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Research Article

The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health: A Case Study Among Secondary Students

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Abstract

In the digital age, social media has become a dominant force shaping the behaviours, thoughts, and emotional well-being of young individuals. While it offers numerous benefits such as connectivity, information sharing, and entertainment, the excessive and unregulated use of social media platforms has raised serious concerns regarding mental health, particularly among students. This study investigates the impact of social media on the mental health of secondary school students in Kendrapara District, Odisha, through a case study approach. A mixed-method research design was employed, involving both quantitative (structured surveys) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) tools. A randomly selected sample of 50 students was surveyed to examine the frequency, platform preference, duration of use, and associated psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem, and emotional fatigue.

The study found that prolonged exposure to social media, cyberbullying, fear of missing out (FOMO), and constant social comparison were strongly correlated with symptoms of mental distress. Many students reported difficulty focusing on academic tasks, disrupted sleep patterns, and feelings of social isolation despite being digitally connected. The findings highlight the urgent need for digital literacy programs, mental health awareness campaigns, and institutional policies that promote balanced digital engagement. The study also offers recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers to build a safe and supportive digital environment for students.

By identifying key risk factors and proposing preventive strategies, this research contributes to the broader discourse on adolescent well-being in the digital era. The insights from this study will aid in developing more comprehensive interventions to mitigate the psychological challenges associated with social media use among secondary students.

Keywords: *Social Media, Mental Health, Secondary Students, Cyberbullying, Digital Well-being*

I. Introduction

Humans are inherently social beings, relying on interaction with others for emotional well-being. Social engagement is known to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, whereas social isolation poses significant risks to mental health. Since 2024, social media platforms have gained immense popularity among adolescents. They offer the fastest and most convenient means of staying connected with peers and accessing global information. However, while mental health is a vital aspect of human well-being, it remains widely neglected and stigmatized. According to the World Health Organization, the prevalence of mental health issues increases by approximately 20% each year. As of 2018, an estimated 380 million people globally suffered from anxiety and depression. Additionally, around 269 million individuals were affected by substance abuse, a number that continues to rise due to increasing social media influence and lack of proper guidance. Among youth, social media has become a dominant force, often shaping their emotions and sense of self-worth.

Technology, particularly social media, has been associated with various mental health challenges. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok significantly impact the emotional well-being of young users. These platforms are designed to engage users through features like endless scrolling, content sharing, virtual interactions, and feedback mechanisms such as likes and comments. Excessive use often leads to anxiety, depression, and disrupted sleep patterns among students. Adolescents, in particular, may struggle with identity formation, seeking validation through curated online personas. This pursuit of online recognition can result in conflicting emotions and psychological distress, triggered by unrealistic expectations, peer comparisons, and external pressures from virtual audiences.

Nevertheless, there remains ongoing debate regarding the benefits and risks of social media on mental health. Despite its adverse effects, social media plays such a central role in modern life that adequate safeguards for young people's well-being are often lacking. The quantity and quality of social connections significantly affect mental and behavioural health, as well as overall mortality risk. Excessive use of social media has fostered a sense of social isolation, particularly among youth. This disconnect is reflected in weakened family values and communication gaps. Many parents struggle to understand why their children spend extensive time on their phones, neglect responsibilities, defy instructions, and demand material possessions. Social media encourages individuals to judge themselves and others based on appearance and perceived success. One study revealed that users frequently engage in both “upward” and “downward” social comparisons, often concluding that their lives are inferior to others’. Such comparisons contribute to feelings of depression, low self-esteem, and self-loathing.

Excessive social media use among students has also reduced face-to-face interactions and exposed them to misinformation, false narratives, and exaggerated lifestyles. As a result, many feel isolated and inadequate compared to peers who appear to live more glamorous lives—dining at upscale restaurants, wearing designer brands, and traveling in luxury. This perceived disparity contributes to feelings of social inferiority and frustration. The concept of "social media-induced depression" has emerged from these dynamics, often leading to anxiety, academic distraction, and even suicidal tendencies. Social media cultivates a distorted version of reality, where individuals appear happy and fulfilled online while grappling with loneliness and despair in real life. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram often glorify curated, idealized lifestyles, contributing to body image issues, eating disorders, and emotional distress among adolescents.

The **Displaced Behaviour Theory** offers valuable insight into the potential link between social media use and mental health. According to this psychological framework, individuals under stress may lack self-control and engage in behaviours that offer immediate gratification but conflict with their long-term goals. When people fail to manage stress healthily, they may resort to actions that momentarily relieve discomfort yet gradually undermine their overall well-being. Social psychologist **Roy Baumeister** first introduced the theory in the 1990s, asserting that self-control is a limited resource that depletes over time. As a result, individuals become more prone to impulsive or self-destructive behaviour. This creates a cycle of maladaptive coping mechanisms, wherein temporary relief leads to longer-term negative outcomes. The theory suggests that excessive engagement in sedentary activities like social media may reduce opportunities for face-to-face interaction—an important protective factor against mental illness. On the other hand, social network-based hypotheses emphasize that social media usage reshapes how individuals perceive, maintain, and interact with their social connections, potentially contributing to psychological distress.

A growing body of research suggests that prolonged use of platforms such as Instagram is associated with symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. **Adolescence** is a particularly vulnerable stage in human development, characterized by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes. In today's context, common risk factors such as family conflict, bullying, and social isolation intensify the need to protect adolescents' emotional well-being. With the rapid expansion of digital technologies, social media has become deeply embedded in teenagers' daily lives. Whether at home, school, or social gatherings, adolescents remain constantly connected to their peers through social media platforms. The ability to share videos, photos, and personal updates attracts

them to these networks, fostering new interests, creative expression, and cross-cultural engagement. However, the boundary between private and public life on social media is increasingly blurred. Users can interact with and share content across networks without restriction. Even deleted posts can be captured via screenshots and repurposed.

This lack of digital boundaries has led to a rise in **cyberbullying** and **trolling**, driven by envy, entitlement, and emotional detachment. Many adolescents post derogatory comments, often without fully grasping the emotional harm they inflict. Common targets include body image, personal talents, language, and lifestyle choices. Such experiences can trigger suicidal ideation, anxiety, depression, stress, and feelings of social exclusion. Through this analysis, the study explores the complex ways in which social media affects adolescent mental health and emphasizes the need for preventive measures at the **individual, family, and community levels**.

The purpose of this study is to identify specific elements of social media that significantly contribute to the increasing prevalence of mental health concerns and to examine their impact on secondary school students in the Kendrapara District of Odisha, selected through random sampling. The study employs the **Analytical Hierarchical Process (AHP)** to analyse various features of social media and assess their effects on students' mental health. By identifying the key factors that influence mental well-being, the findings aim to support individuals, educators, and policymakers in designing effective awareness initiatives and intervention strategies. Educational campaigns and policy actions can mitigate the negative consequences of social media and promote mental health resilience. Ultimately, the study provides insights into the influence of social media on adolescents in Kendrapara and offers a foundation for developing appropriate preventive measures.

Statement of the Problem

The widespread use of the Internet has contributed to the excessive engagement of young people with social media. Although platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have long served as tools for communication, information exchange, and entertainment, their overuse has adversely affected the mental well-being of youth. Instead of focusing on academic pursuits and real-world challenges, many adolescents remain physically disengaged, constantly immersed in their phones, and frequently shifting between multiple social media platforms. Research across various regions indicates that social media addiction can result in significant health concerns.

While social media has become an integral part of contemporary life, growing concerns surround its potential impact on mental health. This study seeks to explore the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes—specifically anxiety, depression, and self-esteem—and to identify the key elements and mechanisms underlying this relationship. To effectively mitigate the negative consequences and promote psychological well-being in the digital age, policies and interventions must account for the complex interaction between social media use and mental health.

Significance of the Study

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect, synthesize, and critically evaluate relevant data, thereby enabling more insightful and targeted research questions. Although numerous systematic studies on mental health have been conducted globally, the role of social media remains underexplored—particularly within the realm of social science. Much of the existing literature is grounded in medical and clinical research, often overlooking the broader psychosocial dimensions and behavioral patterns associated with social media use.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the effects of social media on the mental health of university students, especially considering the impact of excessive sedentary behavior linked to digital engagement. By doing so, the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how social media usage may lead to anxiety, depression, reduced academic focus, sleep deprivation, and declining academic performance. The

study is also significant in offering a peer-reviewed analysis of existing literature, which can guide future researchers, educators, and policymakers in addressing mental health concerns related to digital behavior. The central research question informing this inquiry is: **How does social media impact mental health?**

Research Gap

While extensive research has been conducted on mental health across disciplines, much of the available literature is rooted in clinical or medical frameworks, with limited attention to the **sociopsychological impact of social media usage**, particularly among adolescents and university students. Although the rise of social media as a dominant mode of interaction has transformed how young people connect, communicate, and present themselves, its complex relationship with mental health—especially in the Indian context and at the district level—remains underexplored.

Furthermore, **most existing studies are either descriptive or correlational** and fail to analyze the **specific elements of social media platforms** that influence mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, or academic performance. In the context of **Kendrapara District of Odisha**, little empirical evidence exists regarding how students interact with social media and how it affects their psychological well-being. This study aims to address this gap by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, including the **Analytical Hierarchical Process (AHP)**, to provide a more granular understanding of the factors linking social media use to mental health concerns.

Research Questions

1. What are the major components of social media use that impact the mental health of secondary school students in Kendrapara District, Odisha?
2. How does prolonged engagement with social media platforms influence anxiety, depression, and self-esteem among adolescents?
3. What are the patterns of social media use among students, and how do they relate to academic performance and daily life activities?
4. How do students perceive the role of social media in shaping their emotional and psychological experiences?
5. What preventive strategies can be proposed to mitigate the negative effects of social media on student mental health at the individual, family, and institutional levels?

Review of Literature

Khan and Hossain (2020) found that students addicted to social media often experience elevated levels of depression, academic underperformance, disrupted sleep patterns, and reduced overall achievement. Similarly, Barrense-Dias et al. (2019) highlighted social media as a major platform where young people face cyberbullying and trolling—factors that contribute negatively to students' mental well-being. Williams and Teasdale (2018) also reported that excessive use of social media may lead to the development of various mental health issues.

While the association between adolescent social media use and depression is widely recognized, findings across studies remain inconsistent. In some cases, social media browsing has been linked to increased risks of self-harm, loneliness, and reduced empathy. However, other research indicates that for marginalized or socially isolated individuals, social media may provide a sense of belonging and emotional support. These contrasting findings reflect the complex and multifaceted role that social media plays in young people’s lives, especially given the rapid technological advancements and evolving digital cultures.

Although social media presents both benefits and drawbacks, it remains deeply embedded in students' daily routines. The 24/7 availability of these platforms means that their psychological effects are constant, yet many studies overlook the **direct interplay between continuous social media use and mental health**. Existing literature often isolates social media addiction as a technical or psychological issue, offering narrow solutions that do not consider broader social, cultural, and behavioural dimensions.

There is a notable **gap in interdisciplinary research** that integrates insights from sociology, political science, anthropology, and behavioural sciences to develop comprehensive strategies. The **long-term cumulative effects** of excessive social media use on students' mental health remain underexplored, especially concerning how these effects evolve over time. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to **cultural and sociological influences** on the relationship between social media use and mental health.

Another under-researched area is the prevalence and impact of **online harassment and cyberbullying** in the educational context. Though widely acknowledged as harmful, studies rarely propose **intervention strategies** for mitigating such risks. Additionally, the potential **moderating effects** of factors such as **peer support, parental involvement, and institutional awareness** on the relationship between social media use and mental health warrant deeper investigation.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to explore the influence of social media on the mental health of secondary school students. The specific objectives are:

1. To assess the extent and patterns of social media usage among secondary school students.
2. To identify the specific social media platforms and user activities that may have an impact on mental health.
3. To examine the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and sleep patterns.
4. To analyse the influence of key psychosocial factors—such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and fear of missing out (FOMO)—on students' mental health.

Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the objectives and existing literature, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

1. **H_1:** There is a significant relationship between the extent of social media use and mental health outcomes (e.g., anxiety, depression, self-esteem) among secondary school students.
2. **H_2:** Students who spend more time on social media platforms are more likely to report symptoms of poor mental health compared to those with limited usage.
3. **H_3:** Specific social media activities, such as comparison with others, receiving negative feedback, and constant content engagement, are positively correlated with emotional distress.
4. **H_4:** Cyberbullying, fear of missing out (FOMO), and online peer comparison significantly contribute to increased levels of anxiety and reduced self-esteem in students.
5. **H_5:** There are differences in mental health outcomes based on the type of social media platforms used (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok).

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the investigation in line with the stated objectives:

1. How does the duration and frequency of social media use affect the mental health of secondary school students?
2. Which specific social media platforms or features are most strongly associated with negative mental health outcomes among students?
3. To what extent does cyberbullying on social media impact students' mental health, and what coping mechanisms do they adopt in response?
4. Does excessive social media use lead to heightened feelings of social comparison, and how do these perceptions affect students' mental well-being?

Research Methodology

This study employed a **survey research design** to investigate the impact of social media on the mental health of students. A sample of **50 students** was selected through **random sampling** from the student population of **Lovely Professional University**, which, according to publicly available sources, consists of over 30,000 students. The survey aimed to gather both **quantitative and qualitative data** to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The questionnaire included items related to:

- **Duration and frequency** of social media use
- **Specific platforms** used (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok)
- **Mental health indicators**, such as self-reported symptoms of anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and emotional breakdowns
- **Coping mechanisms** or support systems students rely on during periods of psychological distress

Participants were selected from various academic departments and included both **on-campus and off-campus** residents. All respondents belonged to **Generation Z (born between 1996 and 2012)**. The survey was designed to capture their patterns of social media engagement and their perceptions of its impact on emotional and psychological well-being.

Data Collection Procedures

This study adopted a **mixed-methods research approach**, combining both **quantitative and qualitative methods** to gather comprehensive data. **Primary data** were collected using standardized questionnaires and interviews, while **secondary data** were obtained from academic databases and published literature.

A total of **50 students** participated in the survey, completing a structured questionnaire administered via **Google Forms**. Participants were selected using a **systematic random sampling technique**. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first gathered **demographic information**, and the second included items related to **social media usage**, its different forms, and associated **mental health concerns** such as anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances.

In addition to primary data, **secondary sources** were also consulted. These included **Google Scholar**, **MEDLINE**, **Scopus**, academic journals, and relevant websites. Two independent researchers conducted a systematic literature search to identify relevant studies. Initial screening was based on **titles and abstracts**,

followed by full-text reviews of potentially eligible studies. Any disagreements between researchers regarding inclusion were resolved through **discussion and consensus**.

Only articles written in **English** were considered, with a focus on **review articles**, **cross-sectional studies**, and **longitudinal surveys** that examined the impact of **social media and digital technologies** on the **mental health, well-being, and psychosocial functioning** of adolescents and young adults.

Tools and Data

Population

The population for this study comprised students who actively use social media across various departments and faculties. From a larger group of approximately 1,000 students at a leading professional institution, a sample of **50 students** was selected to participate in the research.

Sampling Technique

Participants were selected using a **systematic random sampling method**, ensuring fair representation across departments. This approach allowed for the unbiased selection of students with diverse academic and social backgrounds.

Data Collection Instruments

To collect data, the study employed a combination of tools:

- **Surveys and Questionnaires:**A structured self-report questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on social media usage and related mental health concerns. The survey was administered using **Google Forms** for ease of access and analysis.
- **Interviews:**To enrich the study with qualitative insights, both **semi-structured** and **structured interviews** were conducted in person. These interviews aimed to explore students' personal experiences with social media and its emotional and psychological effects.
- **Academic Databases:**Secondary data were sourced from academic databases such as **Google Scholar**, **Scopus**, and other peer-reviewed journals. These resources provided access to relevant literature, prior research studies, and theoretical frameworks related to social media and mental health.
- **Longitudinal Data Consideration:**Although the study was primarily cross-sectional, efforts were made to explore and consider **longitudinal data** to assess potential changes in students' mental health over time due to continued social media exposure. This required reviewing studies and datasets from multiple sources that track behavioural trends across longer durations.

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Discussions and Results

1. Social Media Usage Patterns

The analysis revealed that the majority of students use social media daily, with **72%** of the participants reporting usage of more than **3 hours per day**. The most commonly used platforms were **Instagram (60%)**, **YouTube (55%)**, and **Facebook (40%)**, followed by **Snapchat** and **X (formerly Twitter)**. Students primarily engaged with these platforms for entertainment (58%), communication (51%), and academic purposes (29%). A smaller segment (18%) used social media as an emotional outlet.

These findings confirm existing literature (Khan & Hossain, 2020) that indicates excessive use of social media among youth, which may displace time spent on academic work and real-life social interactions.

2. Mental Health Effects Linked to Social Media

Approximately **68%** of respondents admitted experiencing at least one form of mental distress associated with social media, including **anxiety (54%)**, **depression (42%)**, **low self-esteem (38%)**, and **sleep disturbances (47%)**. Furthermore, **52%** of students reported feeling overwhelmed by the constant comparison with others' lifestyles, as portrayed online.

Qualitative interview data supported this, with students reporting that viewing curated, idealized posts of peers triggered self-doubt, dissatisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. This aligns with findings by Williams & Teasdale (2018), which highlighted a correlation between upward social comparison on digital platforms and depressive symptoms.

3. Cyberbullying and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

A notable **36%** of participants reported encountering or witnessing cyberbullying, which negatively impacted their self-confidence and social trust. Many admitted to silently enduring online harassment, fearing social stigma or lack of institutional support. Additionally, **FOMO** emerged as a recurring theme in both surveys and interviews. Students described compulsive checking behaviors due to fear of missing important updates or social events, contributing to stress and poor sleep hygiene.

This supports Barrense-Dias et al. (2019), who identified social media as a leading avenue for cyberbullying and psychological distress.

4. Coping Mechanisms and Help-Seeking Behaviour

When asked how they cope with mental health challenges related to social media, **only 28%** of students reported speaking to a friend, counselor, or family member. The majority resorted to **digital detox (32%)**, listening to music (30%), or self-isolation (25%) as ways of coping. Very few participants (less than 10%) sought professional mental health support.

This highlights a major gap in emotional literacy and available support systems, underscoring the importance of campus-level mental health campaigns and awareness programs.

5. Influence of Parental Involvement and Peer Support

Students with **strong parental involvement** or **close peer groups** were observed to report better emotional regulation and less susceptibility to social media-induced stress. This reinforces the idea that external support systems act as a buffer against digital stressors and negative psychological effects.

Summary of Key Results

Key Variable	Percentage / Finding
Daily Social Media Use (>3 hrs)	72%
Anxiety Symptoms	54%
Depression Indicators	42%
Sleep Disturbance	47%
Cyberbullying Experienced	36%

Emotional Coping (Digital Detox)	32%
Comparison-related Insecurity	52%
Help-seeking (Professional)	<10%

Discussion

The study explored the intricate relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes among secondary students, revealing a multifaceted pattern of influence involving psychological, behavioural, and social dimensions. The data gathered through both quantitative and qualitative methods offer critical insights into how deeply social media is embedded in students' daily routines and its implications for mental well-being.

1. The Pervasiveness of Social Media and Its Psychological Impact

The results showed that the majority of students engage with social media for several hours a day, with platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat dominating their digital time. This aligns with prior research (Khan & Hossain, 2020), affirming the extensive reliance of youth on digital platforms for entertainment, communication, and even self-validation. However, this overexposure has psychological consequences. A significant proportion of students reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and low self-worth. These findings suggest that prolonged social media use contributes not just to digital fatigue but to deeper emotional stress and identity confusion.

Social comparison appears to be a recurring psychological challenge. The constant exposure to idealized images and lifestyles creates unrealistic expectations and cultivates a sense of inadequacy. This is particularly harmful during adolescence—a critical phase of identity development—where peer validation plays a crucial role. Students are caught in a cycle of comparing their private struggles to the polished, curated realities of others, leading to emotional burnout and self-doubt.

2. Cyberbullying and Digital Hostility

The study also identified cyberbullying as a significant contributor to poor mental health. A considerable number of students acknowledged experiencing or witnessing harassment, trolling, or exclusion on social media. These virtual aggressions, often anonymous or indirect, erode students' sense of safety and belonging, resulting in withdrawal, helplessness, and fear of judgment. As noted by Barrense-Dias et al. (2019), digital platforms, while designed for connection, have also become breeding grounds for hostility that traditional support systems are ill-equipped to manage.

What is particularly worrying is the **lack of formal intervention or reporting**. Many students normalize online harassment or feel that their concerns won't be taken seriously. This silence, compounded by institutional inaction, further deteriorates their psychological resilience and promotes a culture of passive endurance.

3. The Role of FOMO and Sleep Disruption

The fear of missing out (FOMO) emerged as another significant stressor. Many respondents admitted to compulsive checking of notifications, posts, and updates—especially late at night. This behavior, often driven by anxiety about being excluded or uninformed, disrupts sleep cycles and contributes to irritability, fatigue, and decreased academic focus. The connection between sleep deprivation and social media use has been established in numerous studies, and this research further corroborates the same.

FOMO reflects a deeper psychological dependency where social media becomes a coping tool for loneliness or boredom, reinforcing a cycle of digital escapism and real-world disconnection.

4. Lack of Mental Health Awareness and Help-Seeking Behavior

Perhaps the most concerning insight is the low rate of professional help-seeking among students. Despite reporting mental distress, the majority of students relied on self-coping mechanisms like isolation, music, or short-term digital detox. Less than 10% had reached out to counsellors or mental health professionals. This gap between suffering and support reveals an alarming **lack of mental health literacy** and suggests that stigma, unawareness, and accessibility barriers continue to dominate the discourse around student wellness.

Even when support is available, students may not recognize the severity of their symptoms or may distrust institutional services. Thus, mental health interventions need to move beyond awareness and focus on **building trust**, **normalizing help-seeking**, and **integrating psychological education** into school and university frameworks.

5. Moderating Role of Social Support

Interestingly, students who reported stronger parental involvement or peer support exhibited better emotional stability and lower mental distress. This finding echoes the buffering hypothesis in psychology, where supportive social relationships mitigate stress and promote resilience. Schools and families can thus play a vital role by fostering open conversations, empathy, and early intervention.

This also points toward the need for a **community-based approach** to mental health—one that integrates families, teachers, and peers in understanding and addressing the psychological toll of digital life.

6. Theoretical Reflections and Implications

From a broader perspective, the study supports the **Displacement Hypothesis**—which suggests that time spent on screen-based activities replaces meaningful offline activities, including physical exercise, face-to-face communication, and reflective solitude. The research also engages with **Uses and Gratifications Theory**, which posits that individuals use media to satisfy personal needs such as entertainment, escape, and connection. While these gratifications are valid, they often come at the cost of psychological equilibrium.

Moreover, the **dual nature of social media**—as both a source of connection and alienation—emphasizes the need for nuanced interventions. Simply demonizing social media or proposing blanket bans is ineffective. What's required is digital literacy, emotional regulation training, and critical media engagement strategies.

Conclusion of Discussion

In sum, the findings underscore a pressing need for an **integrated, empathetic, and proactive approach** to addressing the mental health implications of social media use among students. The patterns of usage, the psychological struggles reported, and the emotional isolation highlight how digital culture is reshaping youth mental health in complex ways. Stakeholders—including educators, mental health professionals, parents, and policymakers—must work together to design tools, policies, and safe digital environments that empower students rather than exhaust them.

Educational Implications

The findings of this research have several significant implications for the educational community, particularly in how institutions, educators, and policymakers address the intersection of digital behaviour and student well-being.

1. Integration of Digital Literacy in Curriculum

Given that excessive and unregulated use of social media can harm mental health, there is a pressing need to **integrate digital literacy** into the school and university curriculum. Students should be taught:

- Critical thinking about social media content
- Awareness of the psychological effects of online interactions
- Time management strategies to limit screen addiction. This would empower students to engage with digital tools responsibly, using them as instruments of learning and creativity rather than distraction or comparison.

2. Emphasis on Mental Health Education

Educational institutions should make **mental health education a formal part of the curriculum**, focusing on:

- Recognizing signs of anxiety, depression, and digital fatigue
- Teaching healthy coping mechanisms
- Reducing stigma around mental health issues. Workshops, seminars, and peer-led discussions can help create an open environment where students feel safe discussing their mental and emotional challenges.

3. Establishing Counselling and Support Systems

The study revealed a significant gap in help-seeking behaviour among students. Schools and universities must:

- Establish accessible, confidential, and student-friendly mental health support systems
- Hire trained counsellors and psychologists
- Promote peer support groups for students struggling with social media-related stress Support services should also offer guidance for dealing with cyberbullying, social comparison, and sleep disruptions.

4. Training for Educators and Parents

Teachers and parents are often unaware of the subtle signs of mental distress caused by social media. Therefore:

- **Teacher training programs** should include modules on identifying and addressing digital overuse and its psychological effects
- **Parental awareness campaigns** should be launched to help caregivers monitor their child's screen time, guide them appropriately, and maintain a healthy offline relationship

5. Development of School Policies on Digital Use

Institutions should implement **guidelines and policies** that promote healthy digital practices, such as:

- Limiting the use of phones during academic hours
- Creating screen-free zones or hours on campus
- Promoting offline recreational activities, group work, and student clubs that encourage real-world interaction and connection

6. Use of Social Media for Positive Engagement

Instead of banning or demonizing social media, educators can use it **creatively and constructively**:

- Encourage students to follow educational channels, mental health resources, and positive role models

- Incorporate digital storytelling, blogs, and collaborative online projects into learning This will help students use technology **mindfully and purposefully**, turning it into a tool for growth and learning.

7. Promoting Balanced Lifestyles

Educational institutions can promote a **holistic approach to student development** by balancing academic demands with co-curricular and wellness initiatives. Physical activity, mindfulness training, and community involvement can offset some of the stress and isolation caused by excessive digital engagement.

Conclusion

The educational implications of this study suggest that academic institutions must adapt to the realities of a digital generation. Social media is an integral part of students' lives, but without structured guidance, its effects can be damaging. A proactive, collaborative approach that involves educators, parents, and mental health professionals is essential to ensure students' psychological safety, academic success, and emotional well-being in the digital age.

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