



SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AND ENGAGEMENT IN YOUTH OF TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

This paper is a part of a larger study that examines the patterns of social media addiction and engagement among youth in Tamil Nadu using two standardized instruments: the Social Media Addiction Questionnaire (SMAQ) and the Social Media Engagement Scale (SMES). A total of 1,062 undergraduate and postgraduate students aged 18–25 from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas participated in the study through a structured survey. The findings reveal a near-equal split between respondents who reported addictive tendencies (49.9%) and those who did not (50.1%), highlighting the prevalence of compulsive and emotionally-driven social media behavior. Key behavioral indicators included frequent use before sleep (62.5%), emotional dependence, disrupted tasks, and interpersonal conflicts caused by excessive social media use. The study emphasizes the importance of mindful digital engagement and calls for targeted interventions such as educational campaigns, behavioral strategies, and support programs to mitigate the adverse impacts of social media overuse while enhancing its positive potential in youth development.

Keywords: Social Media Addiction, Youth Behavior, Digital Engagement, Mental Well-being, Smartphone Usage

Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of contemporary youth culture, reshaping the ways individuals interact, communicate and consume information. In Tamil Nadu, a state known for its vibrant youth population and high digital penetration, the widespread adoption of social media platforms has brought significant social and psychological implications. While these platforms

offer opportunities for connection, self-expression, and knowledge –sharing, they have also raised concerns about addictive behaviors and their impact on mental well-being and productivity.

Social Media addiction, characterized by excessive, compulsive and maladaptive use of social networking sites, has emerged as a growing concern among youth. Studies have highlighted this link between social media addiction and adverse outcomes such as reduced academic performance, sleep disturbance and heightened feeling of anxiety and depression. Simultaneously, the level of social media engagement – the frequency and manner in which individuals interact with content- plays a pivotal role in the interplay between addiction and engagement is essential for addressing the challenges posed by social media overuse.

This research focuses on examining social media addiction and engagement among youth in Tamil Nadu using two validated instruments: the Social Media Addiction Questionnaire (SMAQ) and Social Media Engagement Scale (SMES). The SMAQ provides a comprehensive framework for accessing addictive tendencies, while the SMES captures the depth and breadth of user interactions with social media platforms. By employing these scales, the study aims to provide empirical insights into the patterns, drivers and consequences of social media usage among Tamil Nadu's youth.

Furthermore, the study seeks to explore how social- economic, and educational factors influence the relationship between addiction and engagement in this demographic. The findings aim to inform policy makers, educators and mental health professionals about strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media while promoting its constructive use as a tool for personal and social development. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital media studies and offers a regional perspective on the global phenomenon of social media addiction.

Use of Social networking sites and well-being in Young adulthood:

Though there are many advantages in usage of social networking sites like maintaining relationship with friends and families (Billedo, Kerfhof & Finkenauer, 2015) or social support (Brailovksaia, Rohmann & Bierhoff, 2019), it might lead to problematic usage and habits among the addicted young adults. Billedo et al., 2015 states that problematic Smartphone users have

symptoms that resemble core component of behavioral addictions such as withdrawal and loss of control. Most of the problematic Smartphone users access their social networking sites through mobile phones, which are more likely to be used in a habitual, automatic manner, heightening the risk of the addictive behavior (Van Deuresen et al., 2015).

Scholars have theorized different potential underlying mechanisms with use of social medias and problematic users. Though some have positive experiences which helps them in contributing them for their development. It also creates an emotional bonding to social networking sites, which might be a threat to continuously being online without any actual intention (Brailovksaia, Rohmann & Bierhoff, 2019; Brailovksaia & Margraf, 2017). If not being online the problematic user might not feel at ease, when disconnected from social media (Blachnio, Przrpiorcka & Pantic, 2016).

Social Media Disconnection

Social media platforms are designed for young adults and sometimes for children (El- Khoury et al., 2021) making it even easier to stay connected with friends and family. There are both positive and negative effects in social media usage. Positives like, it allows for easy and swift communication, better organization, quicker information retrieval, increase in productivity and improvements in social and professional networks (Cain, 2018). It's very common to read something or check up on what acquaintances are doing while waiting in line at the grocery store, or on the train heading home (Andreassen et al., 2017). On the other hand there are some negative results which have emerged due to overdo of social media. According to one researcher, potential addiction surrounds the content viewed in addition to total time spent. Are users actively messaging their friends, or are they just scrolling through the feed out of boredom? Each person uses social media for different reasons, and that creates difficulty in research. For example, an introvert may use social media for social compensation and extroverted person may use it for social inflation (Galer, 2018).

