



## **A STUDY ON THE RISE OF UNHEALTHY BEHAVIORS LINKED TO SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Social media has gained immense popularity amongst adolescents. Studies show that 90% of adolescents use at least one type of media regularly. Several studies suggest that its usage is related to anxiety, lower self-esteem, psychological distress, depression and loneliness. The problem with social media challenges was increasing. Therefore, a study aimed at investigating its impact on the selected population was taken. The people who took part in the research consisted of students from colleges, and the working population of both genders was equally distributed. The most significant number of respondents corresponded to the age group of 18 - 25 years and accounted for 84%. Out of the total population of the study, the use of Instagram was in 64% and that of twitter and Facebook were in 34 %and 2%. More than a half of the subjects were 54% who spent an average of 1-3 hours daily with the media and this affected their psychological health. To sum up, even though social media platforms are a good chance for the relationship and self-expression, the emergence of challenges that are mainly for the purpose of unhealthy behaviour poses the most important threats. This condition necessitates the immediate recognition and mitigation of these risks, if the users' body and mind health are to be guaranteed, and more importantly, it is also crucial for those groups who are both young and old.*

**KEYWORDS :** *Social media, Adolescents, Challenges, Unhealthy behaviours, Physical, Mental wellbeing.*



## **INTRODUCTION**

The widespread adoption of social media platforms has transformed the way individuals communicate, access information, and perceive social interactions. While social media offers numerous benefits, including enhanced connectivity, entertainment, and real-time information sharing, it has also contributed to the emergence of several unhealthy behavioural patterns. Increasingly, users, particularly adolescents and young adults, are exhibiting signs of digital addiction, reduced self-esteem, cyberbullying involvement, sleep disturbances, and distorted body image perceptions due to prolonged and unregulated social media engagement (Andreassen et al., 2017; Keles et al., 2020). According to recent global statistics, over 4.5 billion people are active users of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter (Statista, 2023). While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for self-expression, learning, and social connectivity, they have also given rise to a number of concerning psychological, social, and behavioural consequences. Additionally, the prevalence of highly curated and idealized content on social platforms creates unrealistic standards, fostering feelings of inadequacy, depression and anxiety in vulnerable users. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to these effects due to their developmental stage, characterized by heightened sensitivity to peer feedback and identity formation (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). This study seeks to analyze the rise of unhealthy behaviours associated with social media usage, focusing on identifying the behavioural trends, psychological triggers, and demographic groups most affected.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Selection of sample and data collection**

The use of social media created anxiety, depression and other issues among adolescents and adults, therefore, to study the changes among the college-going and working population at Chennai, were included in the study with their consent. The subjects belong to the age group of 18-45 years. Questionnaires were circulated through google form to collect information pertaining to demographic profile, their social media usage on food choices, behaviour and mental health were studied. The data were computed using Microsoft Excel. Number and percentage were carried out to find out the difference between gender.



## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The demographic profile of subjects provides details to interpret study findings. It typically includes variables such as age, gender, education, occupation, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. These characteristics influence participants' behaviours, choices, and outcomes, particularly in health, nutrition, and social science research. Study on dietary behaviour, factors like age and income significantly affect food choices and nutritional knowledge. Accurate demographic profiling enhances the validity and relevance of research conclusions (**Kumar et al., 2020**).

**Table.1 Demographic Details of Subjects**

Variables	Groups	Number	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	8	16%
	Female	42	84%
Age	18-25	42	84%
	26-35	2	4%
	36-45	3	6%
	Above 45	3	6%

The Table 1 shows that study subjects consist of 50 individuals, among those 42 were female and 8 were male. The 84% of respondents were in the age group of 18 - 25 years, and the least count of 4% was noted in the age group of 26-35 years.

### **Challenges due to use of Social media**

Social media influences the lives of many people, it is broadly referred to web and mobile platforms such as Instagram, snap chat, Facebook, snap chat, LinkedIn, twitter. Studies show that individuals with mental illness spend most of their time on media, the usage varies among age groups. The middle age spent 70% and 97 % was seen in younger individuals (**Ahmad et al., 2019**).



