

Impact of Social Media on Students' Mental Health at University Level

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ABSTRACT: This research examines the impact of social media on the mental health and psychological well-being of university students. Being the part and parcel of the daily routine of the university students due to their wide-spread use on the social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, social media is considered to have a detrimental effect on their mental health in terms of creating anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem. The purposes of this study included the examination of social media use patterns among the university students; identification of both positive and negative consequences on mental well-being; and finding out the correlation between social media use and students' psychological well-being. The research adopted the descriptive research methodology and data were gathered through questionnaires and interviews. Simple random sampling technique was used to collect data from 310 university students enrolled at six universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad for the academic year 2025-2026. The gathered data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics and regression analysis using SPSS. The results indicated that 58.4% of respondents used social media for more than five hours per day, 25.8% for three to five hours, and 15.8% for one to three hours. The study concludes that the effects of social media on students' mental health are both positive and negative, depending on the duration and purpose of use.

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Introduction

Social media is the term that refers to websites and apps where people can create, share and interact with each other regarding content, information or even with other people in virtual space. The emergence of social media has changed the way we communicate, interact and share information. It has brought many changes in our lifestyle, our working style and our relationship with others. Now social media is an important part of our life and billions of people all around the globe use social media websites to exchange information. Social media websites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok have become necessities of life. Social media has become an indispensable component of student life, particularly university students. Social media websites including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter have been widely used for communication, education and recreational purposes. According to

researchers, there may not always be a positive impact of social media on the lives of students. For instance, the research done by Osman (2025) revealed that the overuse of social media by university students had a significant relation to anxiety, sleeping pattern and social isolation. According to the study by Li et al. (2025), the addiction to social media made depression worse among students; however, it was minimized because of proper offline relations among women students. Hence, one can state that social media has positive aspects in relation to socialization and expression; nevertheless, it poses a threat to the psychological health of students and their academic success.

In the modern era of digitalization, social media has become an integral element of people's lives, especially of university students. Social networking sites like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and X (Twitter) provide students with opportunities to communicate, share and stay updated with world trends. Nevertheless, despite all its advantages, social media is starting to gain importance in regard to affecting the state of mental health of students. Constant presence in the ideal world can provoke the state of psychological stress. In a research paper by Landa et al. (2024), researchers used the scenario of university students at the National Autonomous University of Honduras to explore the impact of social media addiction on academic engagement. They concluded that, while social media addiction did not have an immediate effect on academic engagement, it produced higher levels of symptoms of depression and lowered self-esteem, both of which had a mediating effect on lowering academic engagement. For example, individuals with greater levels of social media addiction indicated more symptoms of depression, which in turn produced lower academic involvement.

On the other hand, the research conducted by Qamar and Ali (2026) serves as an example of a rather recent study of quantitative nature which seeks to examine the effect of Instagram on the mental well-being of university students in Pakistan. Specifically, it has been carried out on 515 undergraduate students from universities of Islamabad and sought to identify the role of Instagram in the process of development of depression based on its effect on such psychological aspects as self-esteem and social comparison. The findings revealed that regular use of Instagram leads to self-perception distortion, low self-esteem and depression.

Nevertheless, excessive usage of social networks may have adverse effect on people's mental well-being in terms of increased stress, anxiety, loneliness and insomnia. University students are especially vulnerable due to stress related to studies and constant usage of social media. This paper investigates the effects of the usage of social media on the mental well-being of students at the university level.

Objectives of the Study

This research has following objectives:

1. To determine the positive and negative effects of social media on students' mental health.
2. To examine the relationship between social media use and mental health among university students.

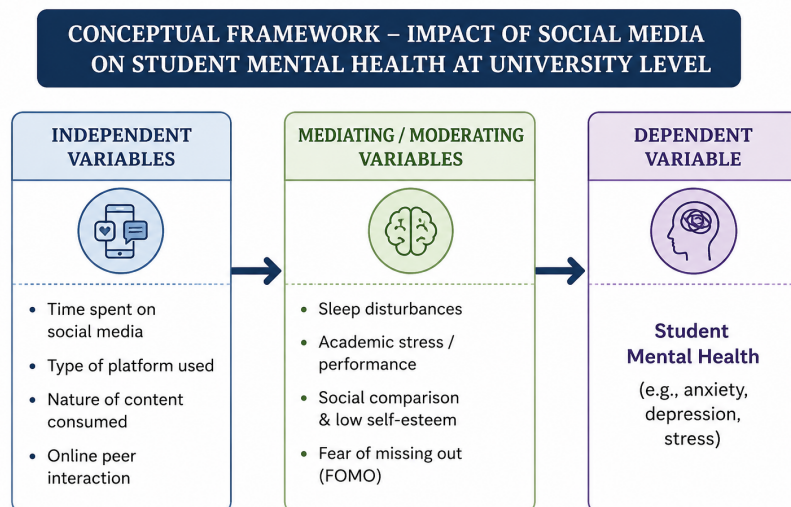
Research Questions

- Q1. What are the positive and negative effects of social media on the mental health of university students?
- Q2. What is the relationship between social media use and the mental health of university students?

Significance of the Study

The current research played a vital role in increasing knowledge about the effect of the use of social media on the mental health of university students. This research highlighted the possible dangers associated with excessive use of social media such as anxiety, depression, and stress. The current research offered important information that can help universities develop proper systems to support their students and increase their awareness. In addition, this research stressed the need for the responsible use of social media.

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Literature Review

The literature review, it can be seen that there is an emerging trend towards concern regarding the effects of social media usage by students on their mental health. literature reveals that excessive use of social media websites has a direct connection with mental problems such as anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem. the students tend to make unfavorable comparisons of themselves with others on social media, which has negative impacts on their self-esteem and psychological condition. Moreover, disturbance in sleep patterns and poor academic results are associated with excessive screen time and late-night usage of social media sites. Even though there is some literature focusing on the positive aspect of social media, such as social connection and expression of emotions, it has been concluded that negative psychological effects prevail over the positive ones, especially if the use is uncontrolled.

Social Media Impact on Mental Health

Additionally, Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) mentioned that mental health issues have become rather common in university students who fail to cope with studying, focus on their subjects, attend classes, and establish healthy relationships with others. The key point which prevents many university students with mental health issues from obtaining any help is stigma, lack of knowledge about the issue, and unavailability of support services. Finally, Stallman (2010) found that psychological issues happen rather often in the case of university students, unlike the rest of the people. In particular, the findings of his research showed that stress can result in psychological problems.

Social Media Platforms

Snap Chat

Snapchat is one of the applications offered on Android, iPad, and iPhones. Through Snapchat, its subscribers can send photos that disappear in 1-10 seconds. Currently, Snapchat has 100 million users every day, out of whom 70% are females. Studies conducted by Piwek et al. (2026) suggest that more than 77% of college students use Snapchat every day. Snapchat is predominantly used for creative purposes (73%) and connecting (27%). Snapchat is reported by 23% of college students to be easier than texting.

YouTube

YouTube is a video hosting website. The website belongs to Google. Unregistered users can view videos on YouTube and registered users can upload videos.

Instagram

Instagram is another site that has become one of the most popular and fastest-growing social media networks (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). This site has been designed in such a way that one can access it only through the smartphone app (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Based on the research carried out here, the use of this site may cause smartphone addiction to the user. The Instagram site is one in which users upload photos and live-stream videos that are visible to other Instagram users. It has also been discovered that people feel envious and depressed when they socially compare themselves to strangers who are living a much better life than them (Verduyn et al., 2017).

The Rise of the Twitter Platform

Twitter is another social networking site that has become popular in recent times. However, while Instagram uses videos and images, Twitter is a site that has been designed to use text messages referred to as tweets. Twitter users can interact with their families, friends, and even sports personalities or celebrities whom they follow in addition to other firms and organizations they follow (Kwak et al., 2010).

Impact of Negative Tweets

However, with the emergence of Twitter, studies have been carried out on the visceral level of the conversation where some individuals used to criticize some sporting events on the platform. In doing so, the study about the negative information being shared on the platform, the researchers took into account the motivation and mindset of the users, their perspective about the quality of their lives (Yang & Srinivasan, 2016). It is seen that the individual suffering from the depressed state of mind and negativity about their quality of life tends to be aggressive and dissatisfied while tweeting.

TikTok

TikTok, which was launched in September 2016, had already gathered fifty million users by June 2018. To put it differently, an average of twenty million new users per month had been gathered.

Positive Effects of Social Media on Mental Health

Even though there are many negative effects of social media usage, its moderate use may have positive impacts on the mental health of university students. The network helps students form social ties, cooperate on academic work and get emotional support. This information is corroborated by Godard (2024), who claims that active social media use is positively related to emotional support and psychological well-being of students.

Communication Improvement

The use of social media helps university students to establish social ties, feel less lonely, and have the feeling of belonging. Social media provides opportunities for social connectivity and allows forming relationships between peers, as Ellison et al. (2007) state.

Educational Assistance

Nowadays, social media has become a significant source for education in universities. University students make use of social networks for receiving necessary learning material, conducting discussion, working on group projects, and communicating with teachers. Educational communities such as Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and YouTube allow students to exchange educational knowledge, solve problems together, and be updated on the course information. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) believed that social networking sites provide collaborative learning and promote student participation. Moreover, according to Tess (2013), social media promotes higher education through collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Emotional Support

Furthermore, social media acts as an emotional platform where students can connect with online forums or groups and get encouragement through sharing their experiences and seeking advice on handling similar issues. Awareness pages about mental health, counseling pages, and peer support groups provide a space where one can discuss his or her mental stresses, anxieties, and other emotional issues. These interactions may help one feel less isolated and motivate him or her to seek professional help in case it is needed. According to Naslund et al. (2016), online peer support communities have the potential to positively influence mental health due to the provision of emotional support and the reduction of mental illness stigma.

Career Opportunities

Social networking sites have provided more options for career development among university students. Sites such as LinkedIn allow students to create their professional profile, meet people from different professions, seek internships, and look for job opportunities. Additionally, social media gives access to career counseling, webinars, skill development courses, and networking events that help students prepare for the workforce. As stated by Nikolaou (2014), social networking sites have become essential tools for recruiting, career planning, and professional networking.

Negative Impact of Social Media on Students' Mental Health (University Level)

Low Self-Esteem and Negative Self-Image

Students in universities tend to make comparisons with other people through social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. With almost all the contents being idealized, it sets up impossible standards for success, beauty, and lifestyles. According to a research done by Vogel et al. (2014), constant social comparison through social media contributes to poor self-esteem and self-evaluation. Upward social comparison has been shown in 2025 studies to cause increased depression due to low self-worth.

Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

One of the major mental health problems facing university populations is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying refers to harassing, humiliating, spreading rumours and sending abuse through electronic devices. According to Kowalski et al. (2014), cyberbullying is highly linked to stress, anxiety, depression and emotional instability. This causes long-term psychological harm, especially when the bullying is repetitive or public.

Sleep Disturbances

Overuse of social media, especially late in the night, has been linked with poor sleep quality among university students. It interferes with their body clock and limits sleep. Levenson et al. (2016) showed in their research that there is a significant relationship between increased social media use and poor sleep quality and insomnia.

Addiction and Reduced Academic Productivity

Social media may be addictive, causing students to spend more time than they should scrolling through, posting, and interacting. It causes decreased concentration and leads to procrastination. According to Andreassen et al., social media addiction correlates with distress, poor self-regulation, and dysfunction. Individuals who have social media addiction tend to perform poorly academically and are stressed. Recent 2025 research indicates that high level of usage (over 3 hours) is linked to mental exhaustion and social isolation among students.

Relationship Between Social Media and Mental Health

Another aspect of the connection between social media and people that has become rather relevant for conducting scientific research in recent years is the link between social media and mental well-being. Given the rise of popularity of social networking websites like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X, today university students often use social media as well. Not only does social media become a means for communication, but it can also be educational and therapeutic. However, it was found out that frequent use of social media can cause numerous problems related to the mental health of individuals.

According to the research conducted by Pantic (2014), social media plays an important role in the lives of adolescents and university students from the point of view of the influence on their mental well-being. The author mentions that despite the fact that social networking provides people with an opportunity to establish contact and communicate with others, frequent usage of social media may negatively influence individuals' mental condition. The main problem mentioned by the researcher is that regular use of social media can cause the development of different psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, loneliness, and low self-esteem.

Research Methodology

Research Design

For the current research study, the descriptive research methodology was adopted, which included using survey research methodology to study the effects of social media usage on the mental health of university students. For the current study, the effects of social media usage have been studied based on more than five variables such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, among others. Furthermore, the university students have been chosen for the current research study because it is only the university students who use these social media websites more than any other category of people. Moreover, the university students belong to the adolescent stage of education and thus can be enticed by these social media websites due to their incomplete psychological development stage.

Population and Sample

Normally, a research population involves a huge number of people or objects which are the main subjects of study in the scientific study. That is why researchers use sampling techniques as one of the most important methods. Moreover, a population is a group of people who differentiate themselves from other groups because of the characteristics specified. Overall, the population of this study involves approximately 1760 students of Rawalpindi and Islamabad universities, consisting of male and female students. The data from the population was collected using the simple random sampling technique, where every member of the population had an equal chance to be selected. The sample size of this study includes 310 undergraduates' students of Rawalpindi and Islamabad universities.

Research Instruments

The main instrument used in this research in the process of data collection is a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher personally. The instrument was designed in order to collect data about the level of mental health and coping strategies used by students.

Data Collection

Data collection refers to a process that involves collecting of information for the purpose of research. Following the acquisition of appropriate permission from concerned departments, the researcher collected primary data by means of a self-designed questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered to university students selected from various

universities located in the cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The data collected was then collated for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected was statistically analyzed by means of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis involved the computation of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages with regard to the demographic features and social media usage trends of the respondents. Inferential statistics, such as regression analysis, were performed to ascertain the connection between social media usage and the mental well-being of students. the findings of the analysis were then interpreted keeping in mind the objectives of the study.

Ethical Consideration

All ethical considerations were maintained during this research process. Participants provided informed consent. Their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and their right to withdraw was guaranteed. Data were gathered without causing any harm to participants for academic purposes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter contains the analysis and interpretation of gathered data on the impacts of social media use on mental well-being of respondents. The analysis of data was done using the tools of SPSS and Excel. Descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing, and regression analyses were used in the analysis. Tables and percentages were used in presenting results including both positive and negative impacts of social media.

Positive Impact of Social Media

Social media gives an opportunity for university students to learn, communicate, and develop themselves. It facilitates learning processes, collaborations within the academic sphere, social interactions, and provision of emotional support. The appropriate use of social media could be beneficial for creativity and self-expression of university students.

Table 1

Positive Effect of Social Media

S.No		1	2	3	4	5
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
	Statement	Percentages (%)				
1	Social media helps me stay connected with friends and family	7.1	3.9	10.3	40.0	38.7
2	Social media provides useful academic information and resources	4.8	8.1	10.3	33.9	42.9
3	I feel socially supported through social media platforms	6.2	19.5	18.2	19.2	37.0
4	Social media helps me build new relationships	8.7	16.5	23.9	22.3	28.7
5	Social media improves my communication skills	10.6	13.2	17.7	21.3	37.1

It can be concluded from the findings that most people viewed social media positively. The majority of respondents stated that social media enables them to keep connected with their friends and families (78.7%). Also, social media serves as a source of academic information and resources (76.8%). More than half of the people agreed that social media improves their communication skills (58.4%), and more than half believed that social media serves as a form of social support (56.2%). Furthermore, 51.0% of the respondents felt that social media helps create relationships, while a considerable number of people (23.9%) remained neutral.

Negative Effect of Social Media

While there are several positive outcomes of social media, excessive social media usage might have negative implications for the mental well-being of university students. Spending too much time on social media websites, comparing oneself to others, cyberbullying, and social media addiction are linked to anxiety, stress, depression, and low self-esteem among university students. Besides, too much usage of social media is associated with sleep disorders, poor academic performance, lack of concentration, and social isolation.

Table 2

Negative Effect of Social Media

S.No		1	2	3	4	5
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
	Statement	Percentages (%)				
1	Social media distracts me from my academic responsibilities.	10.0	16.8	20.0	22.9	30.3
2	Excessive social media use affects my sleep quality.	11.0	15.5	16.5	27.4	29.7
3	Social media negatively affects my self-confidence.	12.9	27.1	26.5	10.6	22.9
4	I experience mood swings because of social media.	11.6	22.3	29.0	15.5	21.6
5	Social media increases my stress level.	9.7	24.5	24.8	19.4	21.6

The results indicate that the participants experienced moderate negative effects of social media use. The majority of participants confirmed that social media distracts them from schoolwork (53.2%) and influences their sleep quality (57.1%). In contrast, fewer respondents considered social media's influence on their self-confidence negative (33.5%), mood fluctuations (37.1%) or stress level (41.0%).

Relationship between Social Media Use and Mental Health

The relationship between the use of social media and mental health is not simple and is defined by the level of social media use, its duration and purpose. The moderate and goal-oriented social media use promotes communication, education and psychological well-being of a person. Meanwhile, excessive social media use leads to elevated level of anxiety, depression, stress, low self-esteem and sleeping problems. The factors like social comparison, cyberbullying, FOMO (fear of missing out) and social media addiction increase this negative correlation.

Table 3*Relationship between Social Media and Mental Health*

S.No		1	2	3	4	5
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
	Statement	Percentages (%)				
1	There is a link between time spend on social media	11.0	9.4	26.5	16.1	37.1
2	Balance use of social media supports good mental well-being	5.8	11.6	20.6	27.4	34.5
3	When I reduce social media use, my mental health improves	6.1	5.5	22.3	25.5	40.6
4	Social media affects my confidence level	11.6	18.4	25.5	15.8	28.7
5	Social media affects my ability to build real life relationships	13.2	22.6	26.1	18.7	19.4

The results show that the participants had an understanding that there exists a relationship between social media use and mental well-being. The majority of the participants acknowledged that proper use of social media leads to positive mental well-being (61.9%), and that reduced social media use results in improved mental well-being (66.1%). Additionally, a large number of the participants (53.2%) felt that there exists a relationship between the amount of time used on social media and the effects on mental well-being.

Findings of the Study

- ▶ The study showed that there existed a significant relationship between social media use and mental health of university students.
- ▶ Majority of the respondents (58.4%) used social media more than five hours a day.
- ▶ Overuse of social media was linked with anxiety, stress, depression, and low self-esteem.
- ▶ Results from regression analysis showed that social media use significantly impacted the mental health of university students.
- ▶ Female university students reported increased stress and anxiety due to social media compared to males.
- ▶ Moderate and responsible use of social media was found to support communication, learning, and social connectivity.
- ▶ The findings suggest that balanced social media use can help improve students' psychological well-being and academic performance.

Discussion of the Study

The current study underscores the importance of social media in affecting the mental wellbeing of the university-going students. The results reveal that high utilization of social media platforms increases anxiety, stress, depression, and low self-esteem among students. The current research results imply that the online behavior of individuals, social comparison, and online experience have a strong effect on psychological wellbeing. Nevertheless, social media offers many opportunities for positive communication, educational, and social activities when used properly. It should be noted that the results of the current research match the results of earlier research that revealed that the effects of social media depend on its frequency of use and purpose.

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