

Impact of Social Media Addiction on Social Withdrawal Among Adolescents

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Abstract: In the digital age, adolescents' pervasive engagement with social media platforms has sparked concerns about its potential impact on their social behaviors. This study investigates the relationship between social media addiction and social withdrawal among adolescents in Udaipur, India. A total of 300 students from three schools were initially assessed using the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS). From this cohort, 240 participants were purposively selected and categorized into two equal groups: 120 identified as social media addicted and 120 as non-addicted. The Social Withdrawal Scale (Hikikomori) was administered to evaluate their levels of social withdrawal. Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between the two groups, with addicted adolescents exhibiting markedly higher social withdrawal scores compared to their non-addicted counterparts. These findings suggest that excessive social media use is associated with increased social withdrawal in adolescents. The study underscores the need for early identification and intervention strategies to address social media addiction and its potential psychosocial consequences. Implementing educational programs that promote balanced digital habits and encourage real-life social interactions may mitigate the adverse effects of social media overuse on adolescent development.

Introduction - In recent years, the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread accessibility of smartphones have significantly transformed the ways in which adolescents communicate, connect, and interact. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook have become integral to the daily lives of young people, offering spaces for social interaction, identity expression, and peer validation. While these platforms provide numerous benefits, including enhanced connectivity and access to information, there is growing concern among educators, psychologists, and parents regarding the excessive and often compulsive use of social media by adolescents, leading to what is now widely referred to as *social media addiction*.

Social media addiction is characterized by excessive concern about social media, an uncontrollable urge to log on or use social media, and devoting so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other important areas of life. This addiction has been linked to a variety of psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Among these concerns, one of the most critical yet often overlooked outcomes is *social withdrawal* — a condition in which individuals reduce or entirely avoid face-to-face interactions, exhibit poor interpersonal functioning, and become increasingly isolated from society. Adolescents, due to their developmental stage and heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation, are particularly vulnerable to these

effects.

Social withdrawal during adolescence can severely impact emotional development, academic performance, and future social relationships. It may stem from feelings of inadequacy, cyberbullying, or the fear of missing out (FOMO), all of which are exacerbated by prolonged exposure to social media. As virtual interactions increasingly replace real-life communication, adolescents may find it challenging to engage in meaningful social encounters, leading to detachment, loneliness, and even early signs of social anxiety disorders. This behavioral shift raises significant questions about the long-term consequences of digital engagement on adolescent mental health and social functioning.

Despite a growing body of research on the psychological impacts of social media, there is still limited empirical focus on the specific relationship between social media addiction and social withdrawal among adolescents. Understanding this dynamic is essential for educators, parents, and mental health professionals seeking to design effective interventions. This study aims to explore the extent to which social media addiction contributes to social withdrawal in adolescents and to identify the underlying behavioral and psychological mechanisms that mediate this relationship.

By examining this issue, the present research intends to shed light on a pressing concern of contemporary

adolescent development. The findings may serve as a foundation for the development of preventive strategies, awareness programs, and therapeutic modules to mitigate the negative impact of social media overuse and to promote healthy, balanced digital habits among youth.

Objectives: The objectives of the present research are as follows:

1. To study the social withdrawal of social media non-addicted adolescents.
2. To study the social withdrawal of social media addicted adolescents.
3. To compare the social withdrawal between social media non-addicted and social media addicted adolescents.

Review of Literature

Guazzini et al. (2022) explores adolescents' perceptions of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their tech use, sense of community, and loneliness. Technology use increased, helping maintain social contact, but many felt lonelier and less connected to their communities. The study stresses the need to balance digital and meaningful social interaction for adolescent well-being.

Moretta et al. (2021) review traces 20 years of research on problematic internet and social media use, analyzing psychological models, diagnostic tools, and challenges in standardization. It highlights inconsistencies in assessments and stresses the need for theory-based, cross-cultural, and developmental research. The authors propose a future research agenda combining psychological and biological approaches.

Reer et al. (2020) in their study examined problematic social media use (PSMU) and problematic game use (PGU) among 1,520 adolescents and young adults in Germany. PSMU was more common, especially among females, while males showed more PGU. Loneliness and stress were strong predictors of both behaviors, which were linked to higher psychological distress and lower life satisfaction. The study calls for early intervention to reduce the negative mental health impacts of excessive digital media use.

Choi & Noh (2019) research links social media use to attitudes toward suicide, mediated by well-being, isolation, and social support. Excessive use lowered well-being and increased isolation, leading to more accepting views of suicide. Supportive social media use, however, improved mental health. The study emphasizes both risks and benefits of social media in shaping suicidal attitudes.

Corvaglia et al. (2008) study examines bullying in schools, focusing on depression, self-esteem, and gender differences among perpetrators and victims. Victims showed more depression and lower self-esteem, while bullies also had low self-esteem with externalizing behaviors. Boys were more involved in direct bullying; girls in relational forms. The authors highlight the need for gender-sensitive mental health support.

Corsano (2003) explores how adolescence, a time of

identity and social change, often brings loneliness due to struggles with autonomy, communication, and forming deep relationships. The chapter emphasizes loneliness as a subjective, developmental issue with potential long-term mental health effects, underscoring the importance of timely support.

Research Gap: While a considerable body of research has explored various aspects of adolescents' digital behavior, including the psychological and emotional effects of social media use, there remains a notable gap in specifically understanding *social withdrawal* as a distinct construct in the context of social media addiction. Studies like Guazzini et al. (2022) and Choi & Noh (2019) emphasize loneliness, isolation, and well-being, yet they do not distinctly isolate or deeply examine how these experiences translate into behavioral withdrawal from real-world social interactions. Moreover, while Reer et al. (2020) and Moretta et al. (2021) provide insights into problematic digital media usage, their focus remains largely on mental health outcomes, diagnostic challenges, and general behavioral patterns, rather than addressing the nuanced manifestations of social withdrawal in addicted versus non-addicted adolescents.

Furthermore, existing literature often discusses social media's role during specific events (like the COVID-19 pandemic) or examines broader developmental and emotional factors (as seen in Corsano, 2003 and Corvaglia et al., 2008). However, few studies have conducted direct comparative analyses between adolescents who are addicted to social media and those who are not, especially in terms of their real-life social engagement and withdrawal behaviors. This leaves a critical research gap in understanding how addiction to social media may uniquely influence adolescents' tendency to disengage from social environments. Addressing this gap is essential for designing targeted interventions aimed at fostering healthier social development in the digital age.

Methodology

Sample: The present study included a total of 300 adolescents who were randomly selected from three different schools in Udaipur. From this initial group, a purposive sample of 240 adolescents was identified—comprising two equal groups: 120 adolescents with a high level of social media addiction and 120 adolescents showing no signs of addiction. The selected participants included individuals of both genders.

Tools of the Research Study:

Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS): The Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), developed by Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz (2015), is a well-established instrument used to assess the level of addiction to social media. The scale contains 41 items, divided into four major sub-dimensions: *Virtual Tolerance*, *Virtual Communication*, *Virtual Problems*, and *Virtual Information*. Each sub-dimension reflects a specific aspect of problematic social media behavior. The scale employs a 5-point Likert response format, where 1 =

Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Participants are required to indicate how strongly they agree with each statement. Higher overall scores reflect greater social media addiction, indicating more intensive involvement in one or more of the sub-dimensions. The SMAS demonstrates strong reliability and validity, making it a reliable tool for research purposes.

Social Withdrawal Scale (Hikikomori): The Social Withdrawal Scale (Hikikomori) is a psychological tool developed to assess tendencies toward social withdrawal used. The scale uses a Likert-type format and focuses on three key dimensions: *socialization* (interest and comfort in social interactions), *self-isolation* (preference for solitude and avoidance of social roles), and *emotional support seeking* (willingness to seek help and emotional openness). Psychometrically sound, the scale demonstrates strong reliability and validity, with Cronbach's alpha values typically above 0.80 and stable test-retest scores. Factor analysis supports its three-dimensional structure, confirming that it captures distinct aspects of social withdrawal. It also shows strong construct validity when compared with related psychological traits such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness, making it a useful tool for identifying at-risk individuals and informing interventions. The low score shows low social withdrawal.

Procedure of Data Collection: The data collection process began with obtaining formal permission from the principals of three selected schools located in Udaipur. Once approval was granted, the researchers visited each school and explained the study's objectives, ensuring students were informed about the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. An initial group of 300 adolescents was randomly chosen from these schools to take part in a preliminary screening. To evaluate their level of social media use and detect signs of addiction, the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) by Tutgun-Unal and Deniz (2015) was administered to all 300 participants.

