

Awareness of Social Media Addiction Among University Students and Its Association with Social Media Use Patterns

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to assess university students' awareness of social media addiction and explore the relationship between awareness levels and social media usage patterns.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was done to ascertain the awareness of university students regarding social media addiction, The study was conducted over a specific timeframe from October/ 10th/ 2023 to January/ 19th / 2025. The study utilized a questionnaire comprising of two sections: First to gather sociodemographic data of students consisting of 10 items; Second for the awareness of social media addiction developed by the researcher that consisting of 9 items. Reliability of the questionnaire for awareness of social media addiction ($r = 0.856$). Electronic convenient sampling was employed involving (450) students, the sample collected at university of Kerbala / colleges of medicine, nursing, pharmacy and dentistry and the exclusion criteria includes the students of Kerbala University who studies at other departments and students who study at other disciplines. The data were analyzed and interpreted through use of the application of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), version 26.

Results: The results of the study demonstrate that students have moderate awareness about social media use addiction as reported by 56.7% of them ($M \pm SD = 31.85 \pm 5.464$) as well as there is a positive significant relationship between students' awareness about social media addiction and daily hours use of social media at $p\text{-value} = .046$.

Conclusion: students have moderate level of awareness about social media use addiction and the level of this awareness is affected by daily hours use of social media.

Keywords: Social Media Addiction, Awareness, University Students



1. Introduction

The previous ten years have seen a notable increase in the use of social networking sites, particularly among youth. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are now an essential part of individuals' daily lives. Over half of the global population uses social media 58.7% of people use it on a regular basis. Men make up 54.2% of these users, while women make up 45.8% (Karcı, 2022).

The use of the internet and its related technologies is increasingly prevalent on a global scale. In Iraq during the year 2022 the Internet users reached (74.9%), with active social media users constituting 56.7% (Radcliffe et al., 2023). which indicates the importance of raising awareness about social media addiction.

Students constitute the majority of social media users, deriving advantages from the exchange of knowledge, communication, and entertainment. Furthermore, there exists a direct correlation between the use of social media and academic performance. (Zhang et al., 2024).

According to (El-Din Abbas Ali, A., Mostafa Shahawi & Tarek., 2017) , social media addiction (SMA) could have a positive aspect. There is a favourable association between social media usage density and cooperative learning aspects like peer interaction, teacher interaction, and social integration. Furthermore, SMA proves useful for college students under the supervision of their instructors (Dyson et al., 2015), as well as when paired with formal education (Alshuaibi et al., 2018).

Social network sites (SNS) have been increasingly popular among university students due to their numerous benefits, making them an essential aspect of their lives. On the other hand, The overutilization of these networks can result in behavioural illnesses among users, with addiction being the most significant one (Salari et al., 2023). Undergraduates who use social media extensively experience sleeplessness and poorer academic performance. (Abu-Snieneh et al., 2020).

Sleep quality and exhaustion can exacerbate the reduced academic engagement induced by SMA. Enhancing oversight and intervention in the utilization of social media by college students, along with a focus on psychosomatic health factors such as sleep quality and weariness, may enhance their involvement in academic tasks. (Zhuang et al., 2023).

According to a study by (Sengupta et al., 2018) addiction to the internet has undesirable results on school performance and students' recognition as well as a significant correlation between online addiction and depression among students. However a study conducted in (2023) included university students found a positive relationship between SMA and eating addiction. (Huang et al., 2023).

Youth seem to utilize social media at a high rate because they experience social anxiety and use it to make up for the lack of social interaction and virtual companionship they experience in the real world. As a result, they are more likely than users in other age groups to develop a social media addiction. For this reason, it is vital to increase user awareness in order to reduce the risk of addiction and facilitate safe social media use (Sedek, 2021).

The pervasive presence of the Internet in almost every aspect of life, combined with its continual accessibility through mobile technologies, highlights the need to immediately handle this issue. An essential task is to analyze the prevalence of social media addiction among young people to offer effective assistance for preventing this issue (Cimke & Cerit, 2021).

Despite the growing concern over social media addiction, limited studies have assessed students' awareness of its risks, particularly in Iraq. Understanding students' awareness levels can inform targeted interventions to promote safer social media use. Despite the growing concern over social media addiction, limited studies have assessed students' awareness of its risks, particularly in Iraq. Understanding students' awareness levels can inform targeted interventions to promote safer social media use and to assess the relationship among students' awareness about Social Media Addiction and factors related to social media use. Such as daily use of social media and purpose of social media use .

