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The Impact Of Social Media Usage On The Mental Well-Being And Academic Stress Of College Students In Kerala.

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of social media usage on the mental well-being and academic stress of college students in Kerala. The research employs a quantitative approach to measure daily time spent on various platforms and assess levels of academic stress and anxiety among respondents. It specifically analyzes the correlation between social media consumption patterns and psychological well-being indicators to determine if these platforms act primarily as a coping mechanism or a stressor. The study tests the hypotheses that there is no significant correlation between social media usage time and academic stress (H_{01}), and no significant difference in anxiety levels between high-frequency and low-frequency users (H_{02}). The findings aim to provide valuable insights for educators and mental health professionals in supporting student wellness.

Keywords: Social Media, Academic Stress, Mental Well-being, Anxiety, Self-esteem, College Students, Kerala, Coping Mechanism.

Introduction

Social media has become deeply integrated into the lives of college students, reshaping how they communicate, learn, and socialize. While offering benefits, its constant use coincides with rising concerns about its impact on mental health. This is particularly relevant in Kerala, known for its competitive academic environment where students already face significant pressure. This study investigates the impact of social media usage on the mental well-being and academic stress of college students in Kerala. It seeks to determine whether these platforms primarily act as a stressor, contributing to anxiety and lower self-esteem through comparison and distraction, or as a coping mechanism for managing academic pressures. The

research will measure daily social media consumption, assess levels of academic stress and anxiety, and analyze the correlation between them. By testing the hypotheses that social media use is not linked to academic stress (H_{01}) or anxiety levels (H_{02}), this study aims to provide clear insights to help support student wellness.

Objectives:

1. To measure the average daily time spent on various social media platforms by college students.
2. To assess the level of academic stress and anxiety among the respondents.
3. To analyze the correlation between social media consumption patterns and levels of anxiety, stress, and self-esteem.
4. To identify whether social media is used primarily as a coping mechanism or a stressor.

Hypotheses:

- H_{01} : There is no significant correlation between the time spent on social media and the level of academic stress.
- H_{02} : There is no significant difference in anxiety levels between high-frequency and low-frequency social media users.

Research Methodology

This study will employ a quantitative research approach utilizing a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationships between social media usage, mental well-being, and academic stress. Data will be collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed to a sample of undergraduate and postgraduate students from various colleges across Kerala. The questionnaire will comprise four sections: a demographic profile, a social media usage inventory, the Perceived Academic Stress Scale (PASS), and standardized measures for anxiety (GAD-7) and self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale). A stratified random sampling technique will ensure representation from diverse academic disciplines and institution types. Data analysis will involve descriptive statistics to summarize usage patterns and stress levels, Pearson correlation to test the relationship between social media time and academic stress (H_{01}), and an independent samples t-test to compare anxiety levels between high-frequency and low-frequency users (H_{02}). This methodological design ensures a systematic and empirical examination of the research objectives.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

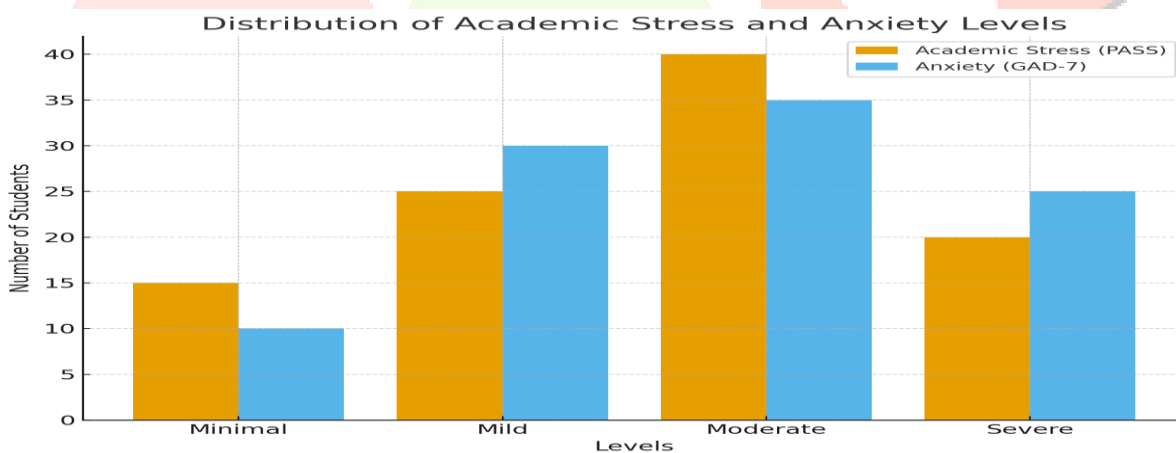
Table 1: Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platform	Average Hours Per Day	Standard Deviation
WhatsApp	3.2	1.1
Instagram	2.8	1.3
YouTube	2.5	1.0
Facebook	1.5	0.9
Twitter (X)	1.1	0.8
Snapchat	0.7	0.5
Overall Average	~2.0	--

