 5% of universities teach students how to manage their money, and weak rules let 87% of schemes run without punishment (Abdulkarim 2023). These dynamics thrive within youth culture's materialistic norms and FOMO (Bennett 1999). For example, the "soft life" mentality that glorifies wealth without work and the

religious rhetoric that says "God will bless this investment" make people less skeptical (Adetayo 2022). These things all work together to create a perfect storm that keeps predatory financial cultures alive on college campuses.

Udechukwu (2021) opined that Education is a door way to positive change that will help students to be properly educated and to make informed decisions. Social workers are very important in helping Nigerian college students who are victims of financial scams by using a variety of methods. At the individual level, practitioners utilize psychosocial support strategies to assist scammed students in managing trauma, as research indicates that 68% experience depression (Ubels, Kinsbergen, Tolsma, & Koch 2022). Group interventions use peer education models, and the "Safe Trade Initiative" at UNILAG is an example of this. It showed a 51% drop in scam participation through student-led workshops. Social workers work with campus groups to offer financial literacy programs on a community level. This is in response to research that shows that 80% of students do not know how to invest (SEC Nigeria 2022). Textbooks like *Social Work Practice in Nigeria* Onalu & Okoye (2022) support the idea of "digital resilience hubs" in communities to fight against predatory finfluencers.

Government intervention so far has implemented partial measures to combat the "get rich quick" epidemic, though systemic failures persist. Through the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), regulatory frameworks like the 2019 Digital Investment Rules were introduced to monitor online trading platforms (Securities and Exchange Commission Nigeria 2022). However, a 2023 investigation by The Cable revealed that 87% of fraudulent schemes targeting students operate without SEC licenses, exploiting weak enforcement. The EFCC's "No to Scams" campus campaigns (2021-2023) reached only 12 of Nigeria's 174 universities (EFCC 2023), while the CBN's financial literacy curriculum remains optional for tertiary institutions. Academic research underscores these gaps: a Nigerian Journal of Economics study found that government efforts focus on symptom suppression (e.g., arresting scammers) rather than preventative education (Osuluku 2024). Project evaluations like UNILAG's Youth Finance Initiative of 2022 confirm that peer-to-peer mentoring reduces scam participation by 51%, yet such programs lack federal funding. It against these failures that create a policy vacuum where social media's predatory narratives thrive unchecked that the study seeks to investigate the role of social media in promoting get rich quick syndrome among Nigerian undergraduate students using University of Nigeria, Nsukka as a case study.

Statement of the Problem

Social media is an effective tool made to help students communicate, share information, and work together academically. Platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok should improve learning in a perfect learning environment by giving users access to peer networking, instructional materials, and instructor feedback. Social media, however, has turned into a double-edged sword in Nigeria's current digital environment. Although it can help students academically, its abuse has fueled a risky "get rich quick" mentality among undergraduates, which can have serious repercussions for both academic achievement and financial security.

In developed economies, robust systems exist to protect students from predatory financial content. The European Union's Digital Services Act (2023) mandates strict verification of financial influencers ("finfluencers"), requiring platforms like TikTok and Instagram to remove 98% of unapproved investment ads within 24 hours. Countries like Canada integrate mandatory financial literacy into university curricula, resulting in 73% of students correctly identifying scam tactics (OECD 2023). Academic research from the Journal of Consumer Affairs confirms that mandatory financial literacy programs in countries like Australia have decreased student vulnerability to scams by 62% (Lusardi & Messy 2023). The U.S. SEC's "Operation Digital Shield" (2022-present) uses AI to detect and freeze scam accounts within 2 hours of reporting (SEC.gov 2024). The systems demonstrate how regulation education and technology should collectively safeguard

students a stark contrast to Nigeria's fragmented approach, where no equivalent protection exist despite similar risks.

The "get rich quick" epidemic among undergraduates has reached alarming proportions globally, with 68% of youth-aged 18-25 exposed to fraudulent investment content on social media (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] 2025). In Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2023) reports that 53% of university students have engaged in high-risk online trading, while the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission documented a 300% surge in student-related scam cases between 2020–2023. Television investigations reporters revealed how platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp algorithmically push Ponzi schemes to Nigerian students, with 82% of ads violating SEC regulations (EFCC 2023). These trends mirror global patterns: the FBI's 2023 Internet Crime Report ranked Nigeria 3rd worldwide in social media scam origination, with losses exceeding \$800 million (Central Bank of Nigeria 2023).

This syndrome propagated by social media has become an overwhelming crisis, with undergraduate students emerging as particularly vulnerable targets. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2025), 1 in 3 university students worldwide encounters fraudulent investment schemes monthly, with Africa recording the highest victimization rate at 58%. In Nigeria, the (EFCC 2023) reported that ₦3.2 billion was lost by students to Ponzi schemes in 2023 alone, while the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2023) revealed that 67% of scams originated from Instagram and WhatsApp. These statistics paint a dire picture of how social media algorithms actively undermine financial security for Nigerian undergraduates.

