SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: *Social media is a place where students spend a lot of time majorly for their entertainment. Due to a lot of time spent on social media, it is affecting their mood. Their mental health is not in good condition. They are facing issues like FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and body image issues. They are having negative emotions (depression and anxiety) because of social media. They are comparing themselves negatively to others on social media. They are managing their negative emotions by talking to their friends/family, by engaging in physical activity and by engaging in hobbies. They are seeking professional help also. They are following mental health influences, pages and communities which are resulting positively for their mental health.*

Keywords: *Mental health, social media, Depression, Anxiety, Students, FOMO, Body image issues.*

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is very important in our lives. If our mental health is not good,then we can't live our life properly. We will not be able to achieve success in future. Today, most people are not happy. They are in depression, anxiety etc. The time is changing and now people are giving importance to their mental health. Social media craze is rising so much in the students. They communicate, get entertained and get information from social media.

Different apps like Instagram, YouTube, snapchat etc. are used by them. As of 2023, over 4,9 billion people use social media worldwide, making it a crucial platform for communication and interaction. Students get so involved in the virtual world as compared to real world. Today, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and body image are new terms from which students are getting affected. In body image issue, they start to think that their body is not perfect. They feel inferior as they see more good-looking people than themselves on social media. Students think that they are not attractive by seeing those creators.

The concept of "fear of missing out" (FOMO) is also associated with anxiety, as students often feel compelled to stay constantly updated on peers' activities (Keles, McCrac, & Grealish, 2020). Students' mental health Is important for themselves and for our country also as they are the future of our nation. It is legal to use social media once a person turns 18. People of this age are not mature enough to understand things rightly. And as a result, they get badly affected by social media. Studies have shown that heavy social media use is linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression among students, often due to comparison with peers and exposure to negative content.

Social media was created so that people can connect with their relatives, friends etc and share information and ideas. But people started showing their money, beauty, fun that they are doing by going on trips, vacations etc which created negative impact on people. They start to feel that their life is not that good. Social media is a place where people post their happy pictures and videos and show other people that they are enjoying so much. Mostly those people are not happy. They just show other people to make them jealous. Vannucci, Flannery, and Ohannessian (2017) found that increased social media usage among young adults correlated with higher anxiety symptoms, particularly due to the pressure to maintain a favorable online image.

Students use social media till late at night. It disrupts their sleep pattern and after that they feel tired. 70% of college students use social media right before bed, which is linked to poorer sleep quality and increased daytime sleepiness. Proper sleep is required so that our brain can work properly. Without proper sleep, our body will not become active. We will become unable to do our work properly. Social media distracts students as notifications

come to students again and again. Due to this, students get distracted. They lack concentration in their work and check their smartphones again. It impacts their academic performance also. The need of this study was to know about the mental health condition of students. Students who are 18 and above use social media mostly. They are adults as well as students. This study focuses on the age group of 18 and above.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Primack et al. (2017) found that young adults who spent more time on social media reported feeling more socially isolated, which was a predictor of depressive symptoms. Fardouly, Diedrichs, **Vartanian, and Halliwell (2015)** found that social comparisons made on social media negatively impacted body image and mood. **Tiggemann and Slater (2014)** noted that young girls exposed to beauty-oriented content on social media platforms were more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and a decline in self-esteem. **Bartels et al. (2016**) argued that social media can provide a sense of community and support for students facing mental health challenges, allowing them to connect with others who have shared experiences.

Galla et al. (2020) found that appearance-related social media pressures were particularly impactful for adolescent girls, who were more likely to experience self-esteem issues tied to social comparison. **Nesi and Prinstein (2015**) also found that both gender and popularity moderate the relationship between social media use and depressive symptoms, with girls and more socially prominent students experiencing greater impacts from social media comparisons. Research by **Hinduja and Patchin (2019)** found that students who experienced cyberbullying were more likely to report depressive symptoms, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

Cyberbullying often takes the form of harassment, exclusion, and public shaming, which can lead to low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness **(Lattanner, et al. 2014).** The blue light emitted from screens, coupled with the engaging nature of social media, can lead to delayed sleep onset and shorter sleep duration **(Scott, Biello, & Woods, 2019).** Students who exhibit signs of social media addiction such as spending excessive time on platforms, feeling anxious without access, and prioritizing online interactions over real-world engagements-may experience lower psychological well-being **(Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, 2017**).

A study by **Kuss and Griffiths (2017)** indicated that compulsive social media use was associated with increased levels of loneliness, anxiety, and depression among university students. **Meier and Gray (2014)** found that young women were more likely to compare themselves to others on social media, leading to lower self-esteem and greater body dissatisfaction. Excessive use of social media can negatively affect students' academic performance by diverting time and attention from academic tasks.

