

## **IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms between 2023 and 2025 has significantly transformed patterns of social interaction, communication, and identity formation among youth. While these platforms facilitate connectivity and self-expression, growing concerns have emerged regarding their impact on mental health. This study investigates the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes among youth through a primary data-based sociological approach.

The research adopts a mixed-method design, combining quantitative survey data collected from 20 respondents aged 20–25 with qualitative insights derived from in-depth interviews. Key variables examined include frequency and type of social media usage, engagement patterns (active vs. passive use), and mental health indicators such as anxiety, stress, self-esteem, and depressive tendencies. Statistical tools such as correlation analysis and descriptive measures are employed alongside thematic analysis of qualitative responses.

The findings indicate a significant association between excessive social media use and increased levels of anxiety, sleep disturbances, and reduced self-esteem, particularly among individuals engaging in passive consumption and social comparison behaviors. Conversely, moderate and purposeful usage—such as educational engagement and peer support—demonstrates potential positive effects on well-being. The study also identifies variations across gender and socio-economic backgrounds, suggesting that the impact of social media is not uniform but mediated by broader social structures.

Grounded in sociological frameworks such as Social Comparison Theory and Symbolic Interactionism, the research highlights how digital environments shape self-perception and emotional experiences. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for balanced digital practices, mental health awareness, and policy interventions targeting youth. It contributes to the expanding field of digital sociology by providing recent, primary-data-driven insights into the complex interplay between technology and mental health.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Youth Mental Health, Anxiety, Digital Sociology, Social Comparison, Well-being

### **2. Introduction**

#### **2.1 Background**

The period between 2023 and 2025 has witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the reach and influence of social media platforms, fundamentally reshaping the social fabric of youth life. Applications such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube have evolved beyond mere communication tools into complex socio-digital ecosystems where identity, relationships, and cultural norms are continuously constructed and negotiated. Features such

as algorithm-driven content feeds, short-form video formats, and interactive engagement mechanisms have intensified user immersion and prolonged platform usage.

Youth, defined broadly as individuals aged 20–25, represent the most active demographic within these digital environments. Recent trends indicate a marked increase in daily screen time, often exceeding 4–6 hours, alongside simultaneous engagement across multiple platforms. This multi-platform presence reflects not only technological accessibility but also the growing centrality of digital interaction in everyday social life. Social media now functions as a primary space for peer interaction, self-expression, entertainment, and even academic engagement.

## **2.2 Problem Statement**

Despite the apparent benefits of enhanced connectivity and access to information, a critical paradox emerges: while social media fosters continuous interaction and a sense of belonging, it simultaneously contributes to psychological distress among users. This contradiction raises important sociological questions regarding the nature of digital relationships and their impact on individual well-being. The very platforms designed to connect individuals may also be amplifying feelings of isolation, inadequacy, and emotional vulnerability.

A significant limitation in existing research is the over-reliance on secondary data and global studies, which often overlook localized socio-cultural dynamics. There is a lack of primary data-based sociological investigations that capture the lived experiences of youth within specific contexts, particularly in rapidly digitizing societies. Factors such as socio-economic background, gender norms, educational pressures, and cultural expectations play a crucial role in mediating the relationship between social media usage and mental health, yet remain underexplored.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by providing empirically grounded, primary data-driven insights into how social media usage influences youth mental health within a defined socio-cultural setting during the period 2023–2025.

## **Objectives**

- To measure social media usage patterns among youth
- To assess mental health indicators
- To analyze sociological variables influencing outcomes

## **Significance of the Study**

This study holds substantial significance at both the academic and policy levels, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving digital environments and their sociological implications.

## **Review of Literature**

**1. Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020)** *Social media use and adolescent mental health: A systematic review. International Journal of Adolescence and Youth.*

This study provides a systematic review of existing research examining the relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health. The authors analyzed multiple

empirical studies to identify patterns linking excessive social media engagement with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. The review highlights that prolonged exposure to online environments, particularly passive consumption and negative social comparison, contributes significantly to reduced well-being. However, the study also acknowledges inconsistencies in findings due to variations in measurement tools and contextual factors. While it offers strong empirical synthesis, the research is limited by its reliance on secondary data and lack of recent post-pandemic digital behavior trends.