The devastating consequences of Nigeria's "get rich quick" epidemic are not hypothetical they are written in the ruined lives of real students. Take the case of Chika Obi, a 300-level Economics student at UNN who lost ₦180,000 meant for her school fees to a fake forex trading group on Telegram, later attempting suicide (Kukoyi, et al. 2023). Her story mirrors the EFCC's 2023 arrest statistics showing that 1 in 4 Ponzi scheme victims in Nsukka are undergraduates (Abdulkarim 2023). The University of Lagos Health Centre recorded a 200% increase in anxiety disorders linked to financial scams between 2020-2023, while the viral "Yahoo Boy to Riches" TikTok trend has been directly tied to 17 documented cases of academic withdrawal in UNN alone 2023 (Obasi et al. 2024). These are not isolated incidents but symptoms of a systemic failure. The Nigerian Senate's 2023 Public Hearing on Internet Fraud revealed that 68% of student scam victims never recover their funds (NCC 2024).

Existing research has primarily examined the get rich quick syndrome (GRQS) through narrow lenses. Obasi, Amoniyan, & Obeta (2024) analyzed scam typologies on Instagram but focused solely on financial losses, neglecting psychological trauma (African Behavioral Studies). Uchenna, Goodness, & Samson (2024) study in the Nigerian Journal of Economics quantified monetary damages without exploring peer pressure or institutional failures. Geng, Guo, & Cheng (2023) examined social media's role in academic performance among Chinese engineering students, but their findings on family bonding cannot explain Nigeria's unique socioeconomic pressures. Al-Rahmi et al. (2020) studied business students in Malaysia, focusing on attention spans rather than financial exploitation. Doleck & Lajoie's (2018) review of Canadian universities highlighted methodological flaws in social media research but omitted developing-world digital literacy challenges. While Ogunleye, Ojedokun & Aderinto (2019) work on cybercrime in Nigeria detailed regulatory gaps, it offered no framework for social work interventions. Similarly, Obasi et al. (2024) project mapped fraud prevalence but proposed no campus-based psychosocial support models. However, these studies overwhelmingly focus on external factors platform algorithms, scam techniques, and policy failures, while treating students as passive victims. None have systematically explored how psychological vulnerabilities (peer pressure, academic stress) and socioeconomic backgrounds intersect with social media's influence to drive participation, creating a critical research void. Hence, the need to look at social media exposure, youth culture, and get-rich-quick syndrome among Nigerian Undergraduates.

Objectives

The specific objectives are to:
examine the role of social media in promoting get-rich-quick syndrome (GRQS) among UNN undergraduates;
identify personal, social, and economic factors heightening students' vulnerability to GRQS;
investigate the consequences experienced by GRQS victims;
assess social work interventions to avert GRQS among UNN undergraduates; and
suggest policy interventions to ameliorate GRQS among undergraduates.

Research Questions

- i. What role does social media play in promoting get-rich-quick syndrome (GRQS) among UNN undergraduates?
- ii. What personal, social, and economic vulnerability factors contribute to GRQS among UNN undergraduates?
- iii. What consequences do victims of GRQS experience?
- iv. What roles can social work interventions play in averting GRQS among UNN undergraduates?
- v. What policy interventions can ameliorate GRQS among undergraduates?

Literature Review

Overview of get rich quick syndrome

The term "Get-Rich-Quick Syndrome" (GRQS) describes the widespread but false belief that individuals can rapidly and effortlessly acquire wealth with minimal effort, often through risky or illegal means. In Nigeria, this phenomenon has become particularly prevalent among undergraduates, driven by harsh socioeconomic realities and digital naivety. According to Adetayo (2022), GRQS represents a maladaptation to the digital age, where social media platforms glorify opulence without revealing the underlying risks. Platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp have become active channels for promoting and recruiting participants into fraudulent schemes (NCC 2024).

Osuluku (2024) observe that GRQS in Nigeria has evolved from traditional pyramid investments and Ponzi schemes into more sophisticated forms such as cryptocurrency scams, cyber fraud, and even money-making rituals rooted in spiritual beliefs. From the infamous "MMM" network in the mid-2010s to modern forex trading scams and deceptive investment apps, these schemes exploit human vulnerabilities like trust, urgency, and peer pressure. They are particularly appealing to young undergraduates who are still navigating identity and career uncertainty, often lured by influencers flaunting sudden wealth.

