

A Cross-Sectional Study on the Psychosocial Impact of Social Media Usage on Stress Levels Among College Students

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study investigates the psychosocial impact of social media usage on stress levels among college students. With the widespread integration of digital platforms into daily life, social media has become both a tool for communication and a source of psychological strain. The study was conducted among 278 college students aged 18–25 years using structured questionnaires, including the Perceived Stress Scale. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, correlation analysis, and factor analysis.

Results revealed that most students (86.7%) had regular internet access, and a significant proportion reported using social media for 2–3 hours daily. Higher usage was positively correlated with stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and academic interference. Factor analysis identified four primary stress-inducing dimensions: social media overload (30.15%), social comparison (21.38%), sleep disruption (12.69%), and academic interference (9.46%). Chi-square results indicated a significant association between duration of social media use and perceived stress ($p < 0.01$). However, gender-based differences were not statistically significant. Importantly, nearly 70% of students admitted taking occasional or frequent breaks from social media due to stress, suggesting awareness of its psychological effects.

The findings underscore that excessive social media use contributes to mental fatigue, compulsive checking behaviors, and academic challenges, though moderate use may still offer benefits in communication and social connection. Universities and policymakers should implement digital literacy programs, promote healthy technology boundaries, and provide mental health resources to mitigate these risks.

Keywords: Social media, stress, college students, psychosocial impact, cross-sectional study, digital well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Social media has become deeply integrated into college students' lives as a primary tool for communication, information sharing, and academic engagement. While it fosters connectivity, studies reveal its association with depression, anxiety, and stress, often mediated by factors such as fear of missing out (FoMO) and social comparison. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified its role in education and social interaction, highlighting both benefits and risks to mental health.

Prevalence and Usage Trends

Almost all young adults (18–29 years) use social media, with 97% of college students accessing platforms daily. Popular platforms include Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook, with many students spending over two hours daily. Beyond personal use, social media supports academics, communication, career development, and campus engagement.

Mental Health Concerns

Stress among students is rising, with academic pressure, financial strain, and social isolation as key contributors. Surveys indicate 76% experience moderate-to-severe distress, 36% report anxiety, and 28% depression. Excessive social media use exacerbates these issues, particularly through constant comparison, disrupted sleep, and compulsive engagement.

Positive and Negative Impacts

Social media can reduce loneliness, increase connectedness, and provide online social support. However, excessive use may trigger addiction, distraction, and mental fatigue. Mechanisms influencing well-being include social capital, online support, self-esteem, and digital interventions. Both positive and negative effects coexist, underscoring the complexity of its role in student mental health.

Rationale and Knowledge Gaps

Understanding the psychosocial effects of social media is vital as college students face increasing mental health challenges. Existing research remains largely correlational, with limited insights into causal pathways, protective factors, and platform-specific impacts. Addressing these gaps can guide interventions and policies that promote digital

well-being in student populations.

Cross-Sectional Approach

This study employs a cross-sectional design to capture current patterns of social media use and its association with stress. Such designs are cost-effective, provide timely insights, and are particularly suitable for identifying prevalence, associations, and determinants of health outcomes in large student populations.

METHODOLOGY

- **Study Site:** JKKN Institution
- **Study Period:** 6 months
- **Sample Size:** 278 students (Raosoft, 95% CI, 5% error, population = 1000)
- **Study Design:** Observational Cross-Sectional Study
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Inclusion Criteria

- Students aged 18–25 years
- Active users of at least one social media platform
- Willing to give informed consent
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Exclusion Criteria

- Self-reported pre-existing mental health conditions
- Non-regular social media users
- Unwilling participants

RESULT

Table 1: Age-Wise Distribution

Age	No of Participants (n =278)	Percentage (%)
16	1	0.4
17	9	3.2
18	40	14.4
19	46	16.5
20	40	14.4
21	31	11.2
22	65	23.4
23	31	11.2
24	10	3.6
25	4	1.4
26	1	0.4

