



The Impact of Social Media Problematic Use on Psychological Wellbeing and Frustration among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Comparative Study

ISSN (Online): 3007-1038

Pages: 79–87

DOI: 10.55737/rl.2025.43105

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<https://regionallens.com>**Amber Awan**¹ **Syeda Malaika Sohail**² **Zara Emanuel Robert**³ **Syeda Shifa Atiq Bukhari**⁴ **Sahar Kiani**⁵

Abstract: The objective of the study is to address a gap in the current literature by exploring the impact of problematic social media use on psychological wellbeing and frustration among adolescents and young adults, as well as to examine mean differences between these groups with respect to the study variables: social media problematic use, psychological wellbeing, and frustration. The study employed a cross-sectional correlational design and a purposive sampling technique to collect data from 322 students, including adolescents aged 12 to 19 and young adults aged 20 to 35. Three measures were used: the *Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)*, the *Psychological Well-Being Scale*, and the *Frustration Discomfort Scale*. Correlational analysis revealed that among adolescents, social media problematic use is significantly and negatively related to psychological well-being and frustration. Among young adults, social media problematic use is significantly and negatively related to psychological well-being, but its relationship with frustration is positive, though not significant. Regression analysis indicates that problematic social media use among adolescents significantly and negatively predicts psychological well-being, while positively and significantly predicting frustration. For young adults, however, problematic social media use does not significantly predict psychological well-being or frustration. Independent sample t-tests show that adolescents scored significantly higher on social media addiction and also scored higher on frustration, though the latter difference was not significant compared to young adults. Conversely, young adults scored significantly higher on psychological well-being than adolescents. The study provides important implications, particularly for adolescents, who appear to be the most affected group.

Key Words: Social Media Problematic Use, Psychological Wellbeing, Frustration, Adolescents, Young Adults

Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly virtual day by day. The invention of the smartphone is an amazing achievement of science and information technology, as it enables swift communication, particularly through social media. People across the globe not only interact but also form online relationships (Astapova, 2016; Khan et al., 2024). Social media refers to websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Wolf et al., 2018). There are many advantages of social media, such as providing entertainment, information, swift communication, facilitating business dealings, and serving as a source of online educational content (Badr et al., 2024; Macías Urrego et al., 2024; Štreimikienė et al., 2021). However, problematic use of smartphone particularly social media can deteriorate functional life, cause clinical distress, elevate frustration, and negatively affect the psychological wellbeing of individuals (Irfan et al., 2025; Shahid et al., 2024).

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Citation: Awan, A., Sohail, S. M., Robert, Z. E., Bukhari, S. S. A., & Kiani, S (2025). The Impact of Social Media Problematic Use on Psychological Wellbeing and Frustration among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Comparative Study. *Regional Lens*, 4(3), 79-87. <https://doi.org/10.55737/rl.2025.43105>

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Psychological wellbeing refers to an individual's emotional health and overall functioning. It consists of positive social relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, a sense of purpose, and personal growth (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Frustration is a specific type of anger that arises when expected rewards or outcomes are not achieved, and the situation is perceived as unjust or beyond one's control (Yazdi, 2025). Recent and previous studies have shown that problematic social media use negatively affects psychological wellbeing and increases frustration among both adolescents and young adults. A study conducted in the United Kingdom on 915 young adults revealed that problematic social media use is associated with lower psychological wellbeing (Worsley et al., 2018). Another study in Bangladesh on 5,511 college and university students found that higher social media use significantly associates with poor psychological wellbeing, as well as higher anxiety and depression (Islam et al., 2021). A study with 724 participants (41% men, 59% women) reported that problematic social media use is associated with higher frustration (Roksoz et al., 2023). Another study on 100 undergraduate students indicated that reducing social media use results in lower depression, higher psychological wellbeing, and reduced frustration (Gmiro, 2024).

A study in Finland with 3,408 adolescents aged 11, 13, and 15 showed that problematic social media use is associated with lower academic performance, higher frustration and stress, and detrimental wellbeing (Paakkari et al., 2021). Similarly, a study in Italy reported that problematic social media use is significantly related to poor psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students (Casale et al., 2015). In India, a study on 100 college students aged 18 to 22 found that excessive social media use is associated with stress and frustration (Ghoti, 2024). A large-scale study of 154,981 adolescents (average age 13.5) across 29 countries also found that problematic social media use consistently relates to lower wellbeing (Boer et al., 2020).