**Table 2 : Habits of Subjects on the Use of Social Media**

<b>Challenges of social media</b>	<b>Duration of usage</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
How many hours do you spend on social media daily?	Less than 1 hour 1-3 hours 4-6hours More than 6hours	2 27 12 9	4% 54% 24 % 18%
Which social media platform do you use most frequently?	Instagram Facebook others (Twitter, snapchat, linkedin)	32 1 17	64% 2% 34%
How engaging do you find social media challenges?	Not engaging Slightly engaging Moderately engaging Highly engaging	7 20 16 7	14% 40% 32 % 14%

Table 2 shows the challenges of social media usage, such as duration, platform and trends in media. The result shows that the majority of the individuals were using Instagram(64%) followed by other platforms such as Facebook(2%)and others (34%). It was found that(54 %) of participants spent 1-3 hours on social media and only (4%) spent less than 1 hour.( 40%) of subjects felt the media was slightly engaging and( 40 %) felt it was highly engaging.

The use of media among adolescents in Europe and the United States varied from 7.9% to 25.2%, the Middle East and Africa obtained 17.3 to 23.6%. The prevalence in Asia was 8.1% and 50.9%. (**Hassan et al., 2020**). Studies found that twitter user had more discussion on tobacco use, depression symptoms, and suicidal thoughts. Swen et al., 2017. The study goes in line with the above.



### **Food habits and social media**

Social media has revolutionised young adult lives including their food consumption patterns and behaviour. This is an emerging concern and a significant gap exists in understanding how social media influences eating behaviour (**Mallya *et al.*, 2024**).

**Table 3 : Influence of Social Media on the Food Habits of Subjects**

<b>Food Habits</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Have you ever tried a food trend or challenges seen on social media	Yes	26	52%
	No	24	48%
If yes, how often do such challenges influence your eating habits	Rarely	29	57.5%
	Sometimes	13	27.5%
	Often	8	15%
	Always	-	-

Table 3 shows that 52% of the respondents reported that they had tried the food challenges in the social media and 48% did not make an attempt. Interestingly, 57.5% of the subjects accepted that media does not influence their eating habits, 27.5% opined it influenced them at times and 15 % said, influence on them is often. **Mental health and social media** Social media use is integral to many adolescents' lives. It brings benefits but can also have detrimental effects on both physical and mental health. This study conducted a systematic review examining associations between social media use, adolescent mental health (including body image, self-esteem, stress, interpersonal relationships and loneliness, anxiety, and depressive symptoms), and dietary outcomes.



**Table 4 : Social Media Influence on Mental Health of Subjects**

<b>Challenges on media</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Do you think social media promotes unhealthy body standards?	Yes No	33 17	66% 34%
How does exposure to social media affect your mental well being?	No impact Slightly negative Moderately negative Strongly negative	15 20 12 3	30% 40% 24% 6%
What unhealthy behaviour have you adapted due to social media influences?	Late night eating Excessive eating Skipping meals none (no influence)	15 4 2 29	30% 8% 4% 58%

Table 4 shows that 66% of the responses considered that social media promotes unhealthy body standards and 44% considered that it does not influence their body standards. About 40% of the respondents considered that exposure to social media affects their mental health with a slight negativity and 30% had no impact, 24% had moderate impact and 6% strongly believe that it had negative impact on their mental health. Interestingly, 58% had no influence from the media and 30 % had late night eating, 8% had excessive eating and 4% had the habit of skipping meals. A recent study found that exposure to traumatic online content on social media showing violence or hateful posts directed at racial minorities contributed to increases in psychological distress, PTSD symptoms, and depression among African American and Latinx adolescents in the United States (**Tynes et al., 2019**).



## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study provide insights into the impact of social media on the lifestyle and well-being of individuals, particularly in the age group of 18-25 years. The majority of respondents were female, and Instagram was the most commonly used social media platform. The study reveals that social media usage is associated with negative impacts on eating habits, with many respondents reporting that they try food trends seen on social media and that it often affects their eating habits. This suggests that social media influencers and food trends may be contributing to unhealthy eating habits among young adults. Furthermore, the study found that social media usage is associated with negative impacts on mental health, with the majority of respondents believing that social media promotes unhealthy body standards. The study also found that social media influences behaviours such as late-night eating and excessive snacking. These findings suggest that social media usage may be contributing to unhealthy lifestyle habits among young adults. The findings of this study highlight the need for individuals, particularly young adults, to be aware of the potential negative impacts of social media on their lifestyle and well-being.

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