

Research Paper

Life Beyond the Horizon: A Study of Screen Usage Patterns and Social Networking Addiction among Students Aged 16–25 Years

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ABSTRACT

The phenomena related to addiction revolve around different concepts, which eventually hamper the real life of an individual. The generation and period we are experiencing are bombarded with technology and extensive information. With the increasing use of mobile phones and unlimited internet connections, social networking addiction has taken a front seat, and the young and new generation are prey to it. The present study aimed to examine screen time patterns, social networking usage, and the level of social networking addiction among students aged 16–25 years, as well as to assess the effect of screen time on addiction levels. The sample consisted of 100 students, equally divided by gender (boys and girls), selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using a standardized Social Networking Addiction Scale along with a self-constructed demographic questionnaire. The findings revealed that most students reported moderate screen time and social networking usage, with minimal gender differences. Entertainment emerged as the primary purpose of social networking use, and YouTube and Instagram were the most preferred platforms. The dimensional analysis indicated that salience, mood modification, and relapse were the most prominent components of social networking addiction. The overall addiction level among students was moderate, with considerable individual variability. A significant difference was found between students with less than 5 hours and more than 5 hours of daily screen time, indicating that higher screen time is associated with greater social networking addiction ($t = 2.61, p < 0.05$). The study concludes that while social networking use among students is generally moderate, increased screen time significantly contributes to higher addiction levels. The findings emphasize the need for awareness and preventive interventions to promote balanced and healthy digital engagement among young adults.

Keywords: *Social Networking Addiction, Screen time, Students, social media*

It is a significant milestone that we all could use and understand the brain and its different components. But the very question of utilizing it in a format makes it more complex, as we live in a world full of information that consciously and unconsciously shapes who we are.

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Social networking sites and applications have become an essential means of social contact and communication in today's contemporary world. Social networking sites are virtual communities where users can create individual public profiles, interact with real-life friends, and meet people (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011).

Social networking provides us with a mindset and information in abundance; it can be defined as a systematic way of meeting and greeting, but social networking sites are virtual platforms to interact in various forms, be it verbal, non-verbal, graphical, audio-based, or video format. It could be anything under the sun. The most prominent social networking sites include WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

These platforms are a great source of spreading information without the course of worrying about the time. All these platforms run on a series of algorithms that focus on the user activity and provide the exact amount of information that is relevant to that user at that particular time. Their basic principle is to rule the system through infinite user activity.

With the introduction of the concept of reels (very short videos) on almost every social networking platform, it is difficult for individuals to hide themselves from the web of too much of everything.

Social Networking addiction is a booming issue, specifically among the younger population of the country, as they succumb to the ill facets of lies that hide behind the cloak of these platforms.

Many young people report that they hardly turn off their smartphones, sleep with their phones next to them, and also compulsively check their smartphones throughout the day (Carbonell et al., 2012)

A student of class 9 stated that, *“social media is what runs inside my mind all the time. I am unable to sleep properly as I enjoy scrolling reels on Instagram.”*

This is just a normal scenario where students do not even know what they are doing and what the outcome of this intense addiction to social networking sites is.

Another student of class 12 said, *“I have my board exams coming up sometime, and what I am doing is just scrolling my phone every time I try to study; it has become a tiresome activity for me; I just cannot study at all. I surely want to leave it, but I tried and failed again and again.”*

The basic question is that this problem is getting bigger and bigger, catching more and more people, especially the youth.

The time is passing, and every other individual in a virtual life with deteriorating cognitive ability is inviting psychological issues and vulnerabilities.

The students are prey to the nasty social networking life that provides absolutely nothing in return.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature around social networking addiction highlights the basic phenomena of social networking and its varied levels of disruption that it has on individuals and their quality of life.

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Amirthalingam J, Khera A. (2024). This review aims to summarize the prevalence and patterns of social media addiction among teenagers; identify psychological, social, and technological factors contributing to social media addiction; examine the psychological and social consequences of addiction; and review effective interventions and prevention strategies. The study concluded that social media addiction among teenagers is a growing concern with far-reaching effects on mental health, social relationships, and academic performance.

