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SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract:

The use of social media has grown rapidly in recent years. In this study social media refers to applications such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Telegram, X, and YouTube, which facilitate social interaction and information sharing among users. This study aims to identify the effects of social media usage on users' psychological well-being among university students. Specifically, the objectives were to examine the relationship between social media dependency, social media bonding, and smartphone addiction with users' psychological well-being. Using a quantitative approach, the data collection was conducted online using Google Forms over a one month period, from November 2025 to December 2025. A total of 125 respondents participated in this study. The research instrument was divided into two main sections: respondents' demographic and the independent and dependent variables. The independent and dependent variables were measured using a Likert scale. Meanwhile, demographic data were measured using nominal, ratio, and ordinal scales according to the suitability of the items studied. The data obtained were then analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to determine the relationships between the study variables. The main findings of the study revealed that social media usage has a significant positive relationship with users' psychological well-being. More specifically, the results indicated that social media dependency, social media bonding and smartphone addiction also showed a significant positive relationship with psychological well-being. In conclusion, social media not only serves as a medium for communication and information sharing but also helps to enhance social relationships among users.

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Keyword:

Social Media, Social Media Dependency, Social Media Bonding, Smartphone Addiction, Psychological Well-Being



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Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has made social media a part of everyday life. Its presence not only changes the way a person communicates, but also affects how to get information, build relationships and engage in social activities. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X and YouTube are now no longer used solely for entertainment. On the other hand, the platform is also an important channel for education, business, professional networking and community engagement. According to the Global Overview Report by Kemp (2025), the use of social media continues to increase worldwide with billions of active users spending several hours a day on various platforms. This development shows that social media has become part of the lifestyle of today's society and has the potential to affect the psychological state of its users.

In the context of higher education institutions, social media plays an important role in supporting communication, collaborative learning, information seeking, entertainment and building professional networks among university students. Al-Rahmi et al. (2015) explained that social media facilitates communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing. This facility allows students to be actively involved in academic discussions, share learning materials and continue to interact outside the classroom. The findings are also supported by Ashraf et al. (2021), who found that the use of social media can help improve academic performance through communication, collaborative learning, knowledge sharing and access to various educational resources. Therefore, social media is not just a space to interact, but has become part of the learning process in higher education institutions. Previous studies have also shown that the use of social media has become a daily routine of university students and is related to their learning experience, social life, stress level and overall well-being (Brailovskaia et al., 2026; Hurley et al., 2024).

Although social media offers various benefits such as strengthening communication, expanding access to information and increasing social support, its widespread use also raises concerns about possible psychological implications. Psychological well-being refers to a state of positive psychological functioning, including life satisfaction, emotional stability, quality interpersonal relationships, self-growth and clarity of life goals (Ryff, 2013). Accordingly, understanding how social media usage patterns affect psychological well-being is becoming increasingly important, especially among university students who are among the most active social media user groups.

In addition to the benefits obtained, the excessive use of social media is also associated with several issues such as dependency on social media, smartphone addiction, interference with daily activities that affect the psychological well-being of users. However, social media is also capable of forming positive social relationships through meaningful interactions and support

from online communities. Therefore, the impact of social media on psychological well-being cannot be evaluated only from negative aspects, but needs to be seen more comprehensively based on the various dimensions of social media use.

Based on these requirements, a study was conducted to examine the relationship between social media bonding, social media dependency, smartphone addiction and psychological well-being among university students. This study is expected to expand knowledge about digital well-being by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how dimensions of social media use affect psychological well-being. In addition to contributing to the development of literature in this field, the results of the study are also expected to be a reference for higher education institutions, educators, policy makers and mental health practitioners in formulating strategies to promote healthier and meaningful use of social media among university students.

Literature Review

The use of social media continues to grow around the world and is now part of the daily life of modern society. In addition to serving as a medium of communication, social media also plays an important role in education, entertainment, business, professional networking and information sharing. According to Kemp (2025), there will be more than 5.2 billion social media users worldwide in 2025, representing approximately 64% of the global population, with an average usage of over two hours per day per user. Malaysia also reflects the same development when social media has become the main platform in the daily activities of society, especially among university students who use it to communicate, obtain information, carry out learning, produce digital content and interact socially (Communications and Multimedia Commission of Malaysia [MCMC], 2024).

The rapid development of social media use has brought various benefits to users, including facilitating communication, expanding access to information, encouraging knowledge sharing and strengthening social networks. Nevertheless, the increased use of social media also raises concerns about a number of issues such as excessive use, the spread of false information, cyber bullying, online social comparison and digital addiction that have the potential to affect the psychological well-being of users (Kemp, 2025; Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025). Therefore, understanding how different forms of engagement in social media affect psychological well-being is an increasingly important area of research.

