

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ON COLLEGE STUDENTS: THE CHALLENGING PERSPECTIVE

Archana Subhash Garud, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Adv. Vitthalrao Hande College of Education, Nashik (Affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune)

Dr. Poonam B. Waghmare, Research Guide, Professor, Adv. Vitthalrao Ganpatrao Hande College of Education, Nashik (MS)

ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of daily life for college students, offering platforms for social connection, information sharing, and entertainment. However, its impact on mental health and well-being has sparked increasing concern. While social media can enhance communication and provide a sense of belonging, its negative effects on mental health, particularly among college students, cannot be overlooked. This paper examines the challenges associated with social media use, focusing on the relationship between social media engagement and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, social comparison, cyberbullying, and sleep disruption. Research indicates that the curated nature of social media platforms can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and trigger a cycle of negative self-assessment, leading to heightened levels of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, the fear of missing out (FOMO) and the addictive design of social media can significantly disrupt sleep patterns, further exacerbating mental health issues. The rise of cyberbullying has also been linked to online platforms, with many college students experiencing harassment that leads to feelings of isolation and stress. While social media offers several benefits, it also poses a significant challenge to the psychological well-being of students, making it critical for both individuals and institutions to address its potential harms. This paper calls for increased awareness and digital literacy programs that encourage mindful social media use and promote healthier online environments. Future research should explore the long-term effects of social media use and investigate strategies for mitigating its negative impacts, ensuring that social media remains a positive tool for personal and academic development.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Health, College Students, Anxiety and Depression, Cyberbullying

INTRODUCTION

Social media has rapidly transformed the way people communicate, share information, and connect with one another. For college students, social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok have become integral to daily life, serving as key tools for social interaction, academic engagement, and entertainment. However, as the use of social media has surged, concerns about its impact on mental health have also grown. College students, already navigating the challenges of academic pressure, social integration, and emerging adulthood, are particularly vulnerable to the psychological effects of social media. The pervasive presence of idealized portrayals of life, relationships, and success on these platforms can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, leading to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The concept of "social comparison" is particularly relevant in this context, where students compare their real lives to the curated, often unrealistic images shared by others online. This constant comparison can foster negative emotions, including dissatisfaction with one's appearance, achievements, or social life. Furthermore, the fear of missing out (FOMO) — a common

experience among social media users — can heighten anxiety and stress, as students feel disconnected or left behind in their social circles. In addition to emotional impacts, social media can also disrupt sleep patterns. Many students spend late hours scrolling through their feeds, engaging in online conversations, or consuming content, which impairs their ability to get quality rest. Sleep deprivation, in turn, can have cascading effects on mental and physical health, affecting academic performance and emotional well-being.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the impact of social media use on the mental health of college students, focusing on anxiety and depression.
2. To explore the role of social comparison and self-esteem in the relationship between social media and student well-being.
3. To investigate the effects of social media on sleep patterns and the overall quality of life for college students.

IMPORTANCE OF SUBJECT

1. The increasing use of social media among college students has made it essential to understand its psychological effects.
2. Mental health issues like anxiety and depression are prevalent in college populations, and social media may exacerbate these problems.
3. Understanding the negative impacts can guide universities in providing better mental health support and interventions.
4. The findings can help students develop healthier social media habits, fostering improved well-being.
5. Addressing the challenges can help mitigate risks like cyberbullying, which directly affects students' emotional health.
6. This research can contribute to the development of digital literacy programs to promote balanced, mindful social media use.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Rathod & Das (2019) – Impact of Social Media on Mental Health Among College Students:** This study explored the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, among Indian college students. The authors found that excessive social media use was correlated with higher levels of anxiety and lower self-esteem, particularly among students who compared themselves to idealized portrayals on platforms like Facebook and Instagram.
2. **Vijayalakshmi & Ramasamy (2020) – Social Media Addiction and its Effect on Psychological Well-being:** The authors examined the effects of social media addiction on the psychological well-being of college students in India. Their study concluded that social media addiction led to a significant increase in psychological distress, with students reporting higher levels of anxiety, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic performance. The paper emphasized the importance of raising awareness about responsible social media use to reduce negative outcomes.