Following the screening, a purposeful sample of 240 adolescents was selected for the main phase of the study. This group was evenly divided, with 120 students identified as having a high level of social media addiction and 120 showing no signs of addiction. The sample included both male and female participants to maintain gender diversity. These selected students were then assessed using the Social Withdrawal Scale by (Hikikomori), to evaluate their overall social withdrawal status. Data collection was carried out in a consistent and organized manner during school hours, in a quiet setting free from distractions, and under the direct supervision of the researcher. Participants were reassured about the confidentiality of their responses and reminded that their involvement was entirely voluntary.

Results and Discussion: Table 1 shows comparison of Social Media Non-Addicted and Addicted adolescents on total dimensions of social withdrawal through independent group 't' test.

Table 1: Comparison of Social Media Non-Addicted and Addicted adolescents on Total dimensions of Social Withdrawal

| Social Withdrawal | Social Media | |
|-------------------|--------------|----------|
| | Non-addicted | Addicted |
| N | 120 | 120 |
| Mean | 34.117 | 88.325 |
| Std. Deviation | 8.077 | 8.215 |
| Mean Difference | 54.208 | |
| t' | 51.547 | |
| p value | 0.000 | |

Table 1 presents a comparison between adolescents addicted to social media and those who are not, based on their overall scores on the Social Withdrawal Scale. Each group includes 120 participants, ensuring a well-balanced and sufficiently large sample for meaningful comparison. The mean scores reveal a striking difference between the two groups. Adolescents who are not addicted to social media have an average score of 34.117, indicating lower levels of social withdrawal. In contrast, those identified as addicted show a much higher mean score of 88.325, suggesting a strong association between social media addiction and increased social withdrawal. The large mean difference of 54.208 clearly points to a substantial disparity between the two groups in terms of their social withdrawal tendencies.

Standard deviations for both groups are quite similar (8.077 for the non-addicted group and 8.215 for the addicted group), indicating consistent patterns within each group and that the observed difference in mean scores is not due to variability in responses. The calculated t-value of 51.547 further supports the presence of a significant difference, while the p-value of 0.000 confirms that the results are statistically significant and not due to random chance.

In summary, the data strongly indicate that adolescents addicted to social media experience much higher levels of social withdrawal compared to their non-addicted peers. This highlights the potential negative impact of excessive social media use on adolescents' social functioning and underscores the importance of developing effective strategies and interventions to address social withdrawal and limit social media addiction.

Discussion: Adolescents addicted to social media are more likely to experience higher levels of social withdrawal because excessive time spent online can gradually replace real-life social interactions. Constant engagement with virtual platforms may reduce opportunities and motivation to connect face-to-face with peers, leading to feelings of isolation and discomfort in offline social settings. Over time, these adolescents may begin to prefer the predictability and control of online communication over the complexities of real-world relationships, which can lead to withdrawal from social activities, avoidance of group interactions, and a decline in social confidence.

Additionally, social media addiction often affects

emotional regulation and self-esteem, especially during adolescence, a period marked by identity formation and social comparison. The pressure to maintain an idealized online presence, fear of missing out (FOMO), and exposure to unrealistic standards can increase anxiety and social insecurity. These emotional challenges may cause adolescents to retreat further from social environments they perceive as judgmental or overwhelming. This combination of reduced offline engagement, increased emotional strain, and dependency on virtual validation contributes to a pattern of social withdrawal among adolescents addicted to social media.

Implications: The findings of this study carry several important implications for educators, parents, mental health professionals, and policymakers:

Awareness of Social Media Impact: The study highlights the significant link between social media addiction and increased social withdrawal among adolescents. This raises awareness about the potential psychological and social consequences of excessive social media use.

Early Identification and Intervention: By identifying clear differences in social withdrawal levels between addicted and non-addicted adolescents, the study emphasizes the need for early screening tools in schools to detect signs of social media addiction and social withdrawal at an early stage.

Guidance for Parents and Educators: The research provides valuable insights that can help parents and educators monitor and manage adolescents' social media usage, encouraging more real-life social engagement and balanced online behavior.

Development of Intervention Programs: The strong association between social media addiction and social withdrawal suggests the need for targeted intervention programs aimed at reducing screen time, improving face-to-face interactions, and promoting emotional well-being among adolescents.

Policy and Curriculum Integration: The results support the integration of digital literacy and mental health education

into school curricula, helping students understand the responsible use of technology and develop coping strategies to manage online behaviors.

Support for Mental Health Professionals: The study provides empirical evidence that can be used by counselors and psychologists to develop specialized therapy or support groups addressing both social media addiction and social withdrawal symptoms in adolescents.

Overall, this research reinforces the importance of balanced digital usage and the urgent need for a supportive environment to foster healthy adolescent development in an increasingly digital world.

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