

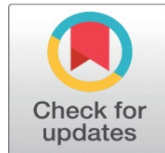
# COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW: RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AMONG YOUNG POPULATION

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## ABSTRACT

Young people's addiction to social media is an increasing global phenomenon, fuelled by digital platforms' enormous reach. This review looks at risk factors such as age, gender, low self-esteem, emotional distress, loneliness, and sleep quality. Technological elements such as limitless scrolling, algorithm-driven content, and gamification exacerbate addiction. This review examines risk variables linked with social media addiction using research from Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and other national and international journals. The review focuses on the mental health consequences, such as anxiety, sadness, poor sleep, academic challenges, and strained relationships, which all have an influence on well-being. To combat this, the study advocates for digital literacy, ethical social media design, emotional resilience, and offline activities, as well as collaboration among researchers, educators, healthcare experts, and social media businesses to safeguard young people. This review provides a critical understanding of the intricate connections between social media addiction, mental health, and well-being, underscoring the need for collective action in a digitally connected world.

**Keywords:** Social Media Addiction, Risk Factors, Low Self-esteem, Loneliness, Social Comparison & Emotion Distress, Sleep Quality, Young Adult Population

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media addiction (SMA) is a growing concern in today's digital landscape, particularly among younger generations that use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. SMA is defined by obsessive and excessive use of social media, which has substantial effects for mental health, academic performance, social connections, and overall well-being (Sheinov & Dziavitsyn, 2021; Bekar et al., 2022). While social media offers unrivaled benefits in connectivity and information availability, its misuse has revealed a number of negative consequences that require immediate action (Zhao et al., 2022). Furthermore, continual comparison to the idealized lives portrayed online reinforces feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, worsening emotional distress (Zivnуска et al., 2019). Social media addiction is defined as an excessive dependence and addiction to social media or social networking activities. An uncontrollable concentration on social and online involvement can occupy considerable amounts of time and energy, thereby impacting other vital elements of life (Shensa et al., 2017). According to research, social media difficulties are linked to psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Wong et al. 2020). Social media platforms are

intended to foster connection, but they can also create conditions that promote compulsive behavior, particularly among young people who are vulnerable. The psychological factors, such as low confidence and mental health difficulties, underscore the need to learn more about how social media can be both a source of anxiety and a coping mechanism. Many young people discover that receiving likes and comments temporarily alleviates their feelings of inadequacy. But frequently, this validation is ephemeral, creating a vicious cycle of dependency that can worsen pre-existing mental health conditions (Amirthalingam, J., & Khera, A., 2024). Social media is an essential part of modern life, connecting people globally and offering quick access to information. However, concerns about excessive use have emerged, with some scholars suggesting that it contributes to unhealthy behaviors like social media addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). By 2025, it's projected that 210 million people globally will suffer from social media addiction, with 33.19 million in the U.S. alone (DemandSage, 2025). 82% of Generation Z admit to being dependent on sites such as Instagram and TikTok, and 36% of teenagers report excessive use, which has been related to worry, stress, and sadness. Unlike chemical addiction, social media addiction is described as a behavioral addiction characterized by obsessive use, withdrawal symptoms, and disruption of everyday life (Griffiths, 2005). The negative implications can be psychological, social, or academic (WHO, 2011). As social media addiction becomes more prevalent, knowing its causes, consequences, and therapeutic strategies is critical to protecting mental health. Social media addiction (SMA) has been a major problem, particularly due to its psychological and social consequences. Several risk factors have been found that contribute to the development and worsening of SMA, with each influencing people in unique ways. One of the most important psychological issues associated with social media addiction is low self-esteem. According to research, people with poor self-esteem are more inclined to seek validation and affirmation on social media sites, notably through the accumulation of likes, shares, and comments. This ongoing desire for digital affirmation generates a cycle of reliance in which the emotional satisfaction gained from online validation leads to obsessive consumption, sustaining the addiction (Hou et al., 2019). Impulsivity, self-esteem, emotions, and attentional biases were potential risk factors associated with SMA. It was found that females were more susceptible to SMA than males. Additionally, impulsivity, low levels of self-esteem, anxiety, social anxiety, and ANI were found to be risk factors for SMA (Zhao J. et al., 2022).

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has included Internet addiction, namely online gambling, as a mental disease in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. In several areas of behavioural addiction, it has been contested whether some extreme behaviors may truly be classified as addiction. Social media addiction, a subset of Internet addiction, has been considered in this context. Griffiths (2013) contributed significantly to this issue by proposing six critical components for characterizing behavior as addiction. The six components are salience, tolerance, mood modification, relapse, withdrawal, and conflict (Griffiths, 2013, p.121). In short, social media addiction is a rapidly growing problem in the twenty-first century. For this reason, a number of studies were conducted in various countries on this subject. Each study presents a new outcome, explains reasons and effects of the social media addiction, and presents new ways of solutions DSM-5<sup>th</sup> ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, (2013).

## 2. RISK FACTOR FOR SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

Research has established a strong correlation between excessive social media use and various psychological risks. A systematic review highlights that prolonged engagement with social networking sites significantly increases the likelihood of depression and anxiety (Keles et al., 2020). Additionally, a recent study found that 70% of teenagers experience heightened anxiety when unable to access social media, underscoring its substantial impact on mental health (Mastermind Behavior, 2024). These findings emphasize the need for awareness and intervention to mitigate the adverse effects of social media addiction. The widespread use of social media among youth is linked to mental health issues, including loneliness, low self-esteem, disrupted sleep, OCD behaviors, depression, anxiety, and stress. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach, including education, awareness, and the promotion of healthy digital habits. Zhao et al. (2022) identified key psychological risk factors for social media addiction (SMA), such as impulsivity, self-esteem, emotions, social anxiety, and attention to negative content. Unlike substance addiction, social media addiction is harder to manage, as users often perceive its benefits to outweigh the risks. Social media platforms also leverage algorithms that exploit the desire for social recognition and provide intermittent rewards, reinforcing compulsive behavior (Chien & Liao, 2023). A study by Parlak Sert and Başkale (2022) found that 70.8% of students spent more time on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to an increase in social media addiction. The main risk factors were increased screen time (3–5 hours) and heightened pandemic anxiety, while gender, class, and socioeconomic status had minimal impact. Similarly, U.S. teens spend an average of 4.8 hours daily on social media, a

behavior linked to poor mental health outcomes like suicidal thoughts and self-harm (APA, 2024). Social media addiction is driven by low self-esteem, impulsivity, FOMO, and peer influence, particularly among youth (Tanhan et al., 2024; Tolan, 2023). Gender differences are also notable, with females reporting higher addiction rates and more anxiety when disconnected (Xie & Karan, 2019).

## 2.1. LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Low self-esteem drives individuals to seek validation through social media, creating a cycle of dependency. People with low self-worth often compare themselves to others online, relying on likes, shares, and comments for approval, which reinforces addictive behaviours (Hou et al., 2019). Research shows that such individuals use social media excessively as a coping mechanism, worsening their addiction (Demircioglu & Goncu Kose, 2020). Social media addiction often worsens self-esteem, as users engage in upward social comparisons that diminish their self-worth. Continuous exposure to idealized images can lead to negative self-reflection, especially among younger users. The addictive nature of social media, driven by the desire for likes and comments, exacerbates low self-esteem (Ahmed et al., 2021; Hou et al., 2019). Individuals with low self-worth are more likely to seek validation online, with the dopamine boost from likes and comments reinforcing compulsive use and addiction (Hou et al., 2019). Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz (2017) found a moderate negative correlation between self-esteem and social media addiction, with lower self-esteem linked to higher addiction levels. The study also highlighted gender differences, showing women were more likely to use social media for mood modification, and that addiction increased with more Instagram followers and behaviors like owning fake accounts or social media stalking. This study highlights the significant psychological impact of social media, especially for individuals with low self-esteem, and calls for further research on this relationship (Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2017). Sarkar, George, and T (2022) found a weak negative correlation between social media addiction and self-esteem among students, suggesting that higher addiction tends to lower self-esteem. The study also revealed that WhatsApp, followed by Facebook and Instagram, were the most used platforms, with 9.3% reporting severe addiction. Shahzad, Hanif, and Haroon (2024) found that higher social media addiction was linked to lower self-esteem, poor sleep quality, increased mind-wandering, and more frequent phubbing behavior, emphasizing the negative psychological effects of excessive social media use.

## 2.2. LONELINESS

Loneliness is another significant psychological factor contributing to social media addiction (SMA). Individuals who feel socially isolated frequently utilize social media to replace in-person contacts, developing a reliance on online participation to fill the hole left by real-world connections (Zivnuska et al., 2019). Excessive usage of social media can lead to loneliness, since it replaces face-to-face socializing and reinforces reliance on virtual participation (Uyaroglu et al., 2022). Social media addiction can increase loneliness because people might spend a lot of time online while still feeling alone. This is frequently motivated by social comparison, in which users compare their life to idealized depictions, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and loneliness (Brailovskaia et al., 2020). Furthermore, an emotional dependence on virtual connections provides short relief but does not replace in-person interactions (Sujarwoto et al., 2021). Loneliness is a major risk factor for SMA, and people commonly use social media to deal with feelings of isolation. Excessive use diminishes face-to-face connections, which increases loneliness and perpetuates the dependency cycle (Savci & Aysan, 2016). Although social media services are intended to connect individuals, excessive use can cause social withdrawal. Loneliness both causes and contributes to social media addiction, emphasizing the importance of addressing it when controlling the addiction (Savci and Aysan, 2016). Many people use social media to relieve bad feelings, tension, or loneliness, but this activity can become obsessive, leading to addiction (Coyne et al., 2019).