Mobile phones users report disturbing effects of phone and tablet use, including physical problems such as eye strain, headaches, sleep problem and trouble concentrating (Smahel et al., 2015). These matters only get worse when the social media use in not limited, which leads to stress. The stress lead to mental health issues like depression or anxiety (Cain, 2018).

Effects of Technologies

Digital devices have affected the working environment (Arnison & Miller, 2002; Tan, Tan & Teo, 2012) as well as business in general (Bharadway et al. 2013; Sambamurthy, Bharadwaj & Grover, 2003). Technology has inevitable has developed the social and personal life, the technology advances global communication and interactions among individuals are enabled (Savci & Aysan, 2017). This provides pivotal contribution to build and maintain interpersonal relationships and to participate in society (Chayko, 2014; McKenna & Bargh, 1998). The smartphone plays a predominant role in today's society, according to Madell and Muncer, 2007, mobile-phone related features such as e-mail, text, and instant messages lead to greater control over young people's social interactions. Digital media use via smart phones and social media had been further recognized as having positive effects on social behaviour and social engagement (Kim, Wang & Oh, 2016), sense of belonging, connectedness and social identity (Park & Lee, 2014; Walsh, White & Young, 2009).

Earlier research indicates negative effects of greater internet consumption on social interactions (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel & Fox, 2002; Kraut et al. 1998). With development of smart phone, negative effects have been investigated on both social interactions and social relationships (Elhai et al. 2016; Kim, 2017; Rotondi, Stanca & Tomasuolo, 2017), the individual well-being (Ethai et al. 2016; Lei et al. 2017; Kim, 2017; Wolniewicz et al. 2018) as well as on the work and study performance (Duke & Montag, 2017; Kuznekoff & Titsworth, 2013; Samaha & Hawi, 2016). Related to negative impacts caused by smartphones, younger generations often have been under examination (Chang & Choi, 2016; Haug et al. 2015; Lei et al. 2017). Many studies indicated that being separated from the mobile phone causes distress among mobile users (Bivin et al. 2013; Konok et al. 2016) and this impact on health is particularly high among young adults (Dongre, Inamdar & Gattani, 2017; Sharma et al. 2015).

Radke et al. (2022) quoted the variety in the empirical approach to the concept of digital detox, with some studies restricting the use of all electronic devices (Dunican et al., 2017), some restricting only Smartphone use (Eide et al., 2018), while others limited access to individual aspects of the digital world such as texting (Skierkowski & Wood, 2012). Few studies have specifically targeted social media use in this context (Brown & Kuss, 2020). And many of those

have focused only on the restriction of access to individual platforms (e.g., Facebook, Turel et al. 2018; Instagram, Fioravanti et al., 2019). These studies have generated mixed findings, with some reporting positive effects (Brown & Kuss, 2020), negative effects (Hanley et al., 2019), or no change in relation to mental well-being (Hall et al., 2019). Theories of planned behavior suggest that self-generated motivations and intentions are critical in supporting effective behavior change (Bosnjak et al., 2020; Michie et al., 2013).

Methodology

The Study employs a descriptive cross-sectional design, focusing on the attitudes, behaviors and experiences of individuals with regards to social media use. This design allows for capturing a snapshot of the variables of interest at a specific point in time, facilitating frequency analysis and inferential testing. It adopts a qualitative research design to explore the nuanced experiences and perspective of youth regarding social media addiction and engagement. By focusing on subjective accounts and contextual factors, the study aims to uncover the underlying motivations, behaviors and consequences associated with social media use.

Sample size:

A total of 1062 students were selected as participants, representing a diverse range of educational and socio-economic background from different districts in Tamilnadu like Chennai, Coimbatore, Tiruchy, Madurai, Thanjavur and Mayiladuthurai. The students were in age group of 18-25 years, who are mostly studying in Undergraduates and Postgraduates courses across Urban, Semi-urban and rural settings. A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of gender, age group and socio economic strata.

Research Objective

Primary Objective: To explore youth's engagement with Social Media in Tamilnadu

Data Collection Method

A structured questionnaire was developed to measure social media usage patterns, attitudes, and emotional responses. The instruments included both closed ended and Likert-scale (e.g. "I often think about social media when I am not using it") and frequency-based questions (e.g. – "How often do you use social media in 15 minutes before sleep").

Ethical Consideration: Participation was voluntary with informed consent obtained from all

respondents. Data confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained.

