Survey on Impact of Social Media on Mental Health: General Perspective

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	This study examines the multidimensional impact of social media on mental health among Indian youth, utilizing a descriptive cross-sectional survey involving 253 participants aged 15–35. In light of the increasing pervasiveness of digital platforms, the research probes how prolonged and patterned social media usage influences emotional well-being, anxiety, depression, self-comparison, cyberbully exposure, and behaviour patterns. Drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data, the findings reveal a paradoxical duality—while social media facilitates connectivity, creativity, and empowerment, it also heightens risks of emotional fatigue, reduced self-esteem, and psychological distress. The study proposes a framework for promoting responsible digital engagement through digital literacy, regulatory policies, and psychological support systems. It further recommends institutional interventions to mitigate adverse mental health outcomes, especially among digitally native populations.

Introduction

The advent of social media has transformed the way individuals interact, express themselves, and consume information. Particularly among youth, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Whats-app, and YouTube have become embedded in everyday routines, shaping identities, social affiliations, and even

emotional health. While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for communication, learning, and social engagement, emerging research highlights a disturbing correlation between excessive social media use and deteriorating mental health. Globally, and in India especially, concerns around anxiety, depression, body image issues, cyberbully, and addiction-like behaviors have gained urgency.

India has one of the largest youth populations globally, and their digital engagement has implications not only for individual mental health but also for public health and educational frameworks. Despite increasing awareness, a large segment of the population remains unaware of how digital habits intersect with emotional resilience and psycho-social development. This study therefore seeks to explore the lived experiences of Indian youth, investigate the psychological impacts of social media, and offer pragmatic interventions grounded in empirical evidence.

2. Research Objectives

Primary Objectives

- To analyse the correlation between social media usage habits and mental health outcomes among Indian youth.
- To examine the effect of social media on interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, and exposure to online risks such as cyberbully.

Secondary Objectives

- To explore coping mechanisms and strategies employed by youth to minimize adverse effects of social media use.
- To assess perceptions of social media as a platform for mental health advocacy and community-building.
- To recommend educational, institutional, and policy-level strategies for encouraging responsible digital behavior.

3. Literature Review

The relationship between social media and mental health has gained increasing attention over the last decade, with researchers seeking to understand both its benefits and adverse effects. Several global studies have emphasized the psychological vulnerabilities associated with constant digital connectivity.

➢ According to Twenge (2017), the rise of smartphones and social platforms has coincided with significant increases in reported symptoms of anxiety and depression among adolescents, especially in the post-2012 era. Similarly, Rosen et al. (2013) highlighted how high-frequency social media use can disrupt sleep patterns, reduce attention spans, and increase symptoms of obsessive-compulsive behaviors.

➢ De Choudhury and De (2014) studied mental health discourse on Reddit and demonstrated how online communities both facilitate emotional expression and perpetuate harmful ideologies. O'Reilly et al. (2018) found that adolescents experience social media as a space of emotional contradiction—both a safe outlet and a source of stress, comparison, and online harassment.

➢ In the Indian context, Bashir and Bhat (2017) noted a high prevalence of social anxiety and decreased self-esteem among Indian adolescents frequently using platforms like Facebook and Instagram. More recent studies (Ahmed, 2023) report that overuse of social media contributes to distraction, academic decline, and digital fatigue in students across urban India.

➢ The World Health Organization (2021) recognized the mental health consequences of digital overexposure as a global health concern, advocating for educational interventions and regulatory frameworks.

➢ Despite the concerns, researchers like Boyd (2014) argue that social media also promotes digital citizenship, supports identity formation, and provides platforms for marginalized voices. Therefore, the literature suggests a dual perspective: one that recognizes both the potential for empowerment and the risks of psychological distress.

This review lays the groundwork for the current study by highlighting the need for region-specific, youth-centered research in India to examine the extent and nuances of these phenomena.

4. **Methodology**

This study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional design with a mixed-methods approach to explore the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes among Indian youth. Data were collected from **February to May 2025.**

4.1 Research Design- A quantitative, survey-based method was adopted, supplemented with qualitative observations to capture subjective perspectives. This approach allows for both statistical analysis and thematic interpretation.

