



## Research Article

# Social Media Addiction and Healthy Lifestyle among Post Graduate Students: A Social Work Perspective

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### Abstract

Digital Technology growth has unprecedentedly impacted daily life, providing opportunities and engendering challenges for professional social work practice. Social media, as an interactive technology, allows people to communicate and exchange ideas in the forms of images and videos with others not in their immediate vicinity. The present study aims to study the relationship between social media addiction and healthy lifestyle practices among postgraduate students from a social work perspective. The descriptive research design was used for this cross-sectional study conducted among 111 postgraduate students of Pondicherry University. The questionnaire includes a socio-demographic profile, a social media addiction scale, and a healthy lifestyle screening tool. According to the findings, most (66.7 percent) respondents have a medium addiction to social media. Most (64.9 percent) respondents follow a healthy lifestyle to a moderate extent. A significant association exists between social media addiction and a healthy lifestyle. The students are highly vulnerable, at the threshold of high addiction levels, and their lifestyle might become susceptible and precarious. Social workers may play a pivotal role in using Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) to bring behavioural change among the youth.

### Introduction

Digital technology has changed individuals' day-to-day activities and made people's life easier (López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós, 2018). Many new issues are starting to arise due to the overuse of technology; however social work is a problem-solving profession that tries to give solutions with readily available resources. Digital technology has created a new field for social work practice with

opportunities and challenges (Mishna *et al.*, 2012; Reamer, 2013). Digital Social Work is a new concept used to solve social problems related to the digital world.

According to the Global Web Index statistics, ordinary people with smartphones spend, on average, two hours and sixteen minutes daily on the network. Internet users have increased in the last decade (Kemp, 2021a). According to India's national youth policy (draft) 2021, the youth is 15 to

29 years old. In the process of digitalisation, social media plays a vital role in the lives of individuals and society. The new generation thinks life without social media is impossible (Reamer, 2020). Social media is an online platform for communicating with people worldwide and exchanging ideas and opinions (Sahin, 2018; Steiner, 2021). In India, 624 million people use the internet (Kemp, 2021b). In India, 5 percent of young people are hooked on social media, while 24 percent have problematic social media usage habits (Rajanna *et al.*, 2016). The positive aspects of social media use include virtual communication and information sharing (Singh *et al.*, 2017), while the negative aspects include decreased satisfaction with daily routines and a desire to postpone daily activities due to excessive time spent on social media (Austin-McCain, 2017). Because of increased use of social media platforms, youth sleep patterns are disrupted, they engage in fewer physical activities, and they experience boredom, loneliness, and struggle with stress reduction (Aparicio-Martinez *et al.*, 2019).

A healthy lifestyle is a natural state of total physical, mental, and social well-being (Akalin, 2022). It provides a person with more energy, allowing them to carry out their everyday duties more actively (Исмаилова & Abadan, 2021). Individuals consciously decide to protect their and others' health (Kima & Kangb, 2019). The current generation is leading a sedentary lifestyle which is a root cause of many lifestyle diseases, mainly affecting middle-aged people and children (Austin-McCain, 2017). A healthy lifestyle is also one of the essential concepts which are affected by addiction behaviour. In the meantime, social media promotes healthy life (Sahu *et al.*, 2020).

## **Literature Review and Methodology**

Previous studies were conducted among students to know the state of socio-educational aspects, mental health, social behaviour, academic performance, internet addiction, and social media addiction. The factors that influence the usage, ethical usage, and social media addiction and its relationship with mental health and social life (Al-Sharq *et al.*, 2015; Islam & Sikder, 2020; Kurniasih, 2017; Mingle & Adams, 2015; Mohan, 2018; Sinyallerinin *et al.*, 2018; Tutgun Ünal, 2020; Wolf, Wenskovitch & Anton, 2016; Ying *et al.*, 2021). Only a few studies (Akalin, 2022; Klavina *et al.*, 2021) were conducted to study internet addiction and a healthy lifestyle.

Previous studies related to social media addiction (Kurniasih, 2017; Sinyallerinin *et al.*, 2018; Tutgun Ünal, 2020; Ying *et al.*, 2021; Исмаилова & Abadan, 2021) were carried out in western countries where technological advancement is far ahead of India. Sahu *et al.* (2020) conducted research to find the role of social media in healthy lifestyle promotion activities. Still, no studies were

conducted regarding the impact of social media addiction on a healthy lifestyle.

Now that the health sector primarily focuses on psychosocial health, physical well-being is not prioritised alongside psychosocial health. Although technology is increasingly considered a boon in accessing and disseminating information in nanoseconds globally, it also engenders infringement, cyberbullying, addiction, and diminishing productivity among youth, consequently bringing detrimental effects and changes in human behaviour (Singh *et al.*, 2017). The world of youth social media use can be viewed through the lens of social work perspective with social work values, knowledge, and skills to bridge the digital divide gap (Fisher-Born *et al.*, 2015).

