

Social media addiction among youth: a gender comparison

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology has brought forward the social media as a prime source to make global connections. Involvement with the electronic services creates an interactive platform for the users which makes communication, sharing ideas, discussing issues easier. Networks framed through social media have been found helpful to improve the connections as well as degrade the relations with self. The two genders male and females are similar in the number of aspects, but there seems a robust deviation that includes multiple facets of social interactions which suggest the existence of inherent behavioural differences. Nevertheless, there are contradictions about the influence of gender and social media use; some studies indicate higher addiction in male while some highlights addiction more in females. At the same time, gender roles on social networking sites mirror the expectations of the societies that the users represent. Thus, the preferences of the males and females vary in context to social media. The present study aimed to see the prevalence of social media addiction among the youth and to see the gender differences in social media addiction. The present study was a cross-sectional survey design conducted among college-going youth (160 male and 321 female). Purposive sampling technique was used to select the students from different colleges of Guwahati, Assam. Four hundred eighty-one students were randomly selected from the different colleges of Kamrup Metropolis. Semi-Structured tool and Bergen's Social Media Addiction were administered. Descriptive analysis in the present study shows the prevalence of social media addiction among 31.6 percent of the participants. The study highlights the significant difference in social media addiction between both male and female participants (Mean rank= 216.29 and Mean rank= 253.32) respectively and p value= .001. There is a need to control the use of social networking sites and aware them about the threats of these tools. Allocating research knowledge about the positive and negative applications of social media at the individual level, social as well as academic levels can be beneficial. The multimodal treatment approach to deal with social media addiction among youth also can be useful.

Keywords: Social Media, Addiction, Youth, Gender, Male, Female, Northeast, Assam

The concept of technology was proposed by Griffiths (2013). According to him, technology addictions are actions which involve extreme human-machine interactions which results in non-chemical but behavioural changes. The more and excessive use of internet has detrimental effects on the physiological, biological,

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psychological and social development of their users (Caplan, 2002). The fast increase in the internet use, mostly the online networks, the time spent over it, has led the researchers to argue over changes in behaviour leading to addiction (Griffiths & Pontes, 2014; Sussman et al., 2011). According to Griffiths (2013) behaviour can be described as addiction with reference to the six components: salience, tolerance, mood modification, relapse, withdrawal, and conflict. The internet has brought forward the social media sites which are the virtual communities where the users can create their profiles individual or the public, can interact with people in, communicate with them and also can come together with people having a common interest (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). It also includes different websites and applications that allow users to share ideas, opinions, feelings, beliefs, personal as well as social experiences, and also allow communication at a global level (Błachnio, Przepiorka and Pantic, 2016). Among the most popular and commonly used virtual social networks come Instagram, Telegram, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and WhatsApp (Ebrahimpour et al., 2016; Guedes et al., 2016; Owusu-Acheaw and, Larson 2015).

Nowadays increasingly uncontrolled usage of internet is being noticed among students, involving problematic computer usage which impairs the functioning of normal lives and also other important domains of life. The changes in the psychological development along with that the easy accessibility to the internet makes the college student more vulnerable to pathological internet use. The vulnerability can also be due to a decrease in the level of parental monitoring of young adults. Gender difference can be often noted as a demographic dimension which can influence the internet usage. It can be due to the influence of psychological factors like aggressiveness, ways of expression, and structure of friendship or also may be due to the variation of cognitive functioning between male and female. Internet addiction also leads to poor academic achievement, impaired functioning at work. Unhealthy food habits, substance abuse, physical inactivity and sleep restrictions have also been noted among students addicted to internet addiction. The intensive use of social media applications seems to rise rapidly, and this has raised concerns for addiction. Surveys consistently show that among the general population mostly the young people and students (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). According to (Lenhart, 2009; Koca 2009) among the social network users, most of them are university students. They found that individuals use their social network profiles mostly to stay in touch with friends. Several studies have been conducted to see whether the internet and its applications are addictive or not. A similar study can be found from China which involved around 2,620 students and the results showed that 24% of the participants were addicted to social media (Cao et al, 2007). The prevalence of social media addiction was present among 36.9% Indian students and causing health issues (Masthi, Pruthvi, and Phaneendra, 2018) and 29.5% among the students in Singapore (Wang P et al.,2018). The studies conducted by Steggink (2015) in the Netherlands and by Monacis et al. (2017) in Italy found gender as an important factor affecting social media addiction. While the purpose of using social media differed among gender. It appears that female students are more addicted to social media than male students (Simsek, Elciyar, & Kizilhan, 2019). Females are seen to make the use most of the time for maintaining the existing relationship, keep in touch with the existing ones, academic purposes while males use it for making new relationship (Mazman and Usluel, 2011). On the other hand, social media addiction was more among the males compared to female students (Azizi, Soroush, & Khaton 2019)