Aslan I, Polat H (2024). This study aimed to determine the level of social media addiction and the effects of these factors on the academic success of university students and to define their interactions with each other. A total of 419 questionnaires were collected and analyzed using SPSS. The results highlighted certain deviations in behavior, academic self-efficacy scale, problem-solving skills, and satisfaction with life had a negative correlation with social media addiction and depression, while a positive correlation with academic performance measures.

Akther, F. (2023). The researcher aimed to explore the prevalence and factors associated with social media addiction among university students. The findings indicate that a significant percentage of university students exhibit symptoms of social media addiction, such as compulsive social media use, withdrawal symptoms, and negative consequences associated with their social media usage.

In addition, students who spent more time on social media platforms were found to have a higher risk of social media addiction.

A Gomathi & P., Veeramani. (2022). A descriptive research design was utilized to achieve the aim of studying social media usage among adolescents. They concluded that social media addiction is high among the age range of 14 to 26 years. It highlighted that most social media platforms are known for their infinite scrolling effect, which permits users to see all of the content on their news feeds in one visit to the platform if they continue to scroll to the extreme of the page. Thus, there is a need to transform the user interface for social media apps to restrain users from getting addicted to them.

Sümen, A., Evgin, D. (2021). This study aimed to examine the relationship between social media addiction with sleep quality and psychological problems in high school students. The study was conducted with 1,274 students receiving education in a district located in the western region of Turkey. Among the high school students who participated in the research, 49.3% stated that they had been using social media for 1–3 years, 53.9% reported that they spent 1–3 hours per day on social media, and 42.8% stated that they placed their telephone under their pillow or beside their bed while sleeping. According to the research model, difficulties experienced by high school students increase their social media addiction, while they decrease prosocial behaviors. Social media addiction in high school students decreases students' sleep efficiency ($p < 0.05$).

Al-Barashdi, Hafidha. (2020). The main objective of the literature review was to provide empirical and conceptual insight into social networking addiction by exploring potential social networking addiction, examining the personalities of social networking addicted users, and exploring social networking addiction's negative consequences on well-being, social, and academic life. The addiction symptoms linked with SNS addiction were

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cognitive and behavioral salience, conflict with other activities, euphoria, loss of control, withdrawal, and relapse/reinstatement.

Xuan, Yap & Che Amat, Muhammad. (2020). The systematic review aims to review and synthesize the factors and relationships between young people and social media addiction, and the interventions for social media addiction among young people. Articles published between 2010 to 2020 were sought from SCOPUS and Science Direct. Eleven studies were finally selected, and data were extracted, organized, and analyzed in a narrative synthesis. The need for satisfaction in real-life relationships among young people becomes the most common factor of addiction. Addiction to social media will cause mental health problems, among them indirectly.

Aim of the study

- To study the patterns of screen usage along with social networking addiction among students aged 16-25 years.

Research Objectives

1. To study the pattern of screen time usage among students aged 16-25 years.
2. To study the pattern of social networking usage among students aged 16-25 years.
3. To study Social Networking Addiction among students aged 16-25 years.
4. To examine the effect of screen time on social networking addiction among students by comparing the levels of social networking addiction between students with less than 5 hours and more than 5 hours of daily screen time.
5. To summarize the social networking usage along with the interventions and responsible steps needed to tackle the situation of social networking usage among students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample:

The sample comprised 100 students, 50 males and 50 females from the Haldwani region aged 16-25 years. All the participants are students enrolled in either school or college. All participants were users of phones and the Internet.

Sampling Technique:

Purposive sampling techniques have been used in the research. The data were collected using the non-probability sampling method.

Instruments

1. **Personal Information Sheet:** It includes the basic information of the individuals, including name, age, gender, screen time usage, and social networking preferences.
2. **Social Networking Addiction Scale:** Social networking addiction has been measured by adapting a 21-item scale developed by M.G. Shahnawaz and Usama Rehman (2020). The scale follows the component model proposed by Griffiths (2005), which emphasizes the importance of dimensions in addiction.

