



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH AMONG YOUNG ADULTS – A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

In the digital era, social media has become the strongest and most popular medium for communication in the world. Of course, it is necessary for people to get information in no time. This study examines the impact of social media on the mental health of young adults, focusing on both its positive and negative effects. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, and X have become an integral part of daily life, providing opportunities for communication, entertainment, education, and self-expression. However, excessive use of these platforms has raised concerns about their influence on psychological well-being. The study explores how prolonged social media engagement affects mental health by contributing to issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, poor sleep quality, low self-esteem, and body image dissatisfaction. It also considers the role of cyberbullying, social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and online validation in shaping emotional health. At the same time, the research highlights the positive aspects of social media, including access to mental health information, emotional support, online communities, and opportunities for social connection. The study emphasizes that the impact of social media depends largely on the way it is used, the amount of time spent online, and individual coping strategies. By reviewing existing research and identifying common patterns, this study aims to provide a balanced understanding of the relationship between social media use and mental health among young adults. The findings suggest that while social media can enhance communication and provide valuable support, responsible and mindful use is essential to minimize its harmful effects. The study concludes by recommending digital literacy, healthy screen-time habits, and increased awareness among young adults, parents, educators, and policymakers to promote positive mental well-being in the digital age.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental health, Communication, FOMO

Introduction:

Social media has become an integral part of modern life, particularly among young adults, who use digital platforms for communication, entertainment, education, networking, and self-expression. Popular platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, and X have transformed the way individuals interact and share information. With the widespread availability of smartphones and internet access, social media has become a daily habit for millions of young people worldwide. While these platforms offer numerous opportunities for learning, creativity, and maintaining relationships, they have also raised concerns about their potential effects on mental health and emotional well-being.

Mental health is a crucial aspect of overall health, influencing how individuals think, feel, and behave. Young adulthood is a significant stage of life marked by personal, academic, social, and career-related challenges. During this period, individuals are more vulnerable to emotional stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The increasing use of social media has introduced both positive and negative influences that can shape the mental health of young adults. On one hand, social media provides emotional support, access to valuable information, opportunities for social connection, and platforms for raising awareness about mental health issues. It enables users to build communities, maintain long-distance relationships, and express their thoughts and experiences freely.

On the other hand, unhealthy use of social media has been associated with several psychological concerns. Constant exposure to idealized lifestyles and edited images can encourage unhealthy social comparisons, leading to dissatisfaction with one's appearance, reduced self-confidence, and feelings of inadequacy. The pressure to gain likes, comments, and followers may increase stress and anxiety, while cyberbullying, online harassment, and fear of missing out (FOMO) can further contribute to emotional distress. Spending long hours on social media may also interfere with sleep, academic performance, physical activity, and face-to-face interactions, all of which are important for maintaining good mental health.



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Researchers, educators, healthcare professionals, and policymakers have shown growing interest in understanding the relationship between social media use and mental health among young adults. Although social media itself is not inherently harmful, the way it is used, the amount of time spent online, and the type of content consumed play significant roles in determining its impact. Developing healthy digital habits and promoting responsible social media use can help maximize its benefits while reducing its potential risks.

This study aims to examine the impact of social media on the mental health of young adults by exploring both its positive and negative effects. It seeks to understand how different patterns of social media use influence emotional well-being, self-esteem, stress, anxiety, and depression. The findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between social media and mental health and may help educators, parents, healthcare professionals, and young adults adopt healthier approaches to digital engagement and overall well-being.

Review of Literature:

The relationship between social media use and mental health among young adults has been extensively studied over the past decade. Researchers have explored both the positive and negative effects of social networking platforms on psychological well-being, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and social connectedness.

1. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) conducted a systematic review examining social media use among adolescents and young adults. Their findings showed that excessive social media use is consistently associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. The authors concluded that prolonged exposure to social media can negatively affect emotional well-being, although more longitudinal studies are needed to establish causality.

2. Kelly et al. (2018) investigated the association between social media use and mental health among young people in the United Kingdom. Their study found that heavy social media use was linked to poor sleep quality, cyberbullying experiences, low self-esteem, and increased depressive symptoms. The researchers emphasized that sleep disturbance partly explains the relationship between social media use and poor mental health.

3. Primack et al. (2017) examined social media use among young adults in the United States. The study reported that individuals who spent more time on social media were more likely to experience perceived social isolation. The authors suggested that online interactions cannot completely replace meaningful face-to-face relationships, making excessive use a potential risk factor for loneliness and poor mental health.

4. Lin et al. (2016) explored the relationship between social media use and depression among young adults. Their research demonstrated that participants with higher daily social media use had significantly greater odds of experiencing depression than those with lower use. The study highlighted that social comparison and negative online experiences may contribute to depressive symptoms.

5. Vannucci, Flannery, and Ohannessian (2017) investigated problematic social media use among college students. Their findings revealed that problematic use was positively associated with anxiety, depression, and perceived stress. The researchers recommended promoting healthy digital habits to reduce mental health risks among young adults.

6. Khalaf et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of studies involving adolescents and young adults. They concluded that while social media provides opportunities for communication, emotional support, and access to health information, excessive use is associated with cyberbullying, sleep disruption, anxiety, depression, self-harm, and reduced psychological well-being.

7. Shannon et al. (2022) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis on problematic social media use. The review found statistically significant associations between problematic social media use and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. The authors emphasized the need for interventions that encourage responsible social media use among adolescents and young adults.



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8. Marino et al. (2024) reviewed research on problematic social networking site use and social well-being among young adults. Their findings suggested that problematic social media use negatively affects social well-being and life satisfaction, while factors such as social anxiety and excessive online engagement predict unhealthy social media behavior.

The reviewed literature indicates that social media has both beneficial and harmful effects on young adults' mental health. While it facilitates communication, social support, and information sharing, excessive and problematic use is consistently associated with anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, sleep disturbances, cyberbullying, and reduced self-esteem. Most researchers recommend promoting balanced and responsible social media use, improving digital literacy, and encouraging healthy offline social interactions to protect the mental well-being of young adults.

Statement of the Problem:

Social media has become a major part of the daily lives of young adults, influencing their communication, learning, and social interactions. Although social media offers many benefits, excessive use has raised concerns about its effects on mental health. Many young adults experience anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, and low self-esteem that may be linked to prolonged social media use. The pressure to gain social approval through likes, comments, and followers can negatively affect emotional well-being. Cyberbullying, online harassment, and unrealistic comparisons with others may further increase psychological distress. Despite growing awareness of these issues, there is still a need to better understand how different patterns of social media use affect the mental health of young adults. This study seeks to examine both the positive and negative impacts of social media on the mental well-being of young adults. The findings will help promote healthier social media habits and support strategies to improve mental health among young adults.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the impact of social media usage on the mental health of young adults,
2. To identify the negative effects of social media on the emotional well-being of young adults,
3. To suggest strategies for promoting healthy and responsible social media use.

Rationale of the study:

The study "The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health among Young Adults – A Sociological Study" is highly relevant in the present context because social media has become a central part of everyday life, particularly for young adults. From a sociological perspective, mental health is not viewed merely as an individual issue but as something shaped by social relationships, institutions, cultural norms, and technological changes. The rapid expansion of digital platforms has transformed how people communicate, form identities, and participate in society, making this topic an important area of sociological inquiry.

According to sociologists such as Erving Goffman, individuals perform different social roles in everyday life. Social media intensifies this process by encouraging users to carefully curate their online identities. Young adults often seek validation through likes, comments, and followers, which can lead to anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, and identity confusion when expectations are not met.

Social media encourages constant comparison with others' achievements, lifestyles, and appearances. Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory explains that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others. Continuous exposure to idealized images may contribute to Depression and anxiety, Poor body image, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and reduced self-confidence. These issues are particularly significant among young adults who are in a critical stage of identity development.

Mental health is increasingly recognized as a public and social issue rather than solely a medical problem. Rising levels of anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, internet addiction, and loneliness among young adults demonstrate how technological



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changes influence psychological well-being. Sociologists examine how these issues are linked to broader social structures, cultural expectations, and digital environments.

Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive research design** to examine the impact of social media on the mental health of young adults. A descriptive approach is appropriate because it helps identify patterns, behaviors, and relationships between social media usage and mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, stress, self-esteem, and overall well-being.

Research Approach

The study follows a **quantitative research approach**, using structured questionnaires to collect numerical data from respondents. This approach enables the researcher to analyze trends, compare responses, and draw meaningful conclusions based on statistical evidence.

Population of the Study

The target population for this research consists of young adults aged 18–30 years who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, X, and WhatsApp for different purposes. The respondents may include college students, university students, and young working professionals.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 86 respondents was selected for the study using the convenience sampling technique. Respondents were chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate. This method is suitable for collecting data efficiently within the available time and resources.

Sources of Data

The study uses both primary and secondary data.

Primary data Collected through a structured questionnaire distributed online and in person. The questionnaire includes questions on social media usage, time spent online, preferred platforms, and indicators of mental health.

Secondary data Collected from books, research journals, academic articles, government reports, and reputable online sources related to social media and mental health.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire consists of two sections:

Section A: Demographic information such as age, gender, education, and occupation.

Section B: Questions related to social media usage, frequency of use, online behavior, and mental health indicators such as stress, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and sleep quality. Most questions use a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Data Analysis

The collected data were organized, coded, and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings were presented in the form of tables, charts, and graphs to facilitate interpretation and draw meaningful conclusions regarding the relationship between social media use and mental health among young adults.



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Ethical Considerations

The study follows ethical research practices by ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of respondents. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes. They were also free to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to a sample of 86 young adults and relies on self-reported responses, which may be subject to personal bias. The findings may not be generalized to all young adults due to the use of convenience sampling and the limited geographical coverage. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the relationship between social media usage and mental health among young adults.

Findings:

Table-1 Demographic information such as age, gender, education, and occupation

<u>Sl.no</u>	variables		Frequency	percentage
1	Age	18-21years	40	46.51
		22-25years	28	32.55
		26-30years	18	20.94
2	Gender	Male	48	55.82
		Female	36	41.86
		Transgender	02	2.32
3	Education	Below PUC	21	24.42
		PUC	27	31.40
		UG	28	32.56
		PG	06	6.97
		Doctoral	04	4.65
4	Occupation	Unorganized sector	33	38.37
		Organized sector	08	9.30
		Studying	45	52.33

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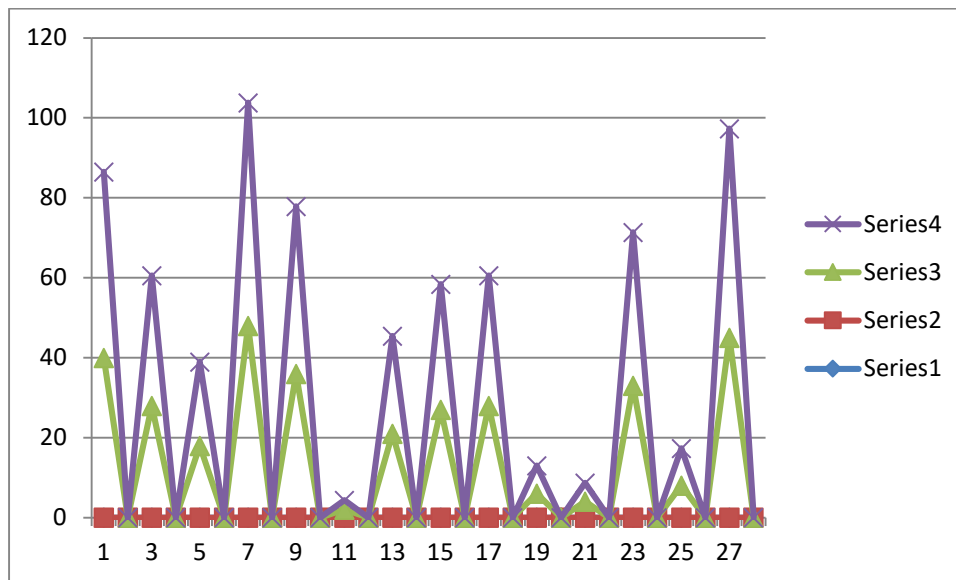


Table-1 shows that about 46.51% of the respondents were 18-21 years used social media at maximum level due to have leisure time to spend on chatting with their friends and they wanted to get maximum like through reels. They opined that it was crazy one. About 32.55% of the respondents were 22-25 years involved in social media for different purposes. About 20.94% of the respondents were belongs to 26-30 years used social media frequently. The study found that almost 18-30 years age group was actively participated. About 55.82% of the respondents were male and 41.86% of female remaining 2.32% of them were transgender engaged in social media. About 24.42% of the respondents were having below PU education. About 31.40% of them were completed PU education. About 32.56% of the respondents were having under graduation and about 6.97% of them were completed post-graduation. About 4.65% of the respondents were having doctoral degree among users. The study has found that Particularly who were at the UG level education they used max social media for academia and information purpose. About 38.37% of the respondents worked in unorganized sector. About 9.30% of them were working in organized sector. About 52.33% of the respondents were studying. The study shows that students are engaged in social media than working class.

Table -2 Negative Impacts of Social Media on Mental Health among Young Adults

Sl.no	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Increased Anxiety and Stress	0	2	0	4	80
2	. Depression and Feelings of Loneliness	0	1	0	4	81
3	. Low Self-Esteem and Poor Body Image	0	3	0	6	77
4	Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	0	3	0	16	67
5	Cyber bullying and Online Harassment	0	6	0	10	70
6	Sleep Disturbances	0	0	0	3	83



7	Social Media Addiction	2	2	2	15	65
8	Reduced Academic and Work Performance	0	0	0	3	83
9	Emotional Dependence on Online Validation	0	0	0	5	81
10	Reduced Face-to-Face Communication and Social Skills	1	1	1	7	76
11	Loss of primary relationship	0	1	1	4	80

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Table 2 explains the negative impacts of social media on mental health among young adults

1. Increased Anxiety and Stress

About 93.02% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that social media creates anxiety and stress. Excessive use of social media can increase anxiety and stress levels among young adults. The constant pressure to stay connected, respond to messages immediately, and keep up with online trends creates mental exhaustion. Notifications, fear of missing important updates, and the need for social approval often lead to chronic stress and emotional instability.

2. Depression and Feelings of Loneliness

Although 94.1% of them strongly agreed that it creates depression and feelings of loneliness. Social media is designed to connect people; excessive use can make users feel isolated and lonely. Spending more time interacting online than in person may reduce meaningful relationships. Constant exposure to others' seemingly perfect lives can also create feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and depression.

3. Low Self-Esteem and Poor Body Image

About 89.53% of the respondents were strongly agreed that Low Self-Esteem and Poor Body Image. Young adults frequently compare themselves with influencers, celebrities, and peers who post edited or idealized images. These unrealistic beauty and lifestyle standards often result in low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and reduced self-confidence, especially among teenagers and young adults.

4. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

About 77.90% of the participants were strongly agreed with the statement that social media creates fear of missing out. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a common psychological effect of social media. Seeing friends attend events, travel, or achieve success can make individuals feel left behind or excluded. This often leads to anxiety, dissatisfaction with life, and compulsive checking of social media platforms.

5. Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

About 81.39% of the respondents strongly agreed that cyberbullying and Online Harassment. Cyberbullying is one of the most harmful effects of social media. Young adults may experience abusive comments, online harassment, rumors, or public humiliation. Such experiences can lead to emotional trauma, anxiety, depression, low self-worth, and, in severe cases, self-harming behavior or suicidal thoughts.



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6. Sleep Disturbances

About 96.51% of them strongly agreed that using social media late at night interferes with healthy sleep patterns. The blue light emitted by mobile devices reduces melatonin production, making it difficult to fall asleep. Poor sleep quality contributes to fatigue, mood swings, reduced concentration, and increased risk of mental health disorders.

7. Social Media Addiction

About 75.58% of the respondents strongly agreed that many young adults develop addictive behaviors related to social media, spending several hours each day scrolling through content. This addiction reduces productivity, weakens self-control, and interferes with studies, work, and personal responsibilities. Dependence on social media can also increase feelings of restlessness when users are offline.

8. Reduced Academic and Work Performance

About 96.51% of the respondents strongly agreed that excessive time spent on social networking sites distracts students and young professionals from their academic or career goals. Frequent interruptions from notifications and endless scrolling reduce concentration, increase procrastination, and lower overall performance and productivity.

9. Emotional Dependence on Online Validation

About 94.18% of the participants strongly agreed that many young adults become emotionally dependent on receiving likes, comments, and shares. Their mood and self-worth may depend on online feedback rather than personal achievements or healthy relationships. When expectations are not met, individuals may experience disappointment, frustration, and decreased confidence.

10. Reduced Face-to-Face Communication and Social Skills

About 88.37% of the respondents strongly agreed that heavy reliance on digital communication may reduce opportunities for real-life interactions. As a result, some young adults struggle to develop effective communication skills, empathy, and emotional connections. Limited face-to-face interaction can increase feelings of isolation and make it more difficult to build strong personal relationships.