## 2.3. SOCIAL COMPARISON & EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Social comparison and emotional distress are key psychological factors contributing to social media addiction (SMA). The constant desire to fit in and compare oneself to others on social media fosters feelings of inadequacy, envy, and insecurity, which can drive individuals to spend more time online in an attempt to enhance their online presence (Cheng et al., 2021; Giordano et al., 2021). This cycle of social comparison intensifies the addictive nature of social media, as individuals engage more to alleviate feelings of inadequacy (Zivnuska et al., 2019). Moreover, many people use social

media to manage negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, but excessive use often worsens mental health, creating a vicious cycle of addiction (Sujarwoto et al., 2021). Prolonged social media exposure exacerbates depressive symptoms by promoting unrealistic portrayals of others' lives and fueling social comparisons (Buran Köse & Doğan, 2018). Individuals with social anxiety or difficulties with face-to-face interactions may become emotionally dependent on these platforms, further driving excessive use (D'Arienzo et al., 2019; Önder, 2019). Studies have shown that social media addiction is strongly linked to increased anxiety, depression, and stress, with individuals using social media to seek validation, which ultimately exacerbates their emotional distress (Lee et al., 2023; Liu & Ma, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020).

## 2.4. SLEEP QUALITY

Excessive social media use, especially before bedtime, disrupts sleep patterns and reduces sleep quality (Huang et al., 2023). Late-night scrolling, blue light exposure, and cognitive stimulation disrupt melatonin synthesis, resulting in sleep difficulties. This deprivation leads to mental instability, stress, and an increased reliance on social media as a coping technique. Studies have found a correlation between social media addiction and poor sleep, with late-night screen use leading to weariness and unfavorable health outcomes (Hou et al., 2019; Malak et al., 2021). Engaging with digital media before bedtime has also been linked to increased anxiety and depression, particularly among adolescents (Woods & Scott, 2016). Unrealistic images on social media can reduce self-esteem, particularly among young people (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017). High social media use before bedtime has been associated to poor sleep quality and increased depression (Pirdehghan et al., 2021). Adolescents who use social media excessively endure sleep disruptions, which impair everyday functioning and exacerbate sadness. In Tamil Nadu, social media addiction had a significant impact on medical students' sleep quality, with gender and usage time as important determinants (Siddharthan et al., 2024). Setyowati et al. (2023) found a high relationship between poor sleep quality and social media addiction, who found that 76% of nursing students in Indonesia had both addiction and poor sleep quality. Topaktaş and Yakşi (2024) showed that social media addiction and poor sleep quality were linked to lower work performance, while Khan et al. (2023) discovered that using social media for over 3.5 hours a day doubled the odds of poor sleep quality, with Facebook Messenger users having higher odds.

## 3. RECOMANDATION

Young people's social media use is influenced by psychological, social, and demographic factors, requiring a multi-sector approach to mitigate risks. Schools, parents, and communities must provide education, psychological support, and ethical technological practices. Support groups and open family discussions help manage internet use, while time management skills and offline activities like sports and arts promote balance. Establishing device-free bedrooms and limiting nighttime screen use can improve sleep quality. Therapy, including CBT, can aid individuals dealing with self-esteem and anxiety issues. Encouraging offline engagement through community programs and "screen-free weekends" can reduce digital dependency. Schools should teach digital literacy, and parents must model responsible social media use. Community awareness and peer support play a vital role in fostering moderation and meaningful real-world interactions.

## 4. DISCUSION

Social media addiction (SMA) among young individuals is driven by psychological vulnerabilities like low self-esteem and anxiety, social influences such as peer pressure and FOMO, and technological factors like infinite scrolling and algorithm-driven content (Demircioglu & Goncu Kose, 2020; Tolan, 2023). These elements reinforce compulsive usage, leading to mental health issues, academic decline, and strained relationships (Hou et al., 2019; Sümen & Evgin, 2021). Addressing SMA requires digital literacy education, mental health support, and platform regulations to encourage healthier social media habits.



## 5. CONCLUSION

SMA poses significant risks to mental well-being and academic performance among youth. Psychological, social, and technological factors collectively drive addiction, making targeted interventions essential. A balanced approach, integrating education, mental health support, and policy regulations, can help mitigate its impact. Future research should explore long-term effects and ethical platform designs to ensure responsible social media use.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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