The literature review revealed that there was not yet a broad range of knowledge on social media addiction and healthy lifestyles. As a result, we attempted to study social media addiction and healthy lifestyles among postgraduate students in Pondicherry to ask what effect social media addiction would have on respondents' healthy lifestyles in higher education.

The cross-sectional study was conducted among Pondicherry University postgraduate students using a descriptive research design. Samples were using the multistage cluster method. Initially, two schools were chosen through a lottery system. In the second stage, we used an effective sampling method to select samples from the two schools. Questionnaires were distributed to sixty students from the School of Social Sciences and International Studies and sixty students from the School of Life Sciences. There were 111 responses out of a possible 120, a 92.5 percent response rate. Participants provide specific socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, age, nativity, family type, department, and number of social media accounts, and the amounts spent on availing internet facilities.

### **Social Media Addiction**

The "Social Media Addiction Scale - Student Form" (Sahin, 2018) was used to assess the participants' social media addiction levels. This scale contains 29 items and is divided into four sub-dimensions. The scale's statements are scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The highest and lowest scale totals are 145 and 29, respectively. It is classified as low (29-67), medium (68-106), and high (107 - 145). Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.898.

### **Healthy Lifestyle**

A "healthy lifestyle screening tool" designed by Kim and Kang (2019) was used to assess the participants' healthy lifestyle practices. The scale has 36 items and measures nine dimensions; each dimension has four questions. The scores are given on a four-point Likert scale. The highest and lowest scale totals are 144 and 36, respectively. It is

classified as low (36-71), medium (72-107), and high (108-144). Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.819.

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 19 software. Statistical tests were conducted to understand the relationship between socio-demographic variables, social media addiction, and a healthy lifestyle.

## Results

57.7 percent of the respondents were male, and 42.3 percent were female. The age group of the respondents ranges from 20 years to 28 years, and the majority (90.09 percent) of the respondents are 21 to 25 years. Most (70.3 percent) of the respondents live in a nuclear family, and more than one-fifth (22.5 percent) live in a joint family. 55.9 percent of the respondents reside in urban areas, and more than one-third (39.6 percent) live in rural areas. More than half (56.8 percent) of the respondents belong to the Social Science stream, and the remaining 43.2 percent belong to the Science stream. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and Twitter are some of the social media platforms used by the respondents. All respondents use WhatsApp, and 74.6 percent use Facebook. More than One-fourth (26.1 percent and 27 percent respectively) of the participants have accounts on four or three social media platforms. More than one-third (36.9 percent) of the respondents spend Rs. 100 to 200 per month on internet facilities, and nearly one-fourth (24.3 percent) of the respondents depend on university wireless connection facilities. The majority (66.7 percent) of the respondents have a medium level of addiction to social media, 24.3 percent have a low level, and 9 percent have a high level of addiction. Most respondents have a medium level (64.9 percent), and only a few (35.1 percent) have a high level of healthy lifestyle practice in their daily lives. Data shown in the Table 1 indicates a significant correlation between social media addiction and a healthy lifestyle.

**Table 1:** Pearson's correlation between social media addiction and healthy lifestyle screening tool

Variables	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Healthy Lifestyle Screening Tool	1		111
Social Media Addiction Scale	.213*	0.025	111

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 2:** Difference between healthy lifestyle screening tool and social media addiction scale with socio-demographic variables

Variable	Healthy Lifestyle Screening Tool	Social Media Addiction Scale
Gender	0.029	0.154
Course of study	0.550	0.568
Family type	0.09	0.020

There is a significant gender difference reported in a healthy lifestyle (Table 2). Males scored better on healthy lifestyle practices than females. However, no gender and course of study differences are written on social media addiction and healthy lifestyle. Table 2 shows that the Family type significantly differs regarding social media addiction and a healthy lifestyle.

## Discussion

All first prefer WhatsApp to communicate with their friends and family members, and Facebook and Instagram are the second preferred social media. It coincides with studies showing that WhatsApp is more prevalent among youth, followed by Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube (Akalin, 2022; Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017). Smartphones are used to start and end the day by young people. Youth spend at least 2 hours daily on social media platforms (Austin-McCain, 2017). Spending more time on social media reduces the healthy living practices in their daily routine. Youth follow a medium level of healthy lifestyle practice in their day-to-day lives. These findings were similar to a previous survey by Austin-McCain (2017), who reported undergraduate and graduate students' exercise and healthy eating habits. But this study contradicts the previous research, which shows that most respondents have a high level, and only a few have a low level of healthy lifestyle practice in their day-to-day life (Borillo *et al.*, 2020). Young people prefer a healthy lifestyle in their daily lives but fail to execute it correctly (Dwivedi & Kaur, 2021).

