The Aftermath of Selected Social Media on the Mental Health of Selected Adolescents in Sharjah: A Psychological Approach

Abdullah Rimawi[1], Tamim Ghaddah[2], Abdulaziz Chaaban[3], Marwan Alawadhi[4]

Sharjah American International School[1,2,3,4]

abdullahasimrimawi@gmail.com[1], tamim.ghaddah@gmail.com[2], Abdulazizchaaban@gmail.com[3], ma.alawadhi08@gmail.com[4]

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the side effects of selected social media platforms on adolescents in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, through using hybrid methodology, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews provides in-depth information from a purposive sample of adolescents aged 13 to 18 attending different schools in Sharjah. The quantitative part of the study measures social media usage, emotional reaction, and self-perception. Social media platforms Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook offer adolescents a wealth of social interaction, but their use generates certain expectations that need to be captured in qualitative interviews. This research measures the primary indicators of mental health that concern the general level of anxiety and depression experienced by the respondents, the disruption of sleep patterns, and the self-esteem of the respondents in relation to their online activities. Results indicate that the overwhelming majority of adolescents report feelings of social media-induced stress, sadness, and anxiety, particularly linked to Instagram and Snapchat as central in social value marking and plunging comparison. Over three-quarters of respondents reported comparing their social status with their peers online undermining their self-confidence and distorting their perception of themselves. Noting along with the risks, several participants acknowledged self-expression and social interaction to be favorable social media aspects. Having captured social media's multifaceted impact, the study seeks to educate parents, social workers, and teachers and urges them to adopt media literacy frameworks and programs that enhance adolescent welfare in Sharjah and other regions.

Keywords: *Adolescents, social media, Mental health, Anxiety, Depression, Self-esteem, Social Comparison, Sharjah, Side effects, Sleep, social awareness,*

Introduction

Over recent years, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok, have dominated the digital landscape, resulting in children and young adults engaging with and understanding the world through the prism of social media. The development of new technologies has brought about different methods of communications with the incorporation of social media into everyday activities within daily life. In spite of the fact that these platforms allow for the articulation of self identity and promote bonding amongst people from different backgrounds, there are also important social risks that should not be ignored as well. Studies suggest that social media had/has the greatest impact on the mental well-being of adolescents aged thirteen to eighteen, and it is a contributor to depression, anxiety and social media disable hypostasis is dropped low self esteem (Keles et al, 2020; Anderson and Jiang, 2018 Twenge, 2017) For other reasons, social media serves as fast and instant gratification which promotes risk behavior towards gaining weight, disrupted sleep patterns and overall long term health issues (Vogel et al, 2014).

This study intends to address the problem of social media use and its impact on the mental health of selected adolescents living in Sharjah. Erikson (1968) regarded social life developmental period as one of high emotional turmoil, and an urgent need of social acceptance. According to Uhls et al. (2017), social media heightens this pressure since adolescents are often required to compare themselves to perfectized versions of people online in order to feel socially adequate. This study seeks to understand the emotional and behavioral effects of social media to assess its psychological impact. This study aims to evaluate the effects of online participation on an individual's mental health, self-image, and social media dependence. It seeks to investigate social media's impact on adolescents' psychosocial thinking during a pivotal development stage and will elucidate the pros and cons of social media engagement for adolescents in Sharjah.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Earlier research has explored the connection through social media and its impact on the mental health and well-being of adolescents regarding other cultures and nations, excluding the UAE: one research noted a relationship between social media use and the symptoms of depression within the youth (Khalaf, Alubied, Khalaf, & Rifaey, 2023), while Nazari et al., (2023) associated the rising use of social media platforms with deteriorating mental health. Alongside these, other concerns such as sleep deprivation and cyberbullying, worsens one's mental health. There has been little to no research focusing on the effects of social media on the mental health of adolescents in Sharjah, UAE.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This Study looks at the social networking effects on adolescents Sharjah has addressing their emotional self-regulation, self-esteem, and overall mental development. Also, this study looks into the social media use pattern associations, such as screen time, type of content viewed, and type of online interaction, with the mental health outcomes of emotional self-regulation, self-concept, and cognitive functioning. The purpose of this research is to assess the effects of social networking within Sharjah as it pertains to emotional self-regulation, self-esteem, and intellectual development. The focus of this study is to examine the social media behavioral impact on mental health concerning screen time, type of content, and interactions online.

1.3. Research Questions

The researchers attempt to answer the following questions:

- What physiological effects of prolonged usage of social media have on Sharjah adolescents, including impacts on stress hormones, brain development, and physical health indicators like heart rate and sleep cycles?
- How do adolescents' cognitive abilities, judgment, and brain function in Sharjah change as a result of being exposed to internet interactions on social media platforms?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Regardless of their level of social activity, social media has an impact on adolescents. One of the problems contributing is the social media screen time which is beyond acceptable levels. Research shows adolescents spend anywhere between 7 to 8 hours on a screen (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP], n.d.). Some scholars argue that nowadays, teenagers are hardly influenced by social media and that

worrying over such issues is unbelievably exaggerated. But social media is increasingly being linked to the negative impact it has on the mental health, self-esteem and the general well-being of adolescents (Dans, 2025). Enhancing the adolescents in Sharjah. Social media has an impact on is that the sheer number of hours devoted to their screens. An approximate of 7-8 hours spent in front of a screen is more than enough to significantly alter thinking patterns over time. Many argue social media has no relevance to teenagers hit its never serious and it's an unfortunate excuse parents have come up with to chastise their children. This research attempts to address the problem, which for many remains unanswered; regardless, the answer will soon come to light, and the enigma will not be an enigma anymore.

