

Research Paper

## A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Social media's ascent in recent decades has changed how people engage, communicate, and support one another. The analysis was conducted on a sample of 140 participants, equally divided into two groups namely male and female. Descriptive statistics revealed that participants identified as female reported slightly higher ICT usage scores, greater perceived social support, and elevated levels of psychological distress (including stress, anxiety, and depression) compared to their male counterparts. Further correlation analysis supported several meaningful findings. ICT usage was found to have a small but statistically significant positive correlation with stress, anxiety, and depression. A strong negative correlation was observed between ICT usage and perceived social support scores. Moreover, there were strong positive correlations among stress, anxiety, and depression, with an almost perfect correlation between anxiety and depression, emphasizing the interconnected nature of psychological distress components. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on the psychological implications of digital connectivity.

**Keywords:** *ICT, Social Media, Psychological Distress, Anxiety*

In recent decades, the rise of social media has transformed human interaction, communication, and support systems. What began as platforms for casual information sharing have evolved into dynamic, multifunctional spaces that now shape personal relationships, emotional expression, and mental health. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, and TikTok are not merely digital tools; they are central features of daily life, especially among young adults.

As the digital landscape expands, so too does its influence on psychological and social well-being. Social media enables users to form online communities, share experiences, and receive emotional and informational support, often from individuals they have never met in person. This shift has changed the traditional model of social support, challenging researchers and clinicians to understand the implications of digitally mediated relationships on mental health. While previous research has extensively examined the negative consequences of social media such as cyber bullying, social comparison, and digital addiction—there is growing interest in its potential for positive psychological outcomes.

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## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

Online spaces may serve as supportive environments, particularly for individuals facing stigma, isolation, or mental health challenges. However, critical questions remain regarding the effectiveness, authenticity, and psychological consequences of online support.

Understanding the evolving role of social media in mental health and support systems is vital, not only for academic discourse but also for developing practical interventions. As societies become increasingly digitally connected, it becomes essential to explore how these platforms influence social adjustment, support-seeking behaviors, and emotional resilience.

This study situates itself within this intersection, examining how social media platforms facilitate or hinder the exchange of social support and the resulting implications for mental well-being. It responds to the urgent need to assess both the opportunities and limitations of digital support systems in the context of global mental health.

### ***Evolution of Social Media***

To contextualize the relevance of this study, it is essential to understand the development and function of social media platforms in shaping human interaction.

Over the past two decades, social media has transitioned from a basic tool for information exchange into a powerful and versatile communication platform. Its integration into marketing, branding, education, and personal communication is now indispensable. These platforms have enabled unprecedented levels of interaction among businesses, consumers, and peer groups, allowing for seamless communication across business-to-business, business-to-consumer, and consumer-to-consumer contexts.

The rise of different social media platforms has paralleled advancements in technology, each becoming more interactive, more persuasive in shaping user behavior, and more adept at targeting and engaging specific audiences. These developments did not occur overnight; rather, they reflect an evolving digital landscape driven by innovation and changing communication needs. Understanding this progression provides valuable insight into social media's expanding influence, particularly in the realm of social support and mental well-being.

Social media has fundamentally altered how people communicate, form relationships, and seek help. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have become embedded in everyday life, enabling individuals to interact without the constraints of geography. This digital shift holds important implications for mental health, especially in how individuals access and experience social support. With the widespread adoption of digital platforms, social norms and interaction styles have also changed. These platforms influence every facet of personal relationships, including how people share experiences, express emotions, and seek validation.

One area significantly impacted is social adjustment—the process by which individuals adapt to their social environments through forming relationships, enhancing social skills, and integrating into various social contexts. Social adjustment is essential for mental and emotional growth, and the influence of social media on this process is complex and multifaceted.

## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

While digital platforms help individuals build support networks and express emotions, they also present notable challenges. Social media offers a space for connection, particularly among younger individuals who may turn to these platforms for emotional comfort. However, issues such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and the pressure to maintain an idealized online image can increase stress, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, heavy reliance on digital communication may diminish face-to-face interaction skills, raising concerns among mental health professionals and educators alike.

This research aims to explore the relationship among social media, psychological distress and social support. By reviewing current literature and examining existing research, the study will identify the strengths and limitations of social media in fostering healthy social interactions and suggest strategies for mitigating potential harms. Ultimately, the study intends to offer valuable insights for individuals, educators, and policymakers as they respond to the evolving role of social media in modern society.