2. Methods

2.1. Design of Study

A quantitative descriptive study was conducted to ascertain the awareness of university students regarding social media addiction at the University of Kerbala. The study was conducted at the University of Kerbala in Holy Kerbala City/ Almuazafin district, particularly colleges of medicine, nursing, pharmacy and dentistry. During the period from October 10, 2023, to September 20, 2024

2.2. Sample and sampling

The selection of the sampling was using the non-probability sample (convenience sample), the population of the study consisted 500 students who study at colleges of medicine, nursing, pharmacy and dentistry at the University of Kerbala. Following an examination of the returned surveys, fifty were disqualified for not being properly completed. As a result, 450 respondents completed the final valid questionnaires for analysis.

2.3. Data collection and study instruments

The questionnaire contains two parts in order to achieve the objectives of the study, the first part contains personal information (age, gender, marital status, academic specialty, academic year, residence, daily use of social media sites, purpose of social media use) and the Social Media Addiction scale with 9 items developed by the researcher based on the related literatures

After conducting the item discrimination analysis, to evaluate how well the objective items are actually working. However the majority of items have a positive correlation with the total scale, demonstrating good internal consistency. The final scale comprises only 9 elements, with a 5-Likert scale was scored as follows: never (1), rarely (2), sometime (3), often (4), and always (5).

The overall score of awareness was categorized into three levels: Low (10–23.33), Moderate (23.34–36.66), and High (36.67–50).

2.4. The Instrument Validity and Reliability

To maintain the tool's validity, the questionnaire was distributed to nine experts with experiences in different nursing fields. The experts reviewed the tools for clarity, scientific content, simplicity and comprehensiveness of the subject. There were minor modifications to the questionnaire used to collect the sample. The Cronbach's alpha shows very good evaluation for the awareness about the social media addiction scale ($r = 0.856$) that means the questionnaires had adequate level of internal consistency and equivalence measurability.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical Committee ID (UOK.CON.23.006). The University of Kerbala's College of Nursing's research ethics committee granted ethical approval for the participants' identities to remain anonymous and confidential. Participants provided written informed consent after receiving a detailed explanation of the study's objectives and procedures. All participant information was anonymized, and data were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.

2.6. Data Analyses

Version 26.0 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze and interpret the data. Descriptive Statistical Tests

- Frequency and percentage were used to describe the demographic characteristics and levels of awareness among university students
- Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD): It was used to describe the levels of students' awareness.
- Cronbach Alpha (α): evaluates a group of survey items' dependability or internal consistency. It was employed to calculate the study instrument's internal consistency.

The association between students' awareness and their sociodemographic traits was discovered using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient.

•Point Biserial Correlation: It was used to determine the relationship among students' awareness with their sociodemographic characteristics.

3. Results

Table 1: Distribution of Students according to their Socio-demographic Characteristics (N=450)

List	Characteristics	F	%
1	Age	> 19 year	12.2
		20 – 21 year	46.4
		22 – 23 year	29.8
		24 – 25 year	6.7
		25 and more	4.9
2	Sex	Male	33.3
		Female	66.7
3	Marital status	Unmarried	93.8
		Married	4.9
		Divorced/Widow(ed/er)	1.3
4	Residency	Urban	83.1
		Rural	16.9
5	College	Nursing	29.8
		Pharmacy	28.2
		Medicine	20.9
		Dentistry	21.1
6	Academic stage	First	10.7
		Second	17.1
		Third	33.3
		Fourth	34
		Fifth	4.9

f: Frequency, %: Percentage

Table(1) shows that 46.4% of students are within age group of 20-21 year. 66.7% of students are females while 33.3% of them are males. The marital status refers that 93.8% of students are still unmarried and only 4.9% of them are married. Regarding residency, 83.1% of students are resident in urban while only 16.9% of them are resident in rural. The college specialty reveals the percentages in succession: 29.8% from college of nursing, 28.2% from college of pharmacy, 20.9% from college of medicine, and 21.1% from college of dentistry. The academic stage refers to fourth stage among the highest percentage of students reported by 34% of them followed by third academic stage reported by 33.3%.