1.5 Structure of the Study

In the first chapter, the problem statement is explained in detail alongside the study's background, underlining the importance of understanding social media's psychological impacts on teenagers. Furthermore, the chapter outlines research which aims to explore the mental health concerns associated with social media use, examine the relationship between screen time and psychological outcomes, and evaluate coping mechanisms. Moreover, this chapter states the problems under investigation while justifying the significance of the study with respect to parents, educators, and policy makers. Chapter Two provides the background information on social media psychology outcomes along with an examination of several earlier hypotheses such as Social Comparison Theory and Cognitive Behavioral Theory. Additionally, it follows the pattern of social media use by adolescents and its impact on mental health challenges including depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. To enhance understanding of the problem, the chapter integrates recent evidence

with previous research through a multitude of frameworks to provide detailed explanations.

Literature Review

This chapter of the study centers on analyzing the literature concerning the social media influence on adolescents in Sharjah. To this end, it evaluates key theories and studies concerning the impact of the digital world on a person's mental health, self-image, and psychosocial functioning. This chapter synthesizes existing literature within the domains of social comparison, cyberbullying, and the associative impact of screen time to build the understanding of the multifaceted influences of the social media and communication technologies. Moreover, it notes the gap in understanding the necessity to investigate the social media influence on adolescents in Sharjah.

2.1. General Impact of Social Media on Teenagers.

2.1.1. Psychological effects.

2.1.1.1. Depression and Anxiety. According to Boers, Afzali, Newton, and Conrod (2019), an increase in time spent on social media has been markedly correlated with elevated prevalence of depression symptoms. Furthermore, each additional hour of social media engagement correlated with a 0.64-unit increase in depressed symptoms among adolescents, with same patterns noted in computer and television usage. Furthermore, these patterns correspond with the reinforcing spirals hypothesis, indicating that social media exacerbates pre-existing emotional difficulties. Longitudinal research conducted from 2010 to 2015 demonstrate that heightened interaction with digital media correlates with elevated depressive symptoms and suicide risks, particularly among females. In contrast, engagement in offline activities such as sports and direct interactions was shown to reduce these risks (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, and Martin, 2018). A growing amount of attention is being paid to the possibility that social media may be implicated in the association between self-harm and the risk of suicide in teenagers. This connection has been demonstrated to be rather close. Indicators of suicidality, such as suicidal ideation or attempt, should be identified, along with aspects related to

contagion in both online and offline social networks. In addition, examining the impact of social media in the context of suicidality of self-harming adolescents is crucial. Vally (2022) portrays an emerging issue regarding problematic use of smartphones among university students in the UAE, confirming the stresses noted in the West concerning overuse of screens and development of anxiety. The study results showed that students who spent too much time on smartphones had higher rates of sleeping problems and tiredness, which is consistent with older studies of the impacts of excessive technology use.

2.1.1.2. Self Esteem. Oyserman and Markus (1990) classify possible selves into three categories, namely, "hoped-for selves" which are idealized, "expected selves," which are those that are realistic and possible to achieve, and "feared selves," which capture negative projections of the Subsequently, the many selves portray how a person identity and self-concept at a particular time, which can be a factor that affects self-esteem. The several selves collectively embody an individual's identities and overall self-concept at a specific moment, potentially influencing their self-worth. Research indicates that adolescents who focus on self-improvement are more inclined to report positive self-esteem compared to those who fixate on negative or unrealistic self-perceptions. Social media postings that curate ideas, attitudes, and hobbies, along with personal photographs across various identity-based domains, may facilitate the dissemination of knowledge regarding these envisioned potential selves. Adolescents who utilize social media to present themselves to a global audience prior to developing a solid self-concept tend to exhibit more highly idealized representations of themselves compared to those with a more developed self-concept. Soliciting public feedback on experimental self-presentations facilitates the evolution of an individual's self-concept, perhaps resulting in the preservation, alteration, or cessation of the presentation (Mann & Blumberg, 2022). 2.1.2 Behavioral changes

2.1.2.1. Social skills. Adolescents can develop skills through positive social media involvement; yet online interactions include unique situations and

problems. Online interactions can adversely affect kids' self-esteem and confidence in managing offline social situations, even as social media enables connections with peers and the pursuit of interests. Adolescents may find it challenging to recognize essential social indicators, like body language, facial expressions, vocal tone and pitch, boundaries, and personal space, if they devote more time to social media than to in-person encounters. (Social Media Victims Law Center PLLC, 2024)

2.1.2.2. Attention spans. There exists a link between the regularity with which young people and adolescents participate in media-related multitasking, which involves texting while watching videos or fast moving between several digital platforms, and greater degrees of distractibility. It has been shown by studies that this behavior is associated with increased activity in the right prefrontal cortex, which is an area of the brain which is linked to the regulation and limitation of attention. Considering this, people who often shift their focus among several various forms of media might have trouble sustaining their focus, especially in settings that need continuous concentration, such as classrooms or study sessions. It is possible that this decreased attentional control may result in difficulty in digesting complicated information, comprehending long-form content, and efficiently completing academic assignments. The practice of multitasking with media may, over time, contribute to long-term cognitive issues. These challenges may include an increased sensitivity to distraction and a weakened capacity to filter out stimuli that are that are not relevant to the job at hand. (Moisala et al. 2016). 2.1.3 Academic performance

2.1.3.1. Productivity. Social media significantly diminishes teenagers' productivity by disrupting focus and encouraging frequent distractions. The incessant stream of notifications and the allure of social media disrupt concentrated attention, with multitasking between academic responsibilities and social media significantly impairing cognitive performance. Research indicates that it may require up to 23 minutes to regain concentration following a disruption, thereby impairing performance. Furthermore, evening social media

engagement diminishes sleep quality, resulting in increased morning weariness and diminished concentration during academic periods. All these things collectively diminish the probability of young individuals maintaining emphasis alongside attaining academic success. (Lakshmi, 2024)

2.2. Impact of Social Media on Adolescents Well-Being and Development

Social networking sites can offer significant benefits for adolescents, particularly those facing mental health difficulties. Studies indicate that social media platforms can function as efficient tools for promoting and fostering communication and helping during challenging periods. They facilitate user engagement with communities that provide emotional support, aiding in the alleviation of loneliness and isolation. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (2023) claims that social media offers an opportunity that allows people to take part in discussions on stigmatized subjects like self-harm and suicide, potentially creating a safer and less judgmental environment compared to in-person encounters. This virtual setting might be especially vital for teens who may be reluctant to seek assistance in person. Additionally, social media platforms can facilitate connections between young individuals and mental health resources, as well as crisis intervention services, thereby enhancing their psychological resilience.