### ***Social Media and Mental Health***

Mental health encompasses more than the absence of mental disorders; it reflects a state of well-being in which individuals realize their potential, manage daily stresses, contribute to their communities, and engage in productive activities. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) highlights that mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall health and is essential for human functioning.

Bhugra, Till, and Sartorius (2013) expand this definition by noting that mental health involves the ability to form close relationships, adapt to changing circumstances, and effectively express and regulate emotions. They emphasize that a strong sense of self-worth and emotional stability are integral to positive mental health.

Galderisi et al. (2015) further conceptualize mental health as a dynamic state of internal balance, involving the effective use of cognitive and emotional skills, empathy, and the ability to manage adversity. According to this view, a harmonious connection between mind and body is key to psychological resilience and overall well-being.

Social media's influence on mental health is multifaceted. On one hand, it offers users a platform for self-expression and emotional release. For instance, Yuan et al. (2023) found that reading and sharing mental health coping narratives on Twitter was associated with reduced stress and lower depressive symptoms. These findings suggest that engaging with supportive content online can promote emotional resilience.

On the other hand, there are concerns about the effectiveness of online support compared to in-person connections. Shensa et al. (2019) reported that while face-to-face support reduced depression, support received through social media was associated with higher depressive symptoms among young adults. This raises questions about the depth and quality of digital emotional support.

College students, in particular, are vulnerable to mental health issues exacerbated by academic pressures. Vornholt and De Choudhury (2021) found that a significant number of students turn to social media for self-expression and emotional support during times of stress. Although this can foster connection, concerns about digital privacy and emotional boundaries remain critical.

## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

Moreover, excessive use of social media has been linked to increased psychological distress. Twenge (2024) observed that prolonged use of platforms like TikTok and Instagram was associated with greater feelings of inadequacy, depression, and suicidal ideation in adolescents. The study underscores the addictive potential of these platforms and the importance of promoting digital well-being.

### ***Social Media and Social Support***

In today's digital era, social media has become a central feature of everyday life, altering the ways people communicate, seek information, and form connections. Platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, and Twitter serve as virtual communities where users share experiences, participate in discussions, and access various forms of support. Beyond entertainment and networking, social media now plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, promoting collective identities, and influencing mental health.

One of the most significant aspects of social media is its potential to offer emotional and informational support, particularly to those who find traditional interactions challenging. These platforms provide spaces for individuals to seek reassurance, advice, and empathy from both familiar and unfamiliar contacts. However, the relationship between social media and mental health is complex, involving both positive and negative dimensions. While digital platforms can foster a sense of belonging and support, they can also expose users to misinformation, online harassment, and superficial interactions that may not provide meaningful emotional connection.

Social support includes the emotional, informational, and practical resources individuals receive from their social networks—including family, friends, and online communities. It plays an essential role in psychological well-being by helping individuals manage stress, build resilience, and maintain positive mental health. Traditionally, such support was delivered through face-to-face interactions. However, the development of digital communication has significantly broadened access to support systems, eliminating geographical and social barriers.

Online platforms now allow people to connect with others who share similar struggles, offering validation and solidarity. These interactions can be particularly valuable for individuals experiencing isolation or stigma in offline settings. Despite these advantages, there are lingering concerns about the authenticity and depth of online support. Questions persist regarding whether digital connections can provide the same level of emotional closeness and comfort as in-person relationships.

### ***Social Support through Social Media***

Despite growing concerns about the psychological risks of social media, digital platforms can also serve as valuable sources of support, especially for individuals who are socially isolated. Knapton (2024) found that regular internet use among older adults was associated with lower depressive symptoms and higher life satisfaction, suggesting that online engagement can reduce loneliness and strengthen social ties.

However, the effectiveness of digital support varies depending on external factors. According to the CDC (2024), while social media can offer emotional support, broader influences such as family relationships and school environments play a more significant role

## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

in adolescent mental health. These findings highlight the need to consider digital support as part of a broader, integrated support system rather than a standalone solution.

