

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT SOCIOLOGY & HUMANITIES



ISSN 2277 – 9809 (online)

ISSN 2348 - 9359 (Print)

An Internationally Indexed Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

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Published by iSaRa Solutions

Stress and Social Media Addiction Among High School and College Students.

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Abstract

The widespread adoption of the Internet and smartphones has resulted in various issues related to usage. Social media addiction, characterized as a psychological condition, involves a harmful dependence on social platforms and can exhibit symptoms similar to behavioral addiction (X. Cao, M. Gong, L. Yu, B. Dai, 2020). Numerous studies suggest that excessive engagement can lead to mental stress and may contribute to anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances (Brailovskaia et al., 2021; Brailovskaia et al., 2022; Brailovskaia et al., 2023; Cao et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2023; Saleem et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2023; Zhao, 2021). Zhao (2021) highlighted that stress, particularly from social media, can trigger a chain reaction that affects social media habits and academic outcomes.

The study aims to examine stress levels and social media addiction among high school and college students. The sample included 100 students, with 60 high school students and 60 pursuing their degrees, all residing in Bangalore. Participants completed the Student Stress Scale and the Social Media Addiction Scale. Purposive sampling was used in this research. Data analysis involved calculating the mean, standard deviation, and t-values using appropriate statistical techniques. The findings indicated a significant difference in stress levels and social media addiction between high school and degree students.

Keywords: Stress, Social Media Addiction, High School, College Students.

Introduction:

For students, social media addiction can intensify both academic and emotional stress. The constant pursuit of instant gratification, ongoing social comparison, and exposure to excessive

information often distract students from their studies, contribute to academic burnout, and disrupt sleep patterns.

Excessive platform use creates a negative feedback cycle that appears in various forms. Social comparison and feelings of inadequacy: The curated highlights of social media posts foster an unrealistic perception of reality. When individuals compare themselves to idealized peers or influencers, it can harm self-esteem, leading to persistent anxiety and dissatisfaction with body image.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) induces constant online engagement, leading to a hyper-vigilant state. This addiction hampers disconnecting, heightening feelings of loneliness and exclusion when offline.

Sleep Disruption: Excessive nighttime scrolling and notifications overstimulate the brain, significantly harming sleep quality. Poor sleep, in turn, directly affects a student's capacity to manage emotions and cope with daily academic stress.

Academic burnout occurs when social platforms promote endless scrolling, leading to wasted time that should be spent studying. This neglect causes panic and significantly increases psychological stress.

Social media usage is particularly high among younger demographics, with about 90% of individuals aged 18 to 29 engaging on these platforms—much higher than in other age groups (Dong, R. T. et al., 2025). While this provides advantages like rapid access to information and broader social networks, it also raises significant concerns, especially regarding social media addiction (SMA). Those affected often face social anxiety, emotional regulation challenges, and increased mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Lei, H., 2022; Dong, R. T. et al., 2025). Research indicates there are gender-based differences in how men and women develop SMA, impacting social support, resilience, and mental health outcomes (Su, W., Han et al., 2020; Victor, S. A. et al., 2024; Barros, C. & Sacau-Fontenla, A., 2021; Hu, B., Wu, 2024).

SMA, or online social dependency, describes frequent social media use that significantly impacts various aspects of life, such as daily routines, work, studies, and relationships (Huang C.J. 2022). This dependency often stems from psychological and social factors, including the craving for

instant approval, satisfaction, and a preference for online interactions over face-to-face contact, commonly fueled by social anxiety (Kudubes AA, & Efe YS. 2024; Doan LP, Le LK, Nguyen TT, et al. 2022). As adolescents increasingly use social media, its potential effects on mental health become clearer. While these platforms facilitate social connection and information sharing, excessive use can contribute to mental health problems, especially ASy (Li WB, Cho H. 2023).

Methodology:

Aim: To find the level of stress among high school and college students.

To find the level of social media addiction among high school and college students.

Objectives: To study the level of stress among high school and college students

To study the level of social media addiction among high school and college students

Hypothesis:

1. There will be no significant difference in the level of stress among high school and college students.
2. There will be no significant difference in social media addiction among high school and college students.

Variables:

Independent variable: High school and college students.