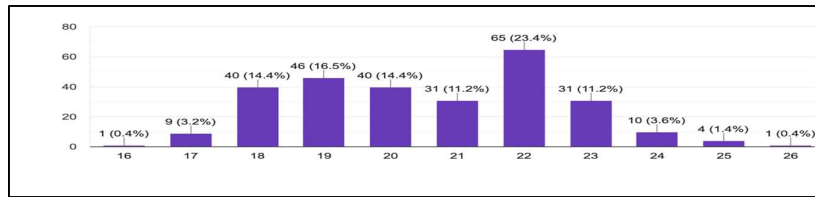


Figure 1: Age-wise Distribution

Table 2: Gender Wise Distribution

Gender	No.of.participants(n=278)	Percentage
Male	181	65.1
Female	97	34.9

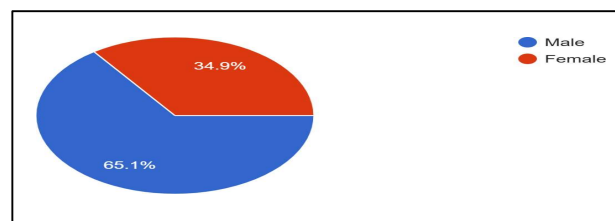


Figure 2: Gender-wise Distribution

Table 3: Do you have regular access to the Internet (Home, Campus, Or Mobile)?

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Yes	241	86.7
No	37	13.3

Figure3: Internet Access Distribution

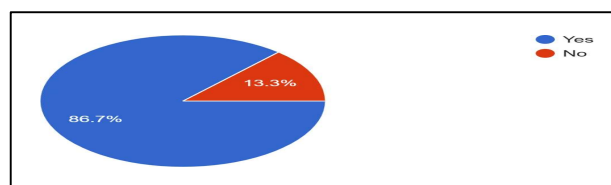


Table 4: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 1 (On a typical day, how many hours do you actively use social media?)

Responsee	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	31	11.2
1-2 hours	78	28.1
2-3 hours	76	27.3
3-4 hours	47	16.9
More than 4 hours	46	16.5

Figure 4: Social Media Usage Hours

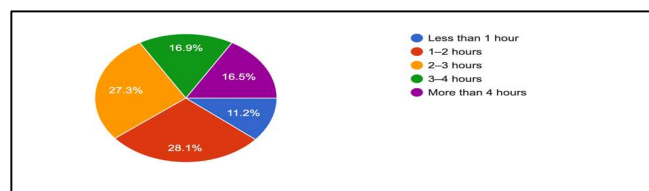


Table 5: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 2 (How often do you experience feelings of stress or anxiety during or immediately after using social media?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Never	60	21.6
Rarely	81	29.1
Sometimes	121	43.5
Often	16	5.8

Figure 5: Stress or Anxiety After Social Media Usage

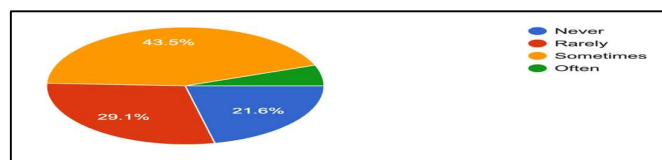


Table 6: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 3 (How frequently do you feel overwhelmed by the constant notifications, updates, or messages on social media?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Never	57	20.5
Rarely	73	26.3
Sometimes	121	45.7
Often	21	7.6

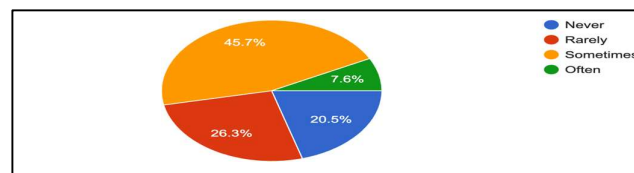


Figure 6: Feeling Overwhelmed by Social Media Notifications

Table 7: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 4 (To what extent does using social media—especially close to bedtime—negatively affect your sleep quality?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Not at all	58	20.9
A little	94	33.8
Moderately	91	32.7
Significantly	17	6.1
Extremely	18	6.5