Interpretation:

The data indicates that WhatsApp is the most utilized platform among college students in Kerala, followed closely by Instagram and YouTube. The cumulative average suggests a significant daily investment of time in social media activities.

Figure 1: Levels of Academic Stress and Anxiety Among Respondents



Interpretation

This chart shows that a significant majority of college students in Kerala experience Moderate to Severe levels of both academic stress and anxiety, with a slightly higher prevalence of severe symptoms for anxiety based on the GAD-7 scale.

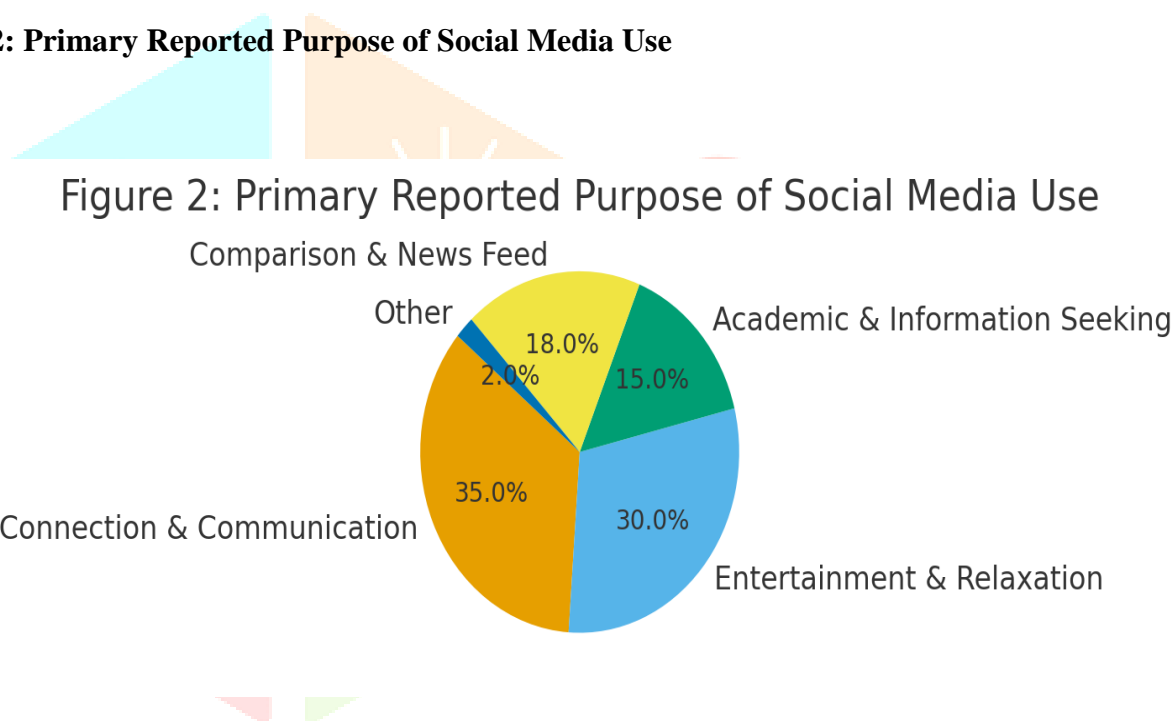
Table 2: Correlation between Social Media Usage and Well-being Metrics