2.2.1. Social media as a tool for education and awareness.

Educators and academics have recognized the potential of social media as a tool to enhance the learning and teaching experiences of students. It has become possible for learners and educators to communicate with online communities located all over the world thanks to the utilization of social media channels (Kimmons, 2014;). This, in turn, makes it possible for learning opportunities to extend beyond the boundaries of traditional classroom structures. Furthermore, according to the findings of Lim and Newby's study from the year 2020, the creation of personal learning environments (PLEs) by students can result in the production of more enriching learning experiences and advocate for a strategy that is centered on the student. When students are given

the option to select social media platforms that correspond with their goals and interests, it is essential for teachers to provide the necessary guidance and support to assist them in making informed selections. This is emphasized by Rezende and Pereira (2021), who state that it is particularly important for teachers to provide this assistance.

2.2.1.2. Academic Skills. According to Kolhar, Kazi, and Alameen (2021) Social media consumption negatively affects academic advancement, while research indicates an extensive positive correlation between social media engagement and academic success. "Most participants used social media platforms [for leisure] rather than for academic purposes". Previous investigations indicate adolescents who dedicate substantial time to social media sites often have inferior academic performance. This occurs as a result of their participation in online discussions and interacting on social media platforms instead of dealing with books. This negatively affects their academic performance.

2.2.2. Social Media and Creativity.

According to Al Hashimi, Al Muwali, Zaki, Mahdi (2019), social media-based learning has the potential to change major creative thinking processes and activities related to art, design and digital media disciplines. Furthermore, this may broaden and expand how educators think about creativity in the classroom, and may contribute to new ways of expressing creativity, digital creativity. Additionally, they (2019) stated that teaching methods based on multimedia have been found to be highly effective in creating engaging learning environments for students, since it offers context and promotes creativity both in the classroom and in various aspects of life. Instagram, for example, enables users to save inspirational images into collections. Moreover, social media provides a platform for sharing and showcasing artworks at any given moment, where followers, peers, and instructors can view and provide feedback. In a survey done by Al Hashimi and her colleagues asked participants whether they have published or shared their work on social media applications; 68% of surveyed students responded "Yes," 27% said "Sometimes," and only

5% said "No." The majority were found to have shared their artwork on platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr. Furthermore, students pointed out that the main purpose for which they shared was to get feedback in order to generate new ideas, as well as to share artistic and creative concepts. (Al Hashimi et al., 2019).

2.3. Strengthening peer connections

Adolescents forge social bonds and develop feelings of acceptance and belonging through social media. For instance, with Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tik, teenagers are able to maintain their friendships, take part in activities, and provide each other with emotional support (Boyd, 2014). In addition, Best, Manktelow and Taylor (2014) also suggest that social media serves as a tool for communication for socially isolated and anxious teenagers and helps them interact with likeminded people.

2.4. The Effect of Social Media on Different Genders

Without a doubt, there exists marked differences in adolescents' social media's impact on their mental health. Adolescent girls have a higher tendency to experience feelings such as sadness, anxiety, or negative body image as a result of the use of social media (Bailey et al., 2022). This group is often socialized to conform certain beauty standards, where the emphasis is on the type of body that is frequently objectified, and the exposure to beauty and sexuality is so rampant on social media that these ideas become normalized at a young age (Mahon & Hevey, 2021). Daily exposure to such ideals leads women to engage in unreasonable societal comparisons, as many feel anxious about their own physiques (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). A variety of maladaptive coping techniques for stress, including self-starvation, are employed, which subsequently exacerbate negative social comparisons, hence reinforcing the detrimental impact of social media on the psychological well-being of adolescent females (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

In contrast, young men face a distinct difficulty regarding their utilization of social media. These individuals, influenced by their ideal of masculinity, which typically encompasses a strong and athletic

appearance (Mahon and Hevey, 2021), appear to have a reduced degree of body dissatisfaction relative to females. Much of the content on social media embodies fitness culture and endorses male hypermasculinity, perhaps resulting in body dysmorphia, when males become preoccupied with their size and muscularity (Pope, Ziebland, Mays, 2000). While social media can serve as a motivational tool for young males seeking a specific body, it also compels them to pursue unattainable perfection, adversely affecting their mental health. Young males not only experience this difficulty but are also less likely to report these mental health concerns, exacerbating the problems associated with social media (Mahon and Hevey, 2021). Understanding boys' interaction with social media and its effects is essential, based on the available evidence, to identify the appropriate measures to address the issue.

Tiggemann and Anderberg (2019) emphasize gender specific interventions are necessary when examining these diverse realities. They suggest that females should employ critical media education to recognize that the unattainable beauty standards promoted by social networks should not be esteemed. Promoting body positivity through educational initiatives that foster appreciation for diverse physical features, or initiating campaigns against such exposure, can also reduce engagement with social networks (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). It is essential for adolescents to engage in discussions regarding body image and to educate them on alternative responses to the suffering linked to depression (Pope et al., 2000). Gender-related concerns can be addressed by suitable interventions aimed at promoting safe usage of social networking sites among teenagers.

2.4.1. Behavioral Impacts.

The effect of social media on adolescent behavior varies. For example, persistent video game use has been linked to reduced depression rates and lower risky behaviors such as binge drinking. While excessive screen time often results in lower self-esteem. Furthermore, adolescents who engage predominantly in sedentary screen-based activities tend to have a diminished sense of self-

worth compared to more active teenagers (Casiano et al., 2012).

