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Research Paper

Social Media Addiction, Boredom Proneness, and Mind-Wandering in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate the relationship between social media addiction, mind-wandering, and boredom proneness among young adults. Findings revealed a moderately strong correlation between social media addiction and mind-wandering, suggesting that excessive engagement with digital platforms can lead to cognitive fragmentation and spontaneous attentional shifts. This may be attributed to the way social media delivers rapid, high-reward stimuli that train the brain to seek constant novelty, thereby encouraging drifting attention and reducing sustained focus. Interestingly, boredom proneness showed only weak positive correlations with both social media addiction and mind-wandering, implying that boredom may not be consciously registered at all. Instead, it appears to be preemptively suppressed and replaced by conditioned responses such as task-switching, habitual scrolling, and cognitive drift. Drawing from theories such as Compensatory Internet Use, Dual-Process Models, and the Default Mode Network, the study highlights how modern digital environments may short-circuit emotional awareness, reinforcing cycles of distraction and passive consumption. Implications for attention, emotional processing, and digital well-being are discussed.

Keywords: *Social Media Addiction, Boredom Proneness, Mind-Wandering, Attentional Fragmentation, Digital Habits*

In the age of constant stimulation, moments of silence both internally and externally have become increasingly rare. Previously, boredom served important functions of introspection, moments of euphoria, or just a mindful rest. Now, in the presence of dopaminergic digital environments, boredom is being replaced by instant gratification. The presence of social media, though intended to connect us, has now created a widespread disconnection not only between people but also within ourselves. It has changed how we perceive and monitor our inner worlds. As the disconnection grows, people often report an inability to stay focused on a task or sit with stillness. They describe a phenomenon of drifting attention to unrelated thoughts, emotions, images, or external cues. This phenomenon, where our focus shifts away from the task at hand toward internal or external stimuli, is known as mind-wandering (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015).

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Mind-wandering is typically categorized into two types: deliberate mind-wandering, which arises intentionally and can foster creativity or self-reflection, and unintentional spontaneous mind wandering, which is intrusive, unproductive, and task-unrelated. (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015). While the former has historically been linked to creative insights and problem-solving like the Eureka moments, the latter is associated with attentional fragmentation, often worsened by digital overexposure. Increasingly, behaviors such as compulsive scrolling have eroded our capacity for deliberate mind-wandering, instead promoting a passive, spontaneous drift of attention. Extensive literature shows how social media and mind-wandering share a strong relationship; the same has been shown for boredom and mind-wandering, which are also positively associated with each other. But the subtle interplay between the triadic concepts of social media, boredom, and mind-wandering in the current age remains under-explored.

Social media apps, especially those designed for short-form media consumption such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, are known for their high-reward algorithm and feedback loops. The structural design is based on variable ratio reinforcement, thus making them not only addictive but also cognitively regulating (Alter, 2017). Prolonged exposure to short media content has been known to cause problems in delaying gratification (Wilmer et al., 2017). It has diminished individuals' capacity to sustain attention on long media content and has serious cognitive implications (Ralph et al., 2020). Several neuroscience studies have shown that social media can bring structural and functional changes in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. These regions are majorly involved in executive control, like controlling impulses, sustained attention, decision-making, etc.

Being continually exposed to chronic digital stimulation can impair parts of the Default Mode Network, which is a neural system that is related to mind-wandering and introspection (Raichle et al., 2001). When attention is not sustained, it can lead to a focus on internally generated thoughts. This has been associated with deliberate mind-wandering, which is responsible for planning and fostering creativity (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015). However, when attention has been dysregulated for a long time, due to habitual digital engagement, it can lead to instances of spontaneous mind-wandering. And as we know, spontaneous mind-wandering is unproductive, intrusive, and is often associated with this distractibility (Seli et al., 2016).

Existing literature suggests that boredom has been a major precursor to mind-wandering. It is often seen as an aversive affective state that has motivational grounds to it and is one of the reasons why people pursue stimulation (Eastwood et al., 2012). This stimulation can either be internal or external. Research has suggested that boredom proneness, especially state boredom, can contribute to maladaptive patterns of digital habits, including problematic smartphone use, more screen time (Elhai et al., 2018), and more chances of mind-wandering both internally and externally. This study originally hypothesized a linear model that social media addiction would increase boredom proneness, which would then lead to mind-wandering. However, the data revealed a far more nuanced and perhaps counterintuitive pattern.

People often turn to social media not because they can recognize that they are bored but because engaging in digital habits has become so reflexive that they don't even have a chance to register boredom (Turel & Bechara, 2016). The question remains whether boredom is still or is still not a conscious motivational affective state that initiates action or if it is passively bypassed by habitual digital behavior. Since social media has previously

been proven to be driven by external stimuli, the act of habitual scrolling reflects a possibility of internal cognitive drift, where the action is no longer volitional but conditioned. In this view, passive social media use and mind-wandering are no longer separate phenomena but rather co-occurring, internalized habit-driven behaviors stemming from reflexive engagement.

Modern boredom is increasingly replaced by micro-entertainment and digital stimuli. Previous studies have noted how such behavior reflects conditioned responses to external cues (Alter, 2017; Kuss & Griffiths, 2015). It can include compulsively checking notifications, passively doom scrolling, rapidly switching from one task to another, etc. The behavioral shift poses a question of whether boredom is consciously felt or is below the threshold of awareness. (Bench & Lench, 2013; Tamir et al., 2015).

This study aims to investigate the cyclical relationship between social media addiction, boredom proneness, and mind-wandering. It seeks to explore whether social media use disrupts attentional control, emotional processing of boredom, thus potentially reinforcing habitual cognitive drift. By examining how social media addiction influences both boredom proneness and mind-wandering tendencies, and how boredom, in turn, contributes to attentional lapses, this research adopts a cyclical lens on digital behavior. Demographic factors are also considered to explore how these relationships may differ across age groups, adding for subtlety to the theoretical understanding of digital behavior and emotional processing. Ultimately, it aims to explain how modern digital habits may interfere with the natural regulation of emotional states like boredom, and to highlight the cognitive and psychological costs of such interference in younger adults.