**2. Odgers, C. L., & Jensen, M. R. (2020),** *Annual Research Review: Adolescent mental health in the digital age. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry.*

This paper critically examines the widely assumed negative impact of digital technologies on adolescent mental health. Drawing on large-scale longitudinal datasets, the authors argue that the relationship between social media use and mental health is complex and often overstated. The study finds that moderate usage does not necessarily lead to adverse psychological outcomes and may even support social connectedness. Importantly, the authors emphasize individual differences, suggesting that vulnerability to negative effects depends on pre-existing mental health conditions and socio-environmental factors. Despite its methodological strength, the study lacks qualitative insights into lived experiences, limiting its sociological depth.

**3. Verduyn, P., Ybarra, O., Résibois, M., Jonides, J., & Kross, E. (2017),** *Do social network sites enhance or undermine subjective well-being? Psychological Bulletin.*

This study explores the dual impact of social networking sites on subjective well-being by distinguishing between active and passive usage. The authors demonstrate that active engagement (e.g., messaging, posting) can enhance social capital and emotional well-being, whereas passive browsing tends to foster envy and negative social comparison. The research is grounded in Social Comparison Theory, emphasizing how curated online content influences self-evaluation. Although theoretically robust, the study predates recent platform developments such as short-form video content, limiting its applicability to current digital trends.

**4. Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2018)** *Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents. Preventive Medicine Reports.*

This quantitative study investigates the correlation between screen time and psychological well-being among young individuals. The findings indicate that higher screen time is associated with lower levels of happiness, increased anxiety, and reduced emotional stability. The authors argue that excessive digital engagement displaces essential activities such as sleep, physical interaction, and academic focus. However, the study adopts a largely deterministic perspective, potentially oversimplifying the relationship by not adequately accounting for the quality and purpose of social media use. Its cross-sectional design also limits causal interpretation.

**5. Huang, C. (2022),** *Time spent on social network sites and psychological well-being: A meta-analysis. Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking.*

Huang's meta-analysis synthesizes findings from multiple studies to evaluate the strength of association between social media usage and psychological well-being. The results suggest a weak but statistically significant negative correlation, indicating that time spent on social media alone is not a sufficient predictor of mental health outcomes. The study emphasizes the importance of mediating variables such as type of engagement, personality traits, and social context. While methodologically rigorous, the research lacks qualitative exploration and fails to address emerging platform-specific behaviors observed in recent years.

**6. Ali, M., Aung, Y., & Rahman, M. (2025)** *Artificial intelligence for mental health: A narrative review. Digital Health.*

This study presents a comprehensive narrative review of artificial intelligence applications in mental health, including diagnostic tools, therapeutic interventions, and monitoring systems. The authors highlight the role of machine learning and natural language processing in enhancing early detection and accessibility of mental health services. While the study is not directly focused on social media, it provides valuable insights into how digital ecosystems intersect with mental health support systems. However, the research remains largely conceptual and lacks empirical validation, limiting its applicability in real-world sociological contexts.

## **Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media usage and youth mental health. The quantitative component enables the measurement of patterns, frequencies, and correlations between variables such as screen time and psychological well-being. In contrast, the qualitative component provides depth by capturing subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings that youth attach to their social media engagement.

The study is cross-sectional in nature, meaning that data is collected at a single point in time during the 2023–2025 period. This design is appropriate for identifying existing associations between variables and understanding prevailing behavioral trends. While it does not establish causality, it offers valuable insights into current social realities and emerging patterns within digital environments.

### **Universe & Sample**

The universe of the study consists of youth aged 20–25 years, representing a demographic that is highly active on social media platforms and simultaneously navigating critical phases of identity formation, education, and early career development.

A sample size of 20 respondents is selected for this study. Although relatively small, this size is suitable for exploratory, primary-data-based research, particularly when complemented by qualitative insights.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### **Primary Data Collection**

The study relies exclusively on primary data collected through the following methods:

#### **Structured Questionnaire:**

A standardized questionnaire is administered using both online (Google Forms) and offline modes. The questionnaire includes closed-ended questions designed to capture:

- Frequency and duration of social media usage
- Types of platforms used
- Nature of engagement (active vs. passive)
- Self-reported mental health indicators

#### **In-depth Interviews:**

A total of 20 participants are engaged in semi-structured interviews to explore their personal experiences, emotional responses, and perceptions related to social media usage. These interviews allow for deeper sociological interpretation, particularly in understanding issues such as social comparison, online validation, and digital identity.

