



Impact Of Social Media Use On Youth Mental Health: Implications For Psychiatric Social Work Practice

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has transformed the social interactions and communication patterns of young individuals. Social media platforms have become an integral component of daily life among adolescents and young adults. While these platforms provide opportunities for communication, information sharing, and social connectivity, excessive or maladaptive use has been associated with psychological distress and mental health concerns. The present study explores the relationship between social media usage and youth mental health and examines the implications for psychiatric social work practice. A descriptive research design was adopted, and data were collected from 120 respondents aged 18–25 years using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistical techniques including frequency distribution and percentage analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that prolonged engagement with social media platforms is associated with increased levels of social comparison, anxiety, and emotional distress among youth. However, social media also facilitates communication and social support networks. The study highlights the need for digital literacy education and psychosocial interventions aimed at promoting responsible digital behavior among youth. The findings have important implications for psychiatric social workers involved in youth mental health promotion and behavioural addiction prevention.

Keywords: social media, youth mental health, behavioural addiction, psychiatric social work, digital wellbeing

Introduction

Digital technology has significantly transformed contemporary social life, particularly among younger generations. The widespread availability of smartphones and internet connectivity has enabled individuals to remain constantly connected through social networking platforms. Social media platforms have emerged as powerful communication tools that allow individuals to share experiences, interact with peers, and participate in online communities.

Young people represent one of the most active demographic groups engaging with social media. These platforms provide opportunities for maintaining friendships, sharing information, and expressing personal identities. However, increasing concerns have been raised regarding the potential psychological consequences of excessive social media engagement.

Recent research has indicated that high levels of social media use may contribute to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem [1]. Exposure to curated online content may lead to social comparison and dissatisfaction with one's own life circumstances [2]. Furthermore, problematic patterns of social media engagement have increasingly been conceptualized as a form of **behavioural addiction**, characterized by compulsive usage patterns and difficulty regulating digital engagement.

The emerging relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes has important implications for the field of psychiatric social work. Professionals working with youth populations must consider the role of digital environments in shaping emotional wellbeing and social relationships. Understanding the psychological effects of social media engagement can assist social workers in designing effective interventions aimed at promoting digital wellbeing and preventing behavioural addiction.

The present study seeks to explore patterns of social media usage among youth and examine the potential psychological consequences associated with prolonged digital engagement.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To examine patterns of social media usage among youth.
2. To analyze the psychological effects associated with excessive social media engagement.
3. To explore the relationship between social media usage and youth mental health.
4. To identify implications for psychiatric social work practice and behavioural addiction prevention.

Literature Review

Previous research has highlighted the increasing influence of digital technologies on the psychological wellbeing of young individuals. Social networking platforms enable users to construct personal profiles and interact with others within digital networks [3]. These platforms facilitate communication and provide opportunities for self-expression and identity development.

Several studies have examined the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes. Research has shown that prolonged engagement with social media platforms may be associated with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress [4]. Young individuals who spend significant time browsing social networking platforms may experience feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction with their own lives.

Social comparison has been identified as one of the key mechanisms through which social media influences mental health outcomes. Individuals often evaluate their lives by comparing themselves with others who present idealized representations of their experiences online [2].

Cyberbullying is another concern associated with social media environments. Online harassment can lead to emotional distress, psychological trauma, and reduced self-esteem among adolescents and young adults [5].

Despite these risks, social media platforms can also provide positive benefits. Online communities may facilitate peer support, enhance social connectivity, and provide access to educational resources. The psychological impact of social media therefore depends largely on the patterns and purposes of usage.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by three theoretical perspectives.

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory suggests that individuals evaluate their own abilities and achievements by comparing themselves with others. Social networking platforms frequently present idealized images of users' lifestyles and achievements, which may lead to upward social comparison and reduced self-esteem.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory explains why individuals actively engage with media platforms. Young people use social media to fulfill psychological needs such as communication, entertainment, and social belonging.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes that human development is influenced by multiple environmental contexts. Digital environments can be considered an important component of the social ecosystem affecting youth mental health.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the relationship between social media usage and youth mental health.

