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## A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PROBLEMATIC SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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### Abstract:

Social media have a significant impact on the everyday lives of its users in the digital age. This research paper provides a comprehensive overview of the problematic use of social media among adolescents, a group of users experiencing important physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes. With 90% of adolescents aged 13-17 using social media, this paper highlights the negative consequences of excessive and compulsive use of these platforms, known as problematic social media use. Research studies have shown a direct correlation between problematic social media use and adverse outcomes such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and social isolation. Illustrative cases are provided in the paper, showcasing adolescents who have faced severe mental health challenges and, tragically, resorted to suicide as a result of their social media addiction. This paper aims to identify and categorize the risk factors of problematic social media use into individual and social factors. Research data underscores the susceptibility of adolescents, especially females, to social media addiction and its consequent mental health well-being. Consequently, this paper proposes interventions and prevention strategies to mitigate the adverse consequences of excessive social media usage, including educational programs and parental guidance from international perspectives on problematic social media use.

**Keywords:**

Adolescents, Literature Review, Problematic Social Media Use, Social Media, Youth

**Introduction**

Social media have a significant impact on the everyday lives of its users in the digital age. Social media refers to online platforms where users can engage with others, either in real-time or at their own pace, and share content that others find valuable (Carr & Hayes, 2015). These platforms enable users to interact, create, and share content, viewpoints, or information on the Internet (Rahaman & Saidi, 2024). It has had a profound impact on many aspects of daily life, especially adolescents. Adolescents are a transitional phase for individuals development between childhood and becoming adults between the ages of 10 and 19 years (WHO, 2022). This transition phase is a crucial stage of human development that is characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial growth, which has a significant impact on their emotions, thoughts, decision-making, and interactions with the outside world. A survey conducted by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in 2018 found that 90% of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 use social media. Among them, 75% have at least one active profile, and 51% access social media sites daily.

However, despite the current prevalence of social media use among teenagers, there is concern about the negative effects of social media addiction, known as problematic social media use. Problematic social media use refers to a consistent and excessive involvement with social media platforms, resulting in negative consequences such as anxiety, depression, and affected overall well-being (Marttila et al., 2021). It is also characterized by excessive and compulsive behavior and has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, including low self-esteem, and social isolation (Pellegrino et al., 2022). Several cases have been reported because of this problematic social media use.

According to a survey conducted by the Royal Society for Public Health, the impact of social media on adolescents aged 14-24 in the United Kingdom has resulted in heightened levels of depression, anxiety, low self-confidence, and loneliness (RSPH, 2017). A number of reported cases in several countries accompanies this survey. For example, a 16-year-old girl in Sarawak, Malaysia, committed suicide because of the pressure she went through on social media in 2019 (The Straits Times, 2019). The investigation revealed that the adolescent was depressed because of her addiction to social media. Similarly, in 2021, an 11-year-old child in the United States died by suicide after being addicted to Instagram and Snapchat for two years. Before the incident, the child had been diagnosed with depression and low self-confidence (BBC News, 2022). These tragic cases underscore the devastating consequences of social media addiction and problematic social media use on mental health.

Therefore, based on the problems that have been reported, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current literature on problematic social media use. It aims to provide information on risk factors, determinants, and health outcomes that impact problematic social media use. Furthermore, this paper will propose intervention and prevention to mitigate the adverse consequences of excessive social media usage.

## Literature Review

This article categorizes three determinant factors of problematic social media use among adolescents which are individual factor and social factor. Individual factors involve the demographic of social media users, which includes age and gender. Individual factors in problematic social media use refer to the particular or circumstances-specific traits that influence a person's behaviour and attitudes towards social media. These factors can contribute to the development of problematic social media use, which is characterized by excessive and compulsive use of social media platforms that can interfere with daily life. Individual factors involve the demographic of social media users, which includes age and gender, personality traits, psychological factors, and self-presentation.

### *Individual Factors as Determinants Factors of Problematic Social Media Use*

Numerous studies have examined individual factors associated with problematic social media use among adolescents. A review of the literature indicates that personality traits, such as extraversion, neuroticism, and sensation-seeking, have been linked to increased risk of problematic social media use (Süral et al., 2019; Meynadier et al., 2024). Extraversion is associated with a higher level of social media usage, which may result in excessive reliance or dependency. Individuals with high levels of neuroticism, which is associated with emotional instability and mood swings, may turn to social media to cope with their emotions. This can lead to excessive usage and negative experiences in their online interactions. Problematic social media use can be associated with sensation-seeking, a personality trait characterised by a desire for novel experiences. This is because social media platforms consistently offer new content and interactions, which can be particularly appealing to individuals who are inclined towards seeking sensations. Additionally, mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and social anxiety, have been found to contribute to problematic social media engagement (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2020; Wang et al., 2019).

Adolescents with low self-esteem and poor self-regulation skills have also been shown to be more susceptible to problematic social media use (Andreassen et al., 2017; Bányai et al., 2017). Adolescents with low self-esteem often turn to social media for validation, leading to problematic use. They struggle with self-regulation skills, which involve managing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Poor self-regulation can result in excessive time spent on social media, neglect of responsibilities, and problematic use, as they struggle to control their time and avoid social media-related issues. Furthermore, research suggests that certain demographic factors, such as gender and age, may influence the prevalence of problematic social media use, with some studies indicating higher rates among female and younger adolescents (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). A number of researchers have reported that female users as young as 10 years old are more susceptible to problematic social media problems than male (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2024; Booker et al., 2018). Previous studies by Shannon et al. (2022) indicate that problematic social media use among adolescents significantly impacts mental health, leading to higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, with anxiety showing the strongest correlation. Compared to adolescents in the younger age group (13–14 years old), adolescents in the older age group (15–17 years old) are more likely to have difficulties giving up their usage of social media (Vogels & Gelles-Watnick, 2023).

### *Social Factors as Determinants Factors of Problematic Social Media Use*

Social factors are determinants of problematic social media use, and they refer to the various external factors such as parental monitoring, peer pressure, and socioeconomic status in a

society that influence the extent and nature of problematic social media use among adolescents. Parental monitoring plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' social media habits, as well as their ability to regulate their usage. Parents should use active and restrictive parental mediation strategies to ensure their children's safety online (Dedkova & Mýlek, 2023). Active mediation involves discussing and advising children about safe internet usage, while restrictive mediation restricts internet usage. Both strategies aim to minimize online risks. According to Steinfeld (2021), restrictive parental control increased adolescent concerns about internet use, while restrictive mediation led to decreased activity and increased risks. A balanced combination of restrictive and active parental control and monitoring can help develop strong norms and boundaries for adolescents, enabling them to self-regulate their social media activities.

Peer pressure play a significant role in shaping adolescents' social media behaviour. Adolescents often use social media to maintain and develop social relationships. The desire to fit in with their peers can lead them to spend more time on social media platforms and engage with specific types of content. Adolescents utilize social media platforms to communicate, connect with friends, and maintain relationships. They can share thoughts, feelings, and experiences, join groups based on interests, and receive emotional support from peers. Social media also allows adolescents to express themselves and explore their identity in a safe environment. Peer pressure have a significant impact on problematic social media use. Next, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a significant factor contribute to determination of problematic social media use. FOMO is a psychological condition characterized by anxiety and fear of missing out on the opportunities and rewards that others may have. According to Franchina et al. (2018), adolescents with greater FOMO use a wider variety of social media platforms (such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube) more frequently. Therefore, adolescents with a high FOMO are more likely to overuse social media and smartphones, potentially leading to offline interaction. This excessive use of social media can have negative consequences for adolescent's mental health, as they may constantly compare themselves to others and feel inadequate. In addition, spending too much time on social media can also affect their academic performance and overall productivity (Chukwuere, 2021).

Additionally, socioeconomic status can impact the accessibility of technology and internet connection, which in turn affects how adolescents interact with social media platforms. Research consistently indicates that adolescents from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds demonstrate higher levels of device use and problematic social media habits in comparison to their peers from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds. Khusnul Amalin et al. (2018) indicate that the level of the parent's income influences the social media usage in the sub-urban area. Adolescents with a lower subjective socioeconomic status are at an increased risk of reporting negative experiences on social media. This could be due to a variety of factors, including the types of interactions they have on these platforms, their perceived social standing, and the ways in which they use and engage with social media (Skogen et al., 2022).

### **Interventions to Mitigate Problematic Social Media Use**

Social media has become an essential aspect nowadays, providing advantages such as enabling communication, offering online social support, and facilitating information-seeking for problem-solving purposes. Research indicates that social media can serve as a valuable tool for adolescents in the area of education, encouraging interaction and collaboration that can positively impact academic performance. Unfortunately, the issue of problematic social media use among adolescents remains challenging to manage. Nevertheless, this paper proposes

several interventions to mitigate the impact of this issue. Educational programmes can play a pivotal role in preventing problematic social media use. They provide information about the potential risks of excessive social media use and offer strategies for maintaining a healthy balance. Parental guidance is crucial in managing children's social media use. Parents should adopt a multipronged approach to social media management, including setting time limits, monitoring and supervising their children's activities, and engaging in ongoing discussions about social media. As children mature, these guidelines should evolve accordingly. For younger children, adults should monitor social media use and coach them on understanding and interpreting social media content. Positive parenting, characterised by affection, responsiveness, and demandingness, is associated with less problematic social media use. In contrast, parenting characterised by inconsistency and control is associated with more problematic social media use. Limiting social media use on platforms that include counts of likes or encourage excessive use can help teens set limits and learn self-control.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, social media has become an integral part of adolescents' lives, offering numerous benefits such as communication, social support, and information-seeking. However, the prevalence of problematic social media use among adolescents is concerning. This issue is multifaceted, with individual and social factors playing significant roles. Individual factors such as personality traits, mental health conditions, self-esteem, self-regulation skills, and demographic factors can contribute to problematic social media use. Social factors, including parental monitoring, peer pressure, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and socioeconomic status, also influence the extent and nature of problematic social media use among adolescents.

Problematic social media use has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and social isolation. Tragic cases reported worldwide underscore the devastating consequences of social media addiction on mental health. Therefore, it is crucial to address this issue proactively. It is important to provide teenagers with the necessary information and abilities to navigate social media appropriately in the digital era. Through comprehending the factors and dangers that contribute to excessive social media use and applying successful measures, we may assist teenagers in harnessing the advantages of social media while mitigating its possible negative effects.

This paper proposes several interventions to mitigate the impact of problematic social media use. Educational programs can provide information about the potential risks of excessive social media use and offer strategies for maintaining a healthy balance. Parental guidance is also crucial in managing children's social media use. Parents should adopt a multipronged approach to social media management, including setting time limits, monitoring and supervising their children's activities, and engaging in ongoing discussions about social media. As children mature, these guidelines should evolve accordingly. For younger children, adults should monitor social media use and coach them on understanding and interpreting social media content. Positive parenting, characterized by affection, responsiveness, and demandingness, is associated with less problematic social media use. In contrast, parenting characterized by inconsistency and control is associated with more problematic social media use. Limiting social media use on platforms that include counts of likes or encourage excessive use can help teens set limits and learn self-control.



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