

The Footprint of Social Media on Youth's Mental Health- A Study on College Students in and Around Kolkata

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The use of social media has become an integral part of the youth's culture, shaping their behavior, interactions and mental wellbeing. This research explores the connection between social media and mental health among the youth based on data collected from 100 students across different Colleges and Universities in Kolkata. Using a judgement free sampling approach, responses were gathered through Google Forms to examine how excessive social media usage influences mental health, mood swings and depression among youth contributing to their overall mental health.

The study uncovers a significant connection between drawn-out social media engagement and increased pressure, motivated by elements such as depression, loneliness, lost sleep, and low self-esteem. The study offers useful strategies for encouraging a more harmonious interaction with social media. These findings add to the growing conversation about stress management and mental health in the digital age which should be promptly followed to absorb the positive side of the new and growing digital age. A better balance between online connections and mental health can be achieved by fostering mindful involvement and advocating for digital wellness techniques.

Keywords: mental sickness, social media effect, depression, low self-esteem, emotional instability

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1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the digital age, social media has emerged as a dominant force in shaping the lifestyles, communication patterns, and psychological well-being of today's youth. While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for connection, expression, and information exchange, they also present complex challenges that can impact mental health. This study explores the intricate relationship between social media usage and the mental well-being of young individuals, with a specific focus on students from various colleges and universities in Kolkata. Drawing from data collected through a judgment-free sampling method using Google Forms, the research highlights how prolonged and excessive engagement with social media correlates with symptoms of depression, emotional instability, low self-esteem, and disrupted sleep patterns. The findings underscore the urgent need to cultivate digital mindfulness and promote healthy online behaviors. By advocating for balanced and informed usage, this work contributes meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on mental health in the digital era.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding the impact of social media on the mental health of youth, particularly college students. This study draws on the following psychological and sociological theories:

1. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954)

This theory suggests that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others. Social media platforms amplify opportunities for comparison, often leading youth to evaluate themselves against idealized portrayals of peers, influencing self-esteem and emotional well-being.

2. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974)

This theory explains how individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs such as entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. For college students, social media serves as a tool for validation, identity formation, and community belonging, which can have both positive and negative mental health consequences.

3. Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957)

College students may experience internal conflict when their real-life experiences don't align with their curated social media identities, potentially leading to stress, anxiety, or depressive symptoms.

3. Research Objective

1. Examination of the link between social media and emotional instability

This research explores the correlation between social media usage and emotional instability, focusing on patterns of anxiety, mood swings, and low self-esteem. Social platforms often expose users to idealized images and constant social comparison, which can trigger emotional fluctuations. This study also considers the role of addictive behavior and online validation in shaping emotional responses.

2. Connection between social media addiction and depression

Social media addiction has been linked to increased levels of depression, particularly due to excessive screen time, disrupted sleep, and negative social comparisons. Exposure to curated online lives can lower self-esteem and heighten feelings of loneliness and inadequacy.

3. To analyze excessive exposure to social comparison affects self-esteem

Excessive exposure to social comparison on social media often leads individuals to evaluate themselves against idealized portrayals of others, which can diminish self-esteem. The continuous comparison can foster feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with one's own life and appearance.

4. Explore the impact of social media on sleep patterns

Social media use, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns by delaying sleep onset and reducing overall sleep quality. The blue light from screens interferes with melatonin production, while engaging content can lead to overstimulation and difficulty falling asleep.

5. Analyze the impact on loneliness

While social media can offer connection, excessive use is often associated with increased feelings of loneliness.

Passive scrolling and lack of meaningful interactions may lead to social isolation and a perceived gap between online and real-life relationships.

6. Examine the potential for social media as a tool for mental health awareness

The social media holds significant potential as a tool for mental health awareness by providing platforms for education, support communities, and destigmatization.

4. Research Methodology

Research Design:

This study employs a quantitative descriptive research design using a survey method. It allows the collection of standardized data from a broad population to analyze trends and correlations.

Sampling Technique:

Stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, academic disciplines, and institution types (public/private).

Data Collection Methods:

Primary Data: Structured questionnaire distributed online through Google forms.

Tools for Analysis:

Statistical Software: Google form or Microsoft Excel for data tabulation and analysis.

Descriptive Statistics (mean, frequency, percentage):

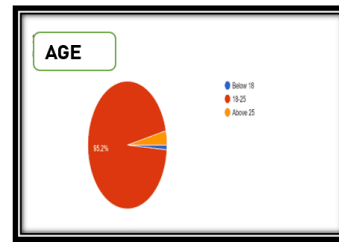
Pie charts and bar graphs

Ethical Considerations:

- Informed consent from all participants.
- Anonymity and confidentiality maintained.
- Participation is voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any stage.
- The study complies with ethical standards of human subject research.