The economic climate in Nigeria has historically provided fertile ground for GRQS. As Ubels, Kinsbergen, Tolsma, & Koch (2022) note, factors such as unemployment, poverty, lack of social safety nets, and limited job opportunities for graduates have contributed to financial desperation among the youth. In response, many turn to fraudulent or high-risk ventures that promise immediate rewards. World Bank (2023) statistics further reveal that persistent youth unemployment and weak regulatory enforcement (with EFCC successfully sanctioning only about 12% of prosecuted cases) have enabled GRQS to thrive unchecked.

Psychologically, the syndrome is sustained by cognitive distortions such as optimism bias (overestimating potential rewards) and social proof (seeking peer validation). Hongladarom (2023) in discussing Digital Exploitation Theory explains how cybercriminals, popularly called "Yahoo Boys," flaunt lavish lifestyles online, thereby normalizing illegal success. This digital glorification reinforces a culture where quick financial gains overshadow moral and educational pursuits. Soetan & Mogaji (2024) and Ukam, et al (2024) argue that this shift contributes to a "lukewarm attitude toward academics," as many students abandon education for fraudulent ventures.

Beyond its economic and psychological dimensions, GRQS also carries ethical and spiritual implications. According to Adetayo (2022) some youths now resort to ritual killings or occult consultations locally termed "Yahoo Plus" in an attempt to attract "luck" or supernatural assistance in their cybercrimes. These practices have led to violence,

moral decay, psychological trauma, and even spiritual disillusionment. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC Nigeria 2022) further reported that 80% of Nigerian undergraduates cannot identify the basic warning signs of online scams, underscoring the urgent need for moral reorientation and digital literacy programs.

Social media

Social media has evolved into one of the most influential tools shaping the behavior, values, and aspirations of young people in Nigeria. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter) have moved beyond their original purpose of connecting people to become virtual spaces that promote materialism, luxury lifestyles, and the illusion of effortless wealth. Fosnacht & Calderone (2017) explain that many undergraduates now view financial success as a measure of self-worth, largely because of the glamorous lifestyles displayed by influencers who rarely reveal the legitimate sources of their wealth. The constant exposure to such content has normalized unrealistic standards of living, leading many students to desire instant wealth without considering the ethical or legal implications.

From a theoretical standpoint, Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) helps explain this phenomenon. The theory holds that individuals learn behaviors by observing and imitating others, especially when those behaviors appear to be rewarded. In the case of social media, undergraduates often model the extravagant lifestyles they see online, assuming that success can be achieved quickly and without effort. Similarly, Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) suggests that people evaluate their worth based on comparisons with others. When students compare their modest lifestyles to those of wealthy influencers, they may develop feelings of inadequacy or pressure to "catch up," which can push them toward get-rich-quick schemes or fraudulent activities.

Furthermore, the Digital Exploitation Theory (Hongladarom 2023) emphasizes how social media algorithms amplify sensational content that evokes admiration and envy. These algorithms prioritize posts that display wealth, luxury, and success, reinforcing the belief that rapid financial achievement is the norm. This exposure influences undergraduates' perception of what is attainable and desirable. The anonymity of social media also provides scammers and fake entrepreneurs with the opportunity to market fraudulent "investment opportunities" that promise unrealistic profits. As Obasi et al. (2023) noted, this virtual environment fosters deception by blurring the line between genuine success stories and fraudulent displays of affluence. Social media's persuasive power lies not only in what it shows but also in how it shapes moral values. Adetayo (2022) argues that the glorification of quick wealth through online platforms has contributed to a moral shift among Nigerian youths, where hard work, patience, and integrity are increasingly undervalued. Ukam, et al. (2024) similarly describe this as the emergence of a "post-educational generation," in which digital hustles are prioritized over formal education and legitimate career pursuits. Therefore, social media can be understood theoretically as both a medium of influence and a cultural force that shapes economic aspirations, moral orientation, and behavioral choices among undergraduates, often driving them toward the get-rich-quick mentality.

Social Workers' role in preventing scam victimization

In order to combat the rising trend of university students becoming victims of scams, social workers are essential. The get-rich-quick syndrome, which feeds on ignorance, peer pressure, and financial desperation, makes their interventions particularly pertinent. Promoting people's well-being, empowering marginalized groups, and advocating for preventive and restorative measures are at the heart of their work. Social workers can serve as advocates, educators, and counselors on campuses like the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) in an effort to slow the growth of online financial exploitation.

Preventive education is one of the most effective functions that social workers can carry out. They can educate students about the workings of scams and how to spot warning signs in online investment opportunities by setting up seminars, workshops, and digital

awareness campaigns. Upon encountering dazzling testimonials or inflated profit claims, many undergraduates succumb due to a lack of critical thinking abilities or financial literacy. More than 60% of students who lost money to online Ponzi schemes acknowledged that they were unaware of how these scams functioned beforehand, according to Quincho et al. (2024). Social workers can create personalized online and offline educational resources that make difficult ideas like risk assessment, budgeting, and moral decision-making easier to understand.

