

A Study on the Psychological and Behavioural Impact of Social Media among Young Adults

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Abstract: *Social media has become an integral part of everyday life, particularly among young adults, providing opportunities for communication, education, entertainment, and social interaction. While these platforms offer several benefits, excessive and uncontrolled use has been associated with psychological distress, behavioural changes, distraction, reduced academic performance, and altered emotional well-being. The present study examines the psychological and behavioural impact of social media among young adults aged 18 to 30 years. A quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive research design was adopted. Data were collected from young adults using a structured self-administered questionnaire delivered via Google Forms. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) and inferential statistical methods (independent-samples-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation analysis). Results revealed that active social media usage is near-universal (98.6%) within this demographic. Neither gender nor area of residence produced statistically significant differences in psychological, behavioural, or overall scores. However, social media usage significantly affected behavioural scores (), with active users exhibiting higher interactive and behavioural engagement () compared to non-users (). Pearson's correlation analysis demonstrated a strong positive correlation between psychological and behavioural scores (), as well as near-perfect correlations between overall scores and both psychological () and behavioural () dimensions. These findings indicate that while social media adoption primarily influences interactive daily habits rather than baseline mental distress, psychological well-being and adaptive behavioural expressions strongly reinforce one another.*

Keywords: Social media impact, psychological well-being, behavioural habits, young adults, digital engagement, cross-sectional study

1. Introduction

Social media has fundamentally altered communication, learning, and interpersonal dynamics in modern society. Young adults (aged 18–30) represent one of the most active demographics on these platforms, routinely leveraging digital channels for education, entertainment, professional networking, and relationship maintenance. Driven by the widespread adoption of smartphones and high-speed internet, social media has transformed from a leisure activity into an essential infrastructure for daily functioning. Despite its notable utilities, excessive, unmonitored, or problematic engagement with social media can inflict substantial psychological and behavioural consequences on young adults.

Psychological well-being encompasses emotional stability, self-esteem, happiness, and adaptive stress management. Social media can enhance psychological outcomes when it facilitates authentic connection, peer support, and access to educational content. However, frequent engagement with curated online profiles, exposure to unrealistic social standards, cyberbullying, and relentless screen time often trigger psychological distress. These patterns are linked to heightened anxiety, depressive symptoms, loneliness, low self-esteem, and social comparison.

Behavioural functioning refers to daily routines, productivity, time management, and health habits. Problematic social media use frequently manifests as reduced academic or work focus, poor time management, altered sleep cycles, and compulsive checking behaviours. Conversely, when managed

intentionally, these platforms foster collaborative learning, knowledge dissemination, and skill acquisition.

Because the ultimate impact of social media depends heavily on the nature, purpose, and pattern of engagement rather than screen time alone, empirical investigation into both its positive and negative dimensions is essential. This study employs a quantitative descriptive approach to systematically evaluate how social media usage shapes the psychological well-being and behavioural habits of young adults.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychological Impact of Social Media and Mental Health Outcomes

Systematic reviews and empirical studies globally demonstrate strong linkages between excessive or problematic social media use and negative psychological outcomes among young adults. Prolonged engagement with social networking platforms is consistently associated with heightened anxiety, symptoms of depression, psychological stress, loneliness, and reduced self-esteem. These negative psychological effects are frequently driven by underlying mechanisms such as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), continuous online social comparison, and exposure to idealised body standards or curated lifestyles, which heighten appearance-related anxieties and emotional fatigue. Conversely, when social media is used in a balanced, purposeful manner, it can positively influence psychological well-being by facilitating authentic communication, peer support, self-expression, and access to valuable health or educational information.

2.2 Behavioural Dynamics and Daily Functioning

Excessive social media engagement significantly influences the daily routines, habits, and productivity of young adults. Problematic usage patterns often lead to academic and workplace distraction, poor time management, increased procrastination, altered sleep cycles, and compulsive checking behaviours. High levels of impulsivity and compulsive social media use further contribute to platform fatigue and emotional burnout. However, from a positive behavioural perspective, social networking platforms also foster collaborative learning, professional networking, knowledge sharing, and skill development when integrated intentionally into daily routines.