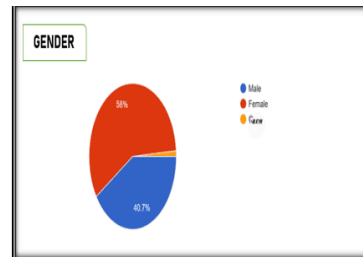
SAMPLE POPULATION	SAMLE SIZE
Age group:18-25	80-85
College students of in and around Kolkata.	

5. Findings



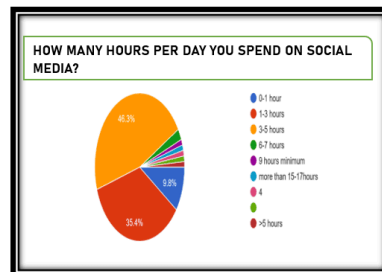
18-25 years (Red – 95.2%)
The overwhelming majority of participants fall into the 18-25 age group. This indicates that the data mainly reflects the opinions, habits, or behaviours of young adults. It suggests a strong youth presence, which is common in social media-related surveys.

Below 18 (Blue – small segment)
A small portion of respondents are under 18. While minimal, their inclusion shows that teens are also part of the social media user base, albeit in lower numbers—possibly due to access limitations or parental control.



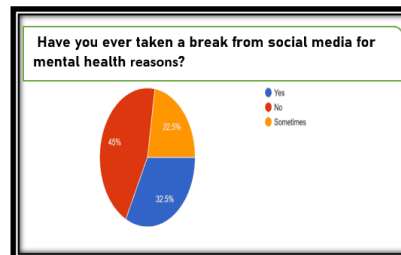
Female (Red – 58%)
The majority of respondents identified as female. With over half of the participants, this group represents the dominant gender in the survey. This may influence the overall trends in the dataset, especially if behaviour patterns differ by gender.

Male (Blue – 40.7%) Males make up a significant portion but are still fewer than females. Their participation is substantial enough to ensure a balanced gender perspective in the data. Differences in social media use or preferences between genders may be explored based on this.



1-3 hours (Orange – 46.3%)
This is the largest portion of the pie chart. Almost half of the participants spend 1 to 3 hours daily on social media. It indicates moderate usage, likely reflecting breaks or leisure scrolling. This may include casual users or those using social media mainly for communication.

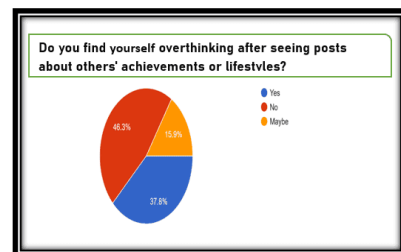
3-5 hours (Red – 35.4%)
Over one-third of the respondents spend 3 to 5 hours a day on social media. This suggests more engaged or habitual use, possibly for entertainment or work-related reasons. It's a significant chunk, hinting at heavy dependence on digital platforms.



No (Red – 35.4%)
Nearly half of the respondents have never taken a break from social media for mental health reasons.

Yes (Blue – 42%)
About one-third of the participants have consciously taken breaks due to mental health concerns. This reflects growing awareness about the impact of social media on well-being and the proactive steps people are taking to care for their mental health.

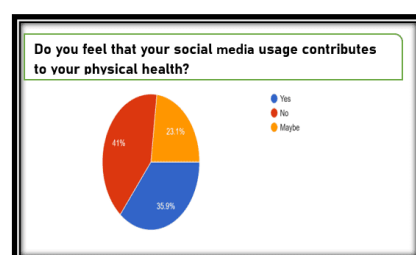
Sometimes (Orange – 22.5%)
A smaller portion of users occasionally take breaks. This group seems to adopt a balanced approach—acknowledging the mental strain while still returning to platforms.



No (Red – 35.8%)
Nearly half of the respondents do not experience overthinking after seeing others' achievements. This suggests they have a stable mindset or strong self-esteem, resisting the pressure of social comparison.

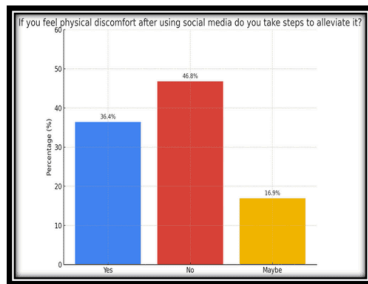
Yes (Blue – 48.3%)
Over one-third of participants acknowledge overthinking in response to such posts. This group may be more vulnerable to social comparison, potentially leading to anxiety, stress, or dissatisfaction.

Maybe (Orange – 15.9%)
A smaller segment is unsure or occasionally experiences overthinking.



No (Red – 41%)
The largest group of respondents believes that social media does not benefit their physical health. This could reflect concerns like reduced physical activity, poor posture, or disrupted sleep due to screen time.