This scale consists of six dimensions: Salience (containing 4 items), Mood Modification (containing 3 items), Tolerance (containing 3 items), Withdrawal (containing 4 items), Conflict (containing 3 items), and Relapse (containing 4 items).

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All the items have been rated on a 1-7 Likert-type scale, with ‘1’ indicating strong disagreement and ‘7’ indicating strong agreement. A total score can be obtained by summing up all the items.

The score can range from 21 to 147. The test-retest reliability of the scale is 0.88.

Statistical Methods

Descriptive statistics include the bar graphs, frequency graphs, mean, and standard deviation, which describe the data.

Inferential statistics includes the t-test, which is used to check the level of significance regarding the screen time and social networking addiction among students aged 16-25 years.

Data Analysis

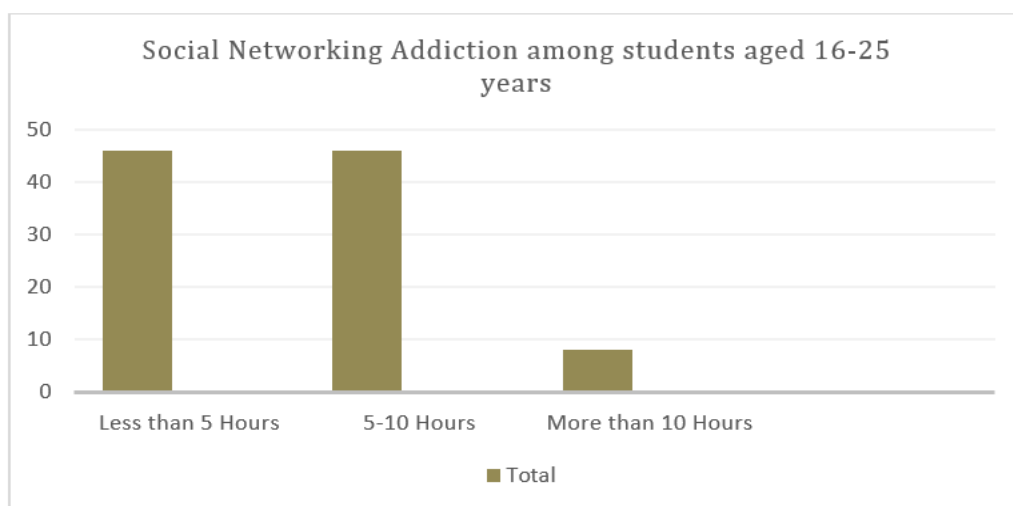
Objective 1: To study the pattern of screen time usage among students aged 16-25 years.

Table 1: Screen time distribution of students aged 16-25 years.

Average Screen Time	Frequency of Boys	% out of n=50	Frequency of Girls	% out of n=50	Total
Less than 5 Hours	24	48%	22	44%	46
5-10 Hours	22	44%	24	48%	46
More than 10 Hours	04	8%	04	8%	08
Total	50		50		100

