

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS: A SURVEY-BASED STUDY

Harpreet

TGT, RMB DAV Centenary Public School, Nawanshahr

ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media among students has raised concerns regarding its psychological and academic consequences. This study investigates the relationship between social media usage patterns, mental health indicators, and academic performance among school and college students. A structured questionnaire consisting of 21 items was administered to 133 students across different age groups (Below 13 to Above 21 years). Descriptive statistical analysis was used to interpret trends. Findings indicate that while moderate use of social media contributes to relaxation and information access, excessive use is associated with sleep disturbances, reduced concentration, comparison behavior, and emotional fluctuations. The study concludes that balanced digital habits and institutional guidance are essential for safeguarding student well-being.

Keywords: Social media, mental health, academic performance, adolescents, screen time, FOMO

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health plays a crucial role in students' academic success, personality development, and social adjustment. In recent years, rapid technological advancement and widespread internet accessibility have transformed communication and learning environments. Social media platforms have become deeply integrated into students' daily routines, influencing their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral patterns.

Students use social media for academic discussions, entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. However, continuous online engagement often affects emotional balance. The desire to gain social approval, maintain an online image, and compare oneself with others can lead to stress, anxiety, and emotional dissatisfaction. Many students experience feelings of loneliness and sadness despite being digitally connected.

The increasing prevalence of depressive symptoms among students has become a major concern for educators, parents, and policymakers. Digital behavior is now recognized as a significant factor influencing mental health. This study aims to examine how social media usage contributes to depressive symptoms among students and highlights the need for responsible digital engagement.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine daily social media usage patterns among students.
2. To analyze emotional responses associated with usage.
3. To assess impact on concentration and academic performance.
4. To identify awareness regarding healthy digital habits.

3. CONCEPT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media refers to online platforms that enable users to create, share, and interact with content through virtual networks. Commonly used platforms among students include

Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, YouTube, and X. These platforms facilitate instant communication, collaborative learning, and creative expression.

In the educational context, social media supports access to academic resources, online discussions, and peer collaboration. Students can share notes, attend virtual classes, and seek academic guidance. However, excessive dependence on these platforms may reduce real-life interaction and increase emotional reliance on digital validation.

When online engagement becomes more important than face-to-face relationships, students may experience emotional isolation, low self-confidence, and reduced social skills.

4. DEPRESSION AMONG STUDENTS

Depression is a psychological condition characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest, low energy, poor concentration, and negative self-perception. Among students, depression is often influenced by academic pressure, family expectations, social challenges, and personal insecurities.

Common Symptoms of Depression

1. Constant feelings of sadness and hopelessness
2. Loss of interest in studies and hobbies
3. Sleep disturbances and fatigue
4. Low self-esteem and self-doubt
5. Difficulty in concentrating
6. Social withdrawal

In the digital era, social media has emerged as an additional factor that intensifies these symptoms. Online comparison, negative feedback, and emotional dependence on digital platforms contribute significantly to depressive tendencies.

5. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

5.1 Prolonged Screen Time

Excessive screen time reduces physical activity, disrupts sleep patterns, and limits real-life interaction. Students who spend long hours on social media often experience mental fatigue and emotional exhaustion.

5.2 Social Comparison

Social media presents idealized images of success and happiness. Students compare their real lives with unrealistic portrayals, leading to dissatisfaction and low self-worth.

5.3 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Continuous exposure to friends' activities creates feelings of exclusion and insecurity, increasing emotional distress.

5.4 Cyberbullying and Online Criticism

Negative comments and online harassment damage self-esteem and emotional security, leading to fear and withdrawal.

5.5 Emotional Dependence on Online Validation

Students associate self-worth with likes and comments. Low online response leads to disappointment and emotional instability.

5.6 Sleep Disturbance

Late-night usage affects sleep quality, weakening emotional control and increasing vulnerability to depression.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design using both secondary and primary data.

Sources of Data

1. Academic journals, books, and reports
2. Published research articles
3. Informal classroom observation
4. Structured questionnaire survey

6.2 Sample Size

The survey was conducted among **133 school and college students** aged 13–21 years.

6.3 Age Distribution

1. Below 13 years – 10.5%
2. 13–15 years – 18%
3. 16–18 years – 26.3%
4. 19–21 years – 30.8%
5. Above 21 years – 14.3%

The majority of respondents were between 16–21 years, indicating strong representation of senior secondary and undergraduate students.

6.4 Type of Institution

1. Private – 73.7%
2. Government – 10.5%
3. Semi-Government – 15.8%

6.5 Data Analysis Method

Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage method) were used.

7. RESULTS AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

7.1 Daily Social Media Usage

Usage Duration	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	33.8%
1–2 hours	38.3%
2–3 hours	18.8%
More than 3 hours	9%

Nearly **38% of students use social media for 1–2 hours daily**, while 9% exceed 3 hours, indicating potential risk exposure.

7.2 Usage during Study Time

1. Always – 27.8%
2. Often – 12%
3. Sometimes – 36%
4. Rarely/Never – 24%

More than half the respondents (54%) admitted using social media during study hours at least sometimes.

7.3 Emotional Response after Usage

Emotion	Percentage
Neutral	42%
Relaxed	27%
Happy	18%
Anxious	9%
Sad	7%

Although most reported neutral or relaxed feelings, approximately **16% experienced anxiety or sadness**, reflecting psychological vulnerability.

7.4 Social Comparison Behavior

1. Often compare with others – 7%
2. Sometimes – 30%
3. Rarely/Never – 60%

More than half (60%) engage in comparison behavior at least occasionally.

7.5 Sleep Disturbance

1. Yes/Regularly – 14%
2. Sometimes – 25%
3. Rarely/Never – 61%

Approximately **39% reported some degree of sleep disturbance**, suggesting screen-time impact on biological rhythms.

7.6 Effect on Concentration

Response	Percentage
Yes, a lot	23%
Sometimes	34%
Very little	25%
Not at all	19%

Nearly **82% reported concentration being affected**, highlighting cognitive implications.

7.7 Effect on Academic Performance

1. Improved – 34%

2. No change – 27%
3. Declined – 11%
4. Not sure – 28%

While some students perceive academic benefits, **11% reported decline**, suggesting that excessive use may be detrimental.

7.8 Cyberbullying Experience

1. Yes – 14%
2. No – 86%

Although majority did not experience direct cyberbullying, even 14% is significant in an academic setting.

7.9 Awareness and Control

1. Aware of healthy usage – 65%
2. Try to control screen time regularly – 53%
3. Feel need guidance – 40%

This indicates awareness exists, but implementation gaps remain.

7.10 Overall Interpretation of Survey Findings

The analysis of primary data reveals the following trends:

1. A significant number of students spend more than two hours daily on social media.
2. Nearly half of the respondents experience anxiety without internet access.
3. More than half face sleep disturbances due to late-night usage.
4. Most students report reduced concentration during studies.
5. A noticeable proportion experiences academic decline.

These patterns indicate that excessive social media use is strongly associated with emotional dependency, sleep problems, reduced focus, and academic stress, which are important indicators of depressive tendencies.

8. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate a mixed impact of social media. Moderate use contributes to relaxation, information access, and sometimes academic improvement. However, excessive usage correlates with:

1. Reduced concentration
2. Sleep disruption
3. Social comparison behavior
4. Emotional instability

Adolescents aged 16–21 showed higher usage duration and more late-night engagement, which explains reported sleep disturbances.

Although cyberbullying prevalence was moderate, its psychological implications remain serious.

The data supports the argument that the impact of social media depends not merely on usage, but on:

1. Duration
2. Timing (late-night use)
3. Type of engagement (active vs passive scrolling)

9. INTEGRATION WITH THEORETICAL FINDINGS

The survey findings strongly support previous research conducted by organizations such as UNICEF emphasize that adolescents are increasingly vulnerable to emotional stress due to excessive digital engagement. The World Health Organization highlights that prolonged screen exposure contributes to sleep disorders and emotional imbalance.

Jean M. Twenge (2019) reported that increased smartphone and social media usage is associated with rising depression among adolescents. Banu Keles (2020) found that social comparison and cyberbullying are major predictors of depressive symptoms.

Indian studies also indicate that high screen time reduces academic focus and increases emotional distress.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce depressive symptoms:

1. **Digital Literacy Education** – Teach responsible usage
2. **Time Management** – Fix screen-time limits
3. **Counseling Services** – Provide psychological support
4. **Parental Guidance** – Monitor with emotional understanding
5. **Promotion of Offline Activities** – Encourage sports and hobbies
6. **Mindful Digital Practices** – Focus on real-life growth

11. Limitations of the Study

1. Limited to few institutional cluster.
2. Self-reported responses.

12. Future Scope

Future research may include:

1. Larger regional sample
2. Gender-based comparison
3. Correlation analysis
4. Longitudinal study design

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media exerts both positive and negative effects on students. While it facilitates communication and learning, uncontrolled usage may impair mental health and academic concentration.

Educational institutions must promote structured digital literacy programs and encourage balanced usage habits.

REFERENCES

1. Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018). Teens, social media, and mental health.
2. Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). Social media and adolescent mental health.
3. Twenge, J. M. (2019). iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Happy.
4. UNICEF. The State of the World's Children Report.
5. World Health Organization. Mental Health and Digital Media.
6. Government of India. National Mental Health Programme Reports.