2.5. Physical Health Impacts

2.5.1. Inflammation

As per the results of an investigation undertaken by one of the researchers at the University of Buffalo, the social media platforms used by college students has biologically and psychologically been linked to poor physical health. One such marker is C-reactive protein (CRP) which is a chronic inflammatory biological marker with the potential to predict catastrophic diseases in an individual like diabetes, certain forms of cancer, and cardiovascular ailments. The study also revealed that higher amounts of C-reactive protein (CRP) was observed in participants who practiced social media too much. It was found that greater social media usage was linked to more pronounced somatic symptoms, including generalized head and back pain, increased upper respiratory infections, and greater access to healthcare services. In addition to the increased CRP levels, participants reported more frequent somatic complaints.

In regard to this, David Lee, the lead author of the research and Assistant Professor of Communication in the College of Arts and Sciences, notes that a large proportion of young individuals have fully integrated the use of social media into their daily routines. Therefore, it makes understanding the implications of social media engagement on their health crucial.

The journal Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking published the study. Much of the scholarship dedicated to social media tends to focus on its effects on an individual's mental health, leaving its effects on one's physical health largely ignored. Recent surveys show that people in the late teenage years and early twenties exhibit extreme social media usage. This age cohort spends approximately six hours per day collectively socializing, messaging, and browsing the internet. Additionally, although some studies show a correlation between social media usage and physical health indicators, a significant amount of research on this subject is still based on

self-reporting or multi-dimensional single-platform use.

Health sociologist Lee notes how "the primary focus of this study was to build upon previous research through analyzing the multi-dimensional social media usage and their associated physical health outcomes, which are measured biologically, behaviorally, and through self-report." With this aim in mind, the research team recruited a diverse sample of 251 participants who were undergraduate students aged 18 to 24 years.

Blood samples from the participants were taken courtesy of finger sticks, while participants completed questionnaires regarding their self-reported health and social media usage, including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram, which were the most used platforms in 2017 when the data was collected. Moreover, these answers were analyzed alongside the results from another survey conducted specifically to assess the rigor of the participants' engagement with the research as a means of validating the study's hypotheses. As Lee notes, "We were able to establish a correlation between the amount of time spent on social media and these physical health indicators." The results imply that the increase in somatic symptoms and healthcare visits. Participants also showed increased chronic inflammation.

2.5.2. Inactive Lifestyle

As stated by Social Media Victims Law Center PLLC (2024), the negative social media effects on physical health are most likely stemming from social media's use algorithms specifically designed to keep you and your child glued to the screen for longer than intended. This is where the concern lies with respect to children, teenagers, and even adult's physical wellbeing. Using social media more than one should has a crippling effect on social life and is the primary cause of a growing trend in sedentary lifestyle. Even though social media has some social advantages, the addictive nature of social media leads to a decline in real life interactions, drastically diminishing the enjoyment of almost every activity that used to bring joy. This inactivity is becoming common because of the undue reliance on social media platforms and is a prominent factor in unhealthy

weight gain. Such a condition is dangerous as it is known to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and other life-threatening changes. The negative impact of social media on physical health most likely comes from the algorithms devised by such platforms to capture your attention and your child's attention for longer periods. The focus of concern has now shifted to the physical repercussions on minors, teens, and adults. Spending too much time on social media is often associated with a sedentary lifestyle which has detrimental consequences on one's health.

Although social media offers certain forms of social interaction, overusing them diminishes one's ability to engage in real life interactions and enjoy activities that they previously found pleasurable. Invasive social media activities due to spending more times online rather than offline contributes towards expansion of unhealthy weight. This is hazardous to the individual's health as it increases the individual's risk factors associated with heart diseases and diabetes

2.5.3. Sleep Deprivation

The day-long engagement with social media often extends into evening hours. Screens of computers, tablets, and mobile phones emit blue light which the American Academy of Ophthalmology claims disrupt the body's natural circadian rhythm. You may experience difficulties in falling asleep. The blue light also, exacerbated by a fear of missing out, affects one's day-to-day functioning. "Likes" on social media posts and comments about posts encourage sleep disruption and impaired bodily functions. Obstructed sleep is linked with greater risks of various ailments, such as obesity, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. Furthermore, Alaleeli and Alnajjar (2020) noted that the Arab Digital Generation in the UAE logs an estimated six hours of screen time daily, which reduces the likelihood that they will exercise. Excessive use of digital devices is often linked with a sedentary lifestyle and the growing trend of obesity among Emirati adolescents, similar to trends in the U.S. and Europe (Alaleeli & Alnajjar, 2020).

2.5.4. Physical Growth Concerns

The correlation is clear as social media consumption relates to sedentary activity and poor dietary choices. Sedentary lifestyles alongside insufficient nutrition of calcium and vitamin D can culminate in juvenile osteoporosis. Additionally, high amounts of social media screen time is linked with reduced bone density. As your child is growing, bone health is important since they continuously form and remodel bone tissue during the teenage and post-teen years. Healthy decisions are crucial throughout life, but the puberty period is where the bone tissue is most fully developed in terms of strength and density. Your child may develop skeletal problems during adulthood as a result.

2.6. Theoretical Perspectives

2.6.1. Reinforcing Spirals Hypothesis.

The reinforcing spirals hypothesis suggests that adolescents with pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as low self-esteem or depression are drawn toward online interactions that provoke their challenges. Furthermore, screen time amplifies social comparisons and represses negative emotional cycles (Bailey et al., 2022).

2.6.2. Displacement Hypothesis.

The displacement hypothesis suggests that social media displaces meaningful activities such as exercise, in-person interactions, and academic pursuits, further deteriorating mental health and cognitive outcomes (Hawton et al., 2020).