4.2 Population and Sampling- The study targeted individuals aged 15–35 residing in Kolkata, West Bengal, who were active users of social media platforms. A total of 253 respondents participated through simple random sampling.

4.3 Data Collection Tools- A structured online questionnaire was disseminated using Google Forms. It consisted of five sections: Demographics, Social Media Use, Emotional Impact, Coping Strategies, and Policy Perceptions.

4.4 Data Analysis Techniques- Data were compiled using Microsoft Excel for frequency tables and basic descriptive statistics. Graphs and charts were used to visually represent key trends. Open-ended responses were coded and thematically categorized to identify recurrent psychological patterns.

4.5 Ethical Considerations- Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained digitally. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No personal identifiers were collected. The study complied with the ethical standards set by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

4.6 Limitations

- Geographic limitation to Kolkata restricts broader generalizability.
- Reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias.
- Mental health indicators were not clinically verified.
- Social media use is dynamic and ever-evolving, requiring ongoing research.

This methodology provided a robust foundation for analysing trends and drawing reliable conclusions about the psychological impacts of social media among Indian youth.

5. <u>Results</u>

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

- **Age Distribution**: 60% (25–35 years), 26.7% (15–24 years), 10% (36 years and above)
- **Gender**: 56.7% Male, 43.3% Female
- **Education**: 90% Graduate or Postgraduate, 6% High School, 4% Diploma
- **Occupation**: 53.3% Employed Full-Time, 36.7% Students

5.2 Social Media Engagement

- **Average Daily Time Spent**: 36.7% (3–4 hours), 26.3% (2–3 hours), 20% (4–5 hours)

- **Popular Platforms**: Facebook (40%), WhatsApp (23.3%), YouTube (20%), Instagram (16.7%)

- **Activities**: Messaging, browsing, content sharing, watching videos, passive scrolling
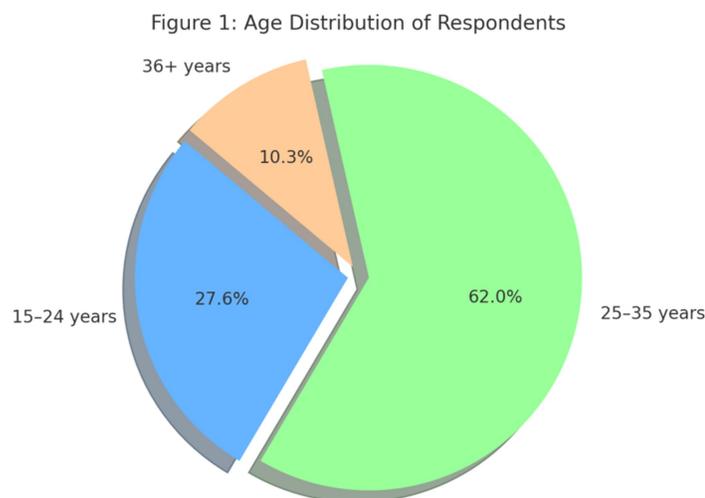
5.3 Mental Health Impacts Reported