Source: Survey

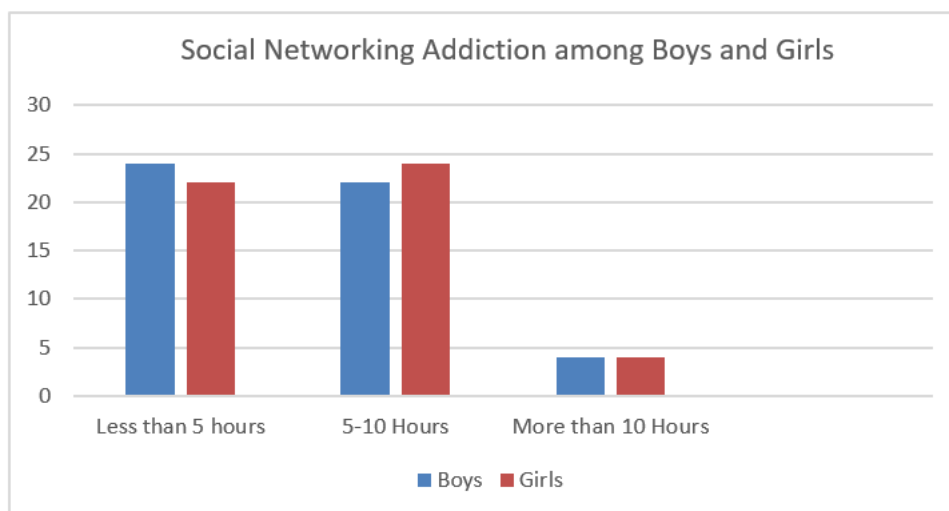
According to the data, 24 boys (48%) and 22 girls (44%) have a screen time of less than 5 hours, making it a total of 46 (44%). While 22 boys (44%) and 24 girls (48%) use the screen for 5-10 hours, making it a total of 46 (44%). 04 boys and 04 girls use the screen for more than 10 hours, which is equal to 08 students (8 %). This indicates that there is no significant difference between the screen time distribution among boys and girls. The majority of students fall into the categories of less than 5 hours and 5-10 hours. Only a few students fall under the category of more than 10 hours of screen time.



Graph: Representing the pattern of social networking addiction among students aged 16-25 years.

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The graph is a pictorial description of the quantitative data, which clearly shows that an equal number of students use the screen for less than 5 hours and 5-10 hours, and a few students use it for more than 10 hours.



Graph: Representing the social networking addiction among boys and girls.

The analysis reveals that the majority of students, regardless of gender, spend less than 5 hours or 5–10 hours per day on screens. Specifically, 48% of boys and 44% of girls use screens for less than 5 hours daily, whereas 44% of boys and 48% of girls fall in the 5–10 hours category. A very small percentage (8% of boys and girls) report spending more than 10 hours on screens.

This indicates a moderate level of screen time among most students, with negligible gender differences.

Objective 2: To study the pattern of social networking usage among students aged 16-25 years.

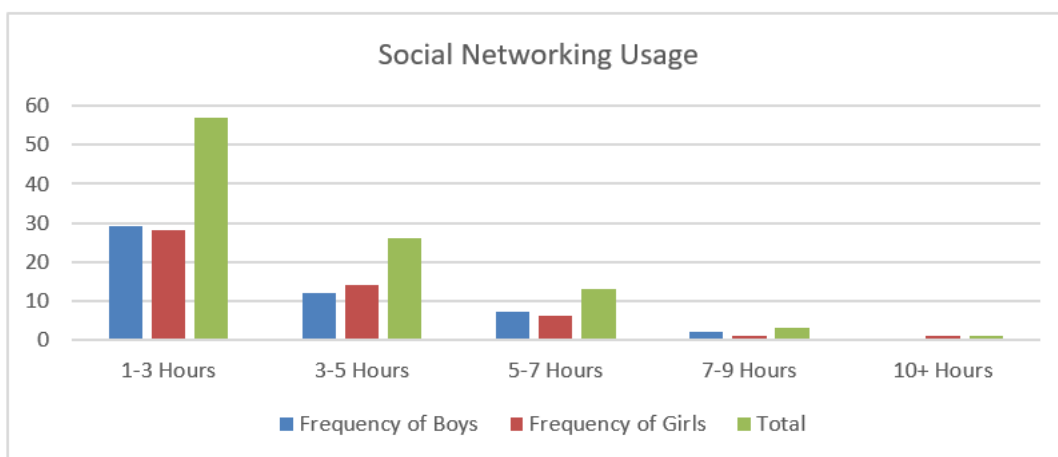
Table 2: Social networking usage among students aged 16-25 years.

Social Networking usage time	Frequency of Boys	Frequency of Girls	Total	% out of n=100
1-3 Hours	29	28	57	57%
3-5 Hours	12	14	26	26%
5-7 Hours	07	06	13	13%
7-9 Hours	02	01	03	3%
10+ Hours	0	01	01	1%
Total	50	50	100	

Source: Survey

The data regarding the time used in social networking among students aged 16-25 years, shows that 57% students use social networking for 1-3 hours/day, 26% use it for 3-5 hours/day, 13% students use it for 5-7 hours/day, 3% students use social networking for 7-9 hours/day and 1% use it for more than 10 hours.