Although substantial literature exists on the association between problematic social media use, poorer psychological wellbeing, and higher frustration among adolescents and young adults, studies in Pakistan are very limited. Therefore, the aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of problematic social media use on psychological wellbeing and frustration among adolescents and young adults, and to assess the mean differences between these groups with respect to social media problematic use, frustration, and psychological wellbeing.

Hypotheses:

H1: There is likely to be a significant impact of social media problematic use on psychological well-being and frustration among adolescents and young adults.

H2: There is likely to be significant mean differences in social media problematic use, psychological well-being, and frustration between adolescents and young adults.

Method

Research Design and Sampling

The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational research design and employed a purposive sampling technique to collect data from students aged 12 to 35 years, including adolescents (12–18 years) and young adults (20–35 years) who had been using social media for at least one year and were enrolled in school, college, or university.

Study Instruments

Three questionnaires were employed: the *Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)*, the *Psychological Well-Being Scale*, and the *Frustration Discomfort Scale*. The BSMAS is a six-item Likert scale (1–5) developed by Andreassen et al. (2016), which demonstrated an internal consistency of 0.80. Psychological well-being was measured using the *Psychological Well-Being Scale* (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), an 18-item scale (1–7 Likert scale, $\alpha = .87-.93$), while frustration was assessed with Harrington's (2005) 28-item *Frustration Discomfort Scale* (1–5 Likert scale, $\alpha = .84-.94$).

Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to the APA 7 ethical code of conduct. Authors of the instruments were contacted via email for permission to use the questionnaires. After receiving approval, data collection commenced, including a consent form, demographic questionnaire, and study instruments. The consent form clearly stated that participation was voluntary,



not coerced, and that participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. After providing written consent, participants completed the demographic form and study questionnaires, which took approximately 20–25 minutes. For participants under 18, permission was obtained from their guardians, and participants were fully informed to ensure they understood the questionnaires. Participants were thanked for their contribution.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, SPSS version 26 was used. Analyses included frequencies and percentages of demographic variables (as shown in the demographic table), correlational analysis, regression analysis, and independent-sample t-tests.

Results

Table 1

Characteristics of the Participants (N=322)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age Group				
Adolescents	165	51.2		
Young Adults	157	48.8		
Age			20.14	4.11
Education Level				
Primary School	4	1.2		
Middle School	10	3.1		
Matriculation	111	34.5		
Intermediate	31	9.6		
Bachelor	117	36.3		
Master	37	11.5		
PhD	12	3.7		
Gender				
Men	75	23.3		
Women	247	76.7		
Socioeconomic Status				
Lower Class	156	48.4		
Middle Class	101	31.4		
Upper Class	65	20.2		

Note. *M*= Mean, *SD*= Standard Deviation

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants (N = 322). The sample consisted of 165 adolescents (51.2%) and 157 young adults (48.8%), with a mean age of 20.14 years (SD = 4.11). In terms of educational level, most students were enrolled at the bachelor's level (36.3%), followed by matriculation (34.5%) and the master's level (11.5%), while a smaller proportion were at the PhD level (3.7%) or lower levels of schooling. Regarding gender, the majority were women (76.7%), whereas men represented 23.3% of the sample. Socioeconomic status indicated that nearly half of the students belonged to the lower class (48.4%), 31.4% were from the middle class, and 20.2% belonged to the upper class.

Table 2

Correlational Analysis of Study Variables among Adolescents (N=165)

Characteristics	1	2	3
1. Social Media Problematic Use	-	-.40**	.35**
2. Psychological Wellbeing		-	-.33**
3. Frustration			-

Note. ** $p < .01$

The above table shows that social media problematic use is significantly and negatively related to psychological wellbeing and significantly positively related to frustration. Furthermore, psychological well-being is significantly and positively associated with frustration among adolescents.

Table 3

Correlational Analysis of Study Variables among Young Adults (N= 157)

Characteristics	1	2	3
1. Social Media Problematic Use	-	-.09*	.04
2. Psychological Wellbeing		-	-.15*
3. Frustration			-

Note. * $p < .05$

The above table demonstrates that social media problematic use is significantly and negatively associated with psychological well-being. However, the relationship between social media problematic use and frustration is positive but not significant. Furthermore, psychological well-being has a significant negative relationship with frustration among young adults.