Table 1: Distribution of Responses to the Statement: 'I often think about social media when I am not using it'

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	175	16.5	16.5	16.5
Disagree	228	21.5	21.5	37.9
Neutral	257	24.2	24.2	62.1
Somewhat Agree	147	13.8	13.8	76.0
Somewhat disagree	77	7.3	7.3	83.2
Strongly Agree	55	5.2	5.2	88.4
Strongly Disagree	123	11.6	11.6	100.0
Total	1062	100.0	100.0	

This category of variables captures respondents' attitudes toward social media. Taking the example of "I often think about social media when I am not using it," frequencies reveal the count of respondents in each response category, such as Agree (175 or 16.5%), Disagree (228 or 21.5%), Neutral (257 or 24.2%), and so on. Percentages express the proportion of responses within the total valid responses (1062), shedding light on the prevalence of this particular social media behavior.

Table 2: Distribution of Responses to the Statement: 'I often use social media for no particular reason'

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	281	26.5	26.5	26.5
Disagree	162	15.3	15.3	41.7
Neutral	194	18.3	18.3	60.0
Somewhat Agree	156	14.7	14.7	74.7
Somewhat disagree	52	4.9	4.9	79.6
Strongly Agree	134	12.6	12.6	92.2
Strongly Disagree	83	7.8	7.8	100.0
Total	1062	100.0	100.0	

This variable assesses the extent to which respondents use social media without a specific purpose. The frequencies show the count of respondents falling into different categories, such as Agree (281 or 26.5%), Disagree (162 or 15.3%), Neutral (194 or 18.3%), and others. Percentages provide a relative distribution within the total valid responses (1062), and cumulative percentages illustrate the progression of responses, emphasizing the prevalence of using social media without a specific reason.

Table 3: Distribution of Responses to the Statement: ‘Arguments have arisen with others because of my social media use’

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	190	17.9	17.9	17.9
Disagree	259	24.4	24.4	42.3
Neutral	186	17.5	17.5	59.8
Somewhat Agree	118	11.1	11.1	70.9
Somewhat disagree	80	7.5	7.5	78.4
Strongly Agree	78	7.3	7.3	85.8
Strongly Disagree	151	14.2	14.2	100.0
Total	1062	100.0	100.0	

The variable explores whether respondents have experienced conflicts with others due to their social media use. Frequencies indicate the count of respondents in categories like Agree (190 or 17.9%), Disagree (259 or 24.4%), and others. Percentages give insights into the proportion of responses within the total valid responses, and cumulative percentages showcase the evolving pattern of responses, emphasizing the impact of social media use on interpersonal relationships.

Table 4: Distribution of Responses to the Statement: I interrupt whatever else I am doing when I feel the need to access social media’

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	196	18.5	18.5	18.5
Disagree	235	22.1	22.1	40.6
Neutral	244	23.0	23.0	63.6
Somewhat Agree	132	12.4	12.4	76.0

Somewhat disagree	74	7.0	7.0	83.0
Strongly Agree	73	6.9	6.9	89.8
Strongly Disagree	108	10.2	10.2	100.0
Total	1062	100.0	100.0	

This variable examines whether respondents interrupt their ongoing tasks to access social media. Frequencies reveal the count of respondents in categories such as Agree (196 or 18.5%), Disagree (235 or 22.1%), and others. Percentages offer a perspective on the relative distribution within the total valid responses, while cumulative percentages depict the overall trend, highlighting the prevalence of interrupting tasks for social media.

Table 4: Distribution of Responses to the Statement: ‘I feel connected to others when I use social media’

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	311	29.3	29.3	29.3
Disagree	165	15.5	15.5	44.8
Neutral	168	15.8	15.8	60.6
Somewhat Agree	133	12.5	12.5	73.2
Somewhat disagree	44	4.1	4.1	77.3
Strongly Agree	160	15.1	15.1	92.4
Strongly Disagree	81	7.6	7.6	100.0
Total	1062	100.0	100.0	

This variable explores respondents' feelings of connection when using social media. Frequencies detail the count of respondents in categories like Agree (311 or 29.3%), Disagree (165 or 15.5%), and others. Percentages elucidate the proportion of responses within the total valid responses, and cumulative percentages demonstrate the changing pattern of responses, emphasizing the role of social media in fostering a sense of connection.

The findings from the analysis highlight the pervasive and multifaceted impact of social media on the daily lives, emotions, and behaviors of individuals. These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of social media use and its implications, summarized as follows:

Overall, while social media remains a powerful tool for connection and communication, its potential for disruption and overuse warrants careful management. These findings provide a foundation for developing strategies to optimize its benefits while minimizing its adverse effects.

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