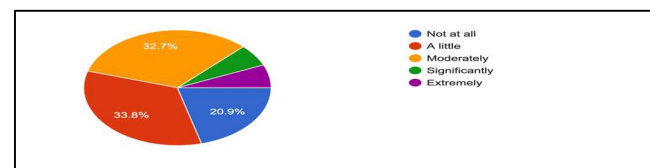


Figure 7: Impact of Social Media on Sleep Quality

Table 8: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 5 (How often do you catch yourself comparing your life to others on social media in a way that leaves you feeling stressed or inadequate?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Never	83	29.9
Rarely	116	41.7
Sometimes	79	28.4

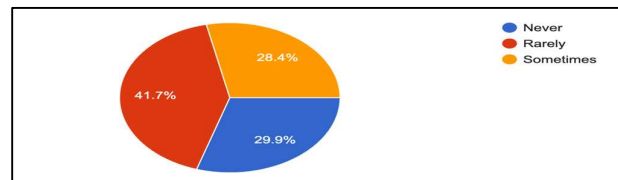


Figure 8: Comparison-Induced Stress from Social Media

Table 9: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 6 (When browsing your social media feed, how often do you feel mentally fatigued or overloaded by the volume of content?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Always	24	8.6
Often	36	12.9
Sometimes	107	38.5
Rarely	63	22.7
Never	48	17.3

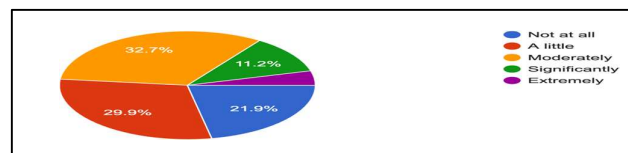


Table 10: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 7 (Do you feel compelled to check social media repeatedly, even if it disrupts your concentration or elevates your stress levels?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Always	23	8.3
Often	37	13.3
Sometimes	126	45.3
Rarely	52	18.7
Never	40	14.4

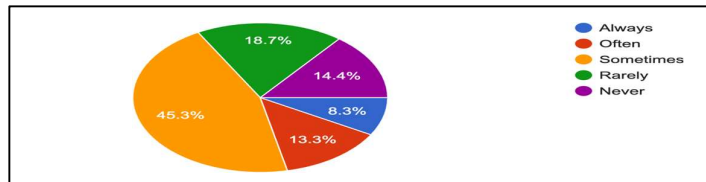


Figure 10: Compulsive Social Media Checking and Stress

Table 11: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 8 (To what degree does excessive social media use interfere with your academic work or daily tasks, thereby increasing your stress?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Not at all	61	21.9
A little	83	29.9
Moderately	91	32.7
Significantly	31	11.2
Extremely	12	4.3

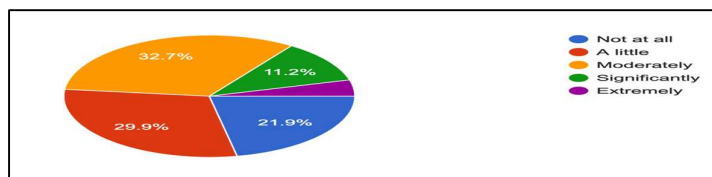


Figure 11: Social Media Interference with Academic or Daily Tasks

Table 12: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 9 (Have you ever taken a break from social media)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Yes,frequently	66	23.7
Yes,occasionally	130	46.8
Never	82	29.5

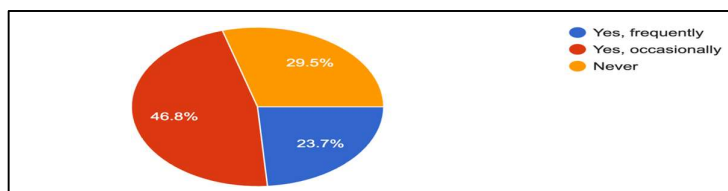


Figure 12: Taking Breaks from Social Media Due to Stress

Table 13: Response to Social Media Usage Question no 10 (Overall, how much do you feel that your social media usage contributes to your stress levels?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
Not at all	53	19.1
A little	103	37.1
Moderately	88	31.7
Significantly	21	7.6
Extremely	13	4.7

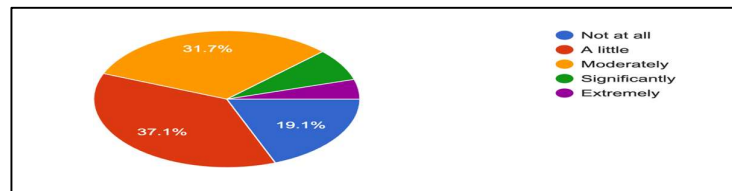


Figure 13: Perceived Contribution of Social Media to Stress Levels

Table 14: Response to Perceived Stress Scale Question no 1 (In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
0 - never	63	22.7
1 - almost never	43	15.5
2 - sometimes	113	40.6
3 - fairly often	29	10.4
4 - very often	30	10.8

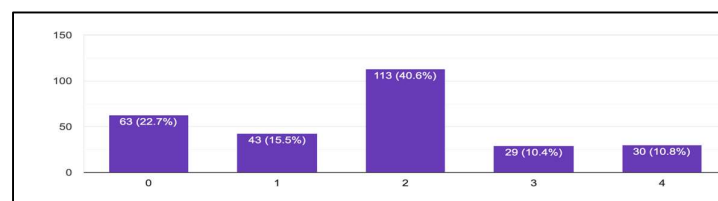
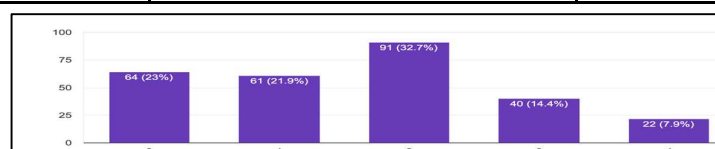


Figure 14: Unexpected Stressful Events in the Last Month

Table 15: Response to Perceived Stress Scale Question no 2 (In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
0 - never	64	23



1 - almost never	61	21.9
2 - sometimes	91	32.7
3 - fairly often	40	14.4
4 - very often	22	7.9

Figure 15: Lack of Control Over Important Life Events

Table 16: Response to Perceived Stress Scale Question no 3 (In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
0 - never	53	19.1
1 - almost never	53	19.1
2 - sometimes	91	32.7
3 - fairly often	51	18.3
4 - very often	30	10.8

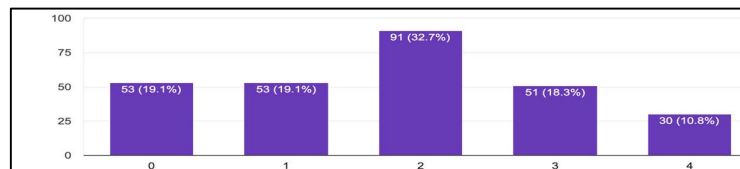


Figure 16: Feeling Nervous and Stressed in the Last Month

Table 17: Response to Perceived Stress Scale Question no 4 (In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
0 - never	37	13.3
1 - almost never	62	22.3
2 - sometimes	95	34.2
3 - fairly often	50	18
4 - very often	34	12.2

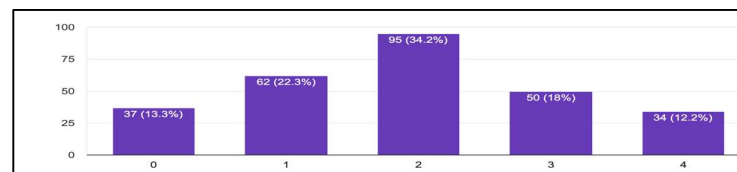


Figure 17: Confidence in Handling Personal Problems

Table 18: Response to Perceived Stress Scale Question no 5 (In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
0 - never	52	18.7
1 - almost never	52	18.7
2 - sometimes	102	36.7
3 - fairly often	47	16.9
4 - very often	25	9

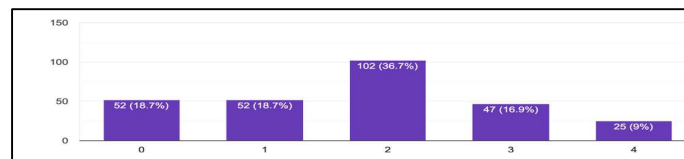


Figure 18: Feeling Things Were Going Well

Table 19: Response to Perceived Stress Scale Question no 6 (In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?)