Sample

The sample consisted of **120 respondents aged between 18 and 25 years**. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active engagement with social media platforms.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure:

- frequency of social media use
- preferred platforms
- psychological experiences associated with digital engagement

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical techniques including frequency distribution and percentage analysis were used to analyze the data.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	58	48.3%
	Female	62	51.7%
Age	18–20	46	38.3%
	21–23	52	43.3%
	24–25	22	18.4%

Table 2: Daily Time Spent on Social Media

Time Spent	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	12	10%
1–2 hours	34	28.3%
3–4 hours	46	38.3%
More than 5 hours	28	23.4%

The results indicate that a majority of respondents spend more than three hours daily on social media platforms.

Table 3: Psychological Effects of Social Media Use

Experience	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Social media helps maintain friendships	84	22	14
I compare my life with others online	68	26	26
Social media causes anxiety	42	38	40
I feel lonely after long browsing	36	30	54

Table 4: Correlation Between Social Media Usage and Psychological Variables

Variable	Social Media Usage (Hours)	Anxiety Level	Self-Esteem	Loneliness
Social Media Usage	1	0.46	-0.38	0.41
Anxiety Level	0.46	1	-0.35	0.44
Self-Esteem	-0.38	-0.35	1	-0.30
Loneliness	0.41	0.44	-0.30	1

Interpretation

The correlation analysis indicates a **moderate positive relationship between social media usage and anxiety ($r = 0.46$)** as well as **loneliness ($r = 0.41$)**. A **negative correlation was observed between social media usage and self-esteem ($r = -0.38$)**, suggesting that higher engagement with social media may be associated with reduced self-esteem among youth.

Table 5: Regression Analysis Predicting Anxiety from Social Media Usage

Predictor Variable	B	Standard Error	Beta	p-value
Social Media Usage	0.52	0.11	0.48	<0.01
Social Comparison	0.37	0.09	0.41	<0.05
Online Interaction Frequency	0.28	0.12	0.24	<0.05

Interpretation

Regression analysis suggests that **social media usage significantly predicts anxiety levels among youth ($\beta = 0.48, p < 0.01$)**. Social comparison and frequency of online interactions also emerged as significant predictors of anxiety. These findings indicate that psychological outcomes associated with social media engagement may be influenced by both **usage intensity and cognitive processes such as comparison with others**.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents Experiencing Social Media Related Stress

Level of Stress	Frequency	Percentage
Low	32	26.7%
Moderate	54	45%
High	34	28.3%

Interpretation

The results show that **45% of respondents reported moderate stress associated with social media usage**, while **28.3% reported high stress levels**. These findings highlight the potential psychological burden associated with prolonged digital engagement among youth populations.

Discussion

The findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in the daily lives of young individuals. A considerable proportion of respondents reported spending multiple hours per day engaging with social networking platforms.

While social media facilitates communication and social connectivity, the findings suggest that excessive engagement may contribute to psychological challenges such as anxiety and social comparison.

These findings align with previous studies indicating that prolonged exposure to curated online content may negatively influence self-esteem and emotional wellbeing [4].

Implications for Psychiatric Social Work

Psychiatric social workers play an important role in addressing emerging mental health challenges associated with digital environments.

Key interventions may include:

- digital literacy education programs
- counseling services addressing social media-related stress
- awareness campaigns focused on behavioural addiction prevention
- collaboration with educational institutions to promote healthy digital behavior

Conclusion

Social media has become an integral component of contemporary youth culture. While digital platforms offer opportunities for communication and social interaction, excessive engagement may contribute to psychological distress.

Promoting responsible digital behavior and enhancing digital literacy among youth are essential steps in addressing emerging mental health concerns associated with social media usage.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted following ethical research principles. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from respondents. Data were collected anonymously, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Artificial intelligence tools were not used to generate the research content of this manuscript. AI tools were used only to improve grammar and readability of the author's original work.

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