Table 4

Regression for Psychological Wellbeing among Adolescents (N= 165)

Variables	B	SE	β	P	R^2	F	95% CI	
							LL	UL
					.16	32.34		
Constant	89.76	5.09		<.001			79.70	99.82
SMPU	-1.63	.28	-.40	<.001			-2.20	-1.06

Note. *** $p < .001$, SMPU= Social Media Problematic Use

The above table depicts social media problematic use as a significant and negative predictor of psychological well-being ($\beta = -1.63^{***}$, $R^2 = .16$, $F = 32.34$) and it accounts for 16% variance in psychological well-being scores among adolescents.

Table 5

Regression for Frustration among Adolescents (N= 165)

Variables	B	SE	β	P	R^2	F	95% CI	
							LL	UL
					.12	23.43		
Constant	60.25	3.54		<.001			53.26	67.25
SMPU	.96	.20	.35	<.001			.57	1.36

Note. *** $p < .001$, SMPU= Social Media Problematic Use

The above table depicts social media problematic use as a predictor, significantly and positively predicting frustration ($\beta = .35^{***}$, $R^2 = .12$, $F = 23.43$), accounting for 12% of the variance in frustration scores among adolescents.

Table 6

Regression for Psychological Wellbeing among Young Adults (N= 157)

Variables	B	SE	β	P	R^2	F	95% CI	
							LL	UL
					.009	1.33		
Constant	75.23	5.28		<.001			64.80	85.66
SMPU	-.37	.32	-.09	.25			-1.02	.26

Note. *** $p < .001$, SMPU= Social Media Problematic Use



The above table depicts social media problematic use as a predictor, which does not significantly predict psychological well-being ($\beta = -.37, R^2 = .009, F = 1.33$), accounting for only 0.9% of the variance in psychological well-being scores among young adults.

Table 7

Regression for Frustration among Young Adults (N=157)

Variables	B	SE	β	P	R ²	F	95% CI	
							LL	UL
					.002	0.36		
Constant	72.74	2.90		<.001			67	78.47
SMPU	.10	.18	.04	.54			-.24	.46

Note. *** $p < .001$, SMPU= Social Media Problematic Use

The above table depicts social media problematic use as a predictor, which does not significantly predict frustration ($\beta = .04, R^2 = .002, F = 0.36$), accounting for only 0.2% of the variance in frustration scores among young adults.

Table 8

Mean Differences of Adolescents and Young Adults between Study Variables (N=322).

	Adolescents (n=165)		YA (n=157)		t(320)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
SMPU	17.02	4.87	15.45	4.57	2.96	.003	0.33
PW	61.90	19.62	69.39	18.75	-3.49	.001	0.39
Frustration	76.74	13.32	74.42	10.28	1.75	.08	0.19

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, YA= Young Adults, SMPU= Social Media Problematic Use, PW= Psychological Wellbeing

The table above illustrates that adolescents scored significantly higher on social media addiction and also scored higher on frustration, although not significantly, compared to young adults. However, young adults scored significantly higher on psychological well-being than adolescents.

Discussion

There is substantial literature regarding problematic social media use, psychological well-being, and frustration across the globe, but in Pakistan, such studies are limited, particularly in comparing two age groups, i.e., adolescents and young adults. The objective of this study is to examine the impact of problematic social media use on psychological well-being and frustration among teenagers and young adults, in order to fill the literature gap, provide insights to academia, and suggest useful implications.

The correlational analysis of the study shows that problematic social media use is significantly and negatively related to psychological well-being and significantly and negatively related to frustration. Furthermore, psychological well-being is significantly and positively associated with frustration among adolescents. For young adults, the correlational analysis indicates that problematic social media use is significantly and negatively associated with psychological well-being. However, the relationship between problematic social media use and frustration is positive but not significant. Moreover, psychological well-being has a negative and significant relationship with frustration among young adults.

A previous study conducted on young adults in Pakistan found that social media addiction is significantly and positively associated with depression and aggression (Shahid et al., 2024). Another study revealed that problematic PUBG use is associated with aggression through expressive suppression. It explained that when objectives are not achieved, individuals become frustrated and angry, leading to aggressive behavior. The study provided useful implications for



students and emphasized conducting further research (Shahid & Yaseen, 2025). Another study aligns with the current results, reporting that problematic social media use is significantly related to poor psychological well-being among undergraduate students in Italy (Casale et al., 2015). Similarly, a study in India conducted on 100 college students aged 18 to 22 showed that problematic and excessive social media use is associated with stress and frustration (Ghoti, 2024). A large-scale study with 154,981 adolescents (average age 13.5) across 29 countries also found that problematic social media use consistently relates to lower well-being (Boer et al., 2020). Another Indian study, conducted on 100 adolescents aged 14 to 19, reported that 60% had high social networking addiction, which was strongly related to frustration (Wagh & Jawale, 2025).