- 63.3% acknowledged social media negatively impacted their mental health

- 40% experienced symptoms of anxiety and depression

- 56.7% identified addictive behavior and reduced self-control

- 43.3% reported incidents of cyberbullying or harassment

- 40% admitted frequent comparison with others' lives online

5.4 Coping Strategies and Perception

- 46.7% actively attempted to limit social media usage

- 53.3% believed social media could serve as a platform for positive change

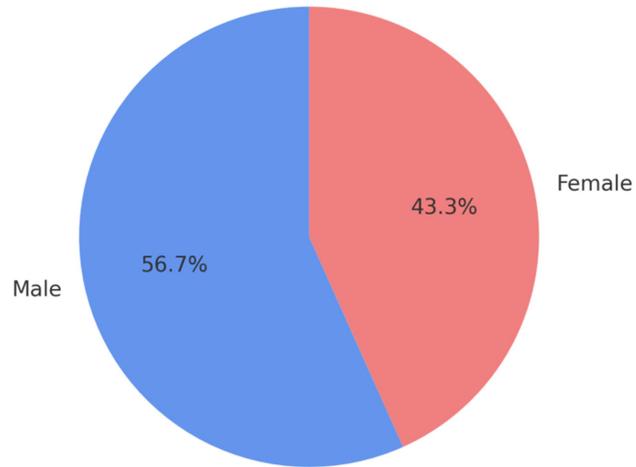- Majority supported stronger content moderation and regulation
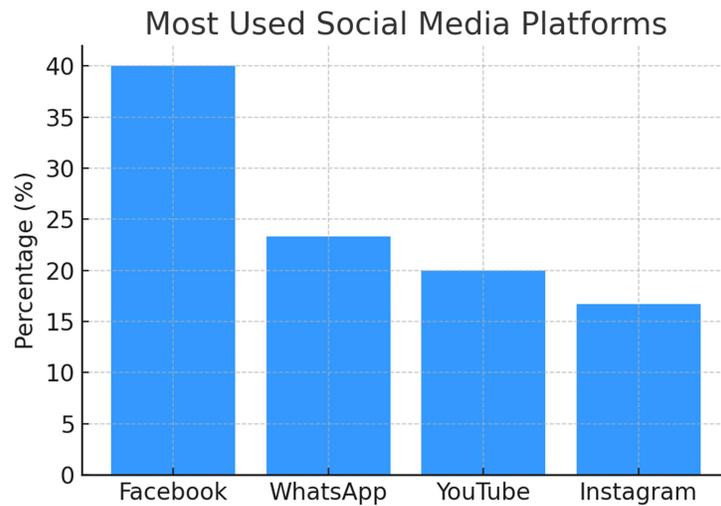
5.5 Charts and Graphs:
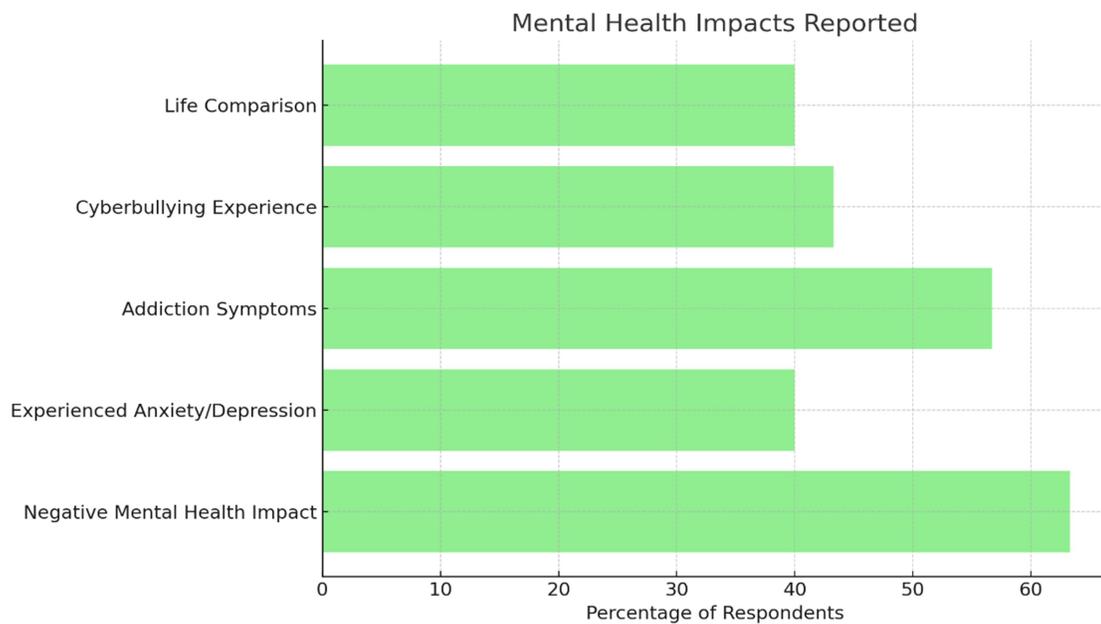

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Figure 2: Gender-wise Participation

Figure 3: Most Used Social Media Platforms

Figure 4: Mental Health Impacts

6. Discussion

The findings from the present study underscore the dual nature of social media's influence on mental health. While a majority of participants acknowledged the benefits of social media for communication, education, and community engagement, a significant portion reported emotional challenges linked to overuse and unregulated exposure.

