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(IJEPC)**[www.ijeipc.com](http://www.ijeipc.com)**SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AND SOCIAL ANXIETY AMONG  
UCSI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN KUALA LUMPUR**Malaahath Mohamed<sup>1</sup>, Syarifah Maisarah Syed Alwi<sup>2\*</sup>, Rojanah Kahar<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Malaysia  
Email: 1002162548@ucsiuniversity.edu.my<sup>2</sup> Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia  
Email: symaisarah.alwi@um.edu.my<sup>3</sup> Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia  
Email: rojanah@upm.edu.my

\* Corresponding Author

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**DOI:** 10.35631/IJEPC.955046.This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

With the advancements of technological evolution, social media has become an essential part of our lives. There is a rising concern regarding university students' dependence on social media use, which can lead to negative consequences for their emotional development, especially social anxiety and overall quality of life. This study cross-sectional study aimed to examine the relationship between social media addiction and social anxiety among private University Students in Kuala Lumpur. A total of 128 participants completed the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) and the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS). Data were analyzed using independent sample t-tests and Pearson's correlation. About two-thirds (68.8%) of our students demonstrated a high level of social media addiction. 25 out of 128 participants exhibited a high level of social anxiety. Social media addiction was moderately correlated with social anxiety ( $r = 0.57^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). There was no significant gender difference in social media addiction and social anxiety. Rigorous validation of the findings by future studies is essential to understand better the effect of social media addiction and other possible factors on social anxiety.

**Keywords:**

Social Media Addiction, Social Anxiety, University Students, Emotional Development, Quality Of Life

## Introduction

Social media use has increased significantly to the degree that nearly 90% of young adults in the United States use it in various ways and activities, such as posting on Instagram, sharing status updates on Facebook, and tweeting news or gossip (Lin et al., 2016). As of 2023, approximately 5.8 billion individuals were using the internet, up to around 64.6% of the world's total population. Among these internet users, about 4.8 billion people, who account for 59% of the global population, were actively using social media platforms. In Malaysia, as reported by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission Internet User survey in 2022, there were 84% of Internet users in the country, an increase from 76.6% in 2016 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2022). This survey found that 24.6 million Malaysians engaged in social networking sites where Facebook was the most popular, followed by Instagram and YouTube (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2022).

Social media platforms are one of the major sources of information, entertainment, and communication. Many adolescents and young adults between the ages of 15 and 39 years spend more of their time on social media platforms, texting, e-gaming, and online networking sites (Dhir et al., 2018; Ostic et al., 2021; Reer et al., 2019; Twenge & Campbell, 2019). The use of social media platforms worldwide has increased significantly, and with it comes worries about the detrimental consequences social media use has on people's mental health, particularly social media addiction, social anxiety, depression, loneliness, bullying, dropping out of school, and poor qualifications (Baltaci, 2019; Reer et al., 2019; Zha et al., 2023).

Excessive internet use has been identified as a public health concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Jaiswal et al., 2020). For many young adults, especially university students, social media dependence usually begins as a habit of misleading impressions into psychological dependence. Having more friends on social media platforms means that users may or may not get positive comments and likes for the photos they post and receive support for their achievements. This may lead the users to fear not receiving support from their followers or online friends on social media platforms. Over time this dependence causes stress, anxiety, loneliness, hopelessness, and other negative consequences including poor academic performance (Aparicio-Martinez et al. 2019; Aslan & Yasar, 2020; Aydin et al., 2021; Azizi et al., 2019; Brailovskaia et al., 2019; Khan et al; 2021; Moreno-Guerrero et al., 2020; Satici et al., 2021;).

A growing body of studies has acknowledged that social anxiety has a strong link and is a risk factor for social media addiction, indicating that there is a need to raise awareness for internet addiction and social anxiety among communities and healthcare providers (O'Day & Heimberg, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022). In a recent study, 93.8% (288 out of 307) of undergraduate students in India demonstrated internet addiction, with the prevalence of social anxiety disorder estimated to be 15.3% (Jaiswal et al., 2020). Individuals who have difficulty communicating with others in social settings and feel anxious prefer to use social media platforms to relieve undesirable emotions by seeking attention or a sense of belongingness (Baltaci, 2019; Zhao et al., 2022).

Individuals who frequently use social media platforms are continuously exposed to highlight reels of their peers, which can develop feelings of inadequacy, have negative self-perceptions, and increase their social anxiety. Social media users may experience physiological distress as a response to receiving unpleasant feedback and negative evaluations from others (Jiang &

Ngien, 2020; Iqbal & Ajmal, 2019). Studies have documented that females tend to experience fear of being evaluated negatively more than males, and males are more social and accepting of their social situations (Lai et al., 2023; Iqbal & Ajmal, 2019).

In Malaysia, individuals between 16 and 34 usually spend about 80 minutes watching videos on YouTube, a duration double the global average (Zulkifli & Abidin, 2023). Research indicates that heightened engagement with social media platforms interferes with various aspects of an individual's routine, such as affecting academic performance, productivity, and relationships, and can negatively affect a person's quality of life (Mohd Salleh Sahimi et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2021; Zulkifli & Abidin, 2023). Although various studies have been conducted to assess social media addiction and social anxiety in Malaysia, there is limited research carried out on gender differences in social media addiction and social anxiety, specifically among both local and international private university students. To the best of our knowledge, existing studies documented elevated levels of social anxiety following social media addiction among local public and private university students (Cho Cho Zaw & Nur Amira Azenal, 2021; Fauzi et al., 2021; Nuzha Mohamed Taha et al., 2023). Hence, the present study has two aims to address these gaps. First, we aimed to investigate gender differences in social media addiction and social anxiety. Second, we aimed to examine the relationship between social media addiction and social anxiety among UCSI University Students in Kuala Lumpur.

## Materials and Methods

### *Study Design, Sampling, And Instrumentation*

This was a cross-sectional study conducted at the UCSI University Kuala Lumpur. The data collection was conducted between December 2023 and March 2024 upon ethical approval. Convenience sampling was used to access participants from the target population efficiently. The sample size is determined using the G\*power 3.1.9.7 version, guided by Cohen's d effect size measure set at 0.5, indicating a medium-sized effect (Cohen, 2013). The total sample size needed is 128 (64 males and 64 females) to detect the indicated effect with 80% power at a significance level of 5%.

To better understand the characteristics of the participants, demographic information such as age, gender, year of study, country of origin, and living situation (on-campus housing/dormitory, alone off-campus apartment/house, with parents or family) were collected from the participants. Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) was used to assess social media addiction. The scale has 41 items and 4 factors (occupation, mood modification, relapse, and conflict) with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "5" (always) to "0" (never). The highest point obtained from this scale is 206, and the lowest is 41. An increase in the SMAS scores indicates an increase in social media addiction. The Cronbach alpha of the scale is .97, indicating the scale's consistency.

Social anxiety was measured by using the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS). The SIAS comprises 20 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale, which ranges from "0" (not at all characteristics of me) to "4" (extremely characteristic of me). Items on the scale are self-statements describing an individual's reactions during one-on-one or group social interactions. The Cronbach alpha of the scale is .89, which indicates high internal consistency (Mattick & Clarke, 1998). The scale's test-retest reliability was 0.92 (Jaiswal et al., 2020).

The demographic questionnaire, SMAS, and SIAS were converted into a Google form. The entries were made clear to avoid missing information, and each item was marked as a required field. A Google form link was generated and distributed through various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook to provide easier access to the questionnaire for the participants to answer. The first page of the Google form consisted of an informed consent form that the participants must read and agree on before continuing to the other subsections that comprised the demographic questionnaire, SMAS, and SIAS. The participants would take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The present study used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 25 to analyze the quantitative data collected. For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic characteristics such as age, gender, year of study, country of origin, and living situation (on-campus housing/dormitory, alone off-campus apartment/house, with parents or family). Independent sample t-tests were conducted to assess the gender differences in social media addiction and social anxiety. A bivariate Pearson's product-moment coefficient ( $r$ ) analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between social media addiction and social anxiety test scores. The statistical significance for all tests was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

### **Results**

The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. A total of 128 students (64 males and 64 females)  $M = 25.2$ ,  $SD = 2.47$ . Of the participants, 42.2% were Malaysian, while 20.3% and 16.4% were from China and Maldives, respectively. The remaining 21.1% is from other countries of origin, including Sudan, Brunei, Indonesia, Egypt, Syria, UAE, Yemen, India, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and the United States of America (USA). Regarding living situation, approximately two-thirds (60.2%) of the participants were staying alone and off-campus, and the remaining 39.8% were staying either on-campus or with parents or family. 98 out of 128 participants were in their study's second to third year, with 71 participants from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts (FOSSLA).

In terms of social media addiction, 68.8% (88 out of 217 participants) had high levels of social media addiction ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ). Meanwhile, 19.5% (25 out of 217 participants) had high levels of social anxiety ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ). Independent sample t-tests were performed to evaluate gender differences in depression and suicidal ideation of medical students. Table 2 presents the means ( $M$ ), standard deviations ( $SD$ ), and significant  $t$  ( $p$ ) value of gender differences. There was no significant gender difference in social media addiction ( $p = 0.24$ ) and social anxiety ( $p = 0.19$ ) among UCSI University students. Table 3 demonstrates the correlations between social media addiction and social anxiety. Social media addiction correlated social media addiction was moderately correlated with social anxiety ( $r = 0.57^{**}$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

**Table 1: Sociodemographic and Parental Characteristics of the Participants (N= 128)**

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percentage (%)	M (SD)
<b>Age (years old)</b>			25.2 (2.47)
≤ 18	1	0.8	
18 - 24	105	82.0	
≥ 25	22	17.2	
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	64	50.0	
Female	64	50.0	
<b>Country</b>			
Malaysia	54	42.2	
Maldives	21	16.4	
Brunei	2	1.6	
China	26	20.3	
Egypt	2	1.6	
India	1	0.8	
Indonesia	7	5.5	
Rwanda	1	0.8	
Saudi Arabia	1	0.8	
Singapore	1	0.8	
Sudan	5	3.9	
Syria	2	1.6	
UAE	2	1.6	
USA	1	0.8	
Yemen	2	1.6	
<b>Living situation</b>			
On-campus housing/dormitory	17	13.1	
Alone, Off-campus apartment/house	77	60.2	
With parents or family	34	26.6	
<b>Level of study</b>			
1st year	18	14.1	
2nd year	56	43.8	
3rd year	42	32.8	
4th year	3	2.3	
Postgraduate	9	7.0	
<b>Faculty</b>			
Faculty of Applied Sciences	9	7.0	
Faculty of Business and Management	17	13.3	
Faculty of Engineering, Technology and Built Environment	23	18	
Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management	1	0.8	
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences	4	3.0	
Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences	1	0.8	
Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts	58	45.3	



**Table 1** (continued)

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percentage (%)	M (SD)
De Institute of Creative Arts and Design	2	1.6	
Institute of Computer Science and Digital Innovation	1	0.8	
Institute of Music	12	9.4	

Remark: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

**Table 2: Mean values, standard deviations, and independent sample t-test results (N= 128)**

Variables	M (SD)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Male	Female		
Social Media Addiction	2.68 (0.61)	2.81 (0.65)	-1.19	0.24
Social Anxiety	1.84 (0.58)	1.98 (0.68)	-1.32	0.19

Remark: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table 3: Correlation between social media addiction and social anxiety**

Variables	Social Media Addiction	Social Anxiety
Social media addiction	Pearson Correlation sig (2-tailed) N	1 0.57** 128

Remark: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## Discussion

This present study examined the level of social media addiction and social anxiety among students at UCSI University. The prevalence of excessive social media use is approximately 68.8% (88 out of 128) of participants. By comparison, the prevalence of social media addiction in our study is high compared to the finding of a cross-sectional study among Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) medical students (Mohd Salleh Sahimi et al., 2022). In this study, the prevalence of social anxiety is 19.5%, which is similar to a study conducted by Mohd Salleh Sahimi and colleagues (2022).

Consistent with studies conducted by Tutgun-Ünal (2020), Aslan and Yaşar (2020), and Basri et al., 2022, we observed no significant mean gender differences in social media addiction among our cohort of students. However, a study by Aparicio-Martínez et al. (2020) suggests there are significant mean gender differences in social media addiction. One of the possible explanations is that social and biological factors were the primary contributors to addiction in males. In contrast, sociopsychological factors, such as low self-esteem and loneliness, had a significant role in addiction among females. Likewise, past research reported that males experience negative impacts from social media. However, females use social media primarily for sharing selfies and seeking emotional support, with females using social media platforms more frequently than males (Schou Andreassen et al., 2016; Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2015).

We also observed no significant mean gender differences in social anxiety. This result aligns with the finding of Baloglu et al. (2018), who found that although males scored higher levels of social anxiety than females, multivariate analyses showed that differences were insignificant. This study suggests that enhanced educational opportunities for females and increasing gender and social roles in current society close the gap in social anxiety between males and females. However, other studies, including epidemiological and community surveys, suggested that females had higher social anxiety than their male counterparts, and therefore, rigorous validations of the findings are warranted (Alsudais et al., 2022; Laldinpuui & Bhattacharjee, 2023; Ye et al., 2021).

Consistent with other published studies, the present study demonstrates a significant moderate relationship between social media addiction and social anxiety (Baltacı, 2019 et al.; Zhao et al., 2022). Meanwhile, studies conducted by O'Day and Heimberg (2021) and Keles and colleagues (2019) suggested that social anxiety is a risk factor for social media addiction. Individuals who struggle with communication in social settings tend to prefer using social media as a way of communication and hence elevate the risk of heightened levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression, particularly among those aged between 15 and 39 (Dhir et al., 2018; Reer et al., 2019). Likewise, a study conducted by Kircaburun et al. (2023) indicated that undergraduates who spend an extreme amount of time using social media platforms exhibited symptoms of anxiety and were more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness, dissatisfaction with their lives, a melancholy mood, and decreased self-esteem.

In summary, this study provides significant insight into the relationship between social media addiction and social anxiety among students at UCSI University. There are several implications from the study findings worth mentioning at this point. First, this study offers insight into the prevalence of social media addiction and social anxiety among university students. Second, it is crucial to develop tailored intervention programs to help university students reduce their level of social media addiction, which in turn will help them reduce their social anxiety. In addition, a longitudinal research design with baseline data would allow future researchers to investigate whether other factors, such as academic stress and adapting to new cultures, influence the changes in social media addiction and social anxiety levels among students and the association between social media addiction and social anxiety.

This study has several limitations. First, this study used a cross-sectional research design focused on one private university. Thus, the generalizations of the findings are limited, and it is difficult to observe the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables. Second, opting for self-reporting questionnaires is another limitation of this study as this leads to response bias, where the participants tend to respond inaccurately or falsely to questions. When addressing sensitive topics such as addiction and social anxiety, participants may also experience social desirability bias, where the respondents may give responses that are more socially accepted by others, leading them to underreport or overreport socially desirable behaviors, impacting the reliability and validity of the findings of the present study.

## Conclusion

Social media platforms are essential in our lives in the current digital era. However, university students' increased reliance on social media platforms is of concern on how it may affect their psychological well-being and quality of life. This present study demonstrated that students from UCSI University demonstrated a high prevalence (68.8%) of social media addiction and

a low prevalence (19.5%) of social anxiety. There were no significant gender differences in social media addiction and social anxiety. Social media addiction was moderately correlated with social anxiety, suggesting the need to develop a tailored intervention for this group of university students.

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