This can create stress due to procrastination and a sense of being overwhelmed, which impacts their mental health **(Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).** Platforms focused on visual content, like Instagram, contribute to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among students. The constant

comparison with curated and edited images fosters unrealistic body standards and negative self-perception **(Perloff, 2014**). FOMO can lead to compulsive checking behaviors, where students feel compelled to stay connected to avoid feeling left out or missing out on social events. This fear has been linked to increased anxiety, feelings of loneliness, and reduced life satisfaction **(Przybylski et al., 2013).**

OBJECTIVES

The broad objective was to investigate how social media influences the mental health of students. The specific objectives for the study are:

1. To analyses the correlation between social media usage and mental health issues.
2. To assess the effects of social media on different demographic groups (such as age, gender).
3. To examine the effects of different types of social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube etc.) on the mental well-being of users.
4. To investigate the negative effects of social media content such as body image issues & FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) on mental health.
5. To develop recommendations for individuals so that they can prevent their mental health.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study's framework is based on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). This theory suggests that individuals have an inherent drive to compare themselves with others to evaluate their own abilities and worth. This theory posits that individuals may engage in upward social comparison by observing idealized content, such as images of physical appearance, lifestyle, or achievements.

THE STUDY

The need for this study was felt to find out the impact of social media on mental health of students. As students are spending so much time on social media and due to this social media creates a negative effect on their mental health. This study is done to know about the mental health condition of students. To find out the reason why they are using social media. To know the number of hours per day they are spending on social media. Students' mental well-being is important. As if his/her mental health is good only then they can achieve anything in life. The FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and body image issues are new terms which impact the mental health of students. This study will also find out how many students are facing both or any of these issues in their life. It will find out the number of students who are comparing themselves negatively to others on social media. Social media affects their mood or not. The study will also find out the number of students who are following any mental health influences. As by following them, it can somehow create a positive effect on their mental health.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Stratified random sampling is used to ensure representation from various academic levels (bachelor's, master's and doctoral) students from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. A structured online questionnaire was distributed to the students. Utilizing a simple random sampling approach, researchers distributed a structured questionnaire to the participants. The questionnaire contained two sections; demographics were assessed in section one and section two contained free choice questions based on different constructs of social networking behavior including the amount of time spent on social media, the frequency of usage for daily activities, and the level of interaction with SNS(s). Health-related issues that were also included in section two of the Bonafide model were as follows: sleep disturbances as well as eating disturbances, depression, and anxiety (research tools used for this study were crosstabulation, Anova and correlation). Data analysis was completed using SPSS.

FINDING

1. Education Most Used Platforms Reason Cross tabulation

Finding	Key Percentage	Key Observation / Insight
1. Education Most Used Platforms Reason	**Most Used Platforms:** - Instagram: 52.8% - YouTube: 39.6% - WhatsApp: 3.8% - Snapchat/Telegram: 1.9% each **Main Reasons for Use:** - Entertainment: 43.3% - Stay Informed: 30% - Stay Connected (friends/family): 11.3% - Work/Study: 9.4% - Other (e.g., sisters, time pass): 1.9%	Instagram and YouTube dominate student usage, primarily for entertainment and staying informed.

Table 1:Education Most Used Platforms Reason Crosstabulation

Majority of students (52.8%) are using Instagram. The second most used platform by students is YouTube (39.6%). Next comes WhatsApp (3.8%). Then, the least used apps by students are snapchat and telegram each at (1.9%). The main reason for using social media is for their entertainment (43.3%). The second main reason for using social media is to stay informed (30%). Then (11.3%) are using social media to stay connected with their friends/family. (9.4%) of students are using social media for work or study. (1.9%) of students are using social media to stay connected with sisters and study, to pass their time and for work and connection.

2. **Age time spend affects mood**

Finding	Key Percentage	Key Observation / Insight
2. Age Time Spend Affects Mood	**Frequency Mood Affected:** - Sometimes: 43.3% - Often: 20.7% - Rarely: 16.9% - Always: 11.3% - Never: 7.5% *Time Spent Correlation:*	A clear dose-response effect is observed: higher daily usage (5-6+ hours) correlates with a higher likelihood of mood being affected. Lower usage (<1 hour) correlates with less impact.

Table 2:Age time spend affects mood

Social media sometimes affects the mood of (43.3%) of students. Then, social media often affects the mood of (20.7%) of students. Social media rarely affects the mood of (16.9%) of students. (11.3%) of students' moods are always affected by social media. (7.5%) of students' moods are never affected by social media. Students who are using social media for 5-6 hours or more than 6 hours per dayget more affected. It didn't happen that their mood never got affected. Students who are using the media for less than 1 hour per day, their mood gets less affected by social media.

3. **Education Compared Negative. Negative Emotions**

Finding	Key Percentage	Key Observation / Insight
3. Education Compared Negative. Negative Emotions	**Frequency of Negative Comparison:** - Never: 45.3% - Sometimes: 30.2% - Often: 11.3% - Rarely: 9.4% - Always: 3.8%	Over half (54.7%) of students engage in negative self-comparison on social media at least occasionally.