A high level of addiction to social media generates more physical and mental problems than a person having medium or mild obsession (Şahin, 2018). A medium level of addiction to social media platforms is shared among participants. This agrees with the study by Rajeswari *et al.*, (2017), which shows that undergraduate students' attitudes about the internet are mild to moderate. Moderate addiction youth risk falling under the addiction category if they continue to overuse social media.

Healthy lifestyle practice has been changing due to technology development, and youth spend most of their time on electronic gadgets. Social media addiction impacts on physical and psychological health (Aparicio & Martinen, 2019). The findings show a correlation between social media addiction and healthy lifestyle practices. This is lined with a study (Akalin, 2022), which offers a link between social media addiction and living a healthy lifestyle and indicates that 60 percent of the respondents did not have regular sleep patterns. They were sleeping less than 7 hours a day found in the study confirmed by previous work (Khayat *et al.*, 2018), showing that the sleep quality of the youth gets affected due to internet addiction. Long periods of staring at a screen might cause eye irritation.

This study's results show that men and women have no difference in social media usage, which coincides with

some previous research (Kahayat *et al.*, 2018). But in contrast, men are more attracted to social media and addicted to it than women (Sharma *et al.*, 2017). In the meantime, men have healthier lifestyles than women due to sports, regular exercise, and less intake of nutritious food, which is also found in another study; women are less concerned about their physical health and nutritional food intake than men (Silva *et al.*, 2020).

In particular, a few studies (Rajeswari *et al.*, 2017; Sharma *et al.*, 2017; Skwes *et al.*, 2016) have found that family types impact on technology addiction. Compared to youth in a joint family, those living in single-parent or nuclear households were more addicted to technology (Rajeswari *et al.*, 2017). Individuals living in a joint family have many members in the family, so they have people to talk with, but in a nuclear family, both parents tend to be working, so they won't have time to interact with family members, so the youth prefer social media as a companion (Sharma *et al.*, 2017). It creates a barrier between the individual and family members. Youth try to connect with people on social media, but they cannot interact with those in their immediate vicinity (Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017). People living in a joint family have more healthy lifestyle practices in their day-to-day life than people living in a nuclear family. A joint family mainly focuses on the overall well-being of the individuals in the family. The science and arts stream didn't show any difference between social media addiction and healthy lifestyle practice, and the course of study did not decide the social media addiction and a healthy lifestyle. This result contrasts with previous research, which shows a difference in social media addiction concerning the course of study (Rajeswari *et al.*, 2017).

The results show a relationship between social media addiction and a healthy lifestyle. Nowadays, social media addiction is also a significant problem requiring solutions from experts in the field. Social workers can deal with this problem better than any other professionals because they have a good understanding and interaction with the community and are aware of societal changes due to technological advancement. They can intervene with addicts and raise awareness among the young population by emphasising the benefits and drawbacks of social media use and insisting that they use it the right way.

The primary work of Megele and Buzzi (2020) illustrates the difficulties of the link between social work and social media as it bridges public-personal and online-offline environments and necessitates further investigation. Social work methods, such as the Person-in-Environment approach, can be used to understand individual behaviour patterns, vulnerability, and the intersectionality of their social locations to provide appropriate intervention and services. Recent educational discussions on social media and social work have produced novel knowledge

contributions and policy implications (Cooner *et al.*, 2020; Megele and Buzzi, 2020). Social work educators can inculcate professional media use standards in students faster than in any other setting. Furthermore, Council on Social Work Education defines professional and ethical behaviour as "using technology ethically and properly to achieve practice objectives." Professional organisations must also support the incorporation of social media into social work education, and social workers must be trained in the use of technology. Social workers can use social media platforms to reduce addiction by creating awareness posts and blogs and regularly keeping in touch with clients (Castillo De Mesa, 2021). Social work values and ethics can help shape a new field of study, such as information and communication technology, to provide more benefits to people and, finally, to educate people on how to use social media more effectively and lead a healthy life.

### **Limitation**

The study was carried out with small sample size and a larger sample is needed to validate the findings. Based on the results of the study, students should be given awareness about the adverse effects of social media addiction and the importance of healthy living need to be explained to youths. Both faculties and social work can create awareness, and digital technology can also be used to create awareness among youths.

### **Further Studies**

The present study was conducted only among university students, so future studies can be conducted among the general population's different age groups. Other aspects of health can be studied in combination with social media addiction to find the influence on the individual's overall health. That will help to understand the general population's addiction level and healthy lifestyle practices. Through that policy level, changes can take place in schools and colleges to give digital technology knowledge and practical use.

### **Conclusions**

The present study was conducted to understand youth's social media addiction and healthy lifestyles. The finding shows a relationship between social media addiction and a healthy lifestyle. Although youth have a medium level of social media addiction and a healthy lifestyle, most are on the borderline of the high addiction stage, making them more prone to fall under the addiction category. Social workers have a solid commitment to society and its problems. They have to study the overall aspects of the addiction and try to form interventions that will help everyone in their daily lives.

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## Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Data Availability Statement

Data will be made available on request.

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