Yes (Blue – 35.9%)
A significant portion feel that social media positively contributes to their physical health. This might include motivation from fitness influencers, access to workout content, or health-related communities.

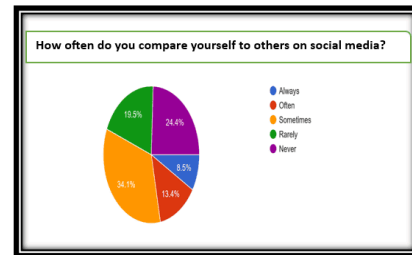


No (Red – 46.8%)

The highest percentage of respondents do not take any action to relieve physical discomfort caused by social media use. This may indicate a lack of awareness or neglect of health issues such as eye strain, back pain, or fatigue.

Yes (Blue – 36.4%)

A good portion of individuals do take steps to address discomfort. This group likely practices healthier habits like taking breaks, stretching, or adjusting screen settings to reduce physical strain.

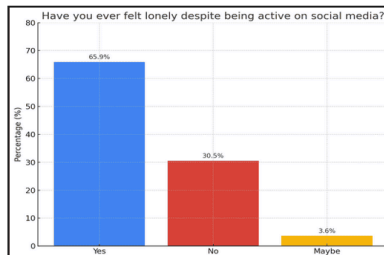


Sometimes (Orange – 34.1%)

The largest segment admits to occasionally comparing themselves to others, highlighting a common emotional response to curated content online.

Never (Purple – 24.4%)

A significant group reports never making such comparisons, suggesting either high self-awareness or reduced engagement in comparison-driven content.

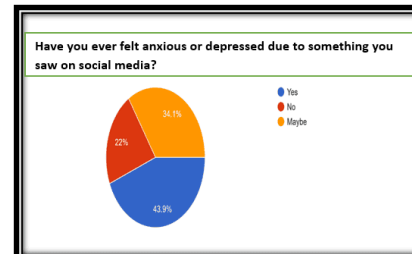


Yes (Blue – 65.9%)

A large majority of participants admit feeling lonely even while being active on social media. This suggests that digital interaction may not fulfill emotional or social needs, highlighting the disconnect between online presence and real connection.

No (Red – 30.5%)

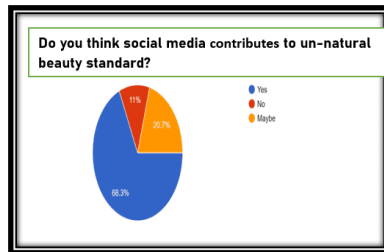
About one-third of respondents do not feel lonely while using social media. This group may have healthy digital habits or supportive online communities that provide meaningful interaction.



Yes (Blue – 43.9%)

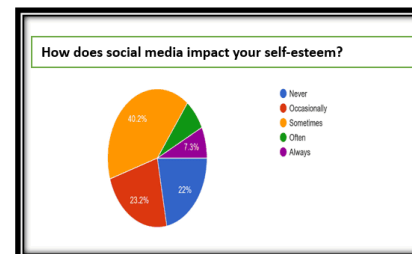
A large portion of respondents admit feeling anxious or depressed after viewing content on social media. This highlights the emotional impact of online content and how digital interactions can affect mental health.

Maybe (Orange – 34.1%) Many participants are unsure if their mental state is directly affected. This could mean they sometimes feel low but don't always link it to social media use.



Yes (Blue – 68.3%); A strong majority believe social media plays a significant role in promoting unrealistic beauty ideals. This reflects widespread awareness of filters, photo editing, and influencer culture shaping public perception of beauty.

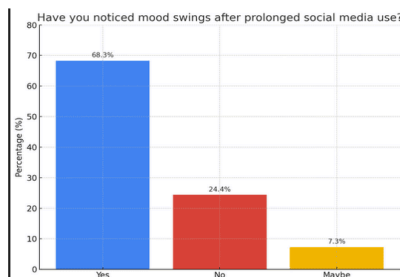
Maybe (Orange – 20.7%); About one-fifth of respondents are unsure, possibly indicating that they recognize both positive and negative influences of social media on beauty norms.



Sometimes (Orange – 40.2%)

The largest group feels social media affects their self-esteem occasionally, suggesting that its impact varies based on what they see or experience.

Occasionally (Red – 23.2%) and Never (Blue – 22%) A significant number feel the impact is infrequent or non-existent, indicating some emotional resilience or selective engagement online.

