

Health and Well-Being Consequences of Social Media and Smartphone in India

Sher Singh^{1*}, Manju²

ABSTRACT

In today's era, social media and smartphone use have become important determinants of physical and mental health in India. According to the study conducted between 2016 and 2025, two effects were observed. Social media and smartphone participation can increase educational achievement, improve communication between people, provide social support systems, and provide opportunities for self-expression. Additionally, digital devices can increase self-confidence and encourage community participation, especially among youth. However, excessive use or misuse is regularly associated with physical complaints such as eye strain and musculoskeletal pain, as well as increased anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and poor sleep quality. In general, adolescents or young people working in medicine or other professions are more likely to display problematic patterns of use. These issues need to be addressed through customized interventions, culturally sensitive strategies, and long-term research to promote balanced, healthy digital participation among the diverse people of India.

Keywords: Health, Well-being, Social Media, Smartphone, India

In today's digital age, social media and smartphones have become an integral part of our everyday lives and are deeply influencing the way people communicate and view the world. This phenomenon affects not only the youth but also all those who are known for their ability to adopt new platforms and technologies. Since smartphones are so widely available and the internet is so cheap nowadays, young people in India are increasingly using social media and social networking. According to Prabhakararao, S. (2016), social media can improve self-expression, communication, education, community involvement, and confidence and even act as a therapeutic outlet when utilized constructively. On the other hand, excessive use is associated with aggressive conduct, rumor victimization, academic deterioration, interpersonal issues, cyberbullying, identity theft, and behavioral addiction. The dual nature of social media's influence is further demonstrated by the fact that it can weaken cultural norms and cause family dissolution. Balakrishnan et al. (2016) found that students spent up to 14 hours daily on mobile activities, primarily for email, browsing, and recreation. Hand pain was prevalent, with 44.5% reporting mild, 24% moderate, and 3.5% severe pain, highlighting prolonged usage's physical strain.

¹Research Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, GJUS&T, Hisar Haryana, India

²Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, GJUS&T, Hisar, Haryana, India

*Corresponding Author

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Adolescents usually compare themselves to social media's idealized representations, which results in low self-esteem and a bad body image. According to a longitudinal study by Sharma (2017), these problems are made worse by sustained exposure to such information, especially for female adolescents. Rana, M. (2017) research emphasizes that while social media connects society and spreads awareness, its impact on adolescents can be harmful. Due to their transitional phase and emotional vulnerability, unrestricted access to platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook can intensify identity crises, emotional conflicts, and psychological strain, leading to both mental and physical harm. Patel, N. S. a. S. a. W., & Puri, N. D. P. A. (2017) studied 150 adolescent girls from Arts, Science, and Commerce streams in Aurangabad and found significant differences in mobile phone addiction levels across streams, but no differences in mental health. A positive and significant correlation indicated that higher mobile phone addiction is associated with poorer mental health. The study emphasizes the need for strategies to reduce mobile phone dependency and promote better mental well-being among adolescent girls.

Anand et al. (2018) found that excessive internet use fosters social isolation, making individuals emotionally detached and less engaged with real-world interactions. This isolation can lead to psychiatric disorders, including low self-esteem, impulsivity, mood disorders, poor sleep quality, and even suicidal tendencies. The study emphasizes the need for integrative therapeutic approaches to address internet addiction and its comorbid mental health issues. Anand et al. (2018) state that those with Internet addiction also experience psychological issues. Social, academic, and interpersonal issues are brought on by pathological Internet users. The excessive use of the Internet is what causes the elevated level of psychological arousal. This psychological arousal leads to sadness, anxiety, and poor family relationships in addition to little sleep, minimal exercise, and prolonged fasting. Social media in India offers connectivity and opportunities but also fosters addictive patterns and risks to youth well-being. While not inherently harmful, excessive engagement in specific online activities can lead to misinformation, reduced real-life interactions, and emotional distress. Given the early stage of research in the Indian context, there is a pressing need for awareness, guidance, and responsible usage to harness social media's benefits while safeguarding the mental health and future of young people (Bharucha J. 2018). Dhir, A. et al. (2018), in a study, examined how psychosocial factors, including compulsive media use and fear of missing out (FoMO), lead to social media fatigue, which in turn promotes anxiety and depression in Indian adolescents. It was based on the stressor-strain-outcome (SSO) framework. The study used repeated cross-sectional data from two waves (N = 1554, 1144) and discovered that obsessive media use indirectly influences fatigue.