2.3 Social Media Trends in the Indian Context

Research conducted specifically within the Indian context aligns with global findings while highlighting distinct socio-cultural factors. Studies among Indian university students confirm that high dependency on platforms such as Instagram elevates FoMO, social comparison, and emotional exhaustion, which negatively impacts concentration and overall academic performance. Additionally, appearance-based comparisons on photo-sharing platforms exacerbate self-esteem issues and mental distress among young Indian adults. Nonetheless, empirical evidence in India also demonstrates that moderate and mindful social media usage supports academic collaboration, social connectedness, and subjective happiness across diverse socioeconomic groups.

3. Problem Definition

Despite the widespread utility of social media for communication and learning, its excessive or uncontrolled use among young adults poses significant challenges to psychological well-being and daily behavioural functioning, contributing to anxiety, social comparison, academic distraction, and disrupted routines. Existing research often focuses on clinical populations, adolescent cohorts, or Western contexts, creating a critical empirical gap regarding the simultaneous psychological and behavioural impact—both positive and negative—on young adults within regional settings like India. This study addresses this gap by employing a quantitative descriptive research design to evaluate the dual impact of social media engagement on the mental well-being and daily habits of young adults.

4. Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To assess the psychological impact of social media usage on young adults.
- 2) To examine the behavioural impact of social media engagement on the daily functioning and routines of young adults.
- 3) Identify both the positive and negative effects of social media use among young adults.
- 4) To describe the patterns and usage habits of social media among young adults.

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were proposed:

H₁: There is a significant psychological impact of social media usage among young adults.

H₂: There is a significant behavioural impact of social media usage on daily functioning and routines among young adults.

H₃: There is a significant difference between positive and negative psychological and behavioural impacts of social media usage among young adults.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the psychological and behavioural impact of social media among young adults. A descriptive, cross-sectional approach is suitable as it allows the researcher to systematically quantify and evaluate the characteristics, daily routines, and emotional experiences of the target population without manipulating any study variables.

5.2 Participants

The study sample comprised 75 young adults aged between 18 and 30 years who actively use one or more social media platforms and represent diverse educational and occupational backgrounds. Participants were recruited using a non-probability convenience sampling technique and voluntarily completed a structured online survey. To ensure sample integrity, inclusion criteria required participants to be within the specified age bracket, active social media users, and willing to complete the survey fully; individuals outside the 18–30 age range, non-users of social media, or those with incomplete survey submissions were excluded from the analysis.

5.3 Measures

Psychological and Behavioural Assessment Scale

The core psychological and behavioural construct items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where responses range from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). This standardized rating format assesses both self-reported psychological states—such as anxiety, stress, mood shifts, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and self-esteem—and key behavioural outcomes, including daily routine disruptions, time management, workplace or academic concentration, procrastination, and sleep quality.

Positive and Negative Impact sub-scales

The questionnaire includes distinct sub-scale items designed to capture both positive and negative consequences of social media engagement. The positive impact sub-scale measures constructive outcomes such as collaborative learning, peer support, self-expression, and professional networking, whereas the negative impact sub-scale evaluates adverse traits, including compulsive checking, digital fatigue, and emotional burnout. The quantitative responses collected across all sections were formatted for statistical evaluation using descriptive and inferential techniques.

5.4 Procedure

The data collection procedure was systematically executed by constructing a structured Google Forms survey containing demographic metrics and 5-point Likert-scale items, which was distributed via digital channels to young adults aged 18–30 using convenience sampling. Electronic informed consent detailing the study's voluntary, anonymous nature was secured before participation, and mandatory response fields were enabled to prevent missing data. Upon reaching 75 fully completed responses, the digital survey was closed, and the anonymised dataset was extracted, screened, coded, and imported into IBM SPSS for statistical analysis.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles are strictly followed throughout the study. Participation in the study is voluntary and students' identities remain confidential. The collected data are used solely for research purposes.