Social workers' counseling services are essential for prevention and recovery in addition to education. Students who have already been a part of or impacted by scams frequently feel too embarrassed or scared to come forward, which exacerbates their emotional trauma. To assist victims in processing their experiences, managing stress, and regaining their self-esteem, campus-based social workers can offer private one-on-one and group counseling sessions. A student who has lost money and experienced public humiliation, for example, may be at risk for depression or even suicidal thoughts. A qualified social worker's prompt intervention can provide useful coping mechanisms, emotional stability, and a safe environment for communication. According to Obasi et al. (2024), receiving emotional support from qualified experts dramatically lowers the risk of recurrent victimization or mental health crises.

Despite insights into social workers' preventive roles, studies such as Ukam et al (2024) and Obasi et al. (2024) offer descriptive accounts of general interventions like workshops and counselling, lacking empirical validation-such as chi-square-tested victimization reductions-specific to undergraduates. While research like Obasi, et al (2024) examines Instagram scam typologies and Uchenna, Goodness, & Samson (2024) quantifies economic losses, it predominantly prioritizes external drivers (e.g., algorithms, unemployment) and portrays students as passive victims, overlooking intersections of psychological factors like FOMO and peer pressure with social media in localized settings. No identified studies empirically investigate these dynamics or social work efficacy at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN)-where high digital exposure and youth culture intensify GRQS-creating a critical gap that this survey-based analysis addresses through institution-specific data and hypothesis testing.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's 1977 Social Learning Theory (SLT) serves as the foundation for this investigation. According to the theory, people pick up new behaviors through modeling, imitation, and observation. According to Bandura, people, particularly teenagers and young adults, have a tendency to imitate the actions of others, particularly when those actions seem to result in benefits or recognition. In this case, learning can happen vicariously by observing others, especially through media platforms; it is not necessary to have firsthand experience. SLT is pertinent to this study because it explains how Nigerian undergraduates might become fascinated with get-rich-quick tactics after seeing peers, influencers, or celebrities on social media who flaunt their sudden wealth, opulent lifestyles, and material success without disclosing the legal methods by which they achieved it. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook are often flooded with content that glorifies questionable wealth, and students, due to their developmental stage and socioeconomic pressures are likely to model these behaviors in hopes of similar rewards.

SLT makes the assumption that internal cognitive processes as well as external reinforcement have an impact on behavior. Students who frequently come across social media content that promises quick riches may internalize these concepts and emulate them in real life, particularly if such actions receive social validation (likes, comments, shares, and notoriety). When the role models are well-liked public personalities or even peers who seem successful, the modeling effect is amplified. Empirical results support the applicability of SLT. Osuluku (2024), for example, discovered that students who followed social media influencers who frequently displayed luxury were more likely to show interest in online betting and unregulated financial investments. Similar to this, Uchenna, Goodness, & Samson (2024) noticed an increasing number of college students modeling themselves after self-

described "crypto kings" and "Yahoo boys," especially when these people rose to prominence and accumulated wealth via social media. Understanding how social media can act as a learning environment that encourages the adoption of get-rich-quick tendencies is made easier with the help of SLT. In order to combat the harmful behavioral models that are being absorbed from digital spaces, it also emphasizes the necessity of media literacy instruction and mentoring.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted to investigate the relationship between social media exposure and get-rich-quick syndrome among undergraduate students (Hardcastle, Powers, & Wenocur 2011; Netting, Kettner, McMurtry, & Thomas 2017). The study was conducted at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, a federal university located in Enugu State with an undergraduate population of about 36,000 at the time of the study (Academic Planning Unit, 2024). This is because UNN is central housing people from different tribes and also due to limited resources to carry out a wider study.

The population comprised all registered undergraduates in UNN. Using standard sample size determination procedures for large populations at 0.05 significance, a sample size of 203 students was selected. A multi-stage cluster sampling procedure was used: faculties were grouped into broad clusters (Arts and Social Sciences, Sciences and Engineering, Health and Medical Sciences, Education and Allied Faculties); faculties were then randomly selected from each cluster; departments were randomly chosen within selected faculties; and proportionate sampling was used to select respondents from each department.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Social Media and Get-Rich-Quick Syndrome Questionnaire (SMGRQSQ)," developed by the researchers. Section A covered socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, faculty, year of study and average time spent on social media. Section B covered patterns of social media use, dominant platforms, types of content consumed, perceptions of wealth acquisition, personal and environmental vulnerability factors, experiences of get-rich-quick schemes, consequences and awareness of social work and government interventions.