Social support is widely recognized as a key determinant of mental health, contributing to a sense of belonging, emotional safety, and psychological resilience (Kaplan, Cassel, & Gore, 1977). It buffers against the effects of stress and promotes healthier coping mechanisms (Cohen & Wills, 1983). Rappaport (1993) emphasized the value of shared community narratives in fostering social identity and personal development, offering alternative pathways to traditional psychotherapy.

Cutrona and Suhr (1992) proposed a framework that divides social support into five types: informational, instrumental, esteem, network, and emotional support. Despite its documented benefits, inconsistencies in the delivery and effectiveness of support systems remain a challenge (Thoits, 1982). This study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing how support is exchanged in online mental health communities and how these interactions influence psychological resilience.

### ***Online Communities and Social Support***

Digital communities are increasingly recognized for their role in mental health promotion. Rains and Young (2009) found that receiving support in online spaces can lower depression, enhance self-efficacy, and improve general well-being. Social media platforms offer accessible resources for individuals facing health-related challenges. For instance, Oh et al. (2013) noted that people experiencing health concerns often turn to Facebook for support and information. Similarly, Andalibi et al. (2016) explored how survivors of sexual abuse use Reddit to seek emotional support and community connection.

The present research also considers the role of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in shaping social media use and its impact on psychological well-being. Drawing from the Belongingness Hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and Information Foraging Theory (Muntinga & Taylor, 2018; Trepass, 2018), the study investigates how individuals use digital platforms to fulfill their social needs.

Although social media is designed to foster connectivity, paradoxically, many users report increased loneliness and disconnection (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Understanding the psychological drivers behind social media engagement is essential for balancing its benefits with potential drawbacks, particularly in the context of social support and mental health.

Elsevier Inc. (2010) investigated Facebook's role in facilitating social support and influencing psychological well-being. The study reported a direct relationship between Facebook engagement and perceived support, suggesting that online social activity may serve as a stronger predictor of support than the number of close offline connections. However, the study found no significant association between Facebook usage and life satisfaction. Gender did not appear to influence support reception, and while fixed Internet use negatively correlated with life satisfaction, mobile usage did not show the same effect.

Gowen, K., Deschaine, M., Gruttadara, D., & Markey, D. (2012) noted that individuals with severe mental disorders and young adults experiencing mental illness engage in online relationship-building and social media interactions at levels similar to those of the general

## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

population. This finding is particularly significant, given that such individuals often face limited offline social interactions and an increased sense of loneliness.

Gowen (2013) further observed that young adults with mental health challenges often turn to social media for support and peer connection. While digital spaces help reduce isolation, the study highlighted concerns such as privacy, credibility of information, and exposure to distressing content.

Robinson et al. (2016) found that young individuals used social media as a primary tool for seeking help and sharing mental health experiences. These platforms filled the gap for those unable to access formal mental health services, although concerns about content reliability and the need for digital literacy were raised.

Naslund et al. (2016) also examined how social media supports individuals with serious mental illness (SMI). Their findings emphasized the sense of belonging and emotional validation gained from online communities. However, the study raised concerns about exposure to harmful content and misinformation, underlining the need for careful moderation and critical engagement.

Ahmed et al. (2019) highlighted the growing significance of social media for individuals managing mental health challenges. Their definition encompassed various mobile and web-based technologies—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and LinkedIn—that foster virtual communities for users to connect, share content, and offer mutual support.

Naslund, J.A., Bondre, A., Torous, J., & Aschbrenner, K.A. (2020) found that individuals with mental health conditions engage with social media at rates comparable to the general population. Engagement levels ranged from 70% among older adults to over 97% among younger users, reinforcing the widespread adoption of digital platforms across age groups.

Fitzpatrick, Harris, and Drawve (2020) examined the #chatsafe initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting social media's potential as a supportive space for at-risk individuals. The campaign was found to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behavior, although the authors noted a need for further exploration into long-term impacts.

González-Padilla and Tortolero-Blanco (2020) explored the dual role of social media during the pandemic. While platforms enabled real-time health communication and emotional support, they also became channels for misinformation, digital fatigue, cyberbullying, and harmful self-comparisons—factors that could worsen psychological distress.

Rice et al. (2020) expanded on the supportive role of social media among youth, highlighting the accessibility of peer support and mental health resources online. While emphasizing benefits, they also warned against misinformation and damaging social comparisons.