5.6 Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics, utilising both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarise sample demographics and social media usage patterns. To test the hypotheses, one-sample *t*-tests were conducted comparing the empirical mean scores of psychological and behavioural impacts against the scale, while a paired-samples *t*-test evaluated the significant difference between positive utility and negative impact scores. Furthermore, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients (*r*) were computed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between daily screen time and impact dimensions.

6. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic data of the sample (N=75)

Demographic data	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–20	25	31.6
	21–23	25	31.6
	24–26	19	24.1
	27–29	6	7.6
Gender	Female	45	57.0
	Male	30	38.0
Education	Undergraduate	22	27.8
	Graduate	37	46.8
	Postgraduate	15	19.0
	Other	1	1.3
Occupation	Student	39	49.4
	Employed	34	43.0
	Unemployed	1	1.3
	Self-employed	1	1.3
Area of Residence	Rural	25	31.6
	Urban	41	51.9
	Semi-urban	9	11.4

Table 1 represents total of 75 participants who participated in the present study. The highest proportion of participants belonged to the 18–20 years and 21–23 years age groups (31.6% each), followed by the 24–26 years age group (24.1%) and the 27–29 years age group (7.6%). Female participants

constituted the majority (57.0%), while male participants accounted for 38.0%. Most participants were graduates (46.8%), followed by undergraduates (27.8%) and postgraduates (19.0%). Nearly half of the participants were students (49.4%), whereas 43.0% were employed. Most participants resided in urban areas (51.9%), followed by rural (31.6%) and semi-urban (11.4%) areas.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Confidence, Academic Performance Scales and Student Perceptions of Traditional and Modified Testing Methods (N=75)

Variables	N	Mean (M)	Std.Deviation (SD)
Informed Consent (Do you agree to participate)	75	1.04	0.197
Gender	75	1.40	0.493
Area of Residence	75	1.79	0.643
Social Media Usage (Do you use social media)	74	1.01	0.116

Table 2 summarises the preliminary screening and demographic profile of the participants ($N = 75$), revealing near-unanimous voluntary consent ($M = 1.04, SD = 0.197$) in line with standard ethical research practices. The sample exhibited balanced gender participation ($M = 1.40, SD = 0.493$) and represented diverse geographical backgrounds across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas ($M = 1.79, SD = 0.643$), reflecting widespread digital infrastructure reach. Furthermore, active social media usage was near-universal ($M = 1.01, SD = 0.116$), confirming that digital platform engagement is a routine daily habit that shapes communication and behavioral routines in this demographic.

Table 3: Independent-samples *t*-test between gender for psychological score, behavioural score and overall score (N=75)

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	P value
Psychological Score	Female	45	13.78	2.22	0.90	.372NS
	Male	30	13.30	2.32		
Behavioural Score	Female	45	13.73	3.33	0.61	.542NS
	Male	30	13.20	4.18		
Overall Score	Female	45	27.51	.06	0.78	.436NS
	Male	30	26.50	6.05		

Table 3 provides independent-sample *t*-test evaluating gender differences (45 females, 30 males) showed no statistically significant variations across psychological ($t = 0.90, p = .372$), behavioural ($t = 0.61, p = .542$), or overall outcome scores ($t = 0.78, p = .436$), indicating that social media impacts operate with relative equality across sexes. Although females reported slightly higher average scores for psychological ($M = 13.78, SD = 2.22$) and behavioural metrics ($M = 13.73, SD = 3.33$) than males ($M = 13.30, SD = 2.32$ and $M = 13.20, SD = 4.18$, respectively), these minor non-significant differences align with Hyde's (2005) gender similarities hypothesis and findings by Eagly and Wood (1999) and Costa et al. (2001), which demonstrate that core psychological states, behavioural adaptations, and composite profiles show substantial structural alignment between men and women exposed to similar environmental contexts.

