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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, HAPPINESS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and happiness among university students, with social media addiction serving as a mediating factor. The sample consisted of 75 undergraduate and postgraduate students from various disciplines of the researcher's university, selected through a probability simple random sampling method. Standardized tools were used to collect data: the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form (TEIQue-SF), the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), and the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS). A correlational research design was employed to explore the interrelationships among the variables. The results revealed that gender was positively correlated with happiness ($r = 0.384$) and negatively correlated with Item 4 of the BSMAS ($r = -0.261$). The most used social media applications showed significant negative correlations with Items 1 ($r = -0.265$), 4 ($r = -0.308$), 5 ($r = -0.249$), and 6 ($r = -0.238$) of the BSMAS. Additionally, Item 3 of the BSMAS was positively correlated with emotionality ($r = 0.239$) and negatively correlated with happiness ($r = -0.242$). The findings indicate that gender differences and patterns of social media use influence emotional intelligence and happiness levels among students. Furthermore, social media addiction appears to act as a mediating variable that can negatively impact happiness and emotional well-being. The study highlights the importance of promoting balanced social media use and fostering emotional intelligence to enhance students' overall psychological health and happiness.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Happiness, Social Media Addiction, University Students, Correlational Study

Introduction

Happiness has long been regarded as a central component of human well-being and a key indicator of positive psychological functioning. Contemporary research conceptualizes happiness not merely as a transient emotional state but as a stable dimension of subjective well-being that influences life satisfaction, cognitive functioning, and social adaptation (Diener, 1984; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). For college students, happiness plays a particularly important role, given its association with academic engagement, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life during a developmental period marked by significant transitions. The shift to higher education often entails increased academic demands, financial pressures, and challenges related to independence and social adjustment, all of which may influence students' emotional stability and mental health (Arnett, 2000; Andrews & Wilding, 2004).

Mental health concerns among university students have become increasingly prevalent, with rising rates of anxiety, depression, and stress reported across global contexts (American College Health Association, 2021; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Poor mental health can negatively affect academic performance, motivation, and long-term developmental trajectories. As mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being (World Health Organization, 2004), understanding the factors that influence it—such as emotional intelligence and digital behaviour—has become a pressing research priority in higher education.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a significant predictor of adaptive functioning within academic and interpersonal domains. Defined as the capacity to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively (Salovey & Mayer,



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1990; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004), EI has been linked to enhanced resilience, improved stress management, and better psychological outcomes among college students. Research demonstrates that individuals with higher EI tend to exhibit lower levels of anxiety and depression, stronger coping mechanisms, and greater subjective well-being, including happiness (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2005; Schutte et al., 2002). Emotional intelligence thereby serves as a protective factor, enabling students to navigate academic pressures and social challenges more effectively.

Parallel to these psychological developments, the rapid expansion of internet and social media technologies has significantly shaped young adults' communication patterns, relationships, and daily behaviours. While digital platforms provide valuable opportunities for connection and information access, excessive or maladaptive use has been linked to sleep disturbances, academic difficulties, social isolation, and psychological distress (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Andreassen, 2015). Social media addiction—characterized by compulsive usage, withdrawal symptoms, and functional impairment—has emerged as a growing concern among college populations worldwide. Studies suggest that problematic social media use is associated with reduced well-being and emotional dysregulation, potentially undermining both happiness and emotional intelligence (Ryan, Chester, Reece, & Xenos, 2014; Elhai, Levine, Dvorak, & Hall, 2017).

Given these intersecting trends, it is essential to examine how emotional intelligence and social media addiction collectively influence happiness among college students. Understanding these relationships may help identify psychological mechanisms and behavioural patterns that support or hinder well-being during the crucial developmental stage of higher education. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the interplay between emotional intelligence, happiness, and the mediating role of social media addiction in determining overall well-being among university students. By exploring these constructs in an integrated framework, the research seeks to contribute to both theoretical knowledge and practical interventions aimed at promoting healthier emotional and digital lifestyles in the student population.

METHODS:

AIM:

The present study was conducted to evaluate the relationship between emotional intelligence and happiness among university students, with social media addiction considered as a mediating factor.

SAMPLE:

The study was carried out on a sample of 75 university students (24 men and 51 women) from Adikavi Nannaya University, Rajamahendravaram. The participants represented various academic disciplines and levels of study. The sample profile is presented in Table 1.

A survey method was employed to collect information from the respondents, ensuring that the participants were selected through a non-probability convenience sampling method to maintain objectivity and representativeness.

TOOLS:

Three standardized instruments were used to collect data for this study:

- Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form (TEIQue-SF)
This 30-item instrument developed by Petrides (2009) was used to assess trait emotional intelligence.
- The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ)
Developed by Hills and Argyle (2002), this scale was used to measure psychological well-being and happiness among students.



- Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)

This scale was used to measure the level of social media addiction among participants. It assesses behavioural aspects related to excessive social media use.

PROCEDURE:

The researcher divided the sample to include students from various departments of Adikavi Nannaya University, Rajamahendravaram. A structured plan was followed to collect the data within a period of one week. The researcher personally visited different locations within the university premises—such as classrooms, canteens, and playgrounds—to administer the questionnaires.

Clear instructions were provided to the participants before distributing the questionnaires. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, clarified any doubts regarding the items, and ensured voluntary participation. The data were collected personally to maintain accuracy and completeness.

Demographic information was also gathered, including age, gender, date of birth, socioeconomic status, educational qualification, academic group and year, college name, family background, place of stay, religion, parental education and occupation, number of children in the family, hours spent on mobile phones, most used social media applications, and overall sense of well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Table – 1 : Sample Profile

Demographic s	Gender		Education		Most used social media apps			Overall Wellbeing	
	Mal e	Femal e	Graduatio n	Post graduatio n	Instagra m	YouTub e	Other apps	Satisfie d	Improve d
N	24	51	13	62	29	31	15	38	37
%	32	68	17.3	82.7	38.7	41.3	20	50.7	49.3

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the study. The sample consisted of 75 university students, including 24 males (32%) and 51 females (68%). With regard to educational qualification, 13 students (17.3%) were below degree level, while 62 students (82.7%) were above degree level. In terms of most frequently used social media applications, Instagram was used by 29 students (38.7%), YouTube by 31 students (41.3%), and other social media platforms (such as Facebook, Snapchat, or Twitter) by 15 students (20.0%). Regarding overall well-being, 15 students (20.0%) reported being satisfied with their well-being, whereas 37 students (40.3%) indicated that their well-being had improved.

Table – 2 Correlation between demographics, emotional intelligence and OHQ

Demographics	Well-being	Self-control	Emotionality	Sociability	OHQ
Gender	0.008	-0.045	-1.104	-0.162	0.384**



Table 2 presents the correlations between demographic variables, emotional intelligence, and happiness. The results indicate that gender shows a positive correlation with happiness ($r = 0.384$), suggesting that male and female students in the sample report comparable levels of happiness. This finding implies that both groups generally perceive their lives as pleasant and rewarding, and that gender does not function as a limiting factor in their experience of happiness.

Students enrolled in higher education appear to demonstrate a strong tendency toward positive emotional states and overall life satisfaction. Many students express interest in socializing, forming new connections, and sharing their thoughts and emotions with others. Such social engagement behaviours may contribute to their improved sense of well-being. The data further suggest that these students possess empathetic and kind interpersonal dispositions, which may strengthen their relationships and foster supportive social environments.

Higher education students also seem to display optimism toward life and people. They tend to notice beauty and positive aspects in their surroundings, participate actively in community and social activities, and maintain a positive outlook on their daily experiences. This optimistic orientation likely enhances their overall happiness.

In terms of socio-emotional functioning, the students appear to be adaptable and capable of adjusting to various environments and situations. They create spaces where others feel comfortable sharing personal thoughts, emotions, and concerns. Their willingness to listen, understand, and support others reflects a high level of emotional intelligence, which is known to positively influence happiness.

Family and peer relationships also play a significant role in their well-being. Most students devote quality time to parents, friends, and close relationships, contributing to emotional stability and life satisfaction. They tend to be mindful and conscious in their daily lives, demonstrating awareness of both their psychological and physical well-being.

Overall, the findings suggest that these students lead joyful and fulfilling lives. They possess effective coping strategies, allowing them to manage stress, navigate challenges, and maintain balance during difficult situations. Many have clear personal goals and a sense of purpose, supported by high energy levels and engagement in meaningful activities. Their positive health, strong relationships, and emotional competence collectively contribute to the observed positive correlation with happiness.

TABLE – 3

Correlation between demographics and social media addiction

DEMOGRAPHICS	Spend a lot of time	Urge to use more and more	Forget Personal Problems	Tried to cut down	Restless/Troubled if you are prohibited	Negative impact on your job/studies
GENDER	0.042	-0.044	-0.097	-0.261*	-0.185	-0.046
SOCIAL MEDIA APPS	-0.265*	-0.161	-0.183	-0.308**	-0.249*	-0.238*

Table 3 presents the correlation between selected demographic variables (gender and most-used social media applications) and indicators of social media addiction among university students.

The results indicate that gender shows a significant negative correlation with the variable “tried to cut down on social media use” ($r = -0.261$, $p < .05$). This suggests that university students, irrespective of gender differences, report successful efforts to regulate and reduce their social media usage. The negative correlation implies that students feel confident in controlling their social media use and tend to access social media primarily when required rather than engaging



in excessive or compulsive usage. As the majority of respondents are graduates and postgraduates, their higher educational status may contribute to greater awareness, self-discipline, and responsible use of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and other applications.

Further analysis reveals that the most-used social media applications are significantly and negatively correlated with several dimensions of social media addiction, including spending a lot of time on social media ($r = -0.265$, $p < .05$), trying to cut down usage ($r = -0.308$, $p < .01$), feeling restless or troubled when restricted ($r = -0.249$, $p < .05$), and negative impact on job or studies ($r = -0.238$, $p < .05$).

These negative correlations suggest that students with higher educational attainment tend to use social media in a mindful and controlled manner. They do not excessively invest time in planning or thinking about social media usage and are capable of setting clear boundaries regarding when and how long they use these platforms. The findings also indicate that students prioritize academic responsibilities, real-life social interactions, emotional connections, and interpersonal relationships over excessive engagement with social media.

Moreover, the results suggest that graduate and postgraduate students generally do not experience restlessness or distress when restricted from using social media, nor do they report significant negative effects on their academic performance. Social media appears to be used mainly during leisure or boredom and not as a substitute for face-to-face interactions. Overall, the findings highlight that higher education is associated with better self-regulation, healthier digital habits, and reduced vulnerability to social media addiction among university students.

TABLE – 4

DEMOGRAPHICS	WELLBEING	SELF-CONTROL	EMOTIONALITY	SOCIABILITY	OHQ TOTAL
BSMAS3	-0.017	0.062	0.239*	0.005	-0.242*
BSMAS6	-0.011	-0.038	0.233*	-0.025	-0.256

Table 4 presents the correlation between selected dimensions of social media use, domains of emotional intelligence, and happiness among graduate and postgraduate university students.

The findings indicate that using social media to forget personal problems is positively correlated with the emotionality domain of emotional intelligence ($r = 0.239$). This relationship suggests that social media functions as a medium through which students' channel and express unarticulated or suppressed emotions. Engagement with visual and auditory content on social media platforms may activate sensory processing and emotional regulation mechanisms involving cortical regions of the brain and associated neurochemical and hormonal responses, resulting in emotional fluctuations among university students. In addition to neurobiological processes, several psychosocial and environmental factors—such as early life trauma, disturbed family structures, physiological disabilities, psychological disorders, and challenges during developmental phases—may influence an individual's emotionality.

For students who experience insecurity in emotional expression, difficulties in emotional sharing, or trust issues with peers, social media may serve as an alternative platform for emotional ventilation. Emotional suppression or repression, if prolonged, can lead to maladaptive or risky outcomes, including severe psychological distress. Consequently, instead of seeking emotional support from peers or friends, some students choose social media platforms to express or validate their emotions. The availability of diverse platforms and extensive content enables users to seek information or media that resonates with their emotional state, thereby providing temporary emotional validation. However, this mode of emotional regulation may have both positive and negative implications, depending on the intensity and nature of usage.



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The results further show that using social media to forget personal problems is negatively correlated with happiness ($r = -0.242$). This negative relationship suggests that although social media may provide temporary relief or distraction from personal distress, it does not contribute to sustained or genuine happiness. While students may experience momentary emotional comfort by consuming emotionally congruent content, reliance on social media as a coping mechanism may be associated with reduced overall well-being.

Additionally, the findings reveal that perceived negative impact of social media on studies is positively correlated with happiness ($r = 0.233$). This indicates that students are aware of the potential academic consequences of excessive social media use and demonstrate insight into their behaviour. Despite recognizing its adverse effects, students appear to employ adaptive coping strategies and self-awareness, which may help maintain their subjective sense of happiness. This awareness reflects a level of emotional intelligence that enables students to acknowledge maladaptive patterns while attempting to balance academic responsibilities and emotional needs.

Overall, the results suggest that social media plays a complex role in the emotional lives of university students, serving both as a tool for emotional expression and a potential source of reduced happiness when used primarily for avoidance or emotional escape.

CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify, understand, regulate, and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Happiness is understood as a positive emotional state and a broader condition of well-being that reflects a meaningful life, life satisfaction, and deep contentment. Social media addiction, on the other hand, is a form of behavioural addiction characterized by excessive concern with social media, an uncontrollable urge to use it, and the investment of significant time and effort that interferes with important areas of life such as academics, work, and social relationships.

The present study, titled "Emotional Intelligence and Happiness of University Students: The Mediating Role of Social Media Addiction," was conducted among graduate and postgraduate students of Adikavi Nannaya University, Rajamahendravaram. The sample consisted of 75 male and female students drawn from different educational streams. The study examined the relationships among demographic variables (gender, education, most-used social media applications, and overall well-being), emotional intelligence, happiness, and social media addiction.

The findings revealed that among the demographic variables, gender showed a positive correlation with happiness, indicating that gender differences play a role in the subjective well-being of university students. Further analysis showed that gender was negatively correlated with selected items of the social media addiction scale, particularly the item related to efforts to cut down social media use and perceived negative consequences, suggesting better self-regulation of social media usage among students.

The most-used social media applications were also found to be negatively correlated with multiple dimensions of social media addiction, including spending excessive time, attempts to cut down usage, feelings of restlessness when restricted, and negative impact on studies or work. These findings indicate that graduate and postgraduate students tend to use social media in a controlled and mindful manner, with limited interference in their academic and personal lives.

Regarding the relationship between social media addiction, emotional intelligence, and happiness, the results showed that using social media to forget personal problems was positively correlated with the emotionality domain of emotional intelligence, suggesting that social media serves as a channel for emotional expression and emotional processing. However, this same behaviour was negatively correlated with happiness, indicating that while social media may provide temporary emotional relief, it does not contribute to long-term well-being. Similarly, the perceived negative impact of social media on studies was positively correlated with emotionality and negatively correlated with happiness highlighting the complex role of social media as both an emotional outlet and a potential risk factor for reduced happiness.



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Overall, the findings suggest that emotional intelligence, happiness, and social media addiction are intricately interconnected among university students. While emotional awareness and expression may lead students to use social media as a coping mechanism, excessive or emotionally driven usage appears to be associated with lower happiness. The study underscores the importance of promoting healthy emotional regulation strategies and responsible social media use to enhance the psychological well-being of university students.

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