2.6.3. The Social Comparison Theory.

Festinger (1954), at the outset, proposed that people have a self-evaluative tendency to compare themselves with others in the different aspects of their lives. In their respective works, Willson (1981) and Wood (1989) differentiated between downward social comparison as a process of comparing oneself with people worse off than the reference group, whereas upward social comparison is the process of comparing oneself to individuals better off than the reference group. Newport Academy (2023) cited research showing that adolescents are more likely to make self-comparisons as those depressed and low self-esteem exacerbates their symptoms and form a negative spiral. According to Newport Academy (2023), adolescents who engage in social comparisons on platforms like Facebook struggle with decreased self-esteem and self-worth evaluations.

2.6.4 The Attachment Theory.

In the paper by D'Arienzo, Boursier and Griffiths (2019) attachment theory was mentioned for the first time in the works of Bowlby (1958) who defined attachment as the first and the most important relationships of children with their caregivers (usually mother). Stöven and Herzberg (2020) found that those who had higher levels of abandonment anxiety used social media to enhance their sense of belonging and to make them feel loved by other people. They also tended to want more feedback and attention from others, especially when they were stressed or depressed. They reassured themselves in social media that others like and care for them, particularly when they are unhappy.

2.6.5. Comparison of the Social Comparison Theory and Attachment Theory.

Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory and Bowlby's (1958) Attachment Theory both address the social media phenomenon and its psychological implications, albeit differently. Under Social Comparison Theory, people are understood to engage in upward or downward comparisons of themselves. In this case, adolescents make upward comparisons on social media contributing to the feedback loop that manifests as depressive symptoms (Newport Academy, 2023). Conversely, Attachment Theory focuses on the the emotional needs of the self stemming from the relationships with caregivers in childhood, and how adolescents with heightened abandonment anxiety access social media for validation (D'Arenzo et al., 2019; Stöven & Herzberg, 2020). Social Comparison Theory and Attachment Theory collectively elucidate the complex psychosocial phenomenon concerning social media and mental health in adolescents. While the Attachment Theory discusses the internal emotional processes that drive adolescents to seek validation on social media, the Social Comparison Theory illustrates the external

forces of comparing oneself to idealized portrayals online.

2.7. Previous Studies

2.7.1. Fear of Missing Out.

Previous research indicates some aspects that are both positive and negative in regard to the effects of social media on the mental well-being of teenagers, and this is very vividly captured. For instance, Keles and colleagues (2020) investigated how social media sites such as Instagram and Snapchat affect the health of adolescents. They determined that constant exposure to well-curated and managed lives tends to make teenagers feel depressed and dissatisfied. Although the use of social media assists young people to stay in touch with their peers, it also leads to tendency to self-negligence where teenagers try to outdo each other hence deepening the feelings of depression and anxiety.

The fear of missing out (FOMO) is another factor that stands out with regards to concern for the teenagers who are greatly immersed in the web. Kelly and colleagues (2023) assessed the links between social media usage and mental wellbeing focusing on body, self-esteem, and social communication. Evidence suggests that these platforms can strengthen relationships, but at the same time raise stress and social expectations. Consider a teenager whose timeline is inundated with the latest posts of parties or vacations that they were not allowed to go to; it could be devastating. The combination of being connected and excluded strengthens the thin line of mental wellbeing.

The issue is further complicated by the relationship between social media usage and physical health, both of which have an impact on mental health. McCrae et al. (2017) has revealed in their meta-analysis that spending too much time on the internet affects sleep. For teenagers, it is common to scroll social media late at night and lose out on important sleep, which is important because it allows them to effectively manage their emotions. This lack of sleep, when chronic, can manifest as irritability, difficulties in concentrating, and increased anxiety levels. It reinforces the argument for the necessity of restricting screen time to enable young people adopt healthier spending habits.

Finally, these cannot be overemphasized: cyberbullying. Keles et al. (2019) assert that anxiety, depression, and withdrawal from society as a whole can be traced back to online bullying. How about a teenager on social media receiving negative comments on their posts? The impacts are catastrophic and reach far deeper than the surface level. While social media does provide an avenue for meeting new people, these risks are equally as important— adolescents should be equipped with the knowledge and protective measures. These challenges remain critical to enabling young people to reap the advantages of social media and navigate its pitfalls.

Abaido (2020) explores the impact of cyberbullying on university students in the UAE, noting that 91% of surveyed students admit its existence, with Instagram and Facebook being the more prominent platforms affected (55.5% and 38%, respectively). The study discusses the spiral of silence theory, as victims of cyberbullying choose not to report such incidents because of cultural stigma and fear of repercussions. It also addresses cyberbullying's relation to other mental health issues, like anxiety and depression, insisting on greater legal intervention, digital literacy education, and anonymous reporting mechanisms. The results highlight the need for nation-specific responses to cyberbullying in Arab countries.

Methodology

This chapter details the design and methods, as well as the data collection steps completed for this study. It justifies the use of quantitative approach, for understanding the problem under investigation. The methodology chapter describes how the participants were selected, the ethical issues involved, and the strategies used to analyze the data

3.1. Description of Data

Primary data was collected using a survey created using Microsoft Forms which was shared through various social media platforms, which received about twenty-four responses and counting,

ranging from ages fifteen to eighteen. The majority of participants were females at seventeen responses while the male responses were at seven responses. The data gathered was quantitative which allowed for statistical analysis and objective examination. The survey consisted of three open-ended questions concerning high school students' personal experiences with social media, its negative consequences, suggestions for responsible usage, effects on sleep and productivity, and its impact on self-esteem and mental health. Additionally, it contained eighteen multiple-choice questions covering demographics and opinions toward social media.

3.2. Methodology

Microsoft Forms, the main method of obtaining information, was used to ensure the validity of this study. Microsoft Forms is recognized as a beginner-friendly system that provides quick and easy surveys and by the end of the survey it provides the creators with a spreadsheet on Microsoft Excel that contains the respondents' answers, simplifying data analysis (Vujovic, 2024). To maximize response rates, the survey, intended for adolescents aged fifteen to eighteen, was distributed via popular social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat. The survey responses were divided into groups based on gender and age, so the data could be evaluated accurately and correctly. The challenge faced during the survey was that adolescents nowadays have extremely short attention of eight seconds (Golden Steps ABA, 2025). This suggests the loss of patience and concentration of many participants while completing the survey, so they neglected the writing questions, or they provided improper responses.