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Graph: Representing Social Networking Usage among boys and girls

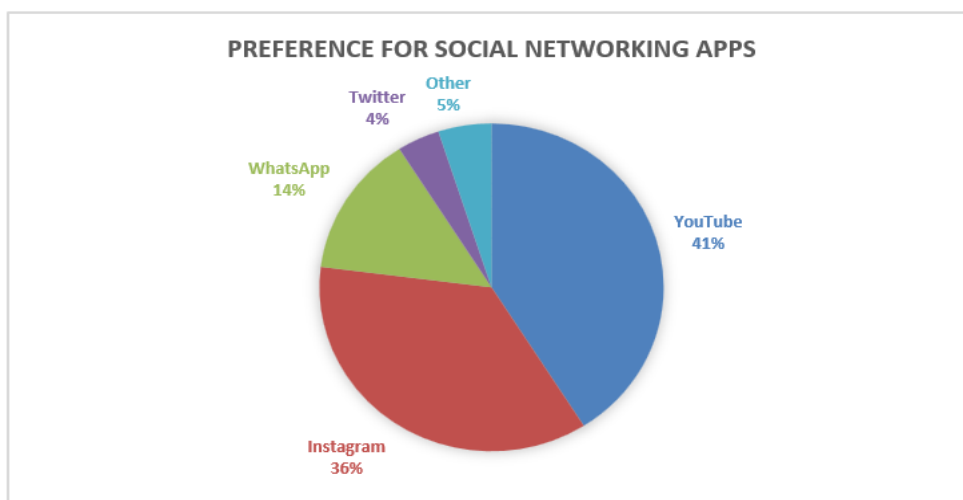
The gender wise data reflect that there is an equal and average time usage among boys and girls.

Table 3: Most Preferred App among students aged 16-25 years.

Most Preferred App	YouTube	Instagram	WhatsApp	Twitter	Other
Frequency	41	36	14	04	05

Source: Survey

The preference survey for the most preferred app among students aged 16-25 years shows that 41% students use YouTube the most, followed by Instagram (36%), WhatsApp (14%), Twitter (4%), and other apps (5%). This data shows the most preferred app while using the screen; it does not specifically provide the data regarding the social networking apps. Many of the above-mentioned apps do not primarily qualify as social networking apps.



Graph: Representing the preference of students for social networking apps.

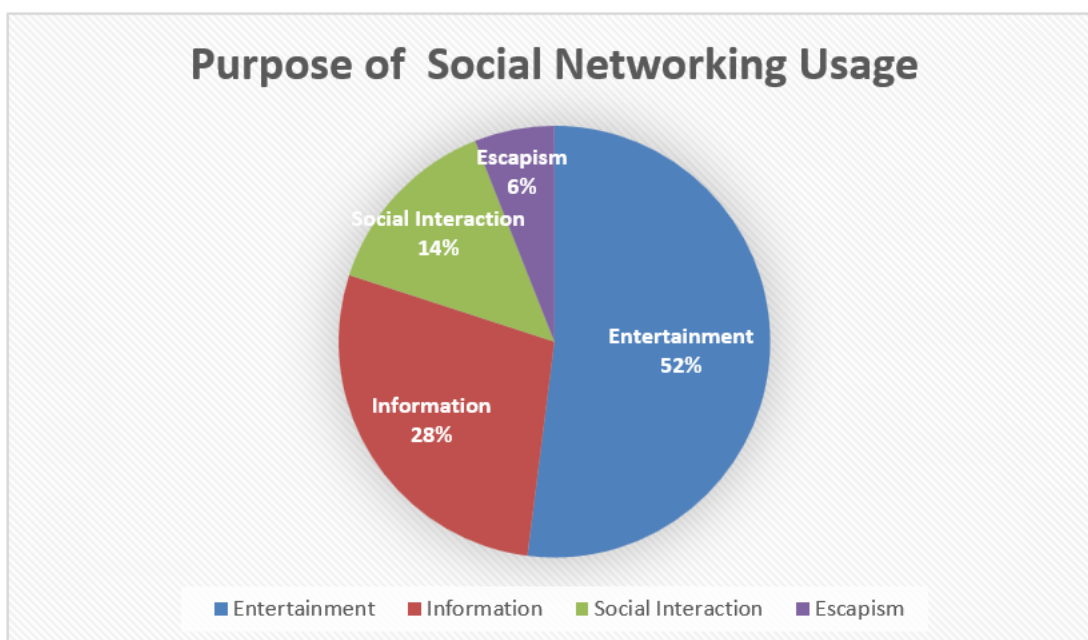
This data highlights a trend towards visually engaging platforms that offer entertainment and short-form content. The recent uplift towards social networking applications such as Instagram and YouTube suggests that these applications provide a full-fledged flow of information in different formats that engage the user to use them more often and frequently.

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Table 4: Purpose of Social Networking Usage

Purpose	Entertainment	Information	Social Interaction	Escapism	Total
Frequency	52	28	14	6	100

This data shows the purpose of social networking use among students aged 16-25 years; it provides us with the statistics that 52% students use social networking primarily for entertainment purposes, followed by 28% use social networking to gain something informational, 14% use it for social interaction, and 6% use it as an escape mechanism to run away from reality.



Graph: Representing the purpose of social networking usage.

This data doesn't provide details regarding what students gain from entertainment, what they watch and experience, or the quality of entertainment that students seek from social networking. Still, it shows and provides details about the particular and common reasons for using social networking in their daily lives. It is quite evident through the data that students are drawn to social networking to seek entertainment, followed by information gaining, social interaction, and escapism from their usual lives.

Objective 3: To study the Social Networking Addiction among students aged 16-25 years.

The scale of social networking addiction has 6 criteria that describe the addictive patterns in an individual. These dimensions or criteria provide the data that is significant in terms of understanding the overall social networking addiction.

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Table 5: Dimensional analyses of Social Networking Addiction among students aged 16-25 years.

Sno.	Dimensions	Description	Min Score	Max Score	Mean	SD
1.	Salience	When social networking dominates one's life	4	28	14.39	5.34
2.	Mood Modification	When social networking modifies or enhances one's mood.	3	21	12.06	4.48
3.	Tolerance	When an increased amount would be required to get the previous effects.	3	21	10.52	4.32
4.	Withdrawal	Unpleasant feeling when unable to use social networking.	4	28	11.95	5.87
5.	Conflict	When social networking conflicts with real life.	3	21	8.75	4.57
6.	Relapse	Revert to social networking after attempts at controlling.	4	28	13.97	5.62

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of the six dimensions of social networking addiction among students. It provides the minimum and maximum score along with the mean and standard deviation.

The **Salience** dimension, which highlights the domination of social networking in one's life, shows a mean score of **14.39**, suggesting that social networking occupies a **moderately prominent** role in the lives of students. This indicates that for many students, social networking frequently captures attention and becomes an important part of daily routines, though not uniformly at an extreme level.

The mean score for **Mood Modification** ($M = 12.06$) reflects a **moderate tendency** among students to use social networking as a means of regulating emotions or enhancing mood. This could suggest that social networking is often used as a coping mechanism for stress, boredom, or negative emotional states.

In the case of **Tolerance**, the mean score ($M = 10.52$) indicates a **moderate level** of increased engagement over time. This implies that some students require progressively greater involvement in social networking to achieve the same level of satisfaction, reflecting an emerging pattern of behavioural dependence.

The **Withdrawal** dimension records a mean score of **11.95**, with a relatively higher standard deviation ($SD = 5.87$), suggesting substantial individual differences. This indicates that while some students experience minimal discomfort when unable to access social networking, others could experience significant psychological unease, irritability, or restlessness, characteristic of withdrawal symptoms.

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The **Conflict** dimension has the lowest mean score ($M = 8.75$), suggesting that, on average, social networking causes **less overt disruption** in real-life responsibilities and relationships.

Finally, the **Relapse** dimension shows a relatively high mean score ($M = 13.97$), indicating that many students experience difficulty maintaining control over their social networking behaviour after attempting to reduce usage. This highlights challenges in self-regulation and suggests persistent engagement despite awareness of negative consequences.

Overall, the pattern of results indicates that **salience, mood modification, and relapse** emerge as the most prominent dimensions contributing to social networking addiction among students. The variability across dimensions underscores that social networking addiction is a multifaceted phenomenon, with different psychological components influencing addictive behaviour to varying degrees.

The dimensional analysis highlights that while social networking use among students is generally moderate, specific addiction-related components, particularly salience and relapse, play a significant role in sustaining addictive behavior.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Social Networking Addiction Scores of students aged 16-25 years. (N=100)

Statistics	N	Min Score	Max Score	Mean	SD
Social Networking Addiction	100	21	147	71.64	21.75

Source: Survey

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics of social networking addiction among 100 students. The mean score of **71.64** indicates a moderate level of social networking addiction on average. The scores range from **21 to 147**, with a standard deviation of **21.75**, suggesting considerable variability in students' engagement with social networking.

Objective 4: To examine the effect of screen time on social networking addiction among students by comparing the levels of social networking addiction between students with less than 5 hours and more than 5 hours of daily screen time.

Table 7: Level of significance between Screen time and social networking addiction.

Screen Time	N	Mean Score	SD	t statistics	p value
Less than 5 Hours	45	65.75	19.52	2.61	0.01058
More than 5 Hours	55	76.65	22.26		

Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates a statistically significant difference.

The independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether daily screen time influences social networking addiction among students. The results show a significant difference between the two groups, $t(98) = 2.61, p = 0.01058$.

Students who reported more than 5 hours of screen time had a higher mean social networking addiction score ($M = 76.65, SD = 22.26$) compared to those with less than 5 hours of screen time ($M = 65.75, SD = 19.52$).

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The data clearly highlights the relationship between screen time and social networking addiction among students. It shows that increased daily screen time is associated with higher levels of social networking addiction and suggests that prolonged exposure to digital devices may contribute to compulsive engagement with social networking platforms.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated social networking addiction among students aged 16-25 years, examining screen usage patterns, purposes, app preferences, and the impact of screen time on addiction level.

Screen Time pattern

The analysis revealed that the majority of students spend moderate amounts of time on screens, with 44% using screens for less than 5 hours and another 44% for 5–10 hours daily. Only 8% reported screen time exceeding 10 hours. Gender-wise, there were negligible differences, indicating that both male and female students exhibit similar screen engagement patterns. The patterns of screen time do not specifically indicate data regarding social networking addiction, but it is indeed a potential indicator that can reveal and highlight the addiction levels.

Social Networking Usage

Regarding social networking specifically, 57% of students used platforms for 1–3 hours daily, 26% for 3–5 hours, 13% use it for 5-7 hours daily, and only a small fraction (4%) exceeded 7 hours per day. The gender-wise distribution was nearly equal, reflecting consistent usage patterns across boys and girls.

According to a report by Wallace (2015), teens spend 9 hours a day on social media. Other reports claim that users of age group 15–19 spend at least 3 hours a day on social media (Sethi, 2015). This data reveals that a higher time for social networking usage is definitely linked with social networking addiction among students.

As per the Kaiser Family Foundation (2010), 8–18-year-olds spend more than 7 hours every day on social media. In another study, McGrath (2016) stated that social networking takes one-third of the time spent online, which is an alarming situation.

Preferred Apps and Purpose

YouTube (41%) and Instagram (36%) were the most preferred platforms for using the screen, highlighting the appeal of visually engaging, entertainment-driven applications. WhatsApp and Twitter were less preferred. The purpose of usage analysis indicated that students primarily engage in social networking for entertainment (52%), followed by information seeking (28%), social interaction (14%), and escapism (6%). These results underscore that social networking serves multiple psychological and social needs, with entertainment being the dominant driver. Although this data does not provide primary and specific information regarding only the social networking sites such as Snapchat, Facebook, etc., it surely indicates the division and purpose of using screens among students.

Social Networking Addiction: Dimensional Analysis

The Social Networking Scale, developed by M. G. Shahnawaz and Usama Rehman, contains 6 criteria for assessing social networking addiction. The dimensional analysis reveals a pattern of social networking combined with possible effects and applications.

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The dimensional analysis revealed that Salience ($M = 14.39$) and Relapse ($M = 13.97$) were the most prominent dimensions, indicating that social networking occupies a central role in students' lives and that many struggle to reduce usage after attempts to control it. Mood Modification ($M = 12.06$), Withdrawal ($M = 11.95$), and Tolerance ($M = 10.52$) suggest moderate psychological dependence, while Conflict ($M = 8.75$) was the least pronounced, implying that social networking rarely disrupts real-life responsibilities for most students. This pattern indicates that addiction is multidimensional, with cognitive preoccupation and behavioral relapse playing key roles in sustaining the behavior.

Oh et al. (2014) found that dissatisfied people tend to use more online social networking. Sabatini and Sarracino (2017) also found that the use of social networking has a negative impact on the wellbeing. Sponcil and Gitimu (2013) also found that 59.4% of college-going students use social networking sites many times in a day, and this provides an explanation for the salience dimension that indicates that students live gets hampered while using social networking addiction.

The overall mean score ($M = 71.64$, $SD = 21.75$) reflects a moderate level of addiction, with substantial individual variability. This indicates that there exists a moderate level of addiction among the students aged 16-25 years.

Impact of Screen Time on Social Networking Addiction

Screen time is an indicator that can provide multi-layered data regarding the different facets of assessment. To assess the impact of screen time on social networking addiction, an independent t-test was utilized. The independent samples t-test showed a significant difference in addiction scores between students with less than 5 hours of screen time ($M = 65.75$, $SD = 19.52$) and those exceeding 5 hours ($M = 76.65$, $SD = 22.26$), $t(98) = 2.61$, $p = 0.01058$. These findings indicate that higher daily screen time is associated with greater social networking addiction, emphasizing that prolonged exposure to digital devices may facilitate compulsive use and reinforce addictive behaviors. It is a significant highlight of the research where the relationship between screen time and social networking addiction indicates a significant relationship.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that students aged 16–25 years generally exhibit moderate social networking addiction, driven primarily by salience, mood modification, and relapse dimensions. Gender differences in usage are negligible, but screen time is a significant predictor of addiction levels. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the patterns, purposes, and psychological components of social networking addiction among young adults and provide guidance for targeted strategies to promote healthy digital engagement.

Suggestions

- 1. Parental Awareness:** Parents must be educated about the digital abuse that students are going through these days; they have lost their sense of self and reality. And they must ensure mindful usage of the screen and social networking.
- 2. Government interventions for strict regulation:** The government must form strict policies and laws for social networking apps running in India, so that these apps do not deteriorate the quality of life of individuals.

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- 3. Institutional Guidelines:** Schools and colleges can include modules on responsible digital behavior. Institutes must watch students' patterns and regulate rules for screen time management.
- 4. Digital Literacy Training:** Encourage students to use social networking for academic and professional growth. Students should know the mechanisms and workings of social networking apps, along with the rules of the algorithm.
- 5. Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct seminars to educate about the risks of addiction and the steps to be taken for mindfulness.
- 6. Brain and dopamine connection:** Social Networking Addiction is a psychological phenomenon that impacts the overall functioning of the human brain; it must be studied in relation to the brain changes and the effects of dopamine release.
- 7. Further Research:** The era after COVID hindered human efficiency and students' cognitive abilities, which still hampers students' lives. More research must be conducted to examine and correlate social networking with other areas such as academic achievement, cognitive ability, self-esteem, etc.

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Conflict of Interest

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