

Impact of Social Media Addiction on Socialization Among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, adolescents' pervasive engagement with social media platforms has sparked concerns about its potential impact on their social behaviors. This study investigates the relationship between social media addiction and socialization among adolescents in Udaipur, India. A total of 300 students from three schools were initially assessed using the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS). From this cohort, 240 participants were purposively selected and categorized into two equal groups: 120 identified as social media addicted and 120 as non-addicted. The Social Withdrawal Scale by Hikikomori was used to measure Socialization was administered to evaluate their levels of social engagement and interpersonal interaction. Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between the two groups, with non-addicted adolescents exhibiting markedly higher socialization scores compared to their addicted counterparts. These findings suggest that excessive social media use is associated with reduced socialization in adolescents. The study underscores the need for early identification and intervention strategies to address social media addiction and its potential psychosocial consequences. Implementing educational programs that promote balanced digital habits and encourage real-life social interactions may enhance social development and interpersonal skills in adolescents.

Introduction

In the digital era, social media has become an integral part of adolescents' daily lives. Platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Facebook provide opportunities for communication, self-expression, and social connection. However, excessive and uncontrolled use of these platforms has led to a growing concern known as social media addiction. Characterized by compulsive usage, emotional dependence, and a strong urge to stay connected online, this addiction is increasingly influencing how adolescents interact with the world around them.

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage where individuals learn to build real-life relationships, develop social skills, and form their social identity. Healthy socialization during this period involves face-to-face interactions, empathy, communication, and the ability to build meaningful connections. However, with the rise of digital communication, many adolescents are replacing real-life interactions with online engagements. Over-reliance on virtual communication can reduce the quality and frequency of in-person social interactions, leading to isolation, poor interpersonal skills, and a superficial sense of connection.

This research aims to explore and analyze the impact of social media addiction on the socialization patterns of adolescents, with a particular focus on how excessive, compulsive, or emotionally-driven use of social media platforms may hinder or reshape traditional forms of social interaction. The study will investigate whether adolescents addicted to social media show reduced face-to-face communication, lower participation in group

activities, difficulty in developing deep interpersonal bonds, or increased feelings of loneliness despite being digitally connected. It will also examine how digital interactions influence their emotional expression, conflict resolution abilities, and real-life social confidence.

By identifying these patterns, the research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the changing nature of adolescent social behavior in the digital age. The findings will help in identifying the risks associated with digital overuse and will assist educators, parents, counselors, and policymakers in designing preventive and interventional strategies. Promoting digital literacy, time management, and offline social opportunities can be essential steps toward supporting the healthy psychosocial development of adolescents in an increasingly online world.

Review of literature

The study by **Ziggi (2024)**, titled “Social Media Addiction Predicts Compromised Mental Health as well as Perceived and Objective Social Isolation in Denmark,” explored how social media addiction affects mental health and social isolation among Danish adults. Using longitudinal data from 1,958 individuals aged 16 and older, the study found that only 2.3% screened positive for social media addiction. However, those individuals had significantly higher risks of depression, loneliness, and smaller social networks. Social media addiction also negatively impacted mental well-being. The findings emphasize the urgent need for preventive strategies and healthier digital habits, as excessive social media use poses serious risks to mental health and social functioning.

Antonio (2024), in the paper “Social Media Use and Emerging Mental Health Issues,” discusses the mixed effects of social media on mental health. While social media can improve social connection, provide information, and support positive interaction, its excessive use can lead to problems like anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor sleep, and stress—especially in adolescents and youth. The paper identifies boredom and loneliness as key factors that drive young people to overuse social media, often worsening their mental health. Exposure to harmful content or misinformation can further increase these negative effects. The study stresses the need for more research to understand how social media affects mental health and calls for the development of educational programs that teach safe, responsible use. It also recommends that mental health professionals be trained to recognize the risks of social media use and that social media platforms follow international guidelines to make online spaces safer for users, especially the youth.

The article by **Samah and Zahran (2023)** highlights the growing issue of social media addiction among adolescents, describing it as a psychological dependence where users feel anxious without daily access. It notes similarities between social media and substance addictions, especially in how both trigger dopamine release in the brain, creating feelings of pleasure. This can lead to behavioral and emotional disturbances, including anxiety, depression, and self-harm. The article reports that 48% of teens use social media, with 62% engaging daily—an increase from previous years. This rising usage is linked to academic neglect, increased anxiety, and concern with online image. Adolescents, being in a critical stage of identity development, are especially vulnerable. The authors stress that parental guidance is essential in helping teens use social media mindfully, promoting healthier habits and better socialization.

Kornienko et al. (2023) examined how loneliness and social support affect social media addiction in adolescents aged 13–18. Using tools like the Loneliness Scale and Social Support Scale, they surveyed over 6,000 teens in Yakutia. The study found that adolescents who felt lonely and lacked support were more likely to become addicted to social media, often using it as a substitute for real-life relationships. On the other hand, teens with strong social ties used social media more positively, to stay connected. The study highlights that improving social support systems can reduce the risks of addiction and promote healthier use of social platforms.

Research Gap

Despite growing global interest in the psychological and social effects of social media, much of the existing research has primarily focused on mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. While these studies offer important insights, they often overlook the broader social development of

adolescents—particularly how excessive use of social media may hinder or reshape their real-world socialization. Additionally, most of the existing studies are either conducted in Western contexts or focus on adult populations, creating a significant gap in understanding how social media addiction specifically affects the social behaviors and interpersonal development of adolescents in diverse cultural settings, such as India. Although research by Kornienko et al. (2023) and Ziggi (2024) addresses the role of loneliness and social isolation in relation to social media addiction, there is limited empirical investigation comparing the actual levels of socialization between adolescents who are addicted to social media and those who are not. Few studies take a comparative approach that evaluates the quality and frequency of social interactions among these two groups. This gap highlights the need for localized, adolescent-focused research that directly examines how social media addiction correlates with or contributes to variations in real-life social engagement, peer relationships, and the development of social skills.

Objectives

The objectives of the present research paper are as follows:

1. To study the socialization of social media non-addicted adolescents.
2. To study the socialization of social media addicted adolescents.
3. To compare the socialization of social media non-addicted and social media addicted adolescents.

Methodology

Sample:

The present study included a total of 300 adolescents who were randomly selected from three different schools in Udaipur. From this initial group, a purposive sample of 240 adolescents was identified—comprising two equal groups: 120 adolescents with a high level of social media addiction and 120 adolescents showing no signs of addiction. The selected participants included individuals of both genders.

Tools of the Research Study:

Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS): The Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), developed by Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz (2015), is a well-established instrument used to assess the level of addiction to social media. The scale contains 41 items, divided into four major sub-dimensions: Virtual Tolerance, Virtual Communication, Virtual Problems, and Virtual Information. Each sub-dimension reflects a specific aspect of problematic social media behavior. The scale employs a 5-point Likert response format, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Participants are required to indicate how strongly they agree with each statement. Higher overall scores reflect greater social media addiction, indicating more intensive involvement in one or more of the sub-dimensions. The SMAS demonstrates strong reliability and validity, making it a reliable tool for research purposes.

Social Withdrawal Scale (Hikikomori) – Assessed for Socialization: Although originally developed to assess social withdrawal, the Social Withdrawal Scale (Hikikomori) was utilized in this study specifically to assess the socialization dimension among adolescents. The scale uses a Likert-type format and emphasizes three key dimensions: socialization (interest and comfort in social interactions), self-isolation (preference for solitude and avoidance of social roles), and emotional support seeking (willingness to seek help and emotional openness). For the purpose of this study, only the socialization-related items were considered to evaluate adolescents' tendencies and attitudes toward engaging in social interactions. The scale has demonstrated strong reliability and validity, with Cronbach's alpha values typically above 0.80, and supports a robust three-factor structure. Its construct validity aligns well with related psychological traits, making it suitable for understanding adolescents' socialization levels.

Procedure of Data Collection:

The data collection process began with obtaining formal permission from the principals of three selected schools located in Udaipur. Once approval was granted, the researchers visited each school and explained the study's objectives, ensuring students were informed about the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. An initial group of 300 adolescents was randomly chosen from these schools to take part in a preliminary screening. To evaluate their level of social media use and detect signs of addiction, the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) by Tutgun-Unal and Deniz (2015) was administered to all 300 participants.

Following the screening, a purposive sample of 240 adolescents was selected for the main phase of the study. This group was evenly divided, with 120 students identified as having a high level of social media addiction and 120 showing no signs of addiction. The sample included both male and female participants to ensure gender diversity. These selected students were then assessed using the Social Withdrawal Scale by Hikikomori, with a specific focus on items measuring socialization. The data collection was conducted in a structured and standardized manner during school hours, in a quiet environment free from distractions, and under the direct supervision of the researcher. Participants were reassured about the confidentiality of their responses and reminded that their participation was entirely voluntary.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and category of study groups on socialization.

Table 1

Mean, S.D. Scores and Category of Study Groups on Socialization

Socialization	Mean	S.D.	N	Category
Social Media Non-Addicts (Boys & Girls)	15.108	3.949	120	Good
Social Media Addicts (Boys & Girls)	38.950	3.616	120	Very Poor

The table 1 evaluates the Socialization, focusing on how individuals engage in social interactions and the extent to which social withdrawal affects them. Social Media Non-Addicts, comprising both boys and girls, achieved a mean score of 15.108 with a standard deviation (S.D.) of 3.949, categorized as good. This indicates that individuals who avoid excessive social media usage demonstrate healthy levels of socialization, with minimal tendencies toward withdrawal. On the contrary, Social Media Addicts recorded a much higher mean score of 38.950 (S.D. = 3.616), categorized as very poor. This stark contrast highlights the adverse impact of social media addiction on socialization, leading to significant withdrawal and reduced engagement in social interactions.

Table 2 shows comparison of Social Media Non-Addicted and Addicted adolescents on socialization through independent group 't' test.

Table 2

Comparison of Social Media Non-Addicted and Addicted adolescents on Socialization

Socialization	Social Media	
	Non-addicted	Addicted
N	120	120
Mean	15.108	38.950
Std. Deviation	3.949	3.616
Mean Difference	23.842	
t'	48.780	

p value	0.000
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The above table 2 shows comparison of social media non-addicted and addicted adolescents on the Socialization reveals a significant and troubling difference in social engagement.

The results indicate that non-addicted adolescents scored much higher on the Socialization dimension (Mean = 15.108, SD = 3.949) compared to their addicted counterparts (Mean = 38.950, SD = 3.616). The mean difference of 23.842 points highlights a striking contrast, with social media-addicted adolescents exhibiting much lower levels of social engagement. This suggests that social media addiction is closely linked to increased social withdrawal, with addicted adolescents tending to isolate themselves more and engage less in social activities compared to those who are not addicted.

A t-test analysis confirmed the statistical significance of this difference, with a t' value of 48.780 and a p-value of 0.000. This result indicates that the observed disparity is highly significant and not due to chance. The findings underline the detrimental impact of social media addiction on adolescents' ability to interact socially and maintain meaningful relationships, further contributing to their social withdrawal.

These results emphasize the need for interventions to address the issue of social media addiction, as it can lead to significant social isolation. Programs focused on promoting real-life social interactions, reducing screen time, and developing healthy communication skills can help mitigate the negative effects of addiction and improve adolescents' ability to engage socially, enhancing their overall social well-being.

Conclusion

The present study clearly demonstrates that social media addiction has a profound and negative impact on the socialization of adolescents. The data reveals a significant difference between social media non-addicted and addicted adolescents in terms of social withdrawal, with addicted individuals showing much poorer levels of social engagement. The stark contrast in mean scores and the highly significant t-test results confirm that excessive use of social media correlates with increased social withdrawal, suggesting that addicted adolescents are more likely to avoid face-to-face interactions and experience difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy social relationships.

These findings highlight the urgent need for awareness and intervention programs aimed at reducing social media dependency among adolescents. Encouraging balanced use of digital platforms, promoting in-person social activities, and developing communication skills can play a vital role in improving social well-being. Schools, parents, and mental health professionals must work collaboratively to create supportive environments that foster real-world connections and minimize the isolating effects of social media addiction. Addressing this issue early on is essential to ensure the healthy psychological and social development of today's youth.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study offer important implications for educators, parents, school counselors, and mental health professionals. By highlighting the differences in socialization patterns between social media addicted and non-addicted adolescents, the study provides valuable insights into how excessive digital engagement may disrupt the development of healthy interpersonal relationships during a critical stage of social and emotional growth.

Educational institutions can utilize these findings to design co-curricular and extracurricular programs that promote face-to-face interactions, group participation, and communication skills among students. Teachers and counselors can play a key role in identifying signs of social withdrawal linked to excessive social media use and can intervene with timely support or guidance.

For parents, the study underscores the importance of monitoring screen time, encouraging real-world social experiences, and fostering open communication within the family. Mental health practitioners may also use the results to develop intervention strategies and social skills training programs tailored to adolescents struggling with digital overdependence.

At a broader level, the research supports the need for awareness campaigns and policy initiatives that address the social consequences of social media addiction. Promoting balanced digital habits and real-life social engagement will be crucial to ensuring the holistic development and well-being of adolescents in today's digitally dominated environment.

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