Research Questions

- To what extent does social media addiction predict mind-wandering tendencies and boredom proneness among young adults?
- Does high social media use reduce the conscious experience of boredom by promoting reflexive engagement behaviors?
- Do age and gender significantly influence the levels of social media addiction, boredom proneness, or mind-wandering among young adults?
- To what extent does compulsive social media use predict unintentional spontaneous mind-wandering, independent of self-reported boredom proneness?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Media Use and Mind-Wandering

The relationship between social media and mind-wandering has become increasingly significant in cognitive and behavioral research. Smallwood and Schooler (2015) introduced a distinction between deliberate and spontaneous mind-wandering, noting that the latter, often intrusive and unproductive, tends to increase with excessive digital media use. Their work highlights how constant digital engagement can erode attentional control, leading to unintentional cognitive drift.

Tarik Mohamed (2024) expanded on this in his study on academic settings. He found that frequent social media engagement correlated with higher levels of mind-wandering, although not directly with lower GPA. This partially supports the hypothesis, emphasizing how digital overstimulation disrupts attention even when measurable outcomes like grades remain unaffected.

Similarly, Wadsley and Ihssen (2023) reported that engaging with social media platforms increases spontaneous mind-wandering, especially when cognitive load is high. This contributes to a broader picture of attentional fragmentation and overload caused by digital media. Ralph et al. (2020) added another layer by studying how boredom and mind-wandering influence memory encoding. Their results showed that both variables negatively impact memory performance, with spontaneous mind-wandering showing the strongest effect. These findings suggest that digital media creates an environment of overstimulation and distraction, leading not only to fragmented attention but also to weakened memory, reduced coherence, and compromised learning.

Other theoretical explanations are habit loops and reinforcement learning models (Alter, 2017), which show how users can become conditioned to unpredictable rewards, responding to environmental cues like replacing boredom with reflexive digital habits. This could lead to the initiation of mind-wandering episodes that are often triggered by external stimuli like notifications but are internally maintained. This can form a feedback loop of cognitive drift, digital dependence, and increased distraction.

The workings of the Default Mode Network, which involves internally focusing on self-referential thoughts and daydreaming, have been found to be hyperactive during mind-wandering incidences. This has been shown in research by Kucyi (2018), who suggested how excessive digital media usage can dysregulate the DMN functioning, thus causing more frequent episodes of spontaneous mind-wandering. These can lead to disruptive habits, addiction tendencies, problems in staying focused, and habitual distractibility.

Emerging research is suggesting that impairment of working memory can be associated with excessive social media usage. Working memory is a critical component when it comes to executive function, which includes manipulating information by temporarily holding it. A comprehensive study by Dikshit and Kiran (2023) highlighted how habitual use of online social media platforms can negatively affect executive cognitive functioning that involves working memory. They designed interventions like mindfulness to medicate these adverse effects on working memory.

Multitasking also shares a close relationship with mind-wandering, since increased distractibility leads to more frequent switching of tasks. This has been shown in a study by Murphy and Creux (2021), who found that media multitasking is prevalent among social media users and is associated with decreased performance on various inhibition and working memory tasks. They suggested that switching between tasks is encouraged by social media platforms, which leads to a diminishing working memory capacity and has cognitive costs.

Another added effect of these problems in relation to working memory is the aspect of delayed gratification, which is the ability to resist immediate rewards in favor of long-term rewards. Delayed gratification has been shown to be affected by social media use in a study by Turel et al. (2018), who demonstrated how high social media addiction can lead to greater delay discounting effects over immediate larger delayed rewards. This behavior also has biological underpinnings and structural differences seen in the posterior insular cortex, which is a brain area that is highly associated with decision-making and impulsivity. To expand this framework, Schulz van Endert and Mohr (2020) also explored the relation between screen time and delay discounting behaviors. They found that increased screen time on digital devices has been associated with a higher tendency to choose immediate rewards over delayed ones. This can lead to problems that involve self-control, like impulsivity.

Social Media and Boredom Proneness

The excessive use of social media has been consistently linked to heightened boredom proneness. Kuss and Griffiths (2011) conducted a comprehensive review outlining how excessive engagement with social networking apps can lead to addictive patterns of behavior. These behaviors are often marked by salience, mood modification, and reduced tolerance to distress. Such patterns not only reflect compulsive engagement but also erode one's capacity to tolerate boredom, thereby increasing the need for constant stimulation.

Elhai et al. (2018) explored this connection further, revealing that boredom proneness mediates the relationship between problematic smartphone use and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Their findings suggest that individuals prone to boredom may use smartphones as a coping mechanism, thus reinforcing a cycle of reduced boredom tolerance and growing digital dependence. Similarly, Isacescu et al. (2017) found a strong relationship between boredom proneness, cognitive functioning, and affective dysregulation. Their study highlights how individual differences in self-control and attention predict susceptibility to boredom, which in turn shapes digital habits and media consumption styles.

Further supporting these observations, Wegmann et al. (2023), in their systematic review and meta-analysis, reported medium to large positive associations between boredom proneness and problematic digital media use. Their work suggests that individuals more prone to boredom are more likely to excessively engage with digital platforms in an attempt to self-regulate. Tam et al. (2020) also noted this relationship, showing how depression partially mediates the link between boredom proneness and problematic mobile phone use. Additionally, they found that attentional control moderates this relationship, where individuals with higher attentional control were less likely to fall into compulsive phone usage, despite their proneness to boredom.

Koessmeier and Büttner (2022) further investigated these dynamics in the context of procrastination. They found that individuals high in boredom proneness were more likely to engage in online procrastination, particularly through social media and instant messaging. Collectively, these findings underscore the role of boredom proneness as both a catalyst and a consequence of problematic digital media use.

Suppression and Unawareness of Boredom

A theme central to this research is the suppression or failure to consciously register boredom, an overlooked yet vital psychological phenomenon in the digital age. Turel and Bechara (2016) proposed that habitual social media use becomes automated over time, bypassing conscious processing. This automation can suppress boredom signals, preventing individuals from recognizing their emotional states and thus impeding engagement with meaningful activities. The result is a perpetuated cycle of passive digital consumption.