Dependent variable: Stress and Social Media Addiction.

Sample:

The sample consisted of 100 students, of whom 50 were in grade 9 and 50 were pursuing degrees in Bangalore. Students were from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. All students lived in Bangalore Urban. Students' ages ranged from 15 to 23 years.

Inclusion criteria:

Students studying in high school and students pursuing their degree

Residing in Bangalore City

Students who know the English Language

Exclusion Criteria:

Students studying in post-graduation.

Students from Rural Bangalore

Students not able to understand the English Language

Students having any psychological/psychiatric issues.

Research design

A between-group design with purposive sampling was opted for the study.

Tools:

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale.

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is a tool used to measure an individual's level of addiction to social media. It consists of six items that assess preoccupation, withdrawal, tolerance, and negative consequences associated with social media use. The BSMAS is a concise and effective tool for evaluating the extent of social media addiction. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("very rarely") to 5 ("very often"). The total score of the BSMAS ranges from 6 to 30, with higher scores indicating a greater risk of problematic social media use (PSMU). The scale demonstrates excellent internal consistency and good test-retest reliability ($r = 0.75$ at 3-week intervals), making it highly stable for longitudinal studies. Construct validity is supported by strong, positive correlations between BSMAS scores and associated mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and stress, demonstrating concurrent validity.

Student Stress Scale

Student Stress Scale Questionnaire: The Student Stress Scale, developed by Dr. Zaki Akhtar (2011), was used in the present study. This test consists of 51 statements that measure students' stress levels. There are 41 positive and 10 negative statements. It uses a 5-point rating scale ranging from Always to Never. The maximum score on the scale is 255, and the minimum score is 51. This scale covers a wide range of situations faced by students. The reliability of the scale is 0.71, and the validity is 0.72.

Procedure:

The sample consisted of 100 students, of whom 50 were in high school and 50 were pursuing degrees. The sample consisted of female students residing in Bangalore. The students were personally approached by the researcher, who explained the importance of the study. After

obtaining consent from the students and assuring them that the collected data would be used for research purposes only, the subjects were administered both questionnaires. Any doubts regarding the questionnaires were clarified immediately.

Analysis of the data:

The results were scored, and an independent t-test was computed to examine stress levels among high school and degree students.

Table 1 presents data on social media addiction among high school and degree students.

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	't'
Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale	High School Students	50	18.56	1.79	3.71**
	Degree Students	50	17.22	1.81	
** Significant at 0.01 level					

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation (SD), and t values for high school and degree students. The mean score for high school students is 18.56 with an SD of 1.79, while the mean for degree students is 17.22 with an SD of 1.81. The t value obtained is 3.71**, indicating a significant difference at the 0.01 level. These findings suggest a notable difference in social media addiction between the two groups. This is supported by research from Zhang, C., Tang, L., & Liu, Z. (2023), who found that students with poorer friendship relationships tended to have higher addiction scores. Additionally, Sibel Sert et al. (2026) reported that students exhibited moderate social media addiction levels. Colonio, J. (2023) also identified moderate-to-high risk levels among adolescents.

Table 2 shows the stress levels of high school and degree students.

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	't'
Student Stress Scale	High School Students	50	136.88	25.40	4.16**
	Degree Students	50	119.96	13.38	
** Significant at 0.01 level					

Table 2 presents the average, standard deviation (SD), and t-test outcomes for high school and university students. High school students have a mean score of 136.88 with an SD of 25.40, while university students have a mean score of 119.96 with an SD of 13.38. The calculated t-value is 4.16**, significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a notable difference in stress levels between the two groups. These results are consistent with the findings of Guang Feng Zheng (2025). Additionally, the data reveal significant relationships between social media addiction, academic stress, sleep quality, and anxiety symptoms among adolescents. Muskan Sudha and Renu Sharma (2025) also found that academic stress was positively associated with social media addiction and negatively associated with academic performance.

Conclusion

1. Students studying in high school are more addicted to social media than students studying for a degree.
2. Students studying in high school are more stressed compared to students pursuing their degree.

Limitation of the study

1. The sample size was small
2. The study was restricted to Bangalore city only.
3. The study was done on only female students

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