Smith and Miller (2022) emphasized how platforms like Facebook and Twitter create virtual communities for individuals struggling with mental health issues. These interactions alleviate loneliness and foster emotional well-being by promoting social engagement.

## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

Anderson, Smith, and Johnson (2023) highlighted how social media enhances emotional well-being during stressful periods. Their findings underscored that digital platforms facilitate access to social support and reduce feelings of isolation.

Lee and Chen (2023) discussed the dual nature of social media's influence on mental health. Users engaging with mental health content often reported reduced stress and depressive symptoms, but the study also highlighted risks associated with excessive use and emotional overexposure.

Kumar, Patel, and Roy (2023) focused on the negative consequences of social media, finding that harmful comparisons and toxic interactions on these platforms can amplify anxiety and depression.

Williams, Johnson, and Walker (2023) evaluated social media's role during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the platforms offered emotional relief and reduced loneliness, constant exposure to distressing news cycles contributed to increased anxiety and emotional burnout among youth.

Adams and Green (2023) analyzed Reddit's mental health forums and found that users often depend on these platforms for emotional validation and long-term peer support. Their findings were mirrored by Baker and O'Conner (2023), who emphasized the therapeutic role of community-driven engagement in online forums.

Morini et al. (2023) studied Reddit discussions on depression and highlighted the importance of emotional validation and community bonding in these spaces. However, concerns were raised over the lack of professional moderation and the risk of circulating misinformation.

Pantic (2023) offered a comprehensive review of social media's dual impact on mental health. While positive emotional outcomes were fostered through supportive networks, serious risks—including cyberbully, toxic comparison, and addiction—were also acknowledged. The study urged more nuanced investigations factoring in age, gender, and cultural background.

Plackett et al. (2023) explored social media-based interventions incorporating Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Structured online programs were associated with positive mental health outcomes. Yet, limitations emerged due to over-reliance on university populations and non-diverse samples, restricting generalization.

Yuan, Saha, Isometsä, and Aledavood (2023) analyzed coping narratives shared on Twitter, finding that storytelling on digital platforms promoted emotional resilience and communal solidarity. Still, they warned that cyberbully and negative interactions may undercut these benefits.

Johns Hopkins Medicine (2024) explored social media as a mental health support space, especially for adolescents and young adults. The study acknowledged the rise of peer forums and online therapy but cautioned that privacy concerns and data security remain significant barriers to widespread adoption.

## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

Despite increasing attention to the mental health effects of social media, much of the existing literature focuses on its negative aspects, such as cyberbully, social comparison, and addictive behaviors. Fewer studies explore how social media can facilitate healing, identity formation, and resilience through online support systems. Moreover, the mechanisms of how support is exchanged on these platforms—and their psychological impact—remain insufficiently explored. Cultural contexts, personality traits, and the quality of digital relationships are often underrepresented in current research.

### ***Aim of the study***

This study aims to understand how young adults use Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and how this is related to their psychological distress and the social support they feel they have. The study also focuses on finding out if there are any differences between males and females in terms of their ICT usage, levels of psychological distress, and perceived social support. The research aims to explore how ICT usage, especially through social media, is linked to psychological distress and social support. The study hopes to give a clearer picture of how technology use and emotional well-being are connected in the lives of young adults.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

- To compare gender differences in ICT usage
- To compare gender differences in Psychological Distress
- To compare gender differences in Social Support
- To examine the relationship between ICT (social media) usage, Psychological Distress and Perceived Social Support among young adults.

### ***Hypotheses of the Study***

- H1: Female would be report higher ICT usage in comparison to male
- H2: Female would be report higher Psychological Distress in comparison to male
- H3: Female would be report higher Social Support in comparison to male
- H4: There would be a significant negative correlation between ICT usage and perceived social support and a significant positive correlation between ICT usage and psychological distress.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

This study employs a quantitative research design to explore the relationship among social media usage, psychological distress and social support in young adults aged 18 to 25. The design focuses on collecting numerical data through structured questionnaires to assess various dimensions of mental health, social support, and ICT engagement. A correlational design is used, and data was collected from participants to understand the current state of these variables.

### ***Participants***

In the present study, the study sample consists of young adults aged between 18 and 25 years, as this group is highly active on social media platforms and may experience significant mental health challenges. A total of 140 college students participated in the study, including 70 male and 70 female students. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling method, based on their availability and willingness to participate.

# **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

## ***Description of the Measuring tools***

The tools used in the present research were selected based on their suitability to the research objective of the study. This section outlines the psychometric tools employed to measure the constructs of information and communication technology use, psychological distress and social support.

### **1. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Scale**

This scale developed by Dr. Shoaib Hasan, which assesses the usage patterns of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) among individuals. The scale comprises 21 items, which are divided into three dimensions:

Accessibility (7 items)

Duration (9 items)

Purpose (5 items)

Participants are asked to rate each statement based on their usage of ICT over the past week, using a 4-point Likert scale. The Likert scale ranges from:

1 = "Strongly Disagree"

2 = "Disagree"

3 = "Agree"

4 = "Strongly Agree"

Higher scores on this scale indicate more frequent or intensive ICT use.

### **2. Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale – 21 Items (DASS-21)**

The DASS-21, developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), is designed to assess the severity of depression, anxiety, and stress. The scale consists of 21 items, grouped into three subscales:

Depression (7 items)

Anxiety (7 items)

Stress (7 items)

Participants are asked to rate how much each item applied to them during the past week using a 4-point Likert scale:

0 = "Did not apply to me at all"

1 = "Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time"

2 = "Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time"

3 = "Applied to me very much, or most of the time"

Higher scores on each subscale indicate greater levels of depression, anxiety, or stress.

### **3. Social Support Scale**

The Social Support Scale is a 21-item tool designed to measure perceived social support from various sources in an individual's life. It evaluates three dimensions of social support:

Emotional support

Informational support

Problem-solving support

Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from:

1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 7 = "Strongly Agree"

This scale measures how supported individuals feel daily and has been widely used in research examining social support.

## A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults

### *Procedure*

The questionnaires as mentioned earlier (Information and Communication Technology Scale, DASS-21, and Social Support Scale) were compiled along with a personal data sheet and an informed consent form. The personal data sheet gathered basic demographic information about the participants, while the informed consent form detailed the purpose of the study, eligibility criteria, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality assurances, and the procedure involved.

Participants were first provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, the inclusion criteria (young adults aged 18–25 years), the voluntary nature of participation, and their rights as participants. After this information was provided, individuals were asked to indicate their willingness to participate by signing the consent form. Those who declined participation were respectfully thanked for their time and not included in the study.

The questionnaires were administered either individually or in small groups of 3 to 4 participants at a time, depending on participant availability and convenience. Clear instructions regarding the completion of each questionnaire were provided verbally and in written form. Any questions or concerns raised by the participants were addressed appropriately to ensure clarity and understanding.

Participants completed the Information and Communication Technology Scale, DASS-21, and Social Support Scale, which together took approximately 20–30 minutes. Upon completion, the data were collected, checked for completeness, and stored securely.

For statistical analysis, the collected data were entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to interpret the results accurately.

## **RESULTS**

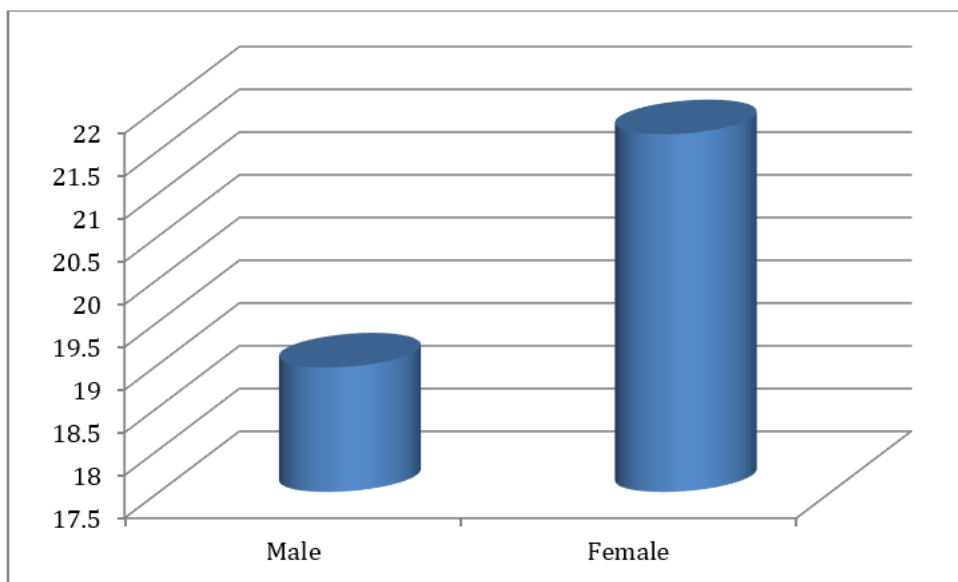
This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected for the study. The primary objective was to examine differences in stress, anxiety, and depression between participants categorized as high and low ICT users. Descriptive statistics compare mean scores of psychological variables across the two groups. In addition, Pearson's correlation analysis is conducted to explore the relationships among stress, anxiety, and depression. All statistical procedures were carried out using SPSS, and the results are interpreted about the research objectives.

*Table 1- Mean and S. D. value of ICT in terms of Gender*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Male</b>	44.8571	8.30974	70
<b>Female</b>	47.2571	7.55019	70
<b>Total</b>	46.0571	8.00159	140

Table 1 reveals that female participants ( $M = 47.26$ ) reported slightly higher ICT usage than male ( $M = 44.86$ ). This suggests that females tend to engage more frequently with social media and other ICT platforms than males.

**A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

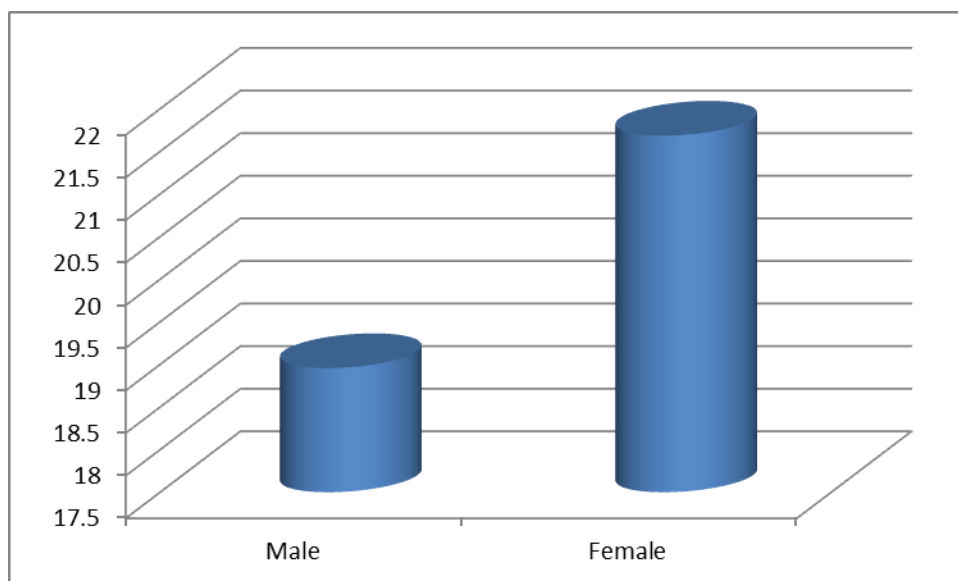


**Figure 1.1. Mean ICT Scores by Gender**

**Table 2- Mean and S. D. value of Psychological Distress in term of Gender**

Gender	Mean	S.D	N
Male	18.9571	12.30345	70
Female	21.6857	13.11879	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.3214</b>	<b>12.74558</b>	<b>140</b>

Table 2 shows that female participants reported a slightly higher level of psychological distress (M = 21.69) in comparison to male (M = 18.96). This supports the assumption that females are more vulnerable to psychological distress, possibly due to higher engagement with ICT and more emotional expressiveness.



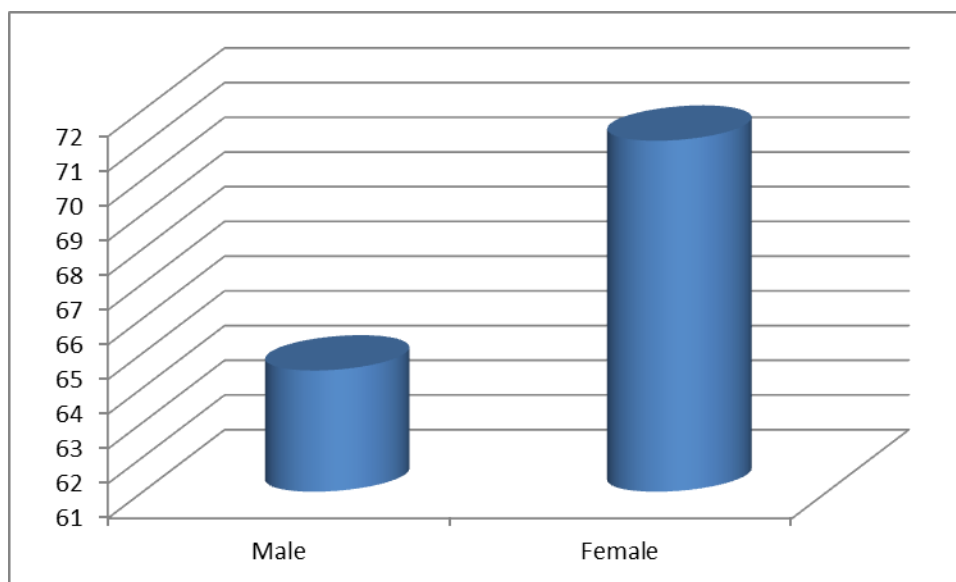
**Figure 1.2 Mean Psychological Distress Scores by Gender**

**A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

**Table 3- Mean and S. D. value of Social Support in term of Gender**

Gender	Mean	S.D	N
Male	64.4928	27.65471	70
Female	71.1143	24.60679	70
Total	67.8273	26.27997	140

Table 3 revealed that the average social support score was higher among females (M = 71.11) compared to males (M = 64.49). This indicates that female participants perceived a higher level of support from their social environment.



**Figure 1.3. Mean Social Support Scores by Gender**

**Correlation Analysis**

The correlation analysis used Pearson’s correlation coefficient to examine the linear relationships among ICT, DASS, Social Support, and the sub-components of psychological distress (stress, anxiety, and depression).

**Table 4- Coefficient of Correlation among ICT, Psychological Distress and Social Support.**

Variables	ICT	Psychological Distress	Social Support
ICT	1	.191*	-.704**
Psychological Distress		1	-.163
Social Support			1

Note-  $P < 0.01$  \*\* $P < 0.05$  \*

Results revealed that ICT usage was found to have statistically significant positive correlations with Psychological Distress ( $r = -0.191$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and a strong negative correlation with social support ( $r = -0.704$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This means ICT usage increases, and perceived social support tends to decrease. These findings support our fourth hypothesis, which hypothesized a positive correlation between ICT usage and Psychological Distress and a negative correlation between ICT usage and social support.

## A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults

**Table 5- Coefficient of Correlation among ICT, DASS and Social Support. Correlations**

	ICT	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
ICT	1	.249**	.211*	.211*
Stress		1	.786**	.786**
Anxiety			1	1.000**
Depression				1

Note-  $P < 0.01$  \*\*  $P < 0.05$  \*

These results indicate that there was a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.249$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) between ICT use and stress levels. This suggests that individuals who engage more with ICT tend to experience higher levels of stress.

Further, a significant positive correlation was also found between ICT use and anxiety levels ( $r = 0.211$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). This finding implies that as ICT usage increases, anxiety levels tend to rise correspondingly.

Similarly, the results revealed a significant positive correlation between ICT use and depression levels ( $r = 0.211$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). This suggests that greater ICT usage is associated with an increase in depressive symptoms.

When considering the total psychological distress score (DASS Total), there was a small but significant positive correlation with ICT use ( $r = 0.191$ ,  $p = P < 0.05$ ). This means that individuals with higher ICT engagement also reported slightly higher levels of overall distress.

These findings of the peace of work show that increased ICT use is associated with elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, pointing to a potentially adverse impact of excessive ICT engagement on psychological well-being. Therefore, these results support our fourth Hypothesis, which proposed a positive correlation between ICT use Psychological distress and negative correlation between ICT usage and social support.

## DISCUSSION

This section provides details about the findings of the study which have been interpreted and discussed in the light of existing literature. Further, this section focused on the empirical and theoretical validation of the finding of the present study. Finally, implications of this research and issues for further research have been discussed also in the light of findings of present research.