Westgate and Wilson (2018) emphasized that boredom is not just a passive state but an aversive signal, a motivational cue pushing individuals toward more meaningful engagement. However, in an age of instant gratification, technology tends to short-circuit this function. Instead of allowing people to sit with their thoughts or discomfort, digital devices provide immediate distraction. This avoidance, though comforting in the short term, may dull one's ability to introspect or engage deeply.

Danckert (2018) added that digital distractions serve as an escape from the discomfort that boredom elicits. Avoiding these internal signals can prevent self-reflection and interfere with

the pursuit of meaningful goals. They argued that social media eliminates traditional "downtime", which are moments for introspection and rest. Ironically, constant stimulation may amplify boredom proneness while making it harder to recognize. This unseen, unacknowledged boredom may even escalate into irrational or maladaptive behaviors.

Belinda, Melwani, and Kapadia (2024) found that suppressing boredom during tasks led to residual mind-wandering and decreased productivity in subsequent tasks. Interestingly, alternating boring tasks with meaningful ones reduced these effects, echoing the Ironic Process Theory (Wegner et al., 1987), which suggests that deliberately trying to suppress certain thoughts often makes them more persistent. In this light, the act of trying not to feel bored may actually intensify the experience, especially when this suppression becomes habitual.

The Compensatory Internet Use Theory (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) provides further insight. It posits that individuals may turn to the internet to cope with unmet psychological needs, such as loneliness, stress, or boredom. While initially compensatory, such behaviors can become habitual, reinforcing usage patterns that may spiral into addiction.

Kahneman's (2011) Dual-Process Theory adds a cognitive layer to this. When faced with boredom or emotional discomfort, individuals often default to System 1, which is fast, automatic, emotionally driven thinking, rather than System 2, which is slower and more reflective. In these moments, social media scrolling becomes an easy escape, bypassing the more effortful route of introspection or meaningful content grasping. Evans (2008) expands on this dual-system idea, emphasizing that boredom fosters impulsive, unreflective behaviors, hence the habitual scroll.

The Default Mode Network (Raichle et al., 2001), active during rest, mind-wandering, and introspection, is crucial here. Kucyi (2016) found that excessive social media engagement can dysregulate DMN functioning, disrupting healthy patterns of spontaneous, constructive mind-wandering. Since boredom naturally activates the DMN, suppressing boredom may lead to dysregulated DMN activity, reducing opportunities for meaningful cognitive engagement and increasing passive media consumption.

This theme also intersects with the concept of cognitive offloading, the tendency to delegate cognitive tasks to external tools (Risko & Gilbert, 2016). In the digital era, this includes not only offloading memory or attention but also emotion regulation. Boredom and stress, once motivational signals, are now being preemptively bypassed via screens. Rather than allowing boredom to arise and serve its purpose, individuals habitually turn to digital media at the earliest sign of disengagement, thereby reinforcing avoidance.

Katy Tam (2024) explored this idea through the phenomenon of rapid video switching on platforms like TikTok and YouTube. Her study revealed that frequent content switching is linked to increased boredom, not because individuals are bored to begin with, but because they're unaware of it. The need for constant stimulation masks their unmet desire for meaningful engagement. This directly aligns with the central argument of the present research: that boredom suppression, while unintentional, becomes habitual, conditioning the mind to bypass discomfort through constant digital input.

Boredom and mind-wandering

Boredom is often intertwined with mind-wandering and has emerged as one of the most significant exploratory areas in behavioral and cognitive sciences. These two constructs often influence each other in complex ways, especially in today's digital context. Zhou et al. (2022) investigated how boredom can affect cognitive flexibility in mind. Their study indicated that increased mind-wandering can lead to higher boredom levels. This can negatively impact cognitive flexibility, thereby leading to impaired ability to adapt to new situations. This impaired flexibility can lead to maladaptive cognitive patterns, such as increased spontaneous mind-wandering, where individuals often struggle to find and focus on meaningful engagement.

Reinecke et al. (2018) further studied the link between psychological well-being and digital behaviors. They conducted this study to see how mind-wandering and mindfulness can impact well-being and online vigilance. They found that constant alertness to the online stream of information can lead to decreased mindfulness and more mind-wandering. These are both associated with lower levels of well-being. These feelings often came from the fear of missing out (FOMO) as a part of social surveillance. This gives a reason why constant media vigilance leads to a reduction in being present at the moment. It highlighted the idea of how disconnection between internal states and conscious attention can lead to mental problems.

Another nuanced study was done by Martarelli et al. (2021) who found positive connections between boredom proneness with both spontaneous and deliberate mind-wandering. However, the correlation came stronger for spontaneous mind-wandering instead of deliberate, since the former is usually more disruptive than the latter. This suggested that individuals who are already prone to boredom are also vulnerable to unintentional cognitive drift. This provided an important distinction between these two concepts and how they affect cognition.

Finally, Irving et al. (2022) offered a nuanced take by showing that mind-wandering can function as an adaptive response to boredom. While spontaneous mind-wandering is often unhelpful, deliberate mind-wandering may serve as a coping strategy when external stimuli are lacking. Whereas spontaneous mind-wandering is more disruptive and less beneficial, often reinforcing social media addiction to cope with aversive feelings of boredom. This view aligns with Mood Management Theory (Zillmann, 1988), which suggests that individuals use media to regulate emotional states. Since boredom is aversive, social media becomes a coping tool for managing this discomfort, thus turning into a habitual self-regulation mechanism. However, this can become a habitual self-regulating coping mechanism, thus leading to passive addictive behavior and mental fatigue.

Gap in Literature

A lot of existing literature explains the individual relationships between boredom, social media addiction, and mind-wandering, but few have attempted to interrelate these three concepts together in a cyclical fashion. A lot of the current research treats boredom as a static personality trait and a predictor of digital behavior. But many overlook the experiential suppression of boredom that often arises from social media addiction and gives rise to frequent unintentional spontaneous mind-wandering episodes. The subtle way in which individuals no longer even register the onset of boredom, due to habitual instances of mind-wandering and digital overuse, has not been explored extensively yet.

Although some explanations exist, like the default mode network, cognitive offloading phenomena, or passive media consumption, they have not been correlated well in defining the masking experience of boredom. While most studies acknowledge that mind-wandering can result from boredom and excessive social media use, they rarely conceptualize it as a conditioned response to the suppression of boredom. This presents a critical blind spot, that digital media habits and mind-wandering episodes may not simply emerge from boredom, but rather reflect a process in which boredom is preempted entirely, never reaching conscious emotional awareness or cognitive processing.

Theoretical frameworks like Dual Process Theory and Compensatory Internet Use Theory explain why people engage impulsively with social media. But very few models attempt to capture boredom detection and boredom avoidance. Therefore, there is a gap in explaining why people are aware of their digital habits and mind-wandering tendencies, but not so for boredom.

This research aims to address these gaps in explaining why modern digital behaviors are not just driven by boredom but also train individuals to skip boredom altogether. It seeks to explain how conditioned cognitive drift is replacing boredom altogether, thus altering how we register motivational and emotional patterns in our behaviors and awareness.

Objectives

- To examine the correlation between social media addiction and boredom proneness.
- To analyze the relationship between boredom proneness and mind-wandering.
- To explore how social media addiction predicts mind-wandering tendencies.
- To evaluate the impact of demographic variables (age and gender) on the three constructs.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** There will be a significant relationship between social media addiction and boredom proneness among young adults.
- **H2:** There will be a significant relationship between boredom proneness and mind-wandering among young adults.
- **H3:** There will be a significant relationship between social media addiction and mind-wandering among young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Aim:

To investigate the relationship between social media addiction, boredom proneness, and mind-wandering among young adults and explore how digital habits influence attentional patterns and emotional processing.

Participants:

The study adhered to ethical guidelines as outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA). Approval was obtained from the relevant institutional research committee of AIPS. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. A total of 110 participants were recruited through online platforms, including university forums and social media channels. In which 73.6 % were females and 25.5% males. The sample comprised individuals from diverse academic backgrounds, occupations, and age groups between 18 and 35. Specific demographic

information (e.g., age, gender) was collected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participant pool.

Study Tools:

- **Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS):** Developed by M.G. Shahnawaz and Usama Rehman, the SMAS is a 21-item self-report measure designed to assess the extent of social media addiction. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), giving a total score between 21 and 147. A score above 84 indicates a significant level of social media addiction. The scale has six core components of addiction: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse. Previous research has demonstrated the scale's robust psychometric properties, including satisfactory internal consistency and construct validity.
- **Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS):** The BPS, developed by Farmer and Sundberg (1986), is a 28-item instrument aimed at measuring an individual's susceptibility to boredom. Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Highly Disagree) to 7 (Highly Agree), with total scores ranging from 28 to 168. Higher scores reflect a greater tendency toward experiencing boredom. The scale has demonstrated satisfactory levels of internal consistency with a coefficient alpha of .79 and test-retest reliability of .83.
- **Mind-Wandering Questionnaire (MWQ):** The MWQ, developed by Mrazek, Phillips, and colleagues, is a 5-item self-report measure assessing the frequency of mind-wandering in everyday life. Participants rate each item on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (Almost Never) to 6 (Almost Always). Higher average scores indicate a greater propensity for mind-wandering. The MWQ has shown high internal consistency and convergent validity with existing measures of mind-wandering and related constructs.

Procedure

Participants were asked to complete an online survey that comprised of the three aforementioned scales. The survey responses were collected through a well-secured Google form maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also asked to give their informed consent, were provided detailed instructions beforehand, and the participation was also voluntary, in which they had the option to withdraw at any point in time without penalty. After completing the survey, the participants' responses were recorded for subsequent statistical analysis.

Findings

To test the first hypothesis, that social media addiction would lead to higher boredom proneness in younger adults, Pearson's correlation and linear regression analysis were used. The correlation between the Social Media Addiction Scale and the Boredom Proneness Scale showed a weak positive correlation with a coefficient of 0.118. While positive, this correlation indicates that social media addiction shares only a minimal relationship with boredom proneness.

A linear regression analysis was also conducted, which revealed an R^2 value of 0.015. This shows that only 1.5% of the variance in boredom proneness can be explained by social media addiction. These findings highlight how social media has negligible influence on boredom, supporting the previously observed weak correlation.

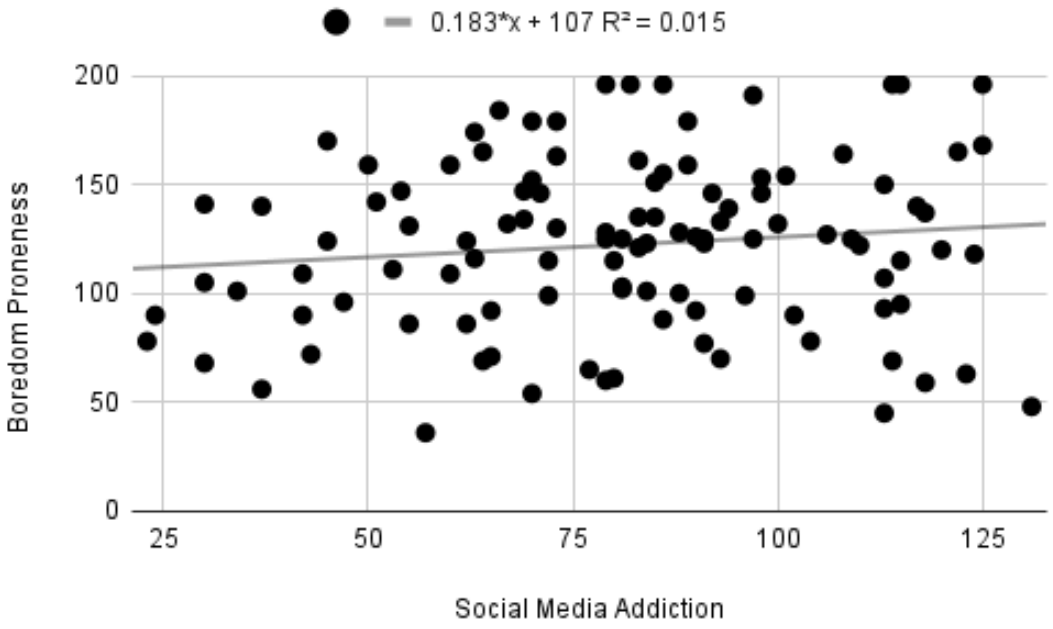

Figure 1. Illustrates a weak positive linear relationship between social media addiction and boredom proneness, suggesting minimal predictive power.

To test the second hypothesis, that higher boredom proneness would lead to higher incidences of mind-wandering, the same methods (Pearson's correlation and linear regression analysis) were applied between Boredom Proneness and Mind-Wandering. The results showed a weak positive correlation of 0.1168, confirming that the relationship between these two variables is weak.

Linear regression analysis further supported this observation, with an R^2 value of 0.011. This indicates that only 1.1% of the variance in mind-wandering can be explained by boredom proneness. While boredom proneness may contribute to mind-wandering to a minor extent, the results also imply that other factors are likely influencing this behavior.

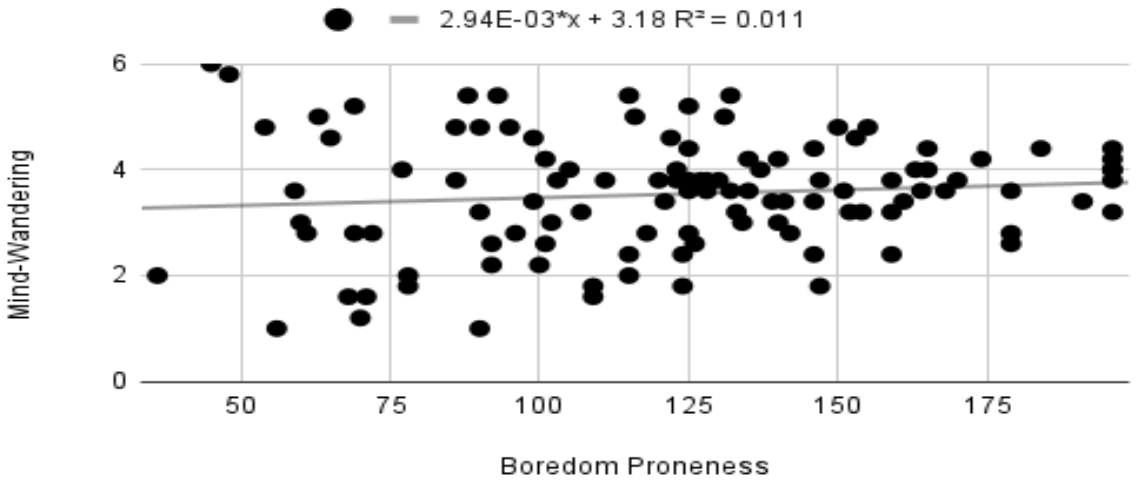

Figure 2. Displays a weak positive correlation between boredom proneness and mind-wandering, indicating that boredom only slightly explains the variance in cognitive drift.

To test the third hypothesis, that social media addiction would lead to higher incidences of mind-wandering, Pearson's correlation and linear regression analysis were again used. The results confirmed this hypothesis, with a moderately strong correlation of 0.49199 between the Social Media Addiction Scale and the Mind-Wandering Scale. This correlation indicates a moderate yet significant relationship between the two variables. It suggests that individuals with higher social media addiction tendencies are more likely to experience increased instances of mind-wandering.

Further supporting this hypothesis, the linear regression analysis revealed an R^2 value of 0.239, showing that 23.9% of the variance in mind-wandering can be explained by social media addiction. This moderately strong regression relationship implies that social media addiction is a significant predictor of mind-wandering. It suggests that individuals who frequently engage with social media are more likely to experience cognitive drifting and attentional dispersion.

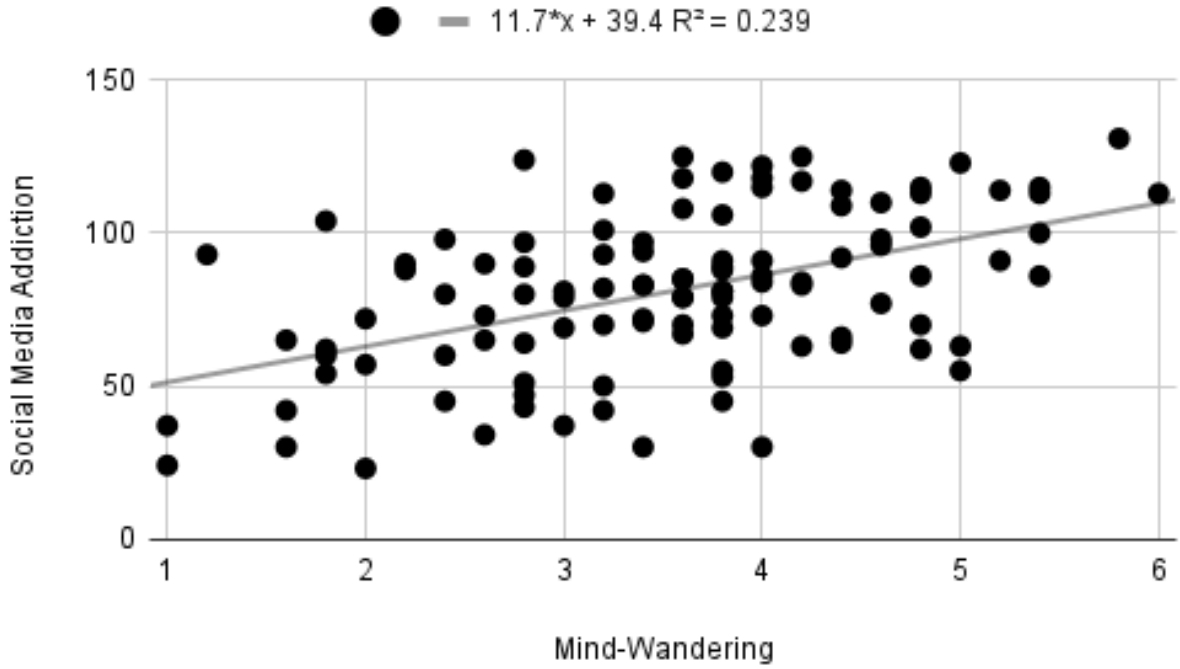

Figure 3. Displays a moderately strong positive correlation between social media addiction and mind-wandering, suggesting that higher social media addiction predicts increased mind-wandering.

Table No. 1 Correlation and Regression Results

S.No	Variables	r-value	p-value	Significance	R^2	Findings
1	Social Media Addiction and Boredom Pronenesss	0.118	$p > 0.05$	Not Significant	0.015	Minimal variance (1.5%)
2	Boredom Proneness and Mind-Wandering	0.1168	$p > 0.05$	Not Significant	0.011	Minimal variance (1.1%)

S.No	Variables	r-value	p-value	Significance	R^2	Findings
3	Social Media Addiction and Mind-Wandering	0.492	$p < 0.01$	** Significant	0.239	Moderate variance (23.9%)

Note: *$p < 0.01$ indicates significance at the 0.01 level (**). Correlations with $p > 0.05$ are not statistically significant.*

Table No. 2 Descriptive Results

S.No	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Social Media Addiction	80.86	26.04
2	Boredom Pronenesss	121.80	38.84
3	Mind-Wandering	3.54	1.082

Demographic Analysis

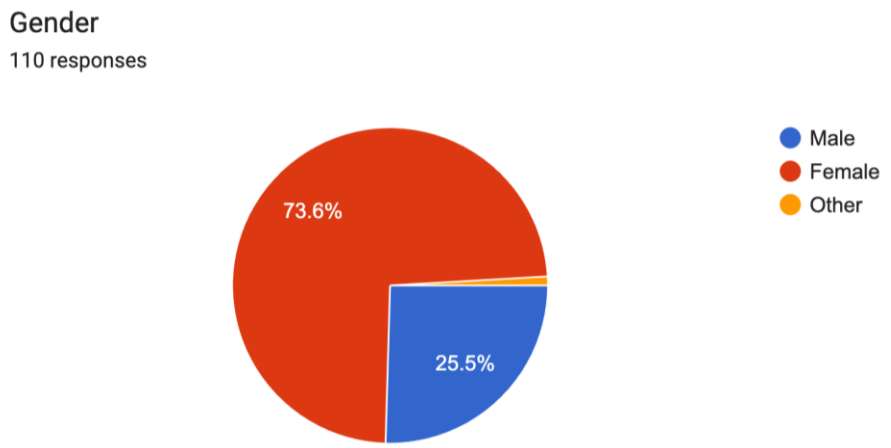

Figure 4. Displays gender distribution in responses where females account for 73.6%, males account for 25.5%, and Other accounts for 0.9%.

The demographic breakdown provides a better perspective on the relationship between social media addiction, boredom, and mind wandering. The sample size was 110, and it was predominantly female (73.6%), with males comprising 25.5% and 0.9% as Other. Prior to the analysis, all the raw scores were standardized using z-score normalization and re-scaled to the mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15 to allow for compatibility across variables. This helped control for differences in scale length and provided a standardized basis for inter-variable comparisons across age and gender groups.

Males aged 18–25 exhibited a borderline risk for social media addiction (M = 81.8), a moderate level of boredom proneness (M = 109), and a moderate tendency toward mind-wandering (M = 3.62). This combination suggests vulnerability to both digital addiction and attentional disengagement. In contrast, females aged 18–25 showed a similar borderline risk for social media addiction (M = 82), but a much higher level of boredom proneness (M = 123.78), alongside moderate mind-wandering tendencies (M = 3.56). These patterns suggest

that younger females may experience a greater psychological burden related to boredom, potentially increasing their susceptibility to both social media overuse and cognitive drifting.

Interestingly, only one participant was identified as other and falls within the pattern of the 18 to 25 age range. They showed high boredom proneness and mind-wandering despite low social media addiction. Even though this is a N=1 case, it hints that there might be potential non-digital origins of cognitive drift. And indicates the risk factor of higher cognitive drifting and high boredom proneness trait. Because the sample size for the 'Other 'category is minuscule, generalization can't be entirely made.

Among the 25–35 age group, both males and females exhibited lower social media addiction compared to their younger counterparts. Males aged 25–35 scored 78.4 on social media addiction and 126.2 on boredom proneness, the highest boredom score among male subgroups, with a slightly reduced mind-wandering score (M = 3.47). This indicates that while digital engagement may reduce with age, boredom susceptibility persists or even increases, possibly manifesting in non-digital disengagement. Females aged 25–35 followed a similar trend, with lower social media addiction (M = 79.25), high boredom proneness (M = 119), and slightly lower mind-wandering (M = 3.4). These results suggest a shift toward greater executive control in older participants, despite ongoing vulnerability to boredom-related disengagement.

Overall, the data reveal meaningful gender and age differences. Females across both age groups showed consistently high boredom proneness, while males exhibited a sharper decline in mind-wandering and social media use with age. The predominance of female participants in the sample (73.6%) may partly explain the overall elevation in boredom scores. These patterns support the idea that boredom susceptibility may play a key role in shaping digital behavior and internal attentional states, particularly among younger individuals.

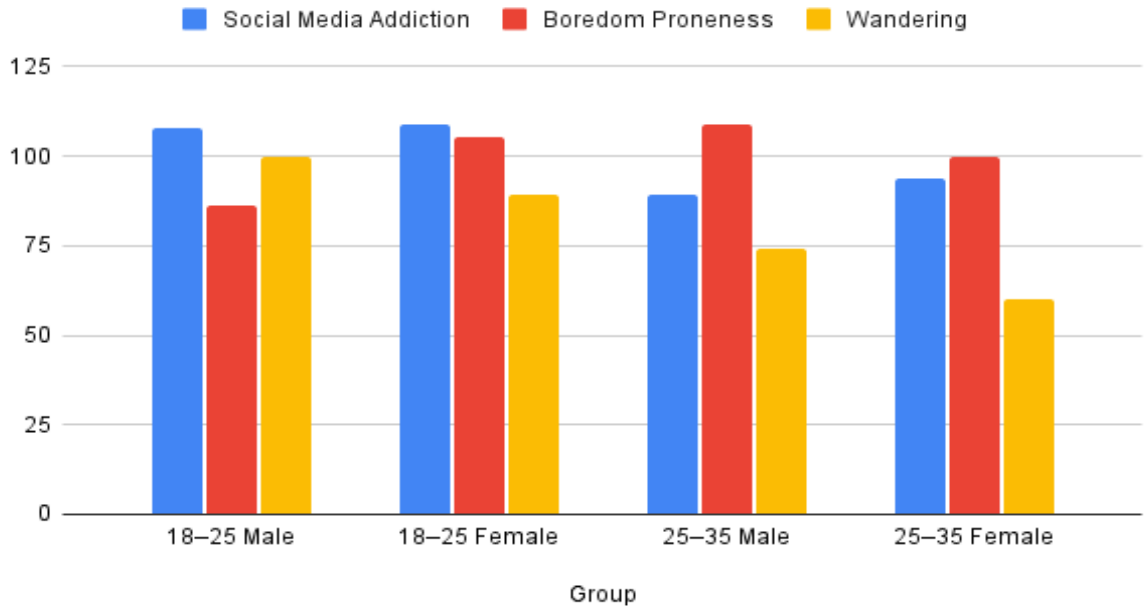

Figure 5. Bar graph displays the mean scores of participants across three variables (SMAS, BPS, and MWS) based on age and gender groupings. It shows average scores of Social Media Addiction, Boredom Proneness, and Mind-Wandering across Gender and Age Groups. X-axis depicts Categories and Y-axis depicts Average Scores.

DISCUSSION

H1: There will be a significant relationship between social media addiction and boredom proneness among young adults.

This study found a weak but positive correlation between boredom proneness and social media addiction (r = 0.118). This helps explain the study's finding that boredom proneness and social media addiction were only weakly correlated, contrasting with earlier literature (Wegner, 2017; Van Hiel & Vansteenkiste, 2006). If boredom is no longer experienced in full awareness, it would make sense that self-reported boredom scores are low even when other indicators like compulsive media use or frequent mind-wandering are high.

This implies that social media use is no longer just a response to boredom; it has become an automated behavior, emerging from environmental cues and internal restlessness, rather than from a conscious experience of boredom itself. This interpretation aligns with models such as cognitive offloading (Risko & Gilbert, 2016), where individuals increasingly depend on external tools, like smartphones and social media, to minimize cognitive effort. In this context, social media becomes a convenient escape from even the mild discomfort of boredom.

Rather than letting boredom act as a cognitive motivator for reflection or engagement, individuals short-circuit that signal by immediately engaging with digital stimuli. This disrupts the natural processing of internal states. Over time, the result is a conditioned cognitive reflex where any momentary lull in engagement doesn't lead to reflection but to automatic external distraction, creating a loop that leads to mind-wandering while suppressing the very awareness of boredom.

To frame this within broader theoretical models, the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) suggests that digital engagement often functions as a coping mechanism for unmet emotional or psychological needs. While past literature connects boredom to social media addiction via this route, the current findings suggest that this compensation may have become so habitual that individuals no longer register the initial discomfort. What they experience instead is the habitual resolution eg. mindless scrolling, fleeting mental drift, while the original trigger (boredom) remains submerged in the background.

H2: There will be a significant relationship between boredom proneness and mind-wandering among young adults.

This study found a weak but positive correlation between boredom proneness and mind-wandering (r = 0.117). This raised an interesting observation - that even though participants did not report being particularly prone to boredom, they did report frequent mind-wandering episodes. This hints at a deeper cognitive shift, suggesting that boredom may no longer be consciously acknowledged, suggesting that mind-wandering may now function as a behavioral proxy, a signal that something is amiss beneath the surface (Danckert & Merrifield, 2018; Smallwood & Schooler, 2015).

In other words, people notice their attention slipping. They notice the compulsive use of digital platforms. But they rarely interpret these as signs of being bored. This disconnect indicates that boredom may now be bypassed altogether, never fully registered, and yet its crumbs can still be seen in other cognitive and behavioral indicators.

Traditional research has often described boredom as a signal for cognitive engagement and exploratory motivation (Westgate & Wilson, 2018; Gerritsen et al., 2014). However, what this study suggests is that we might be seeing a psychological and behavioral transition, from experiencing boredom as a signal to reflexively avoiding it. This shift points toward a broader cognitive adaptation in modern environments, where the moment boredom begins to arise, it is automatically suppressed and replaced, often by unintentional spontaneous mind-wandering episodes shaped by digital habits.

As a result, boredom is not absent; it is simply displaced. The internal state doesn't get registered consciously, but its consequences are externalized in the form of increased attentional drift and digital overuse.

H3: There will be a significant relationship between social media addiction and mind-wandering among young adults.

This study found a strong positive correlation between social media addiction and mind-wandering ($r = 0.492$). This suggests that individuals who compulsively use social media experience more instances of spontaneous cognitive drift. The finding between social media addiction and mind-wandering supports prior theoretical frameworks that excessive digital media can impair attentional control (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015).

Social media apps are designed to structurally change executive functions by presenting highly rewarding and low-effort content. Overtime, this may condition the brain to favor these short dopaminergic circuits, reducing tolerance for sustained focus on cognitively demanding tasks. The strong relationship explains how attention is being dominated by constant digital engagement and facilitating spontaneous unintentional cognitive drift as a default state.

Moreover, the strong positive correlation between social media addiction and mind-wandering is central to the thesis. It reinforces the idea that excessive social media use doesn't just fragment attention, it creates a breeding ground for mind-wandering where it becomes the default cognitive mode, especially when internal cues like boredom are masked rather than acknowledged.

Drawing from reinforcement learning theory (Skinner, 1938; Schultz et al., 1997), this pattern makes sense: social media operates on a variable-ratio schedule of reward, where users scroll in anticipation of unpredictable gratification. This not only strengthens compulsive checking behavior but may also mirror the unanchored, drifting quality of mind-wandering itself. In both cases, the mind is pulled toward stimulation, even in the absence of conscious intent.

This also finds support in dual-process models of cognition, such as Kahneman's (2011) System 1 and System 2 framework (Evans, 2008). The impulsive, fast nature of System 1 might now be increasingly dominant, especially under conditions of boredom or attentional fatigue. Instead of engaging in reflective System 2 thinking, when bored, people default to the easier, habitual route of digital engagement. This reinforces the behavioral loop between social media use and spontaneous mind-wandering.

A biological explanation can be drawn from the Default Mode Network (DMN) model (Raichle et al., 2001). The DMN is activated during passive, internally directed

contemplation, such as daydreaming or reflection. However, excessive social media use may hijack the DMN's natural function, replacing meaningful cognitive engagement with fragmented, externally stimulated mind-wandering. In this way, boredom no longer transitions into imaginative or goal-directed thought, but instead triggers a shallow, stimulus-driven mental state.

Social Media Addiction → mind-wandering
↓ ↑
(weak) (weak)
Boredom Proneness (not consciously processed)

Demographic Observations

The age and gender breakdowns add further nuance. The 18–25 age group reported the highest levels of social media addiction and mind-wandering, reflecting their increased emotional sensitivity and cognitive susceptibility in digital contexts. This reinforces the strong correlation found in our statistical analysis that younger generations are more immersed in these digital ecosystems, thus making them more vulnerable to attentional fragmentation. They showed relatively lower boredom proneness levels than the other older age groups, hinting that younger populations are not even acknowledging boredom as one of the reasons for their frequent mind-wandering episodes caused by social media addiction. This group may also be more prone to impulsivity and social comparison, factors that likely contribute to both higher addiction scores and greater attentional dispersion.

One participant identified as 'Other 'in gender, but due to insufficient sample size, this category was not analyzed separately. Though their scores have been acknowledged in the results section.

Interestingly, participants aged 18-25 seem to experience more frequent mind-wandering, report lower levels of boredom, but are more addicted to social media. This triad of results perfectly reflects the study's central thesis: that boredom is increasingly bypassed rather than experienced, with mind-wandering and digital habits acting as immediate cognitive substitutes. Rather than feeling bored and deciding to use social media, young people might not even get to the "bored" part; they jump straight into scrolling, while their minds drift elsewhere, creating a loop of suppressed awareness and increasing cognitive dispersion.

In contrast, participants aged 25–35 reported lower mind-wandering, despite higher levels of boredom. This is consistent with the central reasoning which suggests that older adults have greater executive control, attentional stability, and self-regulation capacities because of less use of social media platforms. These individuals might still experience boredom, but they are less likely to react impulsively to it. Their lower social media addiction scores support this, suggesting that they are more likely to register boredom consciously and resist masking it through digital distractions or spontaneous mind-wandering.

The findings support the idea that social media acts as a precursor for triggering spontaneous and unintentional mind-wandering episodes, by displacing boredom in younger populations. The instant gratification loop is interrupting the recognition of boredom in its entirety, leading to a more distracted state that further reinforces social media addictive habits. This behavioral loop impairs the ability to engage in deliberate and reflective mind-wandering which has been associated with problem-solving, creativity, planning, novelty, etc. It's leading to a passive, fragmented attentional state, that also leads to a hypo-awareness of

boredom. This reinforces the theoretical narrative that social media is becoming an automated attentional behavior, that is instantly replacing boredom, fragmenting focus, and leading to conditions where the mind relies on external stimulation for cognitive realigning.

Limitations

While the current study has provided comprehensive insights into social media addiction, boredom proneness, and mind-wandering, there are several limitations.

The sample size, particularly for the 'Other' gender category, was small, thus making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from this group. Additionally, the sample primarily consisted of young adults aged between 18-35, thus limiting the generalizability of findings to other age groups and demographic populations. Although the study was meant to study young adults, it mostly comprised female participants, which might affect broader gender representation across different gender identities.

Another limitation was that this study relied solely on self-reported questionnaires, which might have been subjected to social desirability bias. Participants may have either reported their behavior in haste or provided inaccurate responses due to overanalyzing their behaviors, which might affect the reliability.

Since the analysis majorly relied on Pearson's correlation and regression analysis, it provided a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to assign causality between social media addiction, boredom proneness, and mind-wandering. The correlation data only provides insights into speculative reasons, but future research can make use of this research in finding direction between potential causes between these three variables.

Implications and Future Directions

This research has highlighted the urgency to understand how social media addiction can reshape our internal cognitive functioning, thus affecting our behavior. Mind-wandering has long been thought of as a natural cognitive drift, but is now being reinforced by external habits. This is leading to an erosion of our sustained focus capacity, making us vulnerable to distraction. Future studies can explore interventions designed to enhance boredom tolerance and deliberate mind-wandering for enhanced productivity and greater focus. This can also include reevaluating compulsive digital habits and reducing digital checking, thereby helping individuals gain cognitive agency. Longitudinal research can also work upon this aspect to see how these patterns can influence future academic performance, decision-making, impulsivity control, and emotional regulation.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the intricate relationship between social media addiction, boredom proneness, and mind-wandering among young adults. Although all three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) were supported in terms of directionality, the strength of the observed relationships varied. The findings revealed that social media addiction significantly predicts mind-wandering, thus speculating that cognitive drift might occur due to constant digital media engagement. Surprisingly, boredom proneness demonstrated only a weak positive relationship with both social media addiction and mind-wandering, suggesting that boredom is not fully processed or brought into conscious awareness. These results indicate the possibility of boredom being swiftly replaced by mind-wandering, which cycles back into more social media engagement, thus increasing distractibility and impaired focus.

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Conflict of Interest

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