Table 3:Education Compared Negative. Negative Emotions

(45.3%) of students never compare themselves negatively to others on social media. (30.2%) of students sometimes compare themselves negatively to others on social media. Then, (11.3%) of students often compare themselves negatively to others on social media. (9.4%) of students rarely compare themselves negatively to others on social media. (3.8%) of students always compare themselves negatively to others on social media. It means that (54.7%) of students compare themselves negatively to others on social media.

4. **Education Ever Experienced Mental health**

Finding	Key Percentage	Key Observation / Insight
4. Education Ever Experienced Menta health	**Self-Rated Mental Health:** - Good: 41.5% - Very Good: 20.7%	Students without FOMO/body image issues tend to report excellent mental health. A small but significant portion

	- Excellent: 13.2% - Fair: 13.2% - Poor: 11.3% *FOMO/Body Image Issues:* - No Issues (Majority): 66% - Have Issues: 34% (approx.)	(11.3%) report poor mental health, with issues linked to FOMO/body image.

Table 4:Education Ever Experienced Mental health

(41.5%) of students' mental health is good. (20.7%) of students' mental health is very good.(13.2%) of students have excellent mental health. (13.2%) of students have fair mental health. (11.3%) of students' mental health is poor. Majority of students (66%) do not have FOMO or body image issues. The students who do not have FOMO or body image issues, their mental health is excellent. 3.77% of students have poor mental health, who have both or either of these issues.

5. **Gender Mental Health Manage Negative Emotions**

Finding	Key Percentage	Key Observation / Insight
5. Gender Mental Health Manage Negative Emotions	Coping Strategies: - Talk to Friends/Family: 35.8% - Physical Activity: 16.9% - Engage in Hobbies: 9.4% - Seek Professional Help: 1.8% - Use Two+ Strategies: 36.1%	Social support is the primary coping mechanism. A notable majority (over 73%) use active strategies (talking, activity, hobbies) or a combination of them. Professional help is sought rarely.

Table 5: Gender Mental Health Manage Negative Emotions

35.8% of students are talking to their friends/family to manage their negative emotions caused by social media. (16.9%) of students do physical activity to manage their negative emotions. (9.4%) of students engage in hobbies to manage their negative emotions. (1.8%) of students seek professional help to manage their negative emotions. (36.1%) of students are doing two or more than that to manage their negative emotions caused by social media.

6. Gender Follow Mental Health Influence Impact of Following Them

Finding	Key Percentage	Key Observation / Insight
6. Gender Follow Mental Health Influence Impact of Following Them	**Follow Mental Health Influencers?** - No: 64.2% - Yes: 35.8% *Impact on Followers:* - Positive Impact: Majority	A significant minority follow mental health influencers. Among those who do, the impact is largely reported as positive.

Table 6: Gender Follow Mental Health Influence Impact of Following Them

(64.2%) of students are not following any mental health influences. (35.8%) of students are following mental health influences. Those who are following mental health influences, most of them have positive impact of following them on their mental health.

LIMITATIONS

1. This study captures data at a specific time and may not account for the evolving nature of social media platforms and their features, which could influence mental health differently over time. New social media platforms can come in future.
2. Other factors such as academic pressure, family background or pre-existing mental health conditions might influence the results.

CONCLUSION

The students are using Instagram most. The main reason for using social media is for their entertainment. But they don't understand that social media is not only entertaining them, but it is impacting their mental health in a negative way. It affects their mood to different levels. Students are using their mobile phones for longer durations. It disrupts their sleep pattern; they are not getting proper sleep because they use social media till late night. Due to this, they feel tired and exhausted.Students are facing body image issues and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) because of social media. By looking at good looking influences on social media, they think that they are not good looking as compared to them. Due to this, they get into depression and have anxiety. They get FOMO if other people are doing show-off, doing things that they are not doing. This makes them feel less connected to them and they think their lives are much better compared to them. If their mental health is not good, then they cannot achieve success in their lives. They compare themselves negatively to others on social media. By looking at their lifestyle.

Social media was made to connect with others. To share views, ideas etc. But people used social media in a negative way. By overusing it and by being more involved in virtual world than real world. The students are not mature enough to distinguish between what is bad and good for them. They need guidance so that they don't get involved in this in a negative way. Today, mental health awareness is rising. People are becoming more aware of this. They are going to psychologists to treat themselves. But still, more awareness is required. Students manage their negative emotions caused by social media in different ways. They talk with their friends and family, engage in physical activity and engage in hobbies. Students are seeking professional help also. They are following mental health influences, pages and communities on social media. By following them, they have positive results on their mental health. So, students should do this to have a positive result on their mental health. They should not overuse social media. As the longer time they spend on social media, it affects their mental health in a negative way.

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