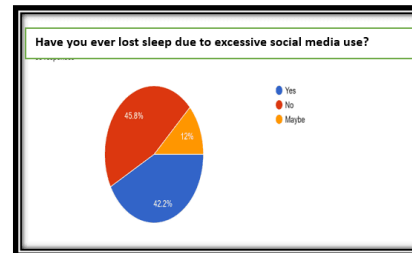


Yes (Blue – 68.3%)

The majority of respondent's report experiencing mood swings following extended social media use. This suggests a strong link between excessive screen time and emotional instability, possibly due to comparison, negative content, or digital fatigue.

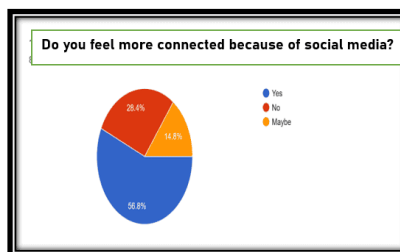
No (Red – 24.4%)

Nearly a quarter of participants do not notice any mood changes, indicating either healthy usage patterns or higher emotional resilience to social media effects.



Yes (42.2%) of respondents admit to losing sleep because of social media, showing its significant impact on nighttime habits.

No (45.8%) slightly outweighs the "Yes" group, suggesting nearly half manage to control their usage.

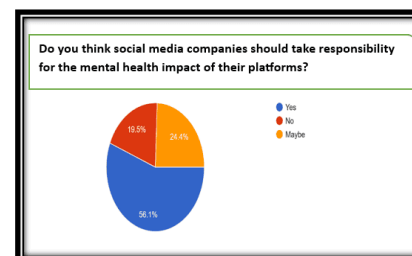


Yes (Blue – 58.8%)

Over half of the respondents feel that social media helps them feel more connected. This suggests that social platforms are serving their intended purpose of fostering communication and maintaining relationships.

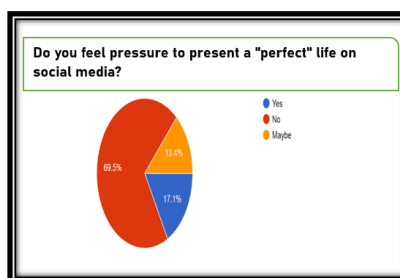
No (Red – 28.4%)

A significant portion of participants do not feel more connected, implying that for some, digital interactions may lack the depth of real-life connections or even increase feelings of isolation.



A majority (58.1%) believe social media companies should take responsibility, showing strong public demand for accountability.

24.4% are uncertain, while 19.5% think they should not, indicating a mix of expectations regarding corporate duty.

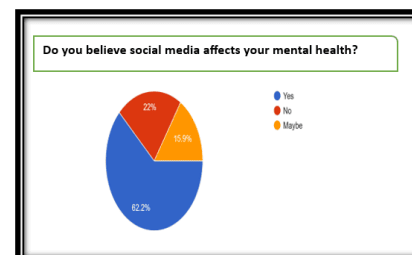


No (Red – 69.5%)

A large majority of respondents do not feel pressured to portray a perfect life, which may reflect growing awareness or resistance toward curated online personas.

Yes (Blue – 17.1%)

A notable portion of participants do feel such pressure, highlighting how social media can drive comparison and influence self-presentation.



A significant 62.2% of respondents believe social media impacts their mental health, highlighting widespread concern.

Meanwhile, 22% say no, and 15.9% are unsure, showing a notable portion still questions or denies the effect.

6. Conclusion

The study indicates that excessive use of social media often leads to depression,

increased feelings of isolation and dependency on online validation. Constant Comparison and pressure to present a perfect digital image causes self-doubt and low self-esteem.

Comparative findings shows that users who are highly engaged with online platforms are more vulnerable to emotional distress. Therefore, promoting digital literacy and proper usage techniques for social media is crucial in improving and protecting psychological well-being of today's youth in digital era.

Recommendations

1. Encourage Screen Time Limits -

Limiting screen time helps children and teens develop healthier digital habits. It encourages them to engage in physical activities, hobbies, and real-world experiences. Parents and educators can set schedules and use digital well-being tools to monitor usage. This balance supports mental and emotional development.

2. Foster Real-Life Social Connections -

Face-to-face interactions build empathy, communication skills, and stronger relationships. Encouraging group activities, sports, or community events helps reduce reliance on virtual connections. Real-world connections are essential for emotional support and long-term mental health. They also help individuals build confidence and social competence.

3. Raise Awareness About Social Comparison -

Social media often promotes idealized versions of life, leading to negative self-image and low self-esteem. Teaching young users to critically evaluate what they see online can reduce feelings of inadequacy. Open discussions about authenticity and self-worth can empower users to value their own unique experiences. This helps create a healthier online environment.

4. Implement Age-Restricted Logins and Verification-

Age restrictions help protect children from inappropriate content and online risks. Platforms should use secure age verification methods to enforce access limits. This ensures that content and interactions are suitable for a user's developmental stage. It also supports digital safety and responsible internet use.

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