Table 2: Distribution of Students according to Factors related to Social Media Use (N=450)

List	Characteristics	F	%
1	Daily use of social media	< 2 hours	11.6
		2 – 4 hours	29.8
		5 – 6 hours	31.3
		6 <	27.3
2	Purpose of social media use	Communication	25.8
		News & Events	18
		Get Information	12.4
		Sharing photos & videos	2.7
		Entertainment	41.1

f: Frequency, %: Percentage

The result indicates that the highest level of daily use of social media among students refers to 5-6 hours as reported by the highest percentage of them (31.3%) Regarding purpose of social media use, 41.1% of the students use social media for entertainment, 25.8% uses for communication with family and friends, whereas 18% uses for exploring news and events.

Table 3: Overall Assessment of Students' Awareness about Social Media Use Addiction.

Awareness	F	%	M	SD	Ass.
Low	17	3.8	31.85	5.464	Moderate
Moderate	255	56.7			
High	154	39.6			
Total	450	100			

f: Frequency, %: Percentage

M: Mean for total score, SD: Standard Deviation for total score, Ass: Assessment

Low= 9 – 21, Moderate= 21.1 – 33, High= 33.1 – 45

The results illustrates that students have moderate awareness about social media use addiction as reported 56.7% of them ($M \pm SD = 31.85 \pm 5.464$) and about third of them have high awareness as reported by 39.6% of them.

Table 4: Relationship among Students' Awareness about Social Media Addiction and their Sociodemographic Characteristics.

Variables		Awareness				Significant relationship
		Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Age	> 20 year	0	38	17	55	r^s = .049 P-value = .301 Sig = N.S
	20 – 21 year	6	133	70	209	
	22 – 23 year	5	80	49	134	
	24 – 25 year	0	16	14	30	
	25 and more	0	18	4	22	
	Total	11	285	154	450	
Sex	Male	7	90	53	150	r* = .075 P-value = .113 Sig = N.S
	Female	4	195	101	300	
	Total	11	285	154	450	
Marital status	Unmarried	11	262	149	422	r^s = .038 P-value = .419 Sig = N.S
	Married	0	19	3	22	
	Divorced/Widowed	0	4	2	6	
	Total	11	285	154	450	
Residency	Urban	9	245	120	374	r* = .080 P-value = .089 Sig = N.S
	Rural	2	40	34	76	
	Total	11	285	154	450	
College	Nursing	2	83	49	134	r^s = .049 P-value = .305 Sig = N.S
	Pharmacy	3	75	49	127	
	Medicine	3	67	24	94	
	Dentistry	3	60	32	95	
	Total	11	285	154	450	
Academic stage	First	1	32	15	48	r^s = .154 P-value = .230 Sig = N.S
	Second	2	45	30	77	
	Third	4	99	47	150	
	Fourth	3	97	53	153	
	Fifth	1	12	9	22	
	Total	11	285	154	450	

rs: Spearman Correlation coefficient, r*: Biserial correlation coefficient, P: Probability, Sig: Significance, N.S: Not Significant, S: Significant, H.S: High Significant

This table indicates that there is no significant relationship is reported among students' awareness about social media addiction and their sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 5: Relationship among Students' Awareness about Social Media Addiction and Factors related to Social Media Use

Variables		Awareness				Significant relationship
		Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Daily use of social media	< 2 hours	2	23	27	52	r^s = .110 P-value = .046 Sig = S
	2 – 4 hours	2	84	48	134	
	5 – 6 hours	1	90	50	141	
	6 <	6	88	29	123	
	Total	11	285	154	450	
Purpos of social media use	Communication	4	73	39	116	r^s = .103 P-value = .615 Sig = N.S
	News & Events	1	59	21	81	
	Get Information	1	25	30	56	
	Sharing photos & videos	1	6	5	12	
	Entertainment	4	122	59	185	
	Total	11	285	154	450	
Experiencing cyberbullying	Yes	5	47	25	77	r* = .142 P-value = .324 Sig = N.S
	No	6	238	129	373	
	Total	11	285	154	450	
Being cyber victimized	Yes	2	29	22	53	r* = .025 P-value = .668 Sig = N.S
	No	9	256	132	397	
	Total	11	285	154	450	

rs: Spearman Correlation coefficient, r*: Biserial correlation coefficient, P: Probability, Sig: Significance, N.S: Not Significant, S: Significant, H.S: High Significant

This table depicts that there is significant relationship between students' awareness about social media addiction and daily hours use of social media at p-value = .046. No significant relationship has been reported with purposes of social media use, experