



ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ANXIETY AMONG HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT :

Social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok have become central to the social lives of adolescents, providing opportunities for communication, self-expression, and social validation. However, the pervasive nature of social media has also raised concerns about its potential impact on mental health. Social anxiety, a condition characterized by an intense fear of social situations and judgment by others, is increasingly prevalent among adolescents. Given the critical stage of social and emotional development during adolescence, understanding the relationship between social media use and social anxiety is essential for developing interventions and support systems for this age group.



This research paper investigates the role of social media use in the development of social anxiety among higher secondary students. The study employed a correlational research design and involved a sample of 250 higher secondary students, aged 16-19 years, from various schools in an urban area. Participants are selected through stratified random sampling method. Data were collected using Social anxiety scale (SAS) and Social media use scale. The Pearson correlation analysis and t-test were performed to analyze the data. The findings reveal a significant relationship between excessive social media use and heightened social anxiety, with specific online behaviors such as passive consumption and frequent social comparisons identified as key contributors.

KEYWORDS : social media use, social anxiety, adolescents.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has become an integral part of daily life, especially for adolescents (Cataldo et al., 2021). Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok provide young people with opportunities for communication, self-expression, and social validation. These platforms allow users to stay connected with friends, share experiences, and participate in broader social networks (Reid & Weigle, 2014). For adolescents, who are in a critical phase of social and emotional development, social media can be both a tool for social connection and a source of stress. While social media offers numerous benefits, it also raises concerns about its impact on mental health, particularly in relation to social anxiety (Naslund et al., 2020). Social anxiety, characterized by an intense fear of social situations and judgment by others, is becoming increasingly prevalent among adolescents. The need for social acceptance and fear of negative evaluation can be exacerbated by the pressures of maintaining an online presence. The constant exposure to idealized images and the pursuit of social validation through

likes, comments, and followers can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and heighten social anxiety (Papadopoulou, 2024).

Adolescence is a vulnerable period for the development of social anxiety, as individuals are navigating complex social dynamics and forming their identities (Crocetti et al., 2009). The pervasive nature of social media during this stage of life can amplify these challenges. Social media use has been linked to various mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Keles, McCrae & Grealish, 2020). However, the specific relationship between social media use and social anxiety in adolescent remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the role of social media use in the development of social anxiety among higher secondary students. By examining the relationship between social media behaviors and social anxiety levels, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how social media influences adolescents' mental health. The findings of this study can inform the development of interventions and support systems that help mitigate the negative effects of social media on young people's well-being.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the role of social media use in the development of social anxiety among higher secondary students. The specific objectives include:

- To assess the prevalence of social anxiety among higher secondary students who use social media.
- To identify specific social media behaviors that are associated with increased social anxiety.
- To determine the correlation between the frequency and intensity of social media use and the level of social anxiety.

1. Research Questions

What is the prevalence of social anxiety among higher secondary students who use social media?

Which specific social media behaviors are associated with increased social anxiety among these students?

Is there a significant correlation between the frequency and intensity of social media use and the level of social anxiety?

1. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform educational institutions, mental health professionals, and parents about the impact of social media on adolescent mental health. Identifying the specific social media behaviors that contribute to social anxiety can guide the development of targeted interventions and preventive measures. The findings may contribute to the broader discourse on digital literacy and the need for promoting healthy social media practices among adolescents.

2. Literature Review

Social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok have become integral parts of adolescents' daily lives, serving as tools for communication, self-expression, and social validation. According to Valkenburg and Peter (2011), adolescents are particularly drawn to social media because it allows them to maintain and enhance peer relationships, which are crucial during this developmental period. However, the immersive nature of social media also poses risks, particularly when it comes to mental health. Oberst et al. (2018) found that adolescents spend an average of nearly nine hours per day on social media, raising concerns about the potential negative effects of such extensive use.

The impact of social media on mental health has been the subject of extensive research, with mixed findings. While some studies highlight the positive aspects of social media, such as increased social support and opportunities for self-expression (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014), others point to negative consequences, including increased anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Twenge et al., 2018). The unique features of social media, such as the ability to engage in social comparison and the emphasis

on appearance and popularity, have been identified as potential contributors to these negative outcomes.

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between social media use and social anxiety among adolescents. A systematic review by Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) found that excessive social media use is associated with higher levels of social anxiety. The review highlights that adolescents who engage in frequent social comparison, passive consumption of content, and who are overly concerned with their online image are particularly vulnerable to developing social anxiety. One of the mechanisms through which social media may contribute to social anxiety is through social comparison. Adolescents often compare themselves to others on social media, focusing on appearance, popularity, and lifestyle (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). This constant comparison can lead to feelings of inadequacy and increased anxiety about how they are perceived by their peers. A study by Lee et al. (2014) found that adolescents who engaged in more frequent social comparisons on social media reported higher levels of social anxiety.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between social media use and social anxiety among higher secondary students. A sample of 250 higher secondary students aged 16- 19 years was selected for the study. The participants were drawn from various schools in an urban area to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The stratified random sampling method was employed. This method ensures that the sample reflects the characteristics of the broader population, allowing for more generalizable results. Two primary tools were used to collect data for this study: Social Anxiety Scale (SAS) by Liebowitz (Olivares et al., 2009) and Social Media Use Scale by Tuck and Thompson (2024). The Social Anxiety Scale (SAS) by Michael Liebowitz, developed in 1987 is often referred to as the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS). The scale has two subscales with a total of 24 items each. 13 items of the scale assess the fear or anxiety in social interaction situations where 11 items assessing fear or anxiety in performance situations. Items of Fear/Anxiety are scored on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = None, 1 = Mild, 2= Moderate, 3 = Severe). On other hand, items of avoidance are also scored on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = Never, 1 = occasionally, 2 = Often, 3 = usually). The Social Media Use Scale (SMUS) by Tuck and Thompson, developed in 2024, is a comprehensive tool designed to measure the intensity, frequency, and impact of social media use among individuals. The scale consists of 30 items that cover different dimensions of social media use. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, ensuring that participants' rights and well-being were protected throughout the research process. Both the guardians and the students gave their informed consent.

IBM SPSS was used to analyze the data that had been collected. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions, were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the overall levels of social media use and social anxiety. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social media use and social anxiety. Also, a t-test was employed to compare the levels of social anxiety between those who engage in passive consumption versus active participation. This analysis helps identify specific online behaviors that may be more strongly linked to social anxiety.

4. Result

The sample consisted of 250 higher secondary students aged 16-19 years. The mean age of the participants was 17.4 years (SD = 1.2 years). Gender distribution was fairly balanced, with 52% of the sample identifying as female and 48% as male. The average daily social media usage was found to be 4.5 hours (SD = 1.8 hours), with Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok being the most frequently used platforms. The Social Anxiety Scale (SAS) scores ranged from 15 to 75, with a mean score of 45.2 (SD = 12.3), indicating moderate levels of social anxiety within the sample. The Social Media Use Scale scores ranged from 20 to 90, with a mean score of 58.7 (SD = 15.1), suggesting a high level of engagement with social media among participants. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship

between social media use and social anxiety. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between overall social media use and social anxiety ($r = 0.54, p < 0.01$). This indicates that higher levels of social media use are associated with increased levels of social anxiety among higher secondary students. A t-test was conducted to compare social anxiety levels between students with high and low social media use (based on median split). The results indicated that students with high social media use ($M = 51.6, SD = 10.8$) exhibited significantly higher social anxiety levels compared to those with low social media use ($M = 39.8, SD = 11.9$), $t(248) = 6.47, p < 0.01$. The results of this study provide significant insights into the relationship between social media use and social anxiety among higher secondary students. The findings indicate that social media use is positively correlated with social anxiety, with specific online behaviors such as passive consumption and social comparison playing key roles in this relationship.

5. Discussion

The present study sought to explore the relationship between social media use and social anxiety among higher secondary students, a topic of increasing relevance in today's digital age. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between social media use and social anxiety, suggesting that higher levels of engagement with social media are associated with increased levels of social anxiety among adolescents.

These results align with previous research that has highlighted the potential negative impact of social media on mental health, particularly among young people (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). One of the key insights from this study is the role of specific online behaviors, such as passive consumption and social comparison, in exacerbating social anxiety. Passive consumption, which involves scrolling through content without actively engaging, can lead to feelings of isolation and inadequacy as adolescents are constantly exposed to idealized portrayals of others' lives. This can create a distorted perception of reality, contributing to heightened self-consciousness and fear of negative evaluation—core features of social anxiety.

Social comparison, another significant contributor, involves evaluating oneself against others based on the curated content shared on social media platforms. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to this behavior, as they are in a critical stage of identity formation and are more likely to seek validation from their peers. The frequent comparisons that occur on platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok can lead to feelings of inferiority and heightened social anxiety, as adolescents may perceive themselves as falling short of the perceived standards set by others. The findings of this study have important implications for both educators and mental health professionals. Understanding the relationship between social media use and social anxiety can help in the development of targeted interventions aimed at reducing the negative impact of social media on adolescents' mental health. For instance, programs that promote digital literacy and healthy social media habits could be beneficial in helping students recognize and mitigate the potential risks associated with excessive social media use. Additionally, incorporating mindfulness-based approaches could help students develop a more balanced and self-compassionate perspective, reducing the likelihood of engaging in harmful social comparison.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

Although the study offers insightful information, there are a few important limitations to be aware of. The reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias, as participants may not accurately reflect their social media use or social anxiety levels. Moreover, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to establish causality. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether social media use directly leads to increased social anxiety or whether socially anxious individuals are more likely to engage in certain online behaviors. Future research should also explore the role of specific social media platforms and features in contributing to social anxiety. Understanding how different platforms and their unique characteristics influence mental health can help tailor interventions to address platform-specific risks.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study underscores the complex relationship between social media use and social anxiety among higher secondary students. While social media offers numerous benefits for communication and self-expression, it also poses risks for mental health, particularly in relation to passive consumption and social comparison. By promoting healthier social media habits and addressing the underlying causes of social anxiety, educators, parents, and mental health professionals can help mitigate the negative effects of social media on adolescents' well-being.

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