### *Findings of the study*

The first objective of the present study was to examine gender differences in the usage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), particularly in the context of social media among young adults. The study aimed to understand whether males and females differed significantly in their engagement with various digital platforms that form part of their daily lives. The results revealed that female participants reported significantly higher ICT usage than males which confirmed our first hypothesis. This is consistent with prior studies by Naslund et al. (2020) and Gowen et al. (2012), which found that women tend to

## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

use social media more frequently and for a broader range of purposes such as emotional expression, maintaining relationships, and information-seeking.

Furthermore, Sharma & Sharma (2023) noted that women often engage more in socially driven digital behavior, such as storytelling, feedback exchange, and emotional sharing, compared to men who may prefer task-oriented or entertainment-based usage. These results suggest that the gendered patterns of ICT use are shaped by both social norms and psychological needs, with females leveraging social media as a space for connection and validation.

The other major objective of the present research was to compare gender differences in Psychological Distress. The results of the study indicated that female participants exhibited higher levels of psychological distress compared to their male counterparts which confirmed our second hypothesis. This finding aligns closely with a broad spectrum of psychological research that suggests women are more vulnerable to experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional disturbances, particularly during periods of transition and stress, such as young adulthood.

Furthermore, societal and cultural expectations may place additional psychological burdens on women, especially in terms of appearance, relationships, and academic or professional performance. These external pressures, combined with internal emotional processing styles, could contribute to the elevated levels of distress found among females in the present study.

Further, the present study compared gender differences in Social Support, result shown that females perceive higher levels of social support than males which confirmed our third hypothesis. This outcome aligns with literature such as Smith & Miller (2022) and Adams & Green (2023), which found that women generally have more emotionally intimate digital interactions and are more likely to seek help and maintain strong social networks, both offline and online.

Additionally, Anderson et al. (2023) emphasize that female users are more inclined to participate in digital communities, offer emotional encouragement, and sustain supportive interactions factors that enhance their perceived social support. The socialization of females into expressive, emotionally attuned roles likely encourages this behavior, while males may underreport support or avoid emotional disclosure due to norms around masculinity.

The other major objective of the present research was to examine the relationship between ICT (social media) usages, Psychological Distress and Perceived Social Support among young adults. The present study revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between Information and Communication Technology (ICT) usage and psychological distress, and a strong negative correlation between ICT usage and perceived social support. These findings support our fourth hypothesis, which anticipated a negative correlation between ICT usage and perceived social support. This aligns with previous research indicating that excessive ICT use can lead to decreased social support. For instance, Swickert et al. (2002) found that high levels of internet use were associated with lower levels of perceived social support, particularly among individuals with certain personality traits. Similarly, Thomée et al. (2010) reported that young adults with high ICT use experienced social isolation and difficulties in maintaining real-life social relationships. These

## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

studies suggest that while ICT can facilitate communication, excessive use may hinder the development and maintenance of meaningful offline social connection.

The ICT use, psychological distress, and perceived support underscore the importance of tailoring mental health interventions to the unique needs and experiences of male and female users. Programs aimed at promoting digital well-being should incorporate gender-sensitive strategies, digital literacy training, and mechanisms for identifying and mitigating online stressors.

### ***Future Implications and Recommendations***

- More in-depth studies are needed to understand how support is exchanged online, what works, what doesn't and why it matters.
- Focus on Positive Uses of social media many studies highlight negative effects, future research should look deeper into how social media can help with healing, connection, and emotional strength.
- Platforms should work toward safer digital environments with emotional validation and support, especially for young adults.
- Future programs should teach young users how to manage online stress, avoid harmful comparisons, and use ICT tools for mental wellness.

### ***Limitations of the study***

- The sample may not represent broader populations across different age groups, cultures, or educational backgrounds. The findings are based on a specific context and may not be generalizable.
- The use of self-reported data can be subject to biases, including social desirability bias, exaggeration, or inaccurate recall.
- The study follows a quantitative method, which limits the ability to establish causality. Qualitative research is needed to confirm directional relationships.
- The type of ICT platform used (e.g., Instagram vs. LinkedIn) was not differentiated, which might have unique effects on social support or distress levels.
- The gender-based comparison may be affected by unequal sample sizes or cultural expectations affecting male and female expression of distress.

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## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

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## **A Study on Information and Communication Technology Users, Psychological Distress and Social Support Among Young Adults**

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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