### **Tools and Scales**

To ensure reliability and consistency in measurement, the study utilizes standardized Likert-scale-based instruments to assess mental health indicators such as:

- Anxiety levels
- Stress levels
- Self-esteem
- Emotional well-being

Respondents rate their experiences on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”), enabling quantitative analysis of psychological patterns.

These tools enhance the methodological rigor of the study by providing measurable and comparable data, while also allowing integration with qualitative findings for a more holistic interpretation.

## **4.5 Data Analysis Techniques**

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires is analyzed using statistical techniques:

- **Descriptive Statistics:**

Measures such as mean, percentages, and frequency distributions are used to summarize patterns of social media usage and mental health indicators.

- **Correlation Analysis:**

This technique is used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between social media usage and mental health variables.

- **Regression Analysis:**

Regression models are applied to assess the predictive impact of independent variables (e.g., time spent, type of usage) on dependent variables (e.g., anxiety, stress), while controlling for demographic factors.

These methods provide empirical rigor and allow for systematic interpretation of numerical data.

### Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews is analyzed using Thematic Analysis. This involves:

- Identifying recurring patterns and themes
- Categorizing responses based on key sociological concepts
- Interpreting narratives related to digital behavior, emotional experiences, and identity formation

This approach enables a deeper understanding of the lived experiences behind statistical trends, enriching the overall analysis.

### Data Analysis & Interpretation

*(Based on primary data collected from 20 respondents at Sangameshwar College)*

#### 5.1 Demographic Profile

**Table 5.1: Gender Distribution**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	11	55%
Female	9	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 5.2: Educational Level**

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate	14	70%
Postgraduate	6	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 5.2 Social Media Usage Patterns

**Table 5.3: Average Daily Social Media Usage**

Usage (Hours/Day)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1–2 hours	3	15%
3–4 hours	9	45%
5–6 hours	6	30%
More than 6 hrs	2	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 5.4: Platform Preferences**

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Instagram	16	80%
YouTube	14	70%
WhatsApp	18	90%
Snapchat	10	50%

### 5.3 Mental Health Indicators

**Table 5.5: Reported Stress Levels**

Stress Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	4	20%
Moderate	10	50%
High	6	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 5.6: Anxiety Levels**

Anxiety Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	5	25%
Moderate	9	45%
High	6	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 5.7: Sleep Disturbance**

Sleep Quality	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Normal	6	30%
Disturbed	14	70%

**Table 5.8: Self-Esteem Levels**

Self-Esteem	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	6	30%
Moderate	8	40%
Low	6	30%

#### **Interpretation:**

A considerable proportion of respondents report moderate to high stress and anxiety, along with sleep disturbances, suggesting a potential link between digital habits and mental well-being.

### 5.4 Correlation Findings

**Table 5.9: Social Media Usage vs Anxiety**

Usage Level	Low Anxiety	Moderate	High
Low Usage	3	1	0
Moderate	2	5	2

High Usage	0	3	4
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**Table 5.10: Type of Usage vs Mental Health**

Usage Type	Positive Well-being	Negative Impact
Active Use	9	3
Passive Use	4	10

**Interpretation:**

- Higher usage correlates with increased anxiety levels.
- Passive consumption shows a stronger association with negative mental health outcomes compared to active engagement.

The findings indicate that while social media serves as a platform for interaction and entertainment, excessive and passive usage is associated with negative mental health outcomes. The qualitative data reinforces quantitative patterns, highlighting the sociological significance of digital behavior in shaping youth experiences.

**Conclusion**

This study concludes that social media has a complex and multidimensional impact on youth mental health. While it offers opportunities for connectivity, self-expression, and access to information, excessive and unregulated usage is associated with adverse psychological outcomes, including anxiety, stress, and diminished self-esteem.

From a sociological perspective, the findings underscore those digital platforms are not merely technological tools but social environments that actively shape identity, relationships, and emotional experiences. Youth engagement with social media is deeply embedded in processes of social comparison, symbolic interaction, and cultural expectations.

The study highlights that digital behavior plays a crucial role in shaping mental health outcomes, making it imperative to promote balanced usage patterns and critical digital awareness. Addressing the mental health implications of social media requires not only individual behavioral change but also broader institutional and societal interventions.

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