Psychological well-being refers to a positive mental and emotional state. This condition includes a person's ability to accept himself, grow as an individual, make decisions independently, manage the environment well, build positive relationships and have a clear purpose in life (Ryff, 2013). However, the impact of social media on psychological well-being largely depends on how it is used. Meaningful online interactions, social support and involvement in digital communities can improve a person's well-being. On the other hand, passive consumption, excessive social comparison and uncontrolled online behaviours can affect mental health (Naslund et al., 2020; Valkenburg et al., 2022). This view is in line with the study of Hu et al. (2026), who found that meaningful engagement in digital media activities can improve the well-being of university students through stronger communication, collaboration and social relationships. Therefore, social media does not necessarily have a negative effect. If used actively and beneficially, social media can help individuals build positive relationships, gain social support and engage in activities that contribute to psychological well-being.

However, excessive or uncontrolled use of social media can have different implications. High reliance on social media is often associated with stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion, while moderate and goal-oriented use can increase social connectedness, expand access to information and strengthen perceived social support (Meier & Reinecke, 2020; Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025). In addition, active involvement in online communities has also been found to reduce the feeling of loneliness, increase the sense of belonging and further contribute to better psychological well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2022; Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025).

There are also studies that also show that the relationship between the use of social media and psychological well-being is multidimensional and more complex than the notion that social media only brings benefits or disadvantages. The psychological effects experienced by users depend on the form of their involvement in social media. Active use involving communication, experience sharing and community building has been found to increase emotional support and social relationships, while passive use such as only viewing content without interaction, making excessive social comparisons and problematic use can contribute to the deterioration of psychological well-being (Naslund et al., 2020; Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025). Therefore, the dimension of social media use needs to be evaluated to obtain a more accurate picture of its relationship with psychological well-being.

In addition to social media, the use of smartphones also plays an important role in shaping the digital experience of consumers. Although smartphone addiction is often associated with various negative effects on mental health, controlled and communication oriented smartphone use is still possible to provide emotional support, facilitate communication, and strengthen social connections when used appropriately (Naslund et al., 2020). Chan (2015) found that communication oriented mobile phone use positively influences subjective well-being by strengthening social capital and enhancing interpersonal relationships. The study suggests that the social benefits derived from meaningful communication contribute to greater well-being.

University students are among the most active social media users, making them particularly vulnerable to both the benefits and risks associated with digital engagement. Previous studies have shown that university students primarily use social media to communicate with peers, seek information, express themselves, and build social networks, all of which may contribute positively to their personal development and psychological well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2022). These suggest that the influence of social media on university students is multidimensional and largely depends on how they engage with digital platforms. Therefore, examining the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being among university students has become increasingly important to better understand the consequences of social media in today's society.

Methodology

This study uses a quantitative method with a cross-sectional survey design. This study aims to look at the relationship between social media dependency, social media bonding, smartphone addiction and psychological well-being among university students. The study respondents are university students who actively use social media. Convenience sampling is used because this method makes it easier for the researcher to get suitable respondents who are easy to contact. Data was collected for one month, from November to December 2025, through an online questionnaire using Google Forms. A total of 125 complete and valid responses were received and used in data analysis.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part A collected background information of respondents such as gender, age and average time spent on social media per day. Part B measured four study variables, namely social media dependency, social media bonding, smartphone addiction and psychological well-being.

All questionnaire items were adapted from previous research instruments to ensure that their content was appropriate for this study. Social media dependency was measured using four items from Chan (2015), while social media bonding was measured using four items from Ellison et al. (2007). Smartphone addiction was measured using five items from the Smartphone Addiction Scale by Kwon et al. (2013). Next, psychological well-being was measured using five items from Butler and Kern (2016). All items were rated using a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Descriptive analysis was used to describe the respondents' background and their social media usage patterns. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between social media dependency, social media bonding and smartphone addiction with psychological well-being. All data were analysed using SPSS software.

Result

Demographic Respondent

Table 1: Gender Respondent (n=125)

Category	Frequency	(%)
Male	33	26.4
Female	92	73.6
Total	125	100.0

A total of 125 respondents participated in this study. Table 1 and Table 2 present the demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of gender and age. Respondent gender shows that the majority of the respondents were female, comprising 92 participants (73.6%), while 33 respondents (26.4%) were male.

Table 2: Age Respondent (n=125)

Category	Frequency	(%)
20–21 years	4	3.2
22–23 years	93	74.4
23–24 years	24	19.2
24–25 years	2	1.6
26 years and above	2	1.6
Total	125	100.0

In terms of age distribution, Table 2 show that the most respondents were between 22 and 23 years old, representing 93 respondents (74.4%). This was followed by respondents aged between 23 and 24 years, with 24 respondents (19.2%). Only four respondents (3.2%) were

aged between 20 and 21 years, while two respondents (1.6%) were aged between 24 and 25 years and another two respondents (1.6%) were 26 years and above.

Table 3: Social Media Platform Accounts n=125)

No. of Social Media	Type Social Media	n	Total n	(%)
1	WhatsApp	3	3	2.4
2	WhatsApp, Telegram	1	1	0.8
3	WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook	1	6	4.8
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok	1		
	WhatsApp, Tik Tok, X	1		
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook	2		
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram	1		
4	WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Facebook	5	10	8.0
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram	3		
	WhatsApp, Tik Tok, Instagram, X	1		
	WhatsApp, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook	1		
5	WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Facebook, X	7	40	32.0
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Facebook, X	7		
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook	26		
6	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, X	58	58	46.4
7	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, WeChat	1	5	4.0
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, X, YouTube	1		
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, X, snapchat	2		
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, X, linkedin	1		
8	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, X, Bondee, Snapchat	1	2	1.6
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, X, Wechat, weibo	1		
Total		125	125	100.0

Table 3 presents the number of social media platform owned by the 125 undergraduate respondents. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents maintained multiple social media platform accounts. Majority of the respondent have six social media platform accounts (n = 58, 46.4%). All of the respondents in this category reported using the same combination of platforms that were “WhatsApp, Telegram, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, X”. This was followed by respondents who owned five social media platform accounts (n = 40, 32.0%). Among these respondents, the most common combination consisted of “WhatsApp, Telegram, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook” (n = 26), while the remaining respondents used combinations of “WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Facebook, X “ (n = 7) and “WhatsApp, Telegram, Tik Tok, Facebook, X” (n = 7).

A total of 10 respondents (8.0%) reported owning four social media platform accounts. The most frequently reported combination in category “WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Facebook” (n = 5), followed by “WhatsApp, Telegram, TikTok, Instagram” (n = 3). Smaller numbers of respondents used combinations involving “WhatsApp, Tik Tok, Instagram, X” (n=1) and “WhatsApp, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook” (n=1). Meanwhile, six respondents (4.8%) owned three social media accounts, with the most common combination being “WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook” (n = 2), while the remaining combinations were reported by only one respondent each.

Only a small proportion of respondents reported owning seven (n = 5, 4.0%) or eight (n = 2, 1.6%) social media platform accounts. These respondents expanded their use beyond the mainstream platforms by incorporating applications such as Snapchat, YouTube, LinkedIn, WeChat, Weibo, and Bondee. In contrast, very few respondents owned only one social media platform account (n = 3, 2.4%), consisting solely of WhatsApp, or two social media platform accounts (n = 1, 0.8%), consisting of WhatsApp and Telegram.

Overall, the findings of the study indicate that undergraduate students have a high level of engagement in social media use. A total of 78.4% of respondents have accounts on five to six social media platforms, indicating that the use of multiple platforms has become part of their daily routine. WhatsApp and Telegram are the most consistently used platforms, followed by Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and X. This usage pattern illustrates that these platforms play an important role as the main medium for communication, information sharing, learning and social interaction among students. This high level of engagement across multiple platforms also reinforces the importance of studying the relationship between social media use and social media dependency, social media bonding, smartphone addiction and psychological well-being among undergraduate students.

Table 4: Hours Spent Using Social Media (n=125)

Hours	Frequency	(%)
≤ 2 hours	6	4.8
3–4 hours	34	27.2
5–6 hours	44	35.2
7–8 hours	26	20.8
9–10 hours	7	5.6
≥ 11 hours	8	6.4
Total	125	100.0

The average duration of social media usage by respondents in a day was shown in Table 4. This study found that the majority of respondents, 44 respondents (35.2%), used social media for 5 to 6 hours a day. This was followed by 34 respondents (27.2%) who reported using between 3 and 4 hours a day, while 26 respondents (20.8%) used social media for 7 to 8 hours a day. In addition, eight respondents (6.4%) used social media for 11 hours or more a day, while seven respondents (5.6%) reported using between 9 and 10 hours a day. In contrast, only six respondents (4.8%) used social media for 2 hours or less per day.

Overall, these findings indicate that the majority of undergraduate students spend more than three hours a day using social media, with the most common duration of use being 5 to 6 hours a day. This usage pattern reflects a high level of engagement in social media and shows that digital platforms have become part of students' daily routines, thus reinforcing the need to examine their relationship with social media bonding, social media dependency, smartphone addiction and psychological well-being.

Relationships between Social Media Use and Psychological Well-Being

Table 5 indicate Pearson's correlation analysis relationship between social media dependency, social media bonding, smartphone addiction and psychological well-being among university students. Overall, the findings show that the three independent variables have a positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being ($p < 0.01$), thus supporting the existence of a meaningful relationship between the variables.

Table 5 : Relationships between Social Media Dependency, Social Media Bonding, Smartphone Addiction and Psychological Well-Being

Variable	Psychological well-being	Correlation Strength
	r value	
Social Media Bonding	0.469**	Moderate
Smartphone Addiction	0.409**	Moderate
Social Media Dependency	0.351**	Moderate

Of the three variables studied, social media bonding showed the strongest positive relationship with psychological well-being ($r = 0.469$, $p < 0.01$). This finding shows that students who build stronger emotional relationships and receive social support through social media tend to report higher levels of psychological well-being. This relationship illustrates the importance of meaningful social interaction in the digital environment as one of the factors that contribute to individual well-being.

Next, the results of smartphone addiction showed a moderate positive relationship with psychological well-being ($r = 0.409$, $p < 0.01$). This means that respondents who used smartphones more frequently or had a slight dependence on them also tended to show higher levels of psychological well-being. This may be because smartphones can be used to relax, communicate with others and maintain social relationships. These activities may help a person feel calmer, connect with others and thus improve psychological well-being.

For social media dependency, the analysis shows that there is a moderate positive relationship with psychological well-being ($r = 0.351$, $p < 0.01$). This finding shows that social media has become part of students' daily lives. Social media helps them communicate, get information and participate in various social activities. This kind of use can strengthen social relationships and facilitate students' access to useful resources, thus contributing to their psychological well-being.

Overall, the correlation analysis showed that social media dependency, social bonding and smartphone addiction had a moderate positive relationship with university students' psychological well-being. Social media bonding showed the highest relationship, followed by smartphone addiction and social media dependency. This finding shows that the effect of social

media on psychological well-being depends on the way and purpose of its use. Social media can be beneficial when used to build meaningful relationships, gain social support and maintain positive interactions with others.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between social media dependency, social media bonding, smartphone addiction and psychological well-being among university students. The findings showed that university students are active social media users, with the majority of respondents having five to six social media accounts and spending an average of five to six hours a day using various digital platforms. WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and X were identified as the most frequently used platforms, thus illustrating that social media has become an integral part of university students' academic, social and personal lives.

Pearson's correlation analysis showed that social media dependency, social media bonding and smartphone addiction had a significant positive relationship with psychological well-being. Of the three variables, social media bonding showed the strongest relationship. This suggests that having good social relationships, emotional support and meaningful interactions through social media can help improve students' psychological well-being. Social media dependency and smartphone addiction also showed positive associations with psychological well-being. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution as this study did not specifically measure whether their use was controlled or purposeful.

The findings of this study also contribute to the development of the literature on digital well-being by providing empirical evidence that the impact of social media on psychological well-being is multidimensional. Psychological well-being is not only influenced by the duration or frequency of social media use, but also by the manner, purpose and quality of user engagement with digital platforms. Therefore, social media should not be viewed solely as a factor that carries negative implications but rather has the potential to be a medium that supports psychological well-being when used to build positive social relationships, obtain emotional support and engage in beneficial activities.

However, this study has several limitations that need to be noted. This study used convenience sampling techniques and only involved respondents from a limited university population, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings to the university student's population as a whole. In addition, the cross-sectional study design only allows the relationship between variables to be identified without explaining the cause-and-effect relationship. Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples from several higher education institutions, in addition to using a longitudinal study design to examine changes in social media use and psychological well-being over time.

Overall, this study concludes that social media has become an important component in the daily lives of university students and has the potential to contribute to psychological well-being when used responsibly, balanced and purposefully. Meaningful social relationships, effective communication and social support obtained through social media were found to play a more important role than the use of social media itself. Therefore, higher education institutions, educators, parents and policymakers need to encourage healthy and constructive social media use practices so that the benefits of digital technology can be fully utilized in improving the psychological well-being of university students in the digital era.

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