The non-significant relationship between problematic social media use and frustration in the present study could be explained by the social and cultural norms of Pakistan's collectivistic society, where interpersonal interactions may buffer frustration. Additionally, young adults may engage in more positive interactions on social media, or their expectations from social media may be relatively low, reducing its potential to cause frustration.

The regression analysis for adolescents indicates that problematic social media use significantly and negatively predicts psychological well-being, while it significantly and positively predicts frustration. However, for young adults, problematic social media use does not significantly predict psychological well-being or frustration. A previous study depicted that higher social media use causes psychological distress among adolescents and lowers their quality of life (Vannucci & McCauley Ohannessian, 2019). A comparative study of adolescents who were heavy media users (>5 hours) and light users (<1 hour) reported that heavy users experienced deteriorated mental health, i.e., higher risk of depression, suicidal attempts, and unhappiness, while light users reported better well-being (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). A previous study is contradictory to the result of this study, as it found that social media addiction significantly predicts depression among young Pakistani adults, lowering their psychological well-being (Shahid et al., 2024). Other studies found that problematic social media use does not significantly predict depression but does significantly predict aggression among young adults (Kausar et al., 2024; Shahid et al., 2024).

The reason for the nonsignificant effect of problematic social media use on poor psychological well-being and frustration among young adults could be resilience-related personality traits, strong social support systems (as most young adults are enrolled in universities where peer involvement mitigates negative effects), cognitive reappraisal, or using social media for academic purposes rather than consuming content that may cause frustration and reduce well-being.

According to mean differences between study variables, i.e., problematic social media use, psychological well-being, and frustration, the independent sample t-test depicts that adolescents scored significantly higher on social media addiction and also higher on frustration, but not significantly more than young adults. However, young adults scored significantly higher on psychological well-being than adolescents. The result of this study is contradictory to the findings of a previous study, which reported that young adults engage in online activities more than adolescents (Salehi et al., 2023). Another study reported that psychological distress is significant among both adolescents and young adults who are problematic Facebook users (Marino et al., 2018). A further study found that among problematic social media users, both adolescents and young adults show significant relationships between depression, stress, and anxiety, which contribute to increased frustration and aggression in these age groups (Shanon et al., 2022).

The reason adolescents scored significantly higher on problematic social media use could be due to a lack of awareness and the inability to achieve the hedonic treadmill effect, as they are relatively new users. Young adults scored significantly higher on psychological well-being because of their lower problematic social media use, stronger social support systems, greater focus on studies (as most are university students), and a more established hedonic treadmill. The nonsignificant difference in frustration could be explained by the fact that, although adolescents use social media more problematically, young adults may experience frustration from other sources, such as financial constraints or academic pressures, which balances the levels of frustration across both age groups.

Limitation and Recommendations

The first shortcoming of the study is its cross-sectional correlational design. Future studies need to focus on longitudinal research designs to measure variables over a longer period of time. The study only included students; however, it is possible that non-studying adolescents and young adults use social media more problematically. Therefore, future studies should also focus on non-studying cohorts to obtain a more accurate representation of problematic social media use and its impact on frustration and psychological well-being. Another limitation is that the study did not apply an inclusion criterion based on the cut-off score for social media addiction (i.e., 24), which could distinguish between problematic and normal use. Future studies should separate participants classified as addicts from non-addicts and compare them with respect to frustration and psychological well-being. Finally, there was an imbalance in the demographic variables of educational level (primary, middle, matric, bachelor, master, PhD), gender (male and female), and socioeconomic status (lower, middle, and upper class). This imbalance made it impossible to conduct ANOVA analysis and an independent sample t-test for those certain demographics. Future studies should ensure balanced data collection across demographic categories.

Strengths and Implications

The study possesses several strengths that are crucial for practical implications. It found that problematic social media use is more prevalent among adolescents than young adults, and frustration, although not significantly higher, may still be linked to increased usage within this age group. The regression analysis also provided valuable insights, showing that problematic social media use significantly predicts lower psychological well-being and higher frustration among adolescents, while its effect on young adults' psychological well-being and frustration remains nonsignificant.

These findings highlight the need for greater mental health awareness initiatives led by specialists to address excessive social media use, particularly among adolescents. Counseling services should be made available in both private and public educational institutions. Parents should play an active role in monitoring and guiding adolescents' social media habits. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to seek psychological help when they find it difficult to regulate their social media use.

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