3. **Singh & Kaur (2018) – Social Media Usage, Cyberbullying, and Mental Health in Indian College Students:** Singh and Kaur (2018) investigated the role of social media in the experience of cyberbullying among Indian college students. Their findings indicated that students who had been targeted by cyberbullying exhibited higher levels of depression and anxiety. They highlighted the need for universities to implement more effective measures to address cyberbullying and support affected students.
4. **Chatterjee & Gupta (2021) – The Role of Social Media in Body Image Concerns Among Indian Youth:** Chatterjee and Gupta (2021) focused on the role of social media in shaping body image concerns among young adults in India. The study found that platforms like Instagram and Facebook, where beauty standards are often idealized, significantly influenced body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among college students. The authors recommended promoting digital literacy and positive body image campaigns to mitigate these effects.
5. **Sharma & Sharma (2017) – Sleep Deprivation and Mental Health in Indian Students due to Social Media Use:** This review by Sharma and Sharma (2017) investigated the relationship between sleep deprivation caused by late-night social media use and its effects on mental health among Indian students. Their study highlighted that prolonged social media engagement, especially before bedtime, contributed to poor sleep quality, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and reduced cognitive functioning in students.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses secondary data to examine the impact of social media on the mental health and well-being of college students. Secondary data was chosen for its accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and the wealth of existing studies available on the topic. The methodology for this research involves gathering and analysing data from previously published academic articles, research papers, and reports from credible sources.

Data Collection:

Data collection for this study was based on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, and reports from reputable academic databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, and Scopus. These sources provided comprehensive data on the relationship between social media use and mental health among college students. Additionally, government and NGO reports on youth mental health were used to supplement the academic literature. The data was carefully selected based on relevance, publication date, and focus on mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying. This approach ensured a wide range of perspectives and insights into the topic.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis for this study involved a thematic approach, where recurring themes and patterns from the secondary data were identified and categorized. Key themes such as social comparison, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, and cyberbullying were explored across various studies. The synthesis of findings from different sources helped to establish a broader understanding of the negative impacts of social media on college students' mental health. Statistical data from selected studies were reviewed to quantify the extent of these effects. The analysis aimed

to provide a comprehensive and cohesive view of how social media influences student well-being, while also identifying gaps in existing research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of secondary data on the impact of social media on the mental health and well-being of college students revealed significant negative effects in several key areas, including anxiety, depression, and social comparison, sleep disruption, cyberbullying, and addictive behaviour.

Impact of social media on mental health and well-being

- 1. Increased Anxiety and Depression:** A large body of research suggests that excessive use of social media is closely linked to heightened anxiety and depression among college students. The constant exposure to idealized images and the pressure to maintain an online persona contribute to negative emotional states. Students often compare their lives to the filtered, curated versions they see on platforms like Instagram or Facebook, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy. Studies show that the more time students spend on social media, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression, especially when they do not receive the desired social validation in the form of likes or comments. This consistent pattern of comparison and self-criticism is a major factor in the rising mental health concerns in student populations.
- 2. Social Comparison:** The findings consistently indicate that social comparison is a major psychological consequence of social media use. As students scroll through posts showcasing peers' successes, relationships, and experiences, they tend to judge their own lives harshly. The selective sharing of positive experiences leads to distorted perceptions of reality, which can cause feelings of envy and low self-esteem. The social comparison effect is particularly significant among younger college students, who are still developing their self-concept. Many studies highlight that the pressure to "keep up" with peers on social media is overwhelming, often leading to greater dissatisfaction with their own lives and a reduced sense of well-being.
- 3. Sleep Disruption:** Another major concern emerging from the secondary data is the disruption of sleep patterns due to social media use. Research indicates that late-night scrolling through social media platforms significantly impacts sleep quality, contributing to sleep deprivation and poor cognitive performance. Students frequently report that they spend hours on their phones before bed, engaging with social media, which delays their sleep onset and reduces the amount of restful sleep they get. This sleep disruption not only affects students' mood but also their ability to concentrate during the day, leading to increased stress and difficulty managing academic responsibilities. The data suggests that managing social media use, especially before bedtime, could help mitigate these negative effects on mental health.
- 4. Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying is a pervasive issue on social media platforms, with numerous studies highlighting its prevalence among college students. Victims of online harassment often experience severe emotional consequences, including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. The anonymous nature of social media makes it easier for perpetrators to target individuals without immediate consequences, which contributes to the frequency and intensity of cyberbullying. Research indicates that students who are victims of cyberbullying experience

