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## Review Article

### ADDICTION TO SOCIAL MEDIA: A REVIEW

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#### ABSTRACT

The massive growth of social media has led to the global concern of social media addiction, which affects a large portion of society. Addicts of social media can be identified using a variety of parameters including conflict, mood swings, behavioral changes and conflict. Researchers in previous literature have approached a variety of methods to identify and curb the problem of social media addiction. In addition to social and cultural aspects, social media addiction like any other type of addiction is also governed by personal lifestyle and health habits. This type of addiction has been classified as a type of behavioral addiction which stems mostly from problems in personal and social life. Several therapies and tactics have been proposed to reduce the level of addiction. In this paper, a comprehensive review of research carried out in social media addiction has been provided.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Social media is defined as a collection of Internet applications which permit users to create and share their content online. Social media is varied and includes both web and mobile applications such as forums, electronic mail, messaging services, social networking websites and blogs. Shared content includes electronic data in the form of statuses, photos, posts, multimedia and text files, likes and comments. Such media allows people to connect with people who have shared interests (Livingstone and Brake, 2010). However, with any new invention comes associated risks, and social media too has a negative side to it.

Most social media have age limits, allowing only people above the age of thirteen to have access. The last few decades have witnessed a burgeoning of progressive social media among adolescents and adults alike. However, a growing concern among medical practitioners and researchers is the addiction to social media (Leung, 2014). Often people even misuse such media. There have been instances of users being exposed to disturbing material containing pornography and violence (Livingstone and Haddon, 2008; Sabina *et al.*, 2008) as well as being victims of sexual harassment and cyber-bullying (Kiriakidis and Kavoura, 2010; Erdur-Baker, 2010). The principal causes of social media addiction include loneliness, need for socializing, monotony, the need to

exchange information or simply to spend time (Yao and Zhong, 2014). More and more attractive content and user-friendly designs in social media applications have resulted in people not being able to control the amount of time spent on such applications. This eventually leads to social media addiction. Several users maintain multiple accounts across social media, which leads to even more addiction. Some people even lose interest in their vocation or other hobbies due to the negative impact of such technology. Addiction to social media also stems from a negative attitude toward other important things and a feeling that usage of such sites and apps cannot be avoided. Many users report feeling 'empty' when they are told to restrict their social media usage. Many also experience depression, health problems, loss of concentration, sleeping troubles, difficulty in real-world interaction, self-obsession, self-conflicts, ineffective planning and impulsivity (Savcı and Aysan, 2016) as a result of prolonged use.

However, identification of the causes of such addiction and taking prompt measures can help individuals regain control over social media addiction. We need not stop using such technology because of addiction. It is important to inculcate in people the notion that controlled use of social media is needed. This will benefit not only society, but also the world at large.

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## RELATED WORKS

A vast amount of research has been done with regard to social media addiction. Boyd, 2014 has discussed the disastrous consequences that social media addiction has, especially on teenagers. Teenagers who stopped using social media suddenly complained of feeling cramped up. Being habituated to the idea of virtual friendships in social media, they also experienced difficulties in socializing and maintaining interpersonal relationships in real life. In this case, addiction refers to the "passionate engagement with technology" which is like a virulent disease. Although the term *addiction* was initially meant for alcohol and illicit drug abuse, it now encompasses a variety of "compulsive behavior" such as over-eating, gambling, self-harm and social media addiction. One of the primary reasons of teenage social media addiction is because parents are more restrictive about teenagers going outside without their knowledge due to safety reasons. This causes teenagers to become more confined to their homes and as a result, they resort to social media as a means of whiling away the time.

O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011 have discussed both positive and negative effects of social media on children, families and adolescents. Parents should regulate the web activities of pre-adolescents and children to ensure they are not exposed to any explicit web content which may be inappropriate for their age. They have also discussed about "Facebook depression" (Walker and Moak, 2010; Selfhout *et al.*, 2009; Melville, 2010) which is a condition occurring in teenagers. When they spend an excess of time on social networking websites like Facebook, they start to exhibit depression-like symptoms. Several advertisements on such social media also deceive youngsters into buying goods over the internet. Such advertisements target the young generation because they are aware that teenagers are mostly not strong enough to make bold decisions at their age.

Cabral, 2008 has analyzed the activities of "Generation Y" with regard to four popular social networking websites, namely, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and MySpace. According to the author, a high percentage of social media users are "Generation Y" or the "next generation". The author discusses that college students are prone to social media addiction due to their vulnerability. Adolescents are also prone due to their perception of social media as a tool for constantly reinforcing relationships. They often try to use social media as a way to relieve their societal pressure. A survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey.com which consisted of answering 12 questions spanning various areas like demographics, personal interests, general social media use and behavioral addiction. Mood was not tested in the study because the responses may have been individually biased. Regularity of social media was ranked as follows: Facebook (98.4%), Twitter (34.2%), LinkedIn (18.5%) and MySpace (1.3%). In the self-perception test, 59% of users agreed to be social media addicts while 22.4% were neutral. The study has been concluded by stating that such high levels of social media addiction are indeed affecting daily lives and relationships of Generation Y users.

Correa *et al.*, 2010 have assessed personality traits as a reason for indulging in excessive social media usage. Their sample consisted of 1482 people ranging from ages 18 to 84. Other

factors they considered in their study besides personality traits are life satisfaction, socio-demographics and social media use. Their results show that more anxious and extraverted males and females are prone to social media usage while in case of this particular sample of women, life satisfaction was not a factor for judging social media usage. With regard to age, extraversion plays a predominant role for social media usage in young adults (ages 18-29). Openness to new things was also positively correlated with increased levels of social media usage.

Griths *et al.*, 2014 have admitted that while usage of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) may be necessary in this generation in order to be connected, it is also necessary to use it appropriately and not to use it excessively. The authors have discussed a number of factors which may be responsible for contributing to social media addiction such as self-perception, social network addiction scales, the effect on interpersonal relationships and the link between social networking and other online addictions. The authors have discussed another important aspect of social media addiction: how such addiction can be controlled or treated. There are various methods of dealing with this type of addiction and some ways are slowly controlling usage instead of complete abstinence and undergoing cognitive-behavioral therapy (Echeburúa and de Corral, 2009) as well as realizing the amount of time spent online, interacting more with people and questioning the value of social media content being browsed regularly (Gupta *et al.*, 2013).

Xu and Tan, 2012 have claimed that the addiction of users to Social Networking Services (SNSs) is completely different from other similar addictions like online pornography, shopping or gambling addiction. They have elucidated the process of build-up of SNS addiction and stress on the role played by usage of SNS. Such users perceive social media as their only source of relieving stress, depression and loneliness, which means they are not able to properly interact with people around them in real life. They have concluded that they will conduct a survey in future studies.

Pelling and White, 2009 have surveyed 223 university students using a TPB (Theory of Planned Behavior) model. The sample consisted of 36% male students and 64% female students with an average age of 19 years. They included reason for usage, attitude, PBC (Perceived Behavioral Control) and subjective model as factors in their model. The results indicate that all these factors play an important role in the process of social media addiction. Moreover, users seeking attention and comfort in social media tend to be more prone to addiction.

Elphinston and Noller, 2011 examined the relation among Facebook intrusion, relationship problems, and related outcomes in 342 undergraduate students in Australia aged 18 to 25 years involved. They used a Facebook Intrusion Questionnaire (FIQ) consisting of eight items in order to gauge the extent of addiction to Facebook. The authors found a high correlation between addiction to Facebook and problems in relationships.

Kittinger *et al.*, 2012 analyzed how Facebook usage is correlated with Internet use in a sample of 281 undergraduate American students having a mean age of about 20 years. They used the IAT (Internet Addiction Test) (Young, 1998)

which consisted of 20 items to evaluate the level of Internet addiction. A 5-point scale is used. A score of 50-79 means the user has occasional problems, while scores  $\geq 80$  indicate a higher level of addiction. The results showed that users having scores of 50 and above reported facing problems mostly with regard to excessive usage of Facebook.

Porter *et al.*, 2012 have analyzed the effect of social media usage on interpersonal relationships among 219 young adults in the range of 18-25 years. The IDS (Internet Dependency Scale) (Mitchell and Beard, 2010) has been used to evaluate the time spent by users on social media. The results depict that the users felt withdrawn from social media after usage for a certain period of time. There was also a negative correlation observed between social media usage and maintaining successful interpersonal relationships.

An important aspect of social media usage is the games offered by the particular social networking website. Most users login to a social media website because they are addicted to one or more games on the website. Such games often allow users to invite or engage other users as part of the game. Zhou, 2010 has analyzed addiction to SNS games using the IAT (Young, 1998) among 342 college students in Mainland China in the range of 18–22 years. In particular, the game "Happy Farm" has been considered in this study. The threshold for addiction was fixed to be five out of eight items in the IAT. 24% of the sample participants have been classified as addicted.

A slight positive correlation was also observed between SNS game addiction and loneliness and a reasonable positive correlation between SNS game addiction and leisure boredom.

Machold *et al.*, 2012 have assessed the hazards of overuse and addiction of Internet usage among 474 teenagers in Ireland in the age group of 11 to 16 years. 72% of the teenagers were frequent users of social networking sites, of which 95% were Facebook users. 33% of teenagers felt they overused social networking.

Olowu and Seri, 2012 have conducted a study among 884 students in Nigeria in the age group of 16 to 30 years. They evaluated the behavior of the students with regard to social networking. 34% of the users admitted to frequent usage of social networks. 64% students were often using the SNSs while 25% of the students claimed they were overspending time. 21% felt agitated without social network usage while 27% agreed they were addicted to social networking.

Saaid *et al.*, 2014 have studied Twitter addiction among undergraduate university students. Of the 100 responses they obtained, 34% were heavy users of Twitter who tweeted 5 to 10 tweets per day. The extreme 10% had no clue about their tweets per day. 71% who were Twitter addicts claimed the reasons were for getting followers (45%), keeping tabs on current news (30%), to be aware of the surroundings (15%) and to spend time (10%). Webb and Wasilick, 2015 have examined social media addiction among school students studying in grades 9 to 12.

**Table 1** Comparison of Studies conducted on Social Media Addiction

Reference	Number of People	Audience	Social Networking Website(s)	Factor(s) for Addiction
[14]	---	Generation Y	Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and MySpace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demographics</li> <li>• personal interests</li> <li>• general social media use</li> <li>• behavioral addiction</li> <li>• personality traits</li> <li>• life satisfaction</li> <li>• socio-demographics</li> <li>• social media use</li> <li>• reason for usage</li> <li>• attitude</li> <li>• PBC (Perceived Behavioral Control)</li> <li>• subjective model</li> </ul>
[15]	1482	18 to 84 years	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FIQ (Facebook Intrusion Questionnaire)</li> </ul>
[20]	223	University students	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> </ul>
[21]	342	Undergraduate Students (18-25 years) in Australia	Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IDS (Internet Dependency Scale)</li> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> <li>• Internet game addiction</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• Internet usage patterns</li> <li>• parental supervision</li> <li>• hazards of SNS use</li> <li>• frequency of usage</li> <li>• time spent</li> <li>• behavioral changes</li> <li>• number of tweets per day</li> <li>• reason for addiction</li> <li>• abstinence</li> <li>• self-perception</li> </ul>
[22]	281	Undergraduate Students in America	Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> </ul>
[24]	219	Young adults (18-25 years)	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> <li>• Internet game addiction</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• Internet usage patterns</li> <li>• parental supervision</li> <li>• hazards of SNS use</li> <li>• frequency of usage</li> <li>• time spent</li> <li>• behavioral changes</li> <li>• number of tweets per day</li> <li>• reason for addiction</li> <li>• abstinence</li> <li>• self-perception</li> </ul>
[26]	342	College students (18-22 years) in China	Happy Farm – SNS game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> <li>• Internet game addiction</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• Internet usage patterns</li> <li>• parental supervision</li> <li>• hazards of SNS use</li> <li>• frequency of usage</li> <li>• time spent</li> <li>• behavioral changes</li> <li>• number of tweets per day</li> <li>• reason for addiction</li> <li>• abstinence</li> <li>• self-perception</li> </ul>
[27]	474	Teenagers (11-16 years) in Ireland	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> <li>• Internet game addiction</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• Internet usage patterns</li> <li>• parental supervision</li> <li>• hazards of SNS use</li> <li>• frequency of usage</li> <li>• time spent</li> <li>• behavioral changes</li> <li>• number of tweets per day</li> <li>• reason for addiction</li> <li>• abstinence</li> <li>• self-perception</li> </ul>
[28]	884	Students (16-30 years) in Nigeria	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> <li>• Internet game addiction</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• Internet usage patterns</li> <li>• parental supervision</li> <li>• hazards of SNS use</li> <li>• frequency of usage</li> <li>• time spent</li> <li>• behavioral changes</li> <li>• number of tweets per day</li> <li>• reason for addiction</li> <li>• abstinence</li> <li>• self-perception</li> </ul>
[29]	100	Undergraduate university students	Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> <li>• Internet game addiction</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• Internet usage patterns</li> <li>• parental supervision</li> <li>• hazards of SNS use</li> <li>• frequency of usage</li> <li>• time spent</li> <li>• behavioral changes</li> <li>• number of tweets per day</li> <li>• reason for addiction</li> <li>• abstinence</li> <li>• self-perception</li> </ul>
[30]	---	School students (Grades 9-12)	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAT (Internet Addiction Test)</li> <li>• Internet game addiction</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• Internet usage patterns</li> <li>• parental supervision</li> <li>• hazards of SNS use</li> <li>• frequency of usage</li> <li>• time spent</li> <li>• behavioral changes</li> <li>• number of tweets per day</li> <li>• reason for addiction</li> <li>• abstinence</li> <li>• self-perception</li> </ul>

The students were first asked to abstain from any form of Internet usage for a period of 24 hours. The students were then asked questions about their abstinence and addiction and their perception of the feelings experienced during those 24 hours. The students were then educated more through class activities and discussions in order to make them more aware about social media addiction and the need to control it. A comparison of all the studies discussed in this paper has been shown in Table 1.

## CONCLUSION

From the above studies, it is clear that social media addiction is a condition which is predominantly affecting students and young adults. It needs to be addressed immediately and is a growing cause of concern. Any form of addiction needs to be curbed and is harmful for the society. It is important that we make people around us aware of the situation and the deleterious effects it can have on our work, friends and family. Social media addiction also hampers the personal development and growth of an individual. Hence, while it is good to use social media to connect and share with other people, it is also important that we do not forget our real-world interactions. It is necessary to restrict social media usage to a certain limit so that addiction does not occur.

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