3.3. Rationale of the Study

This study aims to look into adolescents aged 13 to 18, a group that is known to be active users of social media. Adolescents, as compared to younger children, have far greater average screen time which makes them a critical group to study the impact of social media on health and behavior. Riehm et al. (2019) reported that adolescents who spend over three hours on social media are more likely to suffer from mental health problems such

as internalizing difficulties. This further reveals the psychological risks that are present with social media use within these ages and adds the need for more focused research within this demographic. Microsoft Forms was chosen as the primary tool for the survey in order to have organized and effective data collection. The platform's integration with the Microsoft Office suite enables efficient handling and analysis of data. Besides, there is enhanced reliability and confidentiality due to secure data storage and real-time response retrieval Pham et al., 2024. In another study, Pham et al. (2024) analyzed the use of Microsoft Forms in the classroom and found that it enables systematic reviews, assists teachers in predicting student difficulties, and boosts students' participation and self-efficacy. In the same manner, Cigliana et al. (2024) studied the use of the tool for formative evaluation and feedback in higher education and substantiated that the tool improves evaluation. For its reliability as a data collection tool, Microsoft Forms was appropriate for this study because the respondents could answer without the confines of a paper-based survey. Data analysis was performed on Microsoft Excel owing to its ease of access, user-friendliness, and powerful analytical capabilities. The available data was formatted and analyzed with the aid of filtering, sorting as well as the pivot tables. Furthermore, Excel's graphing capabilities aided in determining trends and patterns pertaining to social media use among teenagers. This research does rely on descriptive statistical analysis of social media data, so central tendency measures, correlation and regression calculations are most certainly needed. I believe that Excel is the most appropriate tool for this. A quantitative approach was selected to analyze the major indicators, which included patterns of social media usage, preferred social media platforms, and well-being. Analyses were also aimed at determining the presence of differences in social media usage with respect to the level of education and gender, due to the existence of some literature which claims that such variables affect the use of social media.

3.4. Procedure of the Analysis

Several elements were considered when interpreting the results. The analysis was broadly categorized into four parts: the amount of time

spent on social media, the specific social media platforms, the reasons as to why social media was used, and how it was hypothesized to affect teenagers' health. These categories were chosen as some studies suggest that those factors might have a considerable impact on teenagers' mental health, social conduct, and academic achievement. The analysis was based on the information from the Excel file, and each category was analyzed independently of the others based on the predetermined divisions. In every category, particular metrics that were indicative of noteworthy phenomena for deeper analysis were selected. For example, in the analysis of platform usage, the most popular platforms were established and analyzed by age to see if any relationships existed. In the same fashion, in the analysis of the impact of social media, answers to questions that were both positively and negatively satisfying the questions were chosen so that the experiences of teenagers could be understood better. Graphs were generated to illustrate the quantitative data, with the independent variables being the social media platforms or the purposes of using social media, and the dependent variable the number of responses in each group. Five graphs were made, depicting patterns by age bracket and reason for use. More subjective answers were analyzed using qualitative techniques to interpret the social and emotional dimensions participants articulated. The mixed methods approach offered an analysis of the impact social media use relationship with the adolescents in Sharjah through combining quantitative and qualitative techniques.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter described the corpus, methodology, rationale of the study, and the procedure for the analysis. This research assessed the psychological effects of social media usage on teenagers residing in Sharjah. Using the set objectives, the effects of social media on mental health, self-image, and social behavior were studied. The results enhance comprehension of the effects of social media on adolescents and opens doors for further conversations about the digital health and policy relations

Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the research results and interprets the data collected. The objective was to understand the relationship of adolescents with social media and their self-reported addiction, sleep, and self-esteem levels. A digital form was created to target respondents from a wide demographic. The respondents were adolescents within the age range of 14 and 18 years old and the sample was balanced in terms of age and gender. Data collection lasted over two weeks which helped monitor the social media habits and their underlying psychological impacts on the user over a long period of time. The research used a mixed methods approach to analyze the datasets. Social media consumption patterns were constructed using descriptive factors such as usage percentages and frequency distributions, whereas addiction, sleep sacrifice, and self-esteem relationships were studied through correlation analysis. Additionally, thematic analysis was used to understand the most mentioned negative impacts and changes that needed to be done based on open-ended responses. This research helps in better understanding the way adolescents use and interact with social media as well as the impact it has on their mental health and daily life.

4.2. Demographics and General Characteristics

4.2.1. Age and Gender Distribution

The study sample consisted of adolescents from different age groups, with an average age of approximately 16.4 years old (SD = 1.2). This suggests that the participants are within a critical developmental period where social interactions and digital engagement are highly influential. Furthermore, the study also observed a gender imbalance, as 70% of the respondents were female, while only 30% were male. This demographic distribution may have implications for the findings, as previous research suggests that social media usage patterns and psychological effects can differ by gender. Females, for instance, tend to engage in social comparisons more and oscillate in their level of self-esteem because of online interactions, while males appear to use social media mostly for entertainment rather than for social affirmation.

These demographic factors are important for understanding the wider implications of social media on adolescents, and their needs must be perceived in order to form a proper understanding. As shown in Figure 4.1, social media's effects may have been moderated by social media, as female participants significantly outnumbered the male participants. Many psychological and behavioral outcomes of social media are sensitive to gender; therefore, this disproportionate representation should be taken into account in the study so that the findings are applicable to a wider population.

4.3. Social Media Usage Patterns

4.3.1 Self-Reported Social Media Addiction

A focus area within the study was reflecting on social media consumption. 66.67% of respondents self-diagnosed themselves as social media addicts, answering affirmatively when asked if they considered themselves an addict, while 33.33% rejected any form of social media addiction. This understanding aligns with increasing worries about the youth digitally reliant on social media platforms. A sizable portion of adolescents self-reporting social media addiction indicates a considerable number acknowledge their excessive use, but moderation is very difficult. The recognition of this addiction seems to stem from the habitual scrolling and check-notification cycles that dominate unsupervised idle time online or the inability to disengage from online social interactions.

As illustrated in Figure 4.2, the majority of respondents admitted to some degree of social media addiction, which heightens concerns about adolescents' use of social media. Although acknowledging an addiction does not imply a formal diagnostic assessment of dependence, it highlights a concerning behavioral trend many adolescents report feeling tied to emotionally. Such dependencies may negatively impact attention span, performance level, and stress levels in the long-term, which highlights the need for effective safeguards that aid in the better controlled usage of social media.

Figure 4.2: Self-Reported Social Media Addiction
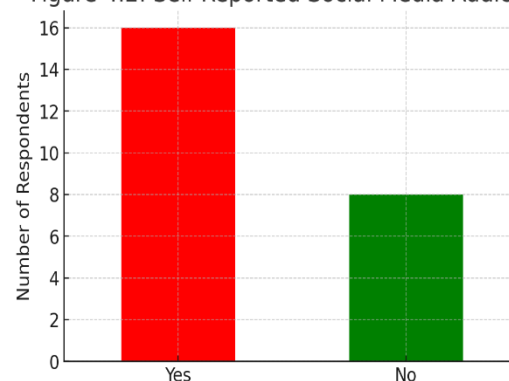
4.3.2 Sleep Sacrifice Due to Social Media

The respondents' effects of social media engagement on sleep were reported to have the most concern. In regard to sleep problems, adolescents were inquired whether insomnia was a result of prior social media engagement. Data showed 43.3% self-reported frequent loss of sleep and 26.67% reported occasional social media usage while staying up late. Such online interactions strongly point towards a nonsensical overflowing engagement where students have to adjust their daily schedules to accommodate social media, resulting in severe harm to their mental health, cognitive abilities, and overall health. Sleep deprivation can severely hinder academic performance, increase stress levels, and is related to poor mood disorders in adolescents. Most participants discussed the problem of social media addiction, offering the explanation that social media is one of the causes for poor sleep Sleep deprivation has irritable and aggressive consequences—an effect the researchers hope supports habitual better screen time management, especially during bedtime. Respondents answering through the blue light social media in Picture 4.3 might as well have sulked over disruptions to melatonin levels that make falling asleep difficult.

4.4. Psychological and Emotional Effects

4.4.1. Impact on Self-Esteem

The impact of social media on self-esteem was another critical area of investigation. Participants were asked to evaluate how social media

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influenced their perception of themselves. The results revealed that 26.67% reported a positive impact, 20% experienced a negative impact, and 33.33% claimed that social media had no significant effect on their self-esteem. Self-esteem, as profoundly stated, is shaped by an individual's interpretation of the content, social media engagement, and the context surrounding the consumption. Hence, the mixed response emphasizes that the effect of the social media platform is deeply personal. Many respondents reported an increase in self-esteem associated with social media engagement while others reported lower self-esteem due to the unrealistic beauty standards imposed on them, cyberbullying, and comparisons on these platforms. Adolescents who reported negative impacts on their self-feeling are likely to be more dissatisfied with their self-image, hence qualifying to be termed as socially anxious and depressed. On the contrary, respondents who reported a positive impact had positive interactions with stimulating content or simply affirming interactions with their peers. It has thus been noted that social media can, in some cases, prove beneficial which only adds to the complex risk assessment concerning it and self-esteem.

Figure 4.4: Impact of Social Media on Self-Esteem
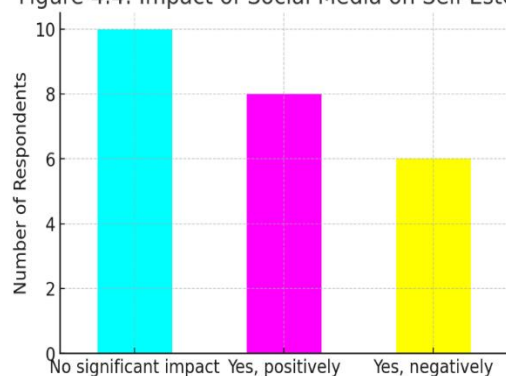
4.4.2 Correlation Between Addiction and Sleep Sacrifice

To ascertain the behavioral impacts of social media addiction, a correlation analysis was carried out using self-reported addiction against sleep sacrifice. The finding showed that there was a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.39$, $p > 0.05$). This further indicates that adolescents who self-report themselves as addicted to social media are likely to pay a heavy price, sleep. That said, the correlation was non-significant which means that there could be several other reasons responsible for disrupted sleep like academic work burden or some personal habits independent of social media. As shown in figure 4.5, the correlation with sleep sacrifice due to social media addiction aligns with other research which suggests that long engagement with digital activities may disturb sleep. This relationship, although still not conclusively established, does serve to suggest the dangers linked to the overuse of social media, particularly as the last activity before going to sleep. Some other factors like anxiety or the duration of exposure to screens could be researched to know the real depth of this issue.

4.5 Qualitative Analysis: Negative Impacts & Suggested Improvements

4.5.1 Thematic Analysis of Negative Impacts

Beyond quantitative results, respondents were asked to explain the most relevant negative impacts of social media. Mentioned most often were problems from social media overuse, lack of concentration, self-esteem difficulties, cyberbullying, anxiety and depression. Respondents noted that social media creates unrealistic expectations, which leads to feelings of inadequacy. Moreover, the overwhelming need to be validated through 'likes' and comments was reported to be extremely straining and anxiety provoking.

Figure 4.6: Most Common Negative Impacts
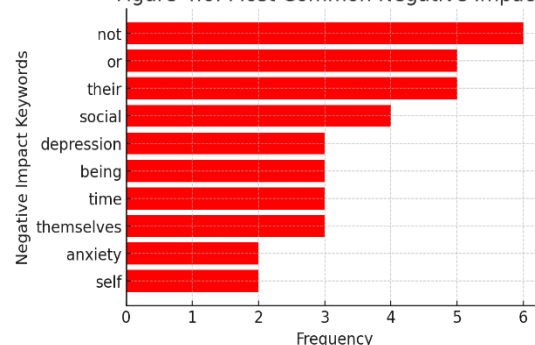
4.5.2 Suggested Improvements

Participants made suggestions regarding how social media can be made better. Numerous respondents said that users should be encouraged to take breaks, that more positive content should be created, greater supervision by parents should be provided, and social interaction in offline settings should be encouraged. Some respondents remarked that there is a need for more programs targeted at adolescents which instruct them on how to use social media in moderation. These findings suggest that social media indeed poses numerous benefits; however, there are profound risks associated with it which, by relying on public education, awareness campaigns, and self-action, need to be lessened.

Figure 4.7: Most Common Improvement Suggestions
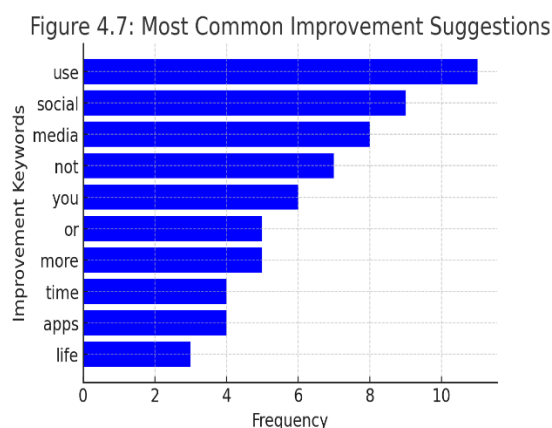
4.6. Summary of Findings

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the study results. Social media is fundamental in adolescent life and greatly impact self-image, restoration, and general psychosocial health. Strategies should focus on the fostering of constructive digital self-reputation skills, social media coping strategy mitigation, and controlled use of social media.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the main outcomes that were derived from the study concerning its research questions. And as social media context, these were the results that were sustained. The results were summarized as placed to the impact of social media on the thoughts and actions of adolescents in Sharjah concentrating on the consequences. The chapter also summarizes the implications of the study, discusses the limitations, and suggests avenues for further research in this dynamic field of concern.

5.1. Summary of the Findings

The research methodically examines the social media impact on the psychological and emotional, and physiological dimensions on adolescents in Sharjah using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. As per the findings, a considerable number of adolescents perceive social media as an 'addiction', out of which 66.67% reported such behaviors, and moderately correlates with having inadequate sleep. Approximately 43.33% admitted to losing sleep frequently, which explains the alteration in circadian rhythm and wellbeing due to staying online on social media platforms late at night. Additionally, there were some gender differences, whereby respondents who were females were more prone to experiencing emotional symptoms connected with social comparison given their low self-esteem, while males used the social media for entertainment purposes. Thematic analysis of depression, anxiety, cyberbullying, and excessive dependence on social media validation has also emerged as prominent recurring themes among the students. At the same time, some adolescents perceived social media as enabling them to express themselves and to support them by their peers. The final discussion of this study suggests the need for digital education for adolescents in Sharjah to help them balance the positive and negative sides of social media, alongside promoting good sleep habits, and the constructive evaluation of social media.

5.2. Implications of the Study

This analysis impacts educators, policymakers, parents, and mental health professionals concentrating on the adolescent's mental health in Sharjah. Their worry is justified - there is no moderation for screen time, and attention to fostering constructive self-regulation skills, such as digital literacy and emotional resilience, is not

given in schools. Given the strong correlation, social media addiction has with sleep and self-esteem issues, self-regulated attention marketing * attention controlling (screen time) frame needs strong attention. Furthermore, the identified gender differences also require concentrating on how teenage boys and girls both uniquely and different respond to social media for effective strategies to be designed and used. It is crucial that policymakers develop the rules concerning the social media access of adolescents, especially adolescents' nighttime usage, because of its negative ramifications on sleep and mental health needs to listen. Mental health specialists need to focus on the issue of social media during therapeutic sessions and help adolescents deal with the emotional realities of the World Wide Web. In conclusion, this text calls on all stakeholders to work together to transform the social media ecosystem into a more nurturing environment.

5.3. Delimitations of the Study

The generalizability of the results is limited by the age group of 16 to 17-year-olds. In addition, the study was conducted solely on a selected number of adolescents in Sharjah. The reliability of the data might be impacted by the adolescents' self-reporting, which may include exaggeration or minimization on social media usage. It is beyond the scope of this study to research about the effect of social media on adolescents in different cities other than Sharjah as well as different age ranges.

5.4. Further Research

Further research is needed to establish the long-term effects of social media on adolescents. Moreover, future studies should take other aspects that were not mentioned in this study. Some of these aspects include academic performance, anxiety levels, types of social media content, and usage patterns. Additionally, further research could include a wider range of participants from other cities, not just Sharjah.

5.5. Conclusion

This section reinforces the results of the research in relation to the various research questions that were posed for the study. The importance of this research is in its geographic focus, particularly in the literature gap regarding social media and adolescents' mental health in Sharjah. The study may be helpful with regard to educating as well as clinically assisting mental health practitioners, and even parents, trying to unravel the mental processes underlying their children's behavior in cyberspace. The investigation contributes to the understanding of adolescents' digital behavioral psychology by analyzing self-esteem, addiction, sleep disruption, and emotional health. Moreover, this research prepares the ground for investigation about physical outcomes and circumstantial strategies for mental health in future studies.

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