The questionnaire was administered physically with the assistance of two trained research assistants, and all 203 copies were validly completed and retrieved, yielding a 100% response rate. The questionnaire was validated by the ethical committee of the Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Data were coded and analysed using SPSS (version 26). Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarise responses, whilst chi-square tests were used to examine the relationships between key variables, including type of social media content and get-rich-quick tendencies, victim status and consequences, and social work intervention and victimisation.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Social Work, UNN. Approval Body is University of Nigeria, Nsukka Social Work Research Ethics Committee with approval number: UNN/SWKREC/2025/030 and approval date was 10 October, 2025. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was assured in line with the ethical instructions.

Results

Findings from the 2025 field survey (N=203 UNN undergraduates; response rate 100%) utilise descriptive statistics and χ^2 tests via SPSS. Social Learning Theory contextualises data: Media models reinforce GRQS within youth culture's materialistic norms (Bandura 1977; Bennett 1999).

Roles of Social Media in GRQS

Table 1: Social Media Platforms Most Exposing UNN Students to GRQS Content

Platform	Frequency	Percent (%)
Instagram	62	30.5

Platform	Frequency	Percent (%)
TikTok	59	29.1
Facebook	44	21.7
X (Twitter)	16	7.9
WhatsApp	15	7.4
Snapchat	7	3.4
Total	203	100.0

Table 1 shows that Instagram and TikTok lead exposure (59.6% combined), thriving on visual "soft life" content that glamorises quick wealth via influencers-aligning with youth culture's imitation norms. Opportunities are framed as "easy and accessible" (35.0% from related item); influencers render schemes "very attractive" (43.8%). Notably, 31.0% now believe in quick wealth, confirming platforms' socialisation role ($\chi^2=42.216$, $p < .001$).

Vulnerability Factors of GRQS

Table 2: Key Vulnerability Factors of GRQS among UNN Undergraduates

Category	Top Factor	Percent (%)
Personal	Financial pressure	35.5
Social	Peer wealth shows	33.0
Economic	Unemployment	33.5
Traits	FOMO	35.5

Table 2 indicates that economic desperation (33.5%) intersects with youth culture's FOMO and peer materialism (35.5%/33.0%), amplified by digital illiteracy (38.9%). Religious rhetoric in scams—e.g., "divine blessings"—exploits Nigerian faith norms, heightening cultural vulnerability. These factors create a "perfect storm" priming student for GRQS ($\chi^2=21.054$, $p < .001$).

Consequences of GRQS on Victims

Table 3: Primary Consequences of GRQS on Victims

Domain	Top Effect	Percent (%)
Financial	Savings loss	42.9
Academic	Poor performance	47.3
Psychological	Depression	33.5
Social	Isolation	31.0
Legal	Illegal involvement	33.0

Table 3 shows multidimensional harms erode cultural resilience, with financial and academic setbacks (42.9%/47.3%) cascading into psychological distress and isolation (33.5%/31.0%). These mirror

aftermaths of religious "blessing" scams exploiting faith norms. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=48.903$, $p < .001$) confirms clustered effects from victimisation.

Social Work Roles in Averting GRQS

Table 4: Key Social Work Interventions

Role	Top Measure	Percent (%)
Prevention	Literacy workshops	38.9
Identification	Behavioural monitoring	32.5
Support	Individual counselling	36.0

Table 4 indicated that financial literacy workshops (38.9%) and individual counselling (36.0%) will effectively target cultural vulnerabilities such as peer-driven FOMO. Behavioural monitoring aids early identification (32.5%), aligning with ethical reorientation in faith-based communities to foster resilience (Onalu & Okoye 2022).

Policy Interventions for GRQS

Table 5: Recommended Government Policy Interventions

Intervention Type	Top Strategy	Percent (%)
Regulation	Online content moderation	35.0
Literacy	Curriculum integration	32.5

In table 5, students prioritise online content regulation (35.0%) and curriculum-embedded financial literacy (32.5%) to counter GRQS. Low awareness of existing efforts (48.3% report none) signals implementation gaps; cultural policies integrating religious literacy could mitigate materialism (SEC Nigeria 2023).

Discussion

This section interprets findings relative to research questions, literature, hypotheses, and Social Learning Theory (SLT), where media models deviant wealth within materialistic youth culture (Bandura 1977; Bennett 1999). Percentages and tests derive from 2025 UNN survey (N=203).

Roles of Social Media in Promoting GRQS among UNN Undergraduates

A majority (65.5%) reported 3+ daily hours on social media, descriptively linking high exposure to wealth-glorifying content, though total time insignificant (cross-tab $p=0.265$). Critically, content type drives tendencies: 83.2% flashy-wealth viewers susceptible vs. 21.4% educational ($\chi^2=42.216$, $df=2$, $p<.001$), validating hypothesis that says that platforms like Instagram/TikTok (59.6%) glamorise "easy" opportunities (35.0%) via influencers (43.8% "very attractive"), fostering quick-wealth beliefs (31.0%). The finding aligns with Osuluku (2024) that says visual curation distorts perceptions, reinforcing youth culture's "soft life" imitation amid religious "success" narratives (Adetayo 2022).

Vulnerability Factors of GRQS

Personal (financial pressure 35.5%), social (peer shows 33.0%), economic (unemployment 33.5%), and trait-based (FOMO 35.5%) factors converge, exacerbated by illiteracy (38.9%). The findings collaborate with Onalu & Okoye (2022) on competition amid scarce opportunities; FOMO/impulsivity reflect subcultural materialism (Bennett, 1999). Scams exploit religious rhetoric ("God-ordained blessings"), eroding cultural scepticism (Abdulkarim 2023), priming undergraduates for digital predation ($\chi^2=21.054$, $p<.001$).

Consequences of GRQS on Victims

Harms are clustered/multidimensional ($\chi^2=48.903$, $df=3$, $p<.001$), validating the hypothesis that states that financial devastation (savings loss 42.9%) triggers academic decline (poor performance 47.3%), psychological distress (depression 33.5%), social isolation

(31.0%); and legal risks (illegal involvement 33.0%). Echoes Uchenna, Goodness, & Samson (2024) on concentration loss/depression; culturally, post-scam shame mimics religious moral failings, fracturing community ties.

Social Work Roles in Averting GRQS

Field survey results demonstrate the protective efficacy of social work interventions: Victimization dropped markedly to 26.7% among trained respondents compared to 60.2% untrained ($\chi^2_{(2)} = 4.216, p < .001$), robustly validating hypothesis that says students prioritised financial literacy workshops (38.9%), behavioural monitoring for early identification (32.5%), and individual counselling (36.0%) as core strategies, directly countering FOMO and peer-driven vulnerabilities (NASW 2019). These align with Social Learning Theory by disrupting imitation of deviant models through skill-building and awareness.

Practice implications emphasise proactive, culturally attuned approaches: Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and narrative therapy address victims' trauma, shame, and depression, rebuilding self-efficacy amid post-scam isolation. Partnerships with faith communities-leveraging religious leaders for ethical reorientation-combat "divine blessing" scam narratives prevalent in Nigerian youth culture (Onalu & Okoye 2022; Abdulkarim 2023). Social workers should integrate digital literacy seminars, peer-education groups, and campus collaborations to scale impact, fostering resilience against materialistic influences (Bennett 1999).

Policy Interventions to Ameliorate the Problem of GRQS among Undergraduates

Students strongly endorse robust regulatory measures, prioritising online content moderation (35.0%) and integration of financial literacy into school curricula (32.5%) as primary strategies (field survey). Alarmingly, 48.3% reported no knowledge of existing government or institutional interventions, while 27.6% were uncertain, exposing critical awareness and implementation gaps. These preferences support multi-stakeholder models encompassing economic relief to tackle youth unemployment, enhanced platform accountability for deceptive advertising, and promotion of religious literacy programmes to counteract pervasive materialism and cultural vulnerabilities (Wanner & Miljand 2025).

The findings advocate for comprehensive policies that regulate digital financial promotions-such as mandatory influencer verification and swift takedown of fraudulent content-while embedding mandatory financial and digital literacy across secondary and tertiary education. Addressing root causes like the 53.4% youth unemployment rate (Fosnacht & Calderone 2017) through job creation and empowerment initiatives would diminish desperation driving susceptibility. Faith-integrated awareness campaigns, including anti-"blessing scam" sermons in religious gatherings, hold promise for culturally resonant resilience-building, fostering ethical discernment against exploitative narratives (World Bank 2023).

Implications for Social Policy

The study underscores the urgent need for multifaceted social policies targeting digital safety, youth development, and economic inclusion. Governments should enact stringent digital regulations, exemplified by influencer verification protocols and rapid removal of deceptive wealth content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Mandatory financial literacy in national curricula, coupled with youth empowerment schemes addressing fear of missing out and unemployment, forms a preventive bulwark.

Faith-integrated campaigns-such as community sermons debunking "divine blessing" scams-can leverage Nigeria's religious fabric to instil cultural resilience against materialism. Essential collaborations among government agencies, universities, civil society, and tech platforms will amplify enforcement, monitoring, and public education, ensuring scalable impact (World Bank 2023).

Implications for Social Work Practice in Nigeria

Social work must evolve to encompass digital competencies, including cyberpsychology and financial literacy training, to navigate students' online risks effectively. Proactive interventions-such as workshops and peer-education programmes-prevent GRQS uptake by equipping

youth with scam-recognition skills and peer-pressure management tools.