a higher incidence of mental health problems, such as stress and suicidal ideation. This is a critical area that needs further attention, with calls for better support systems within universities to address cyberbullying and its psychological effects.

5. **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):** The phenomenon of FOMO was frequently mentioned across studies, with students expressing heightened anxiety about missing out on social events or activities. The constant stream of updates about friends' social lives, vacations, or parties can make students feel excluded, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Many students reported that seeing others post about experiences they were not part of made them feel disconnected and stressed about their own social lives. This sense of exclusion can contribute to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and a decreased sense of social connectedness, negatively impacting mental health. The data underscores the importance of fostering healthier social media habits to counteract the detrimental effects of FOMO.
6. **Addictive Behaviour:** The addictive nature of social media is well-documented in the literature, and the data shows that college students are particularly susceptible to this form of addiction. The constant engagement with social media platforms leads to compulsive checking for notifications, updates, and interactions, often at the expense of academic responsibilities and real-life relationships. Studies reveal that this behavior disrupts students' ability to focus on important tasks, leading to procrastination, lower academic performance, and increased stress. Additionally, the dependency on social media for validation and connection can result in heightened feelings of anxiety when students are unable to access or engage with their online networks. This addiction to social media further exacerbates the mental health challenges students face, making it a critical factor to address in both research and intervention.

The Challenging Perspective

The challenging perspective on the impact of social media on mental health and well-being refers to the viewpoint that while many studies highlight the negative effects of social media, there are also arguments and emerging research that suggest social media may have positive or neutral effects on mental health, or that its impact depends on various factors such as usage patterns, individual resilience, and cultural context.

1. **Positive Social Connections:** Social media can serve as a tool for social connection, allowing students to stay in touch with friends, family, and peers despite physical distance. It can be especially helpful for students in colleges far from home, providing a sense of community and support. Some research suggests that social media helps foster social interaction and emotional support, which can improve mental well-being for those experiencing isolation or loneliness.
2. **Access to Mental Health Resources:** Social media platforms provide access to mental health resources, support groups, and communities that can help students manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. Many individuals find comfort in connecting with others who share similar experiences or struggles, leading to a sense of belonging and reduced stigma around mental health issues. These online spaces can encourage open discussions and offer advice or guidance from others who have faced similar challenges.
3. **Information and Awareness:** Social media also plays a crucial role in spreading awareness about mental health issues, reducing stigma, and encouraging open conversations. Through

various campaigns, influencers, and educational content, students can learn more about mental health, self-care, and available resources. This can help students feel more empowered to seek help and take proactive steps toward improving their mental health.

4. **Constructive Engagement:** Some students use social media for constructive purposes, such as educational content, career networking, or personal growth. When used productively, social media can enhance learning experiences, boost self-esteem by celebrating achievements, and foster professional connections that positively impact mental well-being. The key is ensuring that social media use is intentional and aligned with one's goals, rather than driven by external pressures or compulsive behavior.
5. **Cultural Context and Individual Differences:** The impact of social media on mental health is not universal; it varies depending on individual differences such as personality, coping mechanisms, and cultural background. While some students may experience negative effects like anxiety or depression, others may use social media to enhance their social support networks or find resources for managing stress. The challenging perspective emphasizes that social media's effects are not solely negative, and that its influence can be moderated by individual resilience, positive engagement, and a balanced approach to use.
6. **Moderation and Self-Regulation:** The challenging perspective also argues that social media itself is not inherently harmful, but rather how it is used and managed by individuals. Encouraging healthy use habits, such as limiting screen time, setting boundaries, and using social media in ways that promote positive engagement (e.g., following accounts related to mental well-being or personal development), can mitigate many of the negative effects. Therefore, the focus should be on fostering digital literacy and self-regulation skills to help students manage their online presence in a way that benefits their mental health.