6.1 Psychological Vulnerabilities Over 40% of respondents admitted to experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression following social media use. This aligns with previous studies (Twenge, 2017; Rosen et al., 2013) that identified prolonged screen time and digital overstimulation as risk factors for emotional dysregulation. The survey further revealed that 63.3% of users perceived negative effects on their mental health, suggesting that these experiences are not isolated but prevalent across the youth population.

6.2 Social Comparison and Self-Esteem a substantial number of respondents (40%) admitted to comparing their lives with curated digital content, leading to dissatisfaction and emotional strain. This behaviour reflects the influence of idealized online personas in distorting self-perception, as emphasized

by O'Reilly et al. (2018). The correlation between passive scrolling and emotional fatigue suggests a need for awareness around intentional engagement and digital boundaries.

6.3 Cyberbullying and Online Harassment The study found that 43.3% of youth had experienced cyberbullying or harassment, highlighting a pressing concern for digital safety. Such exposure can exacerbate mental health challenges, particularly among adolescents and young adults who lack robust coping mechanisms. This points to the need for school-based digital literacy programs and strong legal frameworks to protect users online.

6.4 Coping Strategies and Gendered Responses Despite awareness, only 46.7% of respondents reported efforts to limit their social media use, indicating a notable gap between recognition and action. Gendered differences also emerged: females expressed greater emotional impact and vulnerability, while males reported higher usage but less emotional acknowledgment. These insights necessitate gender-sensitive mental health interventions.

6.5 Positive Outlook and Digital Empowerment Encouragingly, more than half the respondents viewed social media as a potential force for social good. Platforms were acknowledged for supporting mental health communities, advocacy campaigns, and awareness efforts. This dual potential of social media—as both a risk and a remedy—should guide future research and policy making.

6.6 Implications for Policy and Practice The study reinforces the urgent need for:

- Integrating digital literacy and emotional well-being programs in educational curriculum,
- Promoting balanced online habits through public health messaging,
- Strengthening platform accountability with regulatory oversight,
- Enhancing access to online mental health services, such as tele-therapy and AI-driven support tools.

In conclusion, the data points to a generational dilemma: how to balance the immense opportunities of digital life with the risks it introduces. Sustainable digital engagement will require collaboration between governments, educators, health professionals, and technology providers.

7. <u>Conclusion</u>

This study illuminates the complex relationship between social media usage and mental health among Indian youth. While social media serves as a powerful tool for communication, self-expression, and social reform, its unregulated use poses significant risks to psychological well-being. The findings underscore a clear link between heavy social media engagement and symptoms of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and exposure to cyberbullying.

The dual nature of social media—as both beneficial and detrimental—calls for balanced usage supported by policy, education, and awareness. Future initiatives should aim to institutionalize digital literacy, promote mental health awareness, and enforce content regulation to foster safer digital spaces. This research also opens avenues for longitudinal studies, clinical assessments, and gender-specific strategies for mental health intervention.

Empowering youth with the tools to navigate digital ecosystems responsibly will be critical for ensuring that the virtual world enhances, rather than compromises, emotional well-being.

8. <u>References</u>

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9. <u>Appendix: Questionnaire</u>

Section A: Demographics

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Educational Qualification
4. Occupation

Section B: Social Media Use -

5. Which platforms do you use most frequently? (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.)
6. What is your average daily social media usage?

7. What are your most common online activities? (e.g., messaging, scrolling, posting, etc.)

Section C: Emotional and Mental Health

7. Have you ever felt anxious or depressed after using social media?
8. Have you experienced online bullying or harassment?
9. Do you compare your life to others based on social media content?

Section D: Coping and Support

10. Do you try to reduce your social media usage?
11. Do you follow mental health influencers or support groups online?
12. Do your school/college/institution promote mental health awareness?

Section E: Policy and Opinion

13. Do you believe social media platforms should be regulated for content moderation?

14. Should there be age-based restrictions on certain platforms?

15. Are mental health services easily accessible online?

Section F: Open Feedback

16. What are the positives you associate with social media?

17. What are the biggest challenges you face due to social media use?

18. What would help you improve your digital habits? 20. Any other comments or suggestions?