In India, social media addiction is emerging as a health problem well as a behavioural problem especially among the young population. This research topic has not yet been explored in the north-eastern part of the country much so this study aims at further

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exploration of social media addiction among the undergraduate students of Assam and sees the difference in its prevalence among the gender.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was a cross-sectional survey conducted among college-going youths; six colleges were selected using purposive sampling technique from Guwahati, Assam. Out of the total student population, a total of 481 respondents were included in the current study using the sample calculator at 95% confidence level and class interval of 4. Students those who were using the social networking sites were included in the study. For ethical consideration confidentiality was assured and informed consent was taken.

Data collection tools

Semi-structured data sheet: Personal information such as age, gender, educational status, and usage of different social media accounts, time spent on the different social media sites, the purpose for usage etc has been collected through this tool.

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS): The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is an adaptation of the Bergen Face book Addiction Scale (BSAS) developed by Anderson Fagan, Woodnutt and Chamorro-Premuzic (2012) and contains six items reflecting core addiction elements as given by Kuss and Griffiths (2011). Each item is answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very rarely (1) to very often (5); thus, yielding a composite score from 6 to 30, concerning experiences during the past year (e.g., "How often during the last year have you tried to cut down on the use of social media without success?"). In the present study, the respondents who responded "often" or "very often" in four or more of the six items were included in the category of Social Media addiction group.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics like frequency, the percentage was used to assess the socio-demographic data & social media addiction and self-esteem. Difference between social media addiction among male and female and self-esteem has been assessed using Mann Whitney u test.

RESULT

Table 1: Sex of the participants

Sex	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	160	33.3
Female	321	66.7

Table 2: Time spent in usage of Social media by participants

Time (hours)	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Less Than 1 hour	77	16
1-2 hours	145	30.1
2-3 hours	112	23.3
More than 3 hours	147	30.6

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Table 3: Social media sites that are used daily by the participants

Social media sites	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Face book	256	53.2
Instagram	200	41.6
Twitter	16	3.3
WhatsApp	422	87.7
Others		11.4

Table 4: Purpose of social media use

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
Social networking	437	90.9
Online shopping	359	74.6
Information surfing	353	73.4
News	314	65.3
Downloads	371	77.1
Gaming	158	32.8
Television serials, shows	365	75.9
Pornography	62	12.9
Distance Education	122	25.4

Table 5. Prevalence of social media addiction among the college going youth

Social media addiction	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Addicted	152	31.6
Non-addicted	329	68.4

Table 6: Gender difference in social media addiction

Variables	Mean Rank		Mann Whitney U value	Z	p value
	Male (N= 160)	Female (N=321)			
Social media addiction	216.29	253.32	21726.500	-3.418	.001

A total of 481 colleges going youth were selected for the study among which the majorities 160 were male and 321 were female. The mean age of the respondents was found to be 19.89 (table 1). Out of 481 respondents, 30 percent were found to spend more than three hours in a day over social media, 23.3 percent spent 2 to 3 hours, 30.1 percent were found to spend 1 to 2 hours and only 16 percent were found to spend less than 1 hour over the use of social media (table 2). Table 3 indicates that 90.9 percent participants were found the users of WhatsApp, followed by 76.9 percent YouTube users, 65.5 percent preferred using Facebook. Instagram was used by 57.8 percent i.e. almost half of the participants. The hike was used by only 15.6 percent of the users. Table 4 highlights the various purposes for the usage of internet and social media. Findings indicate that almost all the participants make use of the internet for social networking such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc. The study reveals that 90.9 percent were using it for the social networking, 74.6 percent used it for shopping, 73.4 percent were using it for surfing information, 65.3 percent made the use for news, 32.8 percent used for gaming, 12.9 percent of the total participants used it for pornography. Table 5 shows social media addiction among the participants in the study. It shows that majority of the participants 329 (68.4%) were found to be non-addict to social media whereas rest 152 (31.6%) were found to be addicted to social media based on Bergen

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social media addiction scale. In the current study, the prevalence of social media addiction was found to be 31.6 percent. The table (6) signifies the difference between social media addiction prevalent among male and female participants. The mean rank of males was found to be 216.29 while those of the females were found to be 253.32. Significant difference was found between the two groups [$U(481) = 21726.500, z = -3.418, p < 0.01$].

DISCUSSION

Access to social media can be seen in all age groups and more among the growing population and the youth. The current study conducted upon college-going youth reveals 33.3 percent social media addiction among the users. Similar studies on social media addiction conducted by Masthi et al., (2018) among the undergraduates also revealed addiction among 36 percent of the users. Raj, Bhattacharjee and Mukherjee, (2018) found 70 percent social media addiction among the age group of 17 and above. Similar studies conducted in Tezpur by Ali et al., (2019) among the adolescents found that 34.0 percent were severely addicted to the internet and its usage. In the study conducted by Masthi, Pruthvi, & Mallekavu, (2017) the overall prevalence of social media addiction was 19.96% among users.

The study conducted by Hampton (2011) precisely looking at the use of Facebook found that there are researches that show gender variances. The study by Sandvig (2009) among the students of Malaysian Universities found the increased use of Facebook predominantly among the females. In a relevant case, Sharifah (2011) highlights the female students from the Malaysian University having a high relationship between motives of Facebook use and Facebook addiction. Simsek, Elciyar, & Kizilhan, (2019) found women to be more addicted to social media compared to men. Other research also has shown similar findings with more women addicted to social media. A research study conducted by Pew also found women to be more keen users of social media.

However, the present study comes in contradiction to the other studies which show males to be more addicted to social media addiction. The study conducted by Kannan, Karthik, Pal and Menon, (2019) on gender variation in internet addictions. The prevalence of addiction was found to be 22.8 percent in male whereas as only 8.1 percent in female. Similarly, the study by Alandajat et al. 2019 conducted upon the University students revealed that males to be more addicted to social media than female (49.6%) and (32%), respectively.

While studies conducted by Raacke & Bonds-Raacke (2008) claimed that there was no gender variation in the use of social media. Similarly, Fox and Warber (2013) found no dissimilarities in motivations between men and women social media addiction. There was no relationship between gender and social media addiction on the results of Wang et al., (2015) in China. Significant results were also found by Jafarkarimi et al. (2016) in Malaysia, and Blachnio et al. (2016) in Poland. This leads to cross-cultural interpretation of the fact that gender has an impact on social media addiction in some countries.

Limitations

The present study is limited in certain ways. It was conducted in the few colleges which are based in the urban zone. It appears that the college-going youth have easy access to social media and a high level of mobile phone ownership. It may not be same in the other zones of the city. Considering that this situation might have affected the results of the study and new studies should be conducted in a larger context which will represent the youth from different regions of the state. Secondly, the data in the study came from a sample of college-going

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youth and more ratio of the female gender. The level and characteristics of social media addiction may be different for the school going students or the adults, therefore future studies should investigate the situation in adult populations. This may give a chance to compare generational aspects of social media addiction. The use of technology may be influenced by the culture in which the youth grow up and act. Thus, cross-cultural studies may provide a deeper understanding of social media addiction. Also, the present research was a quantitative one; a qualitative study might have more different findings.

CONCLUSION

Social media addiction is a behavioral addiction as it shows overly concerned about social media, driven by uncontrollable urge use and devoting much time and effort that it impairs other important areas of life. Excessive use can not only cause unhappiness and general dissatisfaction in life but also increase the risks of developing psychological distress such as anxiety, stress. It also causes social anxiety disorder as one keeps comparing self with others and creates the need for perfectionism. While at the same time there can be preventive measures taken. One of the best ways is to set boundaries to reduce screen time, parental monitoring, or in severe case, the professional intervention from counselors can turn helpful. Cognitive behavioral therapy can also be implemented to bring a shift in the thinking and behavioral patterns.

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Conflict of Interest

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