While social media offers many advantages, excessive and unhealthy use can significantly affect the mental health of young adults. It contributes to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep problems, addiction, and social isolation. Promoting responsible social media use, maintaining a healthy balance between online and offline activities, and encouraging mental health awareness are essential steps toward reducing these negative effects and improving overall well-being.

11. Loss of primary relationship

About 93.02% of the respondents were strongly agreed that huge usage of social media is major cause for loss of primary relationships. Most of the youngsters addicted for the social media especially in whatsapp and instagram. Youth tried to away from their parents while using these. It may strongly disturbed the relationship between and among the parents and children, husband and wife. This is badly effects on social construction.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are recommended to reduce the negative impact of social media on the mental health of young adults:

1. **Limit Daily Screen Time:** Young adults should set reasonable daily limits for social media use to avoid excessive screen time and maintain a healthy balance between online and offline activities.



2. **Promote Digital Well-being:** Individuals should use built-in digital well-being features such as screen-time trackers, app timers, and notification controls to manage their social media habits effectively.
3. **Encourage Positive Online Behavior:** Users should avoid engaging in cyber bullying, spreading misinformation, or posting harmful content. Respectful and supportive online interactions can improve mental well-being.
4. **Reduce Social Comparison:** Young adults should remember that social media often shows only the positive aspects of people's lives. Avoiding unhealthy comparisons can help improve self-esteem and confidence.
5. **Take Regular Digital Breaks:** Scheduling regular breaks from social media, especially before bedtime, can improve sleep quality, reduce stress, and enhance overall mental health.
6. **Increase Mental Health Awareness:** Educational institutions and organizations should conduct awareness programs on mental health, responsible social media use, and stress management.
7. **Seek Professional Support When Needed:** Individuals experiencing anxiety, depression, loneliness, or emotional distress due to social media should seek help from mental health professionals, counselors, or trusted adults.
8. **Strengthen Real-Life Relationships:** Spending more time with family and friends and participating in social, cultural, or recreational activities can reduce dependence on social media and improve emotional well-being.
9. **Develop Healthy Lifestyle Habits:** Regular exercise, a balanced diet, adequate sleep, mindfulness, and hobbies can help reduce stress and improve mental health.
10. **Encourage Responsible Use of Social Media:** Parents, teachers, educational institutions, and policymakers should work together to promote digital literacy, online safety, and responsible social media practices among young adults.

Social media is a powerful tool that offers many opportunities for communication, learning, and social connection. However, excessive and unhealthy use can negatively affect the mental health of young adults by increasing anxiety, depression, stress, sleep problems, and low self-esteem. By adopting healthy digital habits, limiting screen time, promoting mental health awareness, and encouraging positive online behavior, young adults can enjoy the benefits of social media while minimizing its harmful effects. A balanced and responsible approach to social media use is essential for improving overall mental well-being and leading a healthier, more productive life.

Conclusion

Social media has become an essential part of the daily lives of young adults, offering numerous benefits such as improved communication, access to information, educational opportunities, entertainment, and social support. It enables individuals to stay connected with family and friends, build professional networks, and express themselves creatively. However, this study concludes that while social media has many positive aspects, its excessive and unregulated use can have a significant negative impact on the mental health of young adults.

The findings indicate that prolonged social media use is associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, low self-esteem, and poor body image. Factors such as cyber bullying, fear of missing out (FOMO), constant social comparison, and the pressure to maintain an ideal online image contribute to emotional distress. Excessive screen time also affects sleep quality, concentration, academic performance, and overall well-being. At the same time, responsible and balanced use of social media can provide emotional support, promote awareness of mental health issues, and strengthen social relationships.

Therefore, the impact of social media depends largely on how it is used rather than the technology itself. Developing healthy digital habits, limiting screen time, engaging in meaningful offline activities, and promoting digital literacy are essential steps toward protecting mental health. Parents, educators, healthcare professionals, and policymakers also have an important role in guiding young adults toward responsible social media use and providing mental health support when needed.



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In conclusion, social media is a powerful tool that can positively or negatively influence the mental health of young adults. By encouraging mindful and balanced use, individuals can enjoy the benefits of social media while minimizing its potential risks. Future research should continue to explore effective strategies for promoting digital well-being and creating healthier online environments for young people.

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