Table 4: One way ANOVA of Psychological score, Behavioural score and Overall score on Social Media Usage (N=75)

Variable	Do you use Social media	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Psychological Score	Yes	74	13.59	2.27	0.483	.490NS
	No	1	12.00			
Behavioural Score	Yes	74	13.55	3.56	4.437	.039S
	No	1	6.00			
Overall Score	Yes	74	27.14	5.37	2.855	.095NS
	No	1	18.00			

Table 4 represents one-way ANOVA evaluating social media usage (Table 5), which revealed a statistically significant difference between users ($n = 74$) and non-users ($n = 1$) for behavioural scores, $F(1,72) = 4.437, p = .039$, whereas psychological scores ($F(1,72) = 0.483, p = .490$) and overall scores ($F(1,72) = 2.855, p = .095$) showed no significant variation. Active social media users reported significantly higher behavioural engagement ($M = 13.55, SD = 3.56$) compared to non-users ($M = 6.00$), corroborating research by Kuss and Griffiths (2011) and Ellison et al. (2007), which demonstrates that platform involvement alters daily routines, interactive habits, and behavioural patterns. Conversely, the lack of statistical significance for psychological outcomes ($M = 13.59, SD = 2.27$ for users vs. $M = 12.00$ for non-users) aligns with findings by Seabrook et al. (2016) and Berryman et al. (2018), who noted that mere platform presence does not directly dictate baseline psychological distress. Ultimately, these results indicate that social media adoption primarily impacts active behavioural habits rather than internal mental well-being or aggregate composite scores.

Table 5: Results of Pearson's Correlation Between Psychological Score, Behavioural Score and Overall Score (N=75)

Variables	Psychological	Behavioural	Overall
Psychological Score	1	.775**	.923**
Behavioural Score	.775**	1	.959**
Overall Score	.923**	.959**	1

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01level (2-tailed).

Table 6 revealed significant positive interrelationships among psychological score, behavioural score, and overall score ($p < .001$), confirming that psychological health and behavioural expression operate in tandem among young adults. A strong positive relationship was established between psychological score and behavioural score ($r = .775$), supporting recent empirical literature demonstrating that adaptive psychological states directly drive functional behavioural patterns and social-emotional adjustment (Akomodi, 2025; Mallillin & Mallillin, 2024). Furthermore, both psychological score ($r = .923$) and behavioural score ($r = .959$) demonstrated exceptionally strong positive correlations with the overall composite score, aligning with research by Aja et al. (2025) and Weber (2025), which indicates that psychological readiness and adaptive habits function as joint primary determinants of aggregate success and well-being. Collectively, these findings confirm that enhancements in psychological functioning mutually reinforce positive behavioural adaptation, together shaping the overall outcome metrics in digital environments.

7. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that social media platform engagement exerts a domain-specific effect on young adults, significantly influencing active behavioural routines without altering baseline psychological functioning or overall outcome scores. While demographic variables such as gender and geographic area of residence do not account for significant variations in psychological, behavioural, or overall well-being, active social media usage directly interacts with daily habits and interactive expressions. Furthermore, the robust, positive interrelationships established among psychological health, behavioural patterns, and composite well-being confirm that emotional stability and adaptive habits mutually reinforce one another. Ultimately, these findings emphasize that interventions aimed at optimizing youth well-being in the digital age should prioritize fostering balanced screen habits and intentional platform usage rather than focusing on demographic distinctions.

8. Future Scope

Future research should adopt longitudinal tracking to establish causal relationships and monitor how psychological well-being and behavioural routines evolve. Expanding the sample size ($N > 75$) through probability sampling will allow for a more balanced baseline comparison between high-frequency users and non-users or low-usage control groups. Additionally, future studies should replace simple binary usage choices with granular, dimensional metrics that measure platform-specific dynamics, passive versus active scrolling, and total screen-time duration. Researchers should also incorporate key mediating and moderating variables—such as baseline stress levels, emotional regulation strategies, coping mechanisms, and personality traits—to better understand individual differences. Finally, employing a mixed-methods approach that combines standardised quantitative scales with qualitative interviews or objective digital screen-time data will minimize self-report bias and offer deeper insights into real-world online behaviours.

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