Sharma, A. & Sharma, R. (2018) found a significant negative correlation between internet addiction and psychological well-being (PWB) among college students ($r = -0.572$, $p < 0.01$). Higher internet addiction predicted lower PWB and its sub-dimensions, indicating its detrimental effect on students' overall mental health. Subhashini, K.J. & Praveen, G. (2018) found that 57.7% of professional college students were internet addicted, with 38.7% of them experiencing depression, a statistically significant association. Males showed significantly higher addiction rates than females, highlighting gender differences in internet use patterns. Suresh, C.V. (2018) found that first-year medical students with higher internet addiction reported lower subjective happiness, even without obvious psychological disorders. The study suggests that reduced happiness can be an early indicator of addictive patterns, warranting attention during behavioral screenings.

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In a 2019 study, Chandrasekaran, V., et al. found that 44.7% of 150 medical students at a tertiary care hospital in South India were addicted to smartphones. Despite the fact that half of the male students suffered from addiction, there was no discernible gender difference. 51.3% of participants reported having poor sleep, and a strong correlation found between smartphone addiction and poor sleep quality. The findings underscore the need for awareness and treatment aimed at promoting healthy habits, as most medical students use smartphones excessively, which is directly related to their sleep problems. Shilpi M. (2019) found that internet addiction fosters emotional dependence on online interactions, often replacing real-life connections. Individuals use the virtual world to cope with stress, loneliness, or anxiety, making both adults and children increasingly vulnerable to its addictive and isolating effects. Tripathi, G., & Ahad, M.A. (2019) found in their study that excessive use of social media was associated with the physical, mental, and social health of children. Although technology connects people, prolonged use or misuse can have a negative impact on many aspects of their well-being, emphasizing the need for balanced and thoughtful use.

Among 318 medical students in Bengaluru, Bhaskara, N.V. (2020) discovered a strong inverse association between social media use and mental health. While students with better well-being ratings used social media for 1–2 hours a day, those with lower levels (<90.8) were more likely to use it for 4+ hours. In order to promote mental health, the study emphasizes the necessity of reducing screen usage and re-establishing in-person social ties. Priya, D.B., et al. (2020) sought to determine the causes, consequences, and relationships of smartphone addiction to physical and mental health problems. The study links the rising incidence of smartphone addiction in India to harmful effects on an individual's physical and mental health. Panwar, K. (2020) examined a number of studies related to social media and the internet that link excessive use to cyberbullying, mental health issues in adolescents, and privacy threats. Sadhna A. et al. (2020), in their study, examined 395 MBBS students of GMC Haldwani and found that 43% of them reported smartphone addiction, with 42% of students self-reporting smartphone addiction. Men were more likely to be addicted than women (OR = 1.45), but the rate of addiction was much lower among the oldest members and the youngest age group. In every domain examined, smartphone use was substantially associated with a lower quality of life ($p < 0.001$ – 0.002). The results highlight how common smartphone addiction is among medical students and how it negatively affects their general well-being. According to research by Saini N. et al. (2020), college students in Chandigarh who use social networking sites on a daily basis, as opposed to those who do not, report significant advantages in managing relationship and work-related stress. They also report feeling more satisfied with their peers, their ability to solve problems, their physical appearance, and their achievements in life. Teenagers' lives are heavily reliant on social networking, yet their present usage levels don't seem to be detrimental to their health. The results imply favorable effects on life quality, which justifies on-going monitoring of changing patterns in Internet use.

The impact of media exposure, especially new media, on the social and cultural well-being of young Tibetans residing in Indian settlements was examined by Nair P. and Vaishnav D.K. (2021). Based on media psychology and motivated by Tibetan and Indian views on well-being, this study proposes that media can act as a link to preserve cultural, familial, and community links in a geographically remote environment. In the context of migration and diasporic life, it emphasizes the growing role of media in fostering communal well-being while maintaining cultural identity. Sharma, S. (2021) found that internet addiction among 18–35-year-old students and professionals was positively correlated with social desirability

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and selfish behavior but negatively correlated with psychological well-being. The results highlight that higher internet use is linked to lower mental well-being and certain behavioral patterns. The study underscores the importance of preventive strategies to address internet addiction and its psychological impacts. Srivastava, N. et al. (2021) highlight that internet addiction among Indian university students mirrors substance abuse, involving poorly controlled usage that causes distress and functional impairment. The study links internet addiction to depression, stress, and anxiety, noting its potential to reduce productivity and motivation despite the internet's educational benefits. It emphasizes the harmful psychological and behavioral consequences of excessive internet use in academic settings.

Increased time spent on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter was linked to both positive and negative effects. While some youth benefited from improved connectivity and self-expression, excessive use often led to dependency, reduced real-life interactions, and negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional fatigue (Choudhary P. & Baskaran K. 2022). Excessive or inappropriate use of social media can have an impact on a user's mental and physical health in addition to their academic performance. Another major issue is the proliferation of bogus news on social media. However, social media has become a daily necessity, particularly among young people, because of its convenience (Perera U.D.H.L. & Harshanath H.B.M., 2022). Research suggests that strategies including setting screen time restrictions and promoting ergonomic postures might effectively reduce the discomfort associated with prolonged use (Mohan M. et al., 2022).

Even though India is still lagging behind the West in terms of internet usage, the Covid-19 pandemic has sped up the adoption of social media and social networking sites. In early 2020, India and other countries went into lockdown, forcing everyone to stay indoors. Mobile and computer technologies mediated our social, professional, and personal lives, with the majority of users in India having a median age of 27.1 years (Basuroy T., 2023). Adolescents in India have become increasingly active on social media in recent years. Numerous platforms are quite popular, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok (before to its suspension). A survey by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) shows that adolescents are very prevalent online, with over 65% of internet users in India being between the ages of 12 and 29 (IAMAI, 2020). Staying in touch with friends and family, finding information, and having fun are the main reasons why teenagers use social media. Indian adolescents frequently utilize social media as a platform for self-expression and to obtain social approval, according to a study by Sharma and Vyas (2023).

Longitudinal studies emphasize how social media helps sustain support systems, especially for teenagers coping with mental health concerns. According to research by Singh and Gupta (2024), adolescents who took part in online support groups documented steady improvements in their mental health over a two-year period. Putta, S.K. (2024) research found that during the COVID-19 crisis, passive Instagram use among emerging female Indian adults significantly impacted psychological well-being, with increased time spent linked to reduced autonomy, social acceptance, positive relationships, and purpose in life. The crisis altered pre-pandemic patterns, showing that social comparison during this period heightened FoMO, which in turn decreased overall psychological well-being, highlighting the pandemic's unique influence on social media's effects. This need for approval can occasionally result in overuse and reliance on social media. Saleem et al. (2024) emphasized the detrimental consequences of excessive visual time and social media overuse on the mental health of Indian adolescents and young adults. Bajpai, A. (2024) study at Rama

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Medical College found a high smartphone addiction prevalence of 51.79% among undergraduates, with slightly more males affected. Over half (55.38%) reported poor sleep quality, and a highly significant association was observed between smartphone addiction and sleep disturbances, indicating its detrimental impact on students' well-being.

While modest, intentional smartphone usage for non-social activities can have neutral or even beneficial benefits, excessive smartphone use, particularly for social media, is associated with greater levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among medical undergraduates. Targeted awareness campaigns are crucial for promoting balanced usage, lowering mental health risks, and encouraging healthier digital habits among students, as 65% of participants exceed recommended screen-time restrictions (Prafull P. et al, 2024). According to Bharat G. et al. (2024), social media addiction is very common among teenagers and is closely linked to poor mental and physical health consequences. These results highlight the necessity of targeted interventions and education to promote safe digital practices and safeguard teenagers' general wellbeing. Sahoo P. et al. (2024) found that undergraduate students who used social media extensively reported feeling more socially supported and having better psychological well-being than their counterparts who used it less. However, boys had better psychological health than girls. According to the results, social networking can improve college students' sense of social connectedness and loneliness. Taddy et al., (2024) in their study emphasized the need for ways to improve the well-being of Indian youth. They found that adolescents who spend more time on social media face stress, sleep disturbances and mental health problems.

Excessive use of social media can lead to problems such as sleep deprivation, physical inactivity, low self-esteem, and cyberbullying, although it can also promote a sense of well-being. Personal behavior, relationships with friends, and information received indicate a complex and multifaceted effect of social media on adolescent health. It plays a role in health problems such as depression and anxiety. As a result, a well-thought-out strategy that includes parental monitoring, Internet education, and constructive online behaviors is important. Adolescents can benefit from social media and reduce its negative effects by encouraging responsible use and honest communication (Shukla, M., 2024). Social media addiction poses serious risks to the emotional and physical health of people of all ages, even though its effects vary across different age groups. Young people struggle with sleep quality, cognitive development, and social behavior, while adults and older people struggle with depression, anxiety, and physical stress. Overall well-being may be greatly impacted by the long-term effects. Targeted interventions are needed to address this problem, such as encouraging offline activities, managing screen usage, and teaching digital literacy. Healthcare providers, educators, and legislators can assist in reducing negative effects and promoting better relationships with digital devices for people of all ages by promoting balanced technology use (Vettriselvan, R. et al., 2024).

While excessive and uncontrolled use of social media and the internet among Indian adolescents can lead to poor mental health, poor academic achievement, and FoMO, its healthy use can be beneficial for education and global connectivity. To promote holistic development and healthy technology use, they emphasize on-screen time limits, digital education, the importance of offline movement, and parental involvement (Sarkar, S. & Hada, S.S. 2025). According to Moradiya, N., (2025), excessive smartphone use in western India is associated with problems related to frustration, anxiety, decreased physical activity, and impaired social development in adolescents, although smartphone use can improve education and communication. They advocate balanced use of technologies and the

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influence of socio-cultural factors to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks to mental and physical health. Sreehari R. et al. (2025), in a systematic review of 40 cross-sectional studies (2016–2024), found that excessive smartphone use among adults, especially younger populations, is consistently associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. It also contributes to sleep disturbances and physical issues, including muscular strain and fatigue. The reviewed studies, of moderate to high methodological quality, commonly employed validated assessment tools. These findings highlight the urgent need for awareness and preventive strategies to mitigate the negative physical and psychological impacts of excessive smartphone engagement. Sanjay, M., et al. (2025) found that college students use their phones for an average of 6.8 hours a day and that 72.5% of them experienced health problems as a result of this use, with the most common being eye strain (68.2%) and neck stiffness (60.4%). These problems were more likely to occur among heavy users of social media and gamers, highlighting the importance of ergonomic guidance, knowledge, and responsible use behavior.

CONCLUSION

A comprehensive analysis of Indian research on social media and smartphone use and abuse in India between 2016-2025 reveals a link between mental and physical health. Digital device use can enhance academic engagement, improve communication, and strengthen social support systems, and provide opportunities for self-expression when used wisely; while misuse or excessive use can lead to related problems such as reduced sleep quality, eye strain, stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, physical problems such as musculoskeletal discomfort, and low self-esteem. Due to developmental vulnerabilities and social influences, adolescents and young adults are most susceptible, while problematic abuse rates are higher among professional students. Social media and smartphone use and misuse have increased sharply during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Future research should evaluate community-based awareness, labor-education, and digital education programs using longitudinal and mixed methods to better understand the behavioural trajectories of social media and smartphone use and their long-term effects.

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Conflict of Interest

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