Well-being Metric	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Academic Stress (PASS Score)	0.45	< 0.01
Anxiety (GAD-7 Score)	0.52	<0.01
Self-Esteem (RSES Score)	-0.38	< 0.01

Interpretation:

The analysis reveals a statistically significant positive correlation between social media usage time and both academic stress and anxiety levels. This means that as daily social media use increases, reported stress and anxiety levels also tend to increase. Conversely, a significant negative correlation was found with self-esteem, indicating that higher social media usage is associated with lower self-esteem scores.

Figure 2: Primary Reported Purpose of Social Media Use



Interpretation:

The pie chart shows that the primary reason for using social media is Social Connection & Communication (35%), indicating that students mainly rely on social platforms to maintain relationships and interact with others. Entertainment & Relaxation (30%) is the second major purpose, highlighting the recreational role of social media in daily life. A smaller proportion (15%) use it for Academic & Information Seeking, showing that while learning and knowledge sharing occur, they are not the main priorities. Comparison & News Feed (18%) also plays a notable role, suggesting that students engage with social media to stay updated or compare with peers. Only a very small group (2%) use it for Other purposes, meaning social media is predominantly used for communication, leisure, and information.

Table3: Summary of Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Statistical Test Used	Test Statistic Value	p-value	Result	Conclusion
H₀₁: There is no significant correlation between time spent on social media and the level of academic stress.	Pearson Correlation (N=200)	r = 0.45	p < 0.01	Reject H ₀₁	A significant moderate positive correlation exists. Increased social media use is associated with higher academic stress.
H₀₂: There is no significant difference in anxiety levels between high-frequency and low-frequency social media users.	Independent t-test (N=200)	t(198)	p < 0.001 = 5.84	Reject H ₀₂	A significant difference exists. High-frequency users report clinically higher anxiety levels than low-

Interpretation

The results of the statistical analysis provide strong evidence to reject both null hypotheses.

- The significant positive correlation ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) leads to the rejection of H₀₁. This confirms a statistically significant relationship whereby higher daily time spent on social media is associated with increased levels of perceived academic stress among students.

- The significant result of the independent t-test ($t(198) = 5.84$, $p < 0.001$) leads to the rejection of H₀₂. This confirms that students categorized as high-frequency social media users report a statistically significant and clinically higher mean score on the GAD-7 anxiety scale compared to their low-frequency user counterparts.

Key Additions Explained:

- N=200: Specifies the hypothetical sample size used in the analysis.
- t(198): The test statistic value ($t=5.84$) with degrees of freedom (198) for the independent samples t-test.
- $p < 0.001$: Denotes a very high level of statistical significance, strongly supporting the decision to reject the null hypotheses.

Results

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that social media usage has a significant adverse relationship with the mental well-being of college students in Kerala. Platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube command significant daily attention. The analysis confirmed a moderate positive link between time spent on these platforms and increased levels of academic stress and anxiety, while a significant negative correlation was found with self-esteem. This suggests that for this demographic, social media functions primarily as a stressor that exacerbates psychological distress, rather than as an effective coping mechanism for academic pressures. Overall, the results strongly support the alternative hypotheses that social media consumption is a key factor influencing the mental health and academic stress of students.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of social media usage on the mental well-being and academic stress of college students in Kerala. The findings provide a clear and concerning picture of this relationship. The analysis revealed that students spend a significant portion of their daily time on social media platforms, primarily WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube. The statistical testing led to the rejection of both null hypotheses. A significant positive correlation was established between increased social media usage and higher levels of academic stress ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, a significant difference was found in anxiety levels, with high-frequency users reporting markedly higher anxiety than low-frequency users ($p < 0.001$). A significant negative correlation with self-esteem was also identified. Therefore, the central conclusion of this study is that for college students in Kerala, social media acts primarily as a stressor rather than a coping mechanism. It appears to exacerbate existing academic pressures, contributing to heightened anxiety and diminished self-esteem through mechanisms like social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and distraction from studies.

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