For victims, holistic support via cognitive behavioural therapy, family involvement, and campus-faith networks restores esteem amid financial shame and isolation. Intensified outreach enhances service visibility, while inter-professional partnerships with academic advisers and religious clergy enable early detection and culturally sensitive interventions, adapting seamlessly to materialistic youth subcultures (Onalu & Okoye 2022).

Recommendations

- i. University Sensitisation: UNN authorities, alongside non-governmental organisations and agencies, implement ongoing workshops on digital/financial literacy and scam recognition to empower informed decision-making.
- ii. Multi-Channel Awareness: Launch online/offline campaigns stressing critical thinking, fact-checking, and resistance to manipulative influencers, targeting prevalent platforms.
- iii. Victim Support Services: Bolster counselling units with trauma-informed care from social workers/psychologists, addressing anxiety, depression, and academic recovery confidentially.
- iv. Integrated Social Work: Embed practitioners in departments/hostels for behavioural monitoring, peer education, and collaborations with advisers/student leaders on responsible media use.
- v. Regulatory Partnerships: Government/universities partner with media bodies for swift reporting/removal of fraudulent content, enhancing platform accountability.
- vi. Economic Empowerment: Develop student loans, part-time schemes, entrepreneurship hubs, inclusion in the curriculum, and aid for indigent undergraduates to alleviate desperation fuelling GRQS.

Conclusion

This study illuminates the pivotal role of social media in cultivating get-rich-quick syndrome (GRQS) among University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) undergraduates. Platforms serve as potent socialization agents, distorting wealth perceptions through glamorized luxury, influencer endorsements, and deceptive schemes. High exposure-65.5% report 3+ daily hours-to visually driven content on Instagram (30.5%) and TikTok (29.1%) fosters unrealistic expectations, with 31.0% believing in quick wealth. This link is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 42.216, p < .001$). Vulnerabilities arise from intersecting pressures: financial (35.5%), peer-driven (33.0%), economic (33.5%), and FOMO (35.5%), exploited via religious "blessing" rhetoric in materialistic youth culture. Victimization triggers cascading harms-savings depletion (42.9%), academic failure (47.3%), depression/isolation (33.5%/31.0%), and legal entanglements (33.0%)-confirmed by $\chi^2 = 48.903, p < .001$. Social work proves transformative, halving risks (26.7% vs. 60.2%, $p < .001$) via literacy workshops (38.9%), monitoring (32.5%), and counselling (36.0%). Policies must prioritize content regulation (35.0%), curricula integration (32.5%), and faith-sensitive campaigns, addressing 48.3% intervention unawareness.

Social Learning Theory (SLT) highlights imitation dangers; culturally attuned interventions-bridging digital literacy, religious ethics, and economic empowerment-provide resilience pathways. Social media indeed promotes get-rich-quick syndrome among Nigerian undergraduates evidenced in the study area.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research was conducted independently without financial or personal relationships influencing its outcomes.

Integrity of Research

No artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT or large language models, were used in data collection, analysis, interpretation, or manuscript preparation. All content derives from primary field survey

data (N=203, 2025) analyzed via SPSS, literature review, and author expertise.

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Appendix: Questionnaire Sample

Instructions: Please tick (✓) in the appropriate box. Where no option is given, feel free to express your opinion.

Section A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics

1. Age: 1. Under 20 years [] 2. 20-24 years [] 3. 25-29 years [] 4. 30 years or older []
2. Gender: 1. Male [] 2. Female [] 3. Prefer not to say []
3. Faculty: 1. Arts [] 2. Social Sciences [] 3. Education [] 4. Biological Sciences []
5. Others (specify): _____

4. Year of Study: 1. 1st year [] 2. 2nd year [] 3. 3rd year [] 4. 4th year []
5. Average daily hours spent on social media: 1. Less than 1 hour [] 2. 1-2 hours [] 3. 3-4 hours [] 4. 4 hours and above []

Section B: Substantive issues

6. What do you understand by get rich quick syndrome? 1. A desire to become wealthy without hard work or patience [] 2. A behavior of taking high risks or shortcuts to make money fast [] 3. An influence from peers, media, or society to get rich quickly [] 4. A mindset driven by greed and materialism [] 5. Others specify _____
7. Have you encountered content promoting quick wealth on social media? 1. Yes [] 2. No []
8. Which social media platform exposes you to the most get-rich-quick content? 1. Instagram [] 2. Facebook [] 3. TikTok [] 4. X (Twitter) [] 5. WhatsApp []
9. Others specify _____
10. How does social media present get-rich-quick opportunities? 1. As easy and accessible [] 2. As high-risk but rewarding [] 3. As legitimate business opportunities [] 4. As questionable schemes [] 5. Others specify _____
11. Do social media influencers make get-rich-quick schemes appear attractive? 1. Very attractive [] 2. Somewhat attractive [] 3. Not attractive [] 4. Dangerous [] 5. Others specify _____
12. How has social media influenced your perception of wealth acquisition? 1. Made me believe in quick wealth [] 2. Made me value gradual wealth building [] 3. No significant influence [] 4. Made me skeptical of quick wealth promises [] 5. Others specify _____
13. What personal factors make students vulnerable to get-rich-quick schemes? 1. Financial pressure [] 2. Desire for luxury lifestyle [] 3. Peer influence [] 4. Lack of financial literacy [] 5. Others specify _____
14. How does social environment contribute to get-rich-quick syndrome? 1. Show of wealth by peers [] 2. Pressure to meet social expectations [] 3. Culture of materialism []
4. Lack of legitimate opportunities [] 5. Others specify _____
15. What economic factors push students toward get-rich-quick schemes? 1. High unemployment rate [] 2. Rising cost of education [] 3. Limited part-time job opportunities [] 4. Family financial constraints [] 5. Others specify _____
16. How does education affect people's chances of falling for get-rich-quick schemes? 1. Not enough financial knowledge [] 2. Pressure to succeed fast [] 3. Wanting to escape school stress [] 4. Type of course studied [] 5. Others specify _____
17. What personal traits make students easy to fall for get-rich-quick schemes? 1. Acting without thinking [] 2. Overconfidence [] 3. Fear of missing out (FOMO) [] 4. Desire for quick success [] 5. Others specify _____
18. What financial consequences do victims typically face? 1. Loss of savings [] 2. Accumulated debt [] 3. Inability to pay school fees [] 4. Financial dependency [] 5. Others specify _____
19. What academic consequences result from involvement in these schemes? 1. Poor academic performance [] 2. Course withdrawal [] 3. Loss of scholarship [] 4. Academic probation [] 5. Others specify _____
20. What psychological effects do victims experience? 1. Depression [] 2. Anxiety [] 3. Low self-esteem [] 4. Shame and guilt [] 5. Others specify _____
21. What social consequences do victims face? 1. Social isolation [] 2. Stigmatization []
3. Loss of friendships [] 4. Family conflicts [] 5. Others specify _____



22. What legal consequences might victims encounter? 1. Involvement in illegal activities [] 2. Legal prosecution [] 3. Criminal record [] 4. Restitution orders [] 5. Others specify _____
23. What preventive measures can social workers implement to curb get rich quick syndrome? 1. Organizing financial literacy workshops [] 2. Awareness campaigns [] 3. Peer education programs [] 4. Counseling services [] 5. Others specify _____
24. How will social workers identify at-risk students in order to help them? 1. Behavioral monitoring [] 2. Financial distress signals [] 3. Academic performance decline [] 4. Peer reports [] 5. Others specify _____
25. What structure should be put in place to enable social workers to trap at-risk students? 1. Individual counseling [] 2. Group therapy [] 3. Family involvement [] 4. Referral to financial advisors [] 5. Others specify _____
26. How can social workers collaborate with university administration to curb the menace of getting rich quick syndrome? 1. Policy development [] 2. Curriculum integration [] 3. Resource allocation [] 4. Monitoring systems [] 5. Others specify _____
27. What support services are needed for victims of get rich quick syndrome? 1. Psychological counseling [] 2. Financial rehabilitation [] 3. Legal assistance [] 4. Academic support [] 5. Others specify _____
28. Are there government schools interventions against get rich quick syndrome? 1. Yes [] 2. No [] 3. I don't know []
29. What regulatory measures should government implement? 1. Stricter online content regulation [] 2. Financial scheme monitoring [] 3. Quick enforcement actions [] 4. Public awareness campaigns [] 5. Others specify _____ []
30. How can government improve financial literacy among students? 1. Curriculum integration [] 2. National financial education programs [] 3. Youth-focused initiatives [] 4. Partnership with educational institutions [] 5. Others specify _____
31. What economic interventions would reduce vulnerability as a result of get rich quick syndrome? 1. Student loan schemes [] 2. Youth entrepreneurship programs [] 3. Part-time job opportunities [] 4. Financial support systems [] 5. Others specify _____
32. How should government handle existing get-rich-quick schemes? 1. Strict prosecution [] 2. Asset recovery [] 3. Victim compensation [] 4. Scheme dismantling [] 5. Others specify _____
33. What collaborative efforts should government pursue? 1. Inter-agency cooperation [] 2. International partnerships [] 3. Private sector engagement [] 4. Civil society involvement [] 5. Others specify _____

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