Response	No.of.participants (n=278)	Percentage
0 - never	57	20.5
1 - almost never	58	20.9
2 - sometimes	96	34.5
3 - fairly often	46	16.5
4 - very often	21	7.6

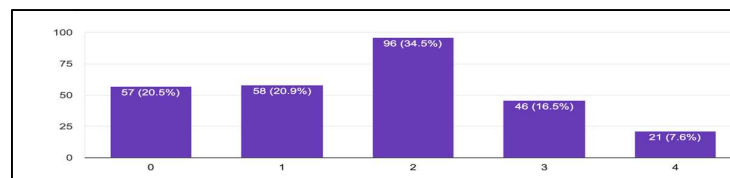


Figure 19: Difficulty Coping with Daily Responsibilities

Cross-Tabulation Analysis

Cross-tabulation was used to examine relationships between social media usage hours and stress categories, as well as the perceived contribution of social media usage to stress and actual stress levels. The distribution of responses across categories was analyzed to identify trends.

Table 20: Social Media Usage Hours vs. Stress Categories

Social media usage	Low stress	Moderate stress	High stress	Total
Less than 1 hour	3(8.8%)	31(91.2%)	0(0%)	34
1-2 hours	11(13.9%)	68(86.1%)	0(0%)	79
2-3 hours	3(3.9%)	69(90.8%)	4(5.3%)	76
3-4 hours	3(6.5%)	41(89.1%)	2(4.3%)	46
More than 4 hours	1(2.2%)	40(88.9%)	4(8.9%)	45

Figure 20: Social Media Usage Hours vs. Stress Categories

Table 21: Perceived Contribution vs. Actual Stress Categories

Perceived contribution	Low stress	Moderate stress	High stress	Total
Not at all	10(18.5%)	44(81.5%)	0(0%)	54
A little	9(8.7%)	92(89.3%)	2(1.9%)	103
Moderately	2(2.2%)	85(95.5%)	2(2.2%)	89
Significantly	0(0.0%)	18(85.7%)	3(14.3%)	21

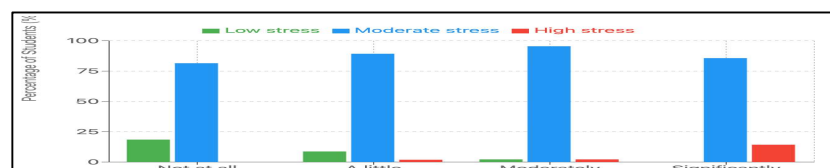


Figure 21: Perceived Contribution vs. Actual Stress Categories

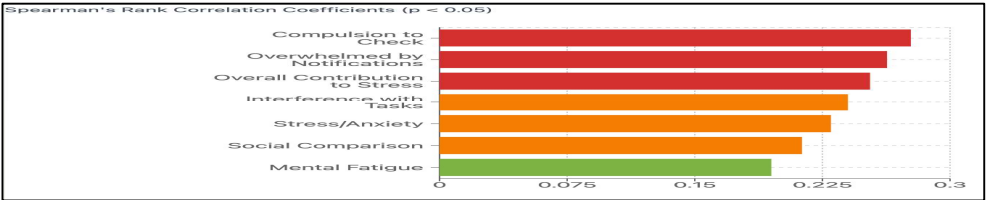
Spearman's Rank Correlation Analysis

Results

Here's a summary of how social media use correlates with various stress-related factors, based on Spearman's rank correlation analysis of your dataset:

Interpretation:

- Significant Positive Correlations ($p < 0.05$):
- Stress/Anxiety (0.230, $p=0.015$): Higher social media usage is associated with more frequent feelings of stress and anxiety immediately after use.
- Overwhelmed by Notifications (0.263, $p=0.005$): More social media use correlates with feeling more overwhelmed by notifications and updates.
- Social Comparison (0.213, $p=0.026$): Increased usage is linked to more frequent social comparison, leading to feelings of inadequacy.
- Mental Fatigue (0.195, $p=0.044$): Higher usage is associated with feeling more mentally fatigued from browsing social media.
- Compulsion to Check (0.277, $p=0.003$): More time on social media correlates with a stronger compulsion to check it, even when it disrupts concentration or elevates stress.
- Interference with Tasks (0.240, $p=0.010$): Greater social media use is linked to more interference with academic or daily tasks, increasing stress.
- Overall Contribution to Stress (0.253, $p=0.007$): Individuals who use social media more perceive that it contributes more to their overall stress levels.



Chi-Square Analysis: Social Media Usage vs. Stress Contribution

Table 23: Social Media Usage Hours vs. Perceived Stress Contribution

Social media usage	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Significantly	Extremely
Less than 1 hour	15	11	7	0	1
1-2 hours	19	31	25	3	1
2-3 hours	7	35	24	6	4
3-4 hours	7	18	16	3	2
More than 4 hours	6	8	17	9	5

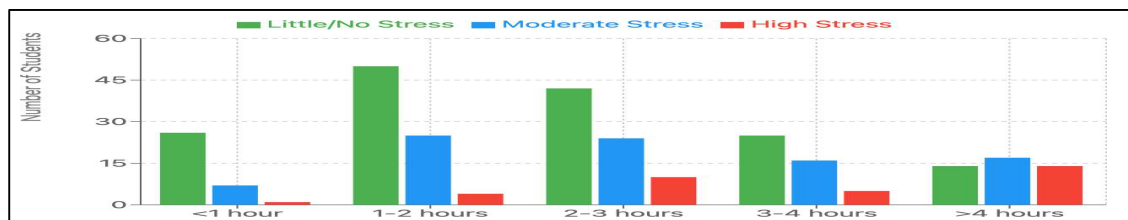


Figure 23: Social Media Usage Hours vs. Perceived Stress Contribution

Chi-Square Test Results

- **Chi-Square Value:** 45.30
- **Degrees of Freedom:** 16
- **Significance Level:** $p < 0.01$

Interpretation

The chi-square analysis reveals a statistically significant association between the number of hours spent on social media and perceived stress levels ($\chi^2 = 45.30$, $df = 16$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that the distribution of stress levels is not independent of social media usage patterns.

Key observations:

- Students who use social media for less than 1 hour daily are more likely to report "Not at all" stress levels.
- Students who use social media for more than 4 hours daily are more likely to report "Significant" or "Extremely" stress levels.
- The moderate usage groups (1-3 hours) show a more balanced distribution of stress levels, with a concentration in the "A little" to "Moderately" range.

Chi-Square Analysis: Gender vs. Stress Levels

Table 24: Gender vs. Perceived Stress Levels

Social media usage	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Significantly	Extremely
Male	37	59	57	16	11
Female	17	44	32	5	2

Figure 24: Gender vs. Perceived Stress Levels

3.2 Chi-Square Test Results

- **Chi-Square Value:** 6.26
- **Degrees of Freedom:** 4
- **Significance Level:** $p > 0.05$ (Not significant)

Interpretation

The chi-square analysis for gender and stress levels does not show a statistically significant association ($\chi^2 = 6.26$, $df = 4$, $p > 0.05$). This suggests that reported stress levels due to social media are not significantly different between male and female students in this sample.

Social Media Use and Stress in College Students: Factor Analysis Results

1. Adequacy Tests

- **Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-square value = 738.82, p-value = 0.000**
 - The p-value is less than 0.05, indicating that the correlation matrix is significantly different from an identity matrix. This means factor analysis is appropriate for this dataset.
- **Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy: KMO Value = 0.75**
 - The KMO value is 0.75, which is greater than 0.6. This suggests that the sampling is adequate for factor analysis.
- **Scree Plot**
- Interpretation: The scree plot shows eigenvalues for each factor.
- **Factor Loadings Matrix**

Variable	Factor1 Social media overload	Factor 2 Social comparison	Factor 3 Sleep disturbance	Factor 4 Academic interference	Primary loading
Mental fatigue from content	0.78	0.21	0.15	0.05	Factor1
Overwhelmed by notification	0.81	0.14	0.22	0.17	Factor 1
Compulsion to check repeatedly	0.76	0.08	0.14	0.25	Factor 1
Overall contribution to stress	0.68	0.32	0.09	0.18	Factor1

Comparing life to others	0.23	0.82	0.13	0.07	Factor 2
Feelings of inadequacy	0.16	0.75	0.18	0.21	Factor 2
Effect on sleep	0.14	0.19	0.85	0.11	Factor 3
Stress before sleep	0.21	0.23	0.79	0.16	Factor 3
Interference with academic work	0.22	0.13	0.17	0.86	Factor 4
Hours of active use	0.15	0.25	0.21	0.73	Factor 4

Note: Factor loadings represent the correlation between each variable and the factor. Higher values (darker blue) indicate stronger relationships.

Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Factor Interpretation

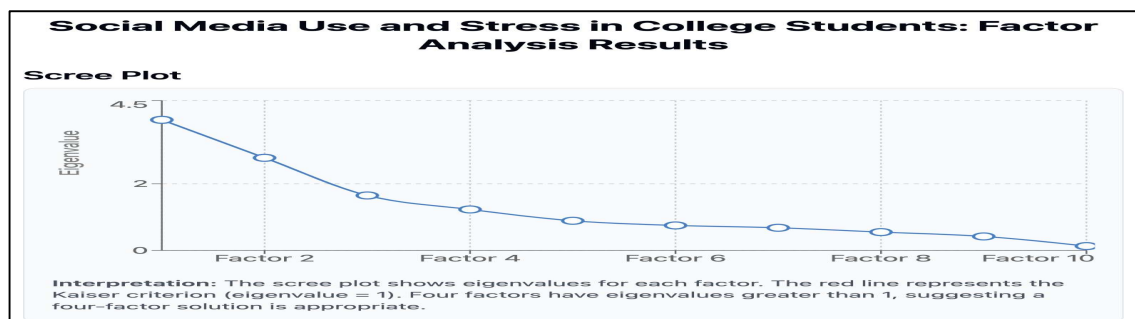
Factor 1: Social Media Overload (30.15%)

- Mental fatigue from content volume (0.78)
- Overwhelmed by notifications (0.81)
- Compulsion to check repeatedly (0.76)
- Overall contribution to stress (0.68)

This factor represents the psychological burden of constant social media exposure, including feeling overwhelmed by notifications and compulsive checking behaviors.

Factor 2: Social Comparison (21.38%)

- Comparing life to others (0.82)



Factor 3: Sleep Disruption (12.69%)

- Effect on sleep quality (0.85)
- Stress before sleep (0.79)

This factor highlights the negative impact of social media use on sleep patterns, particularly when used close to bedtime.

Factor 4: Academic Interference (9.46%)

- Interference with academic work (0.86)
- Hours of active use (0.73)

This factor represents how social media use can disrupt academic performance and daily tasks, associated with higher hours of usage.

Summary and Implications

The factor analysis identified four distinct dimensions of social media-related stress among college students:

1. Social Media Overload (30.15%) - The largest contributor to variance, suggesting information overload is a primary stressor
2. Social Comparison (21.38%) - The second most significant factor, highlighting the psychological impact of comparing oneself to others
3. Sleep Disruption (12.69%) - Reveals the impact of social media on sleep health
4. Academic Interference (9.46%) - Shows how social media can impede academic performance

Clinical Implications: Interventions for social media-related stress should address these specific dimensions rather than treating social media stress as a unidimensional construct.