The challenging perspective asserts that the negative effects of social media on mental health are not inevitable. By adopting a balanced and conscious approach to usage, social media can also offer several benefits that enhance social connectivity, mental health awareness, and personal growth. Acknowledging both the potential harms and benefits of social media allows for a more nuanced understanding and more effective interventions to promote well-being among college students.

FINDINGS

1. Studies consistently show that higher levels of social media use are associated with an increased risk of anxiety and depression among college students. The pressure to maintain a curated online persona and the comparison to others' idealized lives can significantly contribute to emotional distress.
2. Constant exposure to curated content on social media platforms, where others' lives appear perfect, triggers frequent social comparison. This often results in reduced self-esteem and dissatisfaction with one's own life, especially among students still in the process of developing their identities.
3. Many students report that their social media use, particularly late at night, disrupts their sleep. The blue light emitted by screens and the engagement with online content before bed can delay sleep onset, leading to sleep deprivation and its associated mental health consequences.

4. College students often experience FOMO, as they see others participating in social activities or enjoying experiences they were not part of. This can lead to feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and a perceived lack of social connection.
5. Cyberbullying has become a pervasive issue, with many students reporting experiences of online harassment. The effects of cyberbullying include depression, anxiety, decreased self-worth, and, in some cases, suicidal ideation, especially among students vulnerable to online abuse.
6. Many college students report compulsive behavior related to social media, such as frequently checking notifications, posting updates, and engaging in social media activities. This addiction detracts from real-life interactions, academic work, and personal well-being.
7. The time spent on social media is linked to decreased academic performance, as students are distracted from their studies. Research suggests that those who spend more time on social media tend to procrastinate more and exhibit lower concentration levels during lectures.
8. Social media, particularly platforms like Instagram and Facebook, often showcase idealized images that contribute to body image dissatisfaction among students. The constant exposure to photo shopped or filtered images can lead to negative body perceptions and an increased desire to attain unrealistic beauty standards.
9. While social media connects people virtually, it can hinder face-to-face interactions, leading to feelings of social isolation. Many students find that online relationships do not provide the same level of emotional fulfillment as in-person relationships, impacting their social well-being.
10. Many college students experience stress related to seeking validation through likes, comments, and shares on social media. The dependency on online approval for self-worth can lead to increased anxiety, particularly when students do not receive the expected level of interaction on their posts.

REFERENCES

1. **Rathod, S. D., & Das, R. S. (2019).** Impact of social media on mental health among college students in India. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 7(2), 98-104.
2. **Vijayalakshmi, R., & Ramasamy, V. (2020).** Social media addiction and its effect on psychological well-being of college students. *Journal of Mental Health and Social Behavior*, 9(3), 210-218.
3. **Sharma, P., & Sharma, S. (2017).** The impact of social media on sleep patterns and academic performance of college students. *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 33(1), 53-58.
4. **Singh, M., & Kaur, G. (2018).** Cyberbullying and mental health: A study on Indian college students. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 40(5), 464-471.
5. **Chatterjee, A., & Gupta, A. (2021).** Social media and body image issues among youth: An Indian perspective. *Journal of Indian Youth Studies*, 12(4), 251-257.
6. **Patel, V., & Thara, R. (2017).** Social media use and its psychological consequences on young adults in India. *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 33(2), 143-149.



7. **Agarwal, M., & Gupta, R. (2020).** The role of social media in shaping mental health outcomes in Indian students. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 45*(3), 194-202.
8. **Bhattacharya, P., & Sen, P. (2019).** Impact of social media on mental well-being: A case study of college students in urban India. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, 7*(5), 310-317.
9. **Nair, P., & Shankar, V. (2018).** FOMO and its effects on mental health among Indian youth: An exploratory study. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 10*(2), 89-97.