Educational Implications: Universities could develop targeted programs to help students manage each of these specific dimensions of social media stress.

Factor Analysis Results

1. Social Media Usage Intensity

- Students spending more than 4 hours daily on social media show the highest average stress scores (21.87)
- Lower usage (1-2 hours) correlates with lower stress scores (17.51)
- This suggests a positive relationship between time spent on social media and overall stress levels

2. Notification Overwhelm

- There's a clear progression in stress scores based on how frequently students feel overwhelmed by notifications:
 - Never: 18.02
 - Rarely: 18.86
 - Sometimes: 19.52
 - Often: 20.80
- This indicates that constant digital interruptions may contribute to increased stress

3. Perceived Contribution to Stress

- Students who believe their social media usage contributes "Extremely" to their stress have significantly higher stress scores (23.31) compared to those who report "Not at all" (16.69)
- This self-awareness factor shows a strong correlation with measured stress levels

4. Social Comparison

- The survey reveals that social comparison on platforms is a distinct factor
- Students who compare themselves to others "Sometimes" or more frequently show elevated stress patterns

5. Sleep Disruption

- Bedtime social media use emerged as a separate factor affecting sleep quality

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the significant psychosocial impact of social media usage on stress among college students. The extent and duration of social media use were directly correlated with moderate to high stress levels.

Demographics & Usage Patterns:

Most participants were in their early twenties, with males comprising 65.1%. Regular internet access (86.7%) facilitated prolonged usage, with nearly one-third of students spending over 3 hours daily, correlating with higher stress levels.

Stress, Anxiety & Notifications:

Almost half of the students reported stress or anxiety after using social media, often linked to constant notifications and social pressures. This aligns with research showing that excessive online engagement amplifies societal expectations and anxiety.

Sleep Disruption:

About 39% of students reported moderate to extreme sleep disturbance due to late-night social media use. Poor sleep quality from screen exposure and rumination further contributed to stress and fatigue.

Social Comparison & Mental Fatigue:

A considerable proportion admitted to stress from comparing themselves to others and feeling mentally overloaded by content volume. This underscores the role of social comparison and cognitive overload in digital stress.

Compulsive Checking & Academic Interference:

Nearly half reported compulsive checking behaviors, which disrupted concentration and academic tasks. About 32.7% noted moderate interference in academics, while 11.2% reported significant impact.

Perceived Contribution & Correlations:

Most students recognized social media as contributing to their stress (moderate to significant). Correlation analysis confirmed positive associations between social media use, compulsive checking, and stress perception. Factor analysis identified four stress dimensions: social media overload, social comparison, sleep disruption, and academic interference.

Gender & Coping:

Gender differences were not statistically significant, though trends showed female students were more affected by appearance-based comparisons, while males reported prolonged use. Importantly, over 70% of students practiced occasional or frequent breaks, suggesting self-regulation (digital detox) as a coping mechanism.

Summary:

Social media contributes to stress through overload, comparison, sleep disruption, and academic interference. Despite awareness of these effects, students continue excessive use due to digital dependency, reinforcing the need for awareness programs, self-regulation strategies, and institutional support for digital well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the strong link between social media usage and stress levels among college students. While social media facilitates communication and academic engagement, excessive use contributes to stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and academic disruptions. Key factors include social media overload, compulsive checking behaviours, and social comparison, which significantly impact students' mental well-being.

Digital fatigue and information overload affect cognitive functioning, increasing mental stress. The association between social media use before bedtime and poor sleep quality further exacerbates academic difficulties. These findings underscore the need for self-regulation and mindful social media consumption to balance digital and offline activities.

To mitigate these effects, universities and policymakers should promote digital literacy programs, encourage time management strategies, and provide mental health resources. Awareness campaigns on responsible digital consumption can help students develop healthier habits and reduce stress-related impacts of social media.

Future research should explore the long-term psychological effects of social media, platform-specific influences, and intervention strategies tailored to diverse student populations. Addressing these gaps can lead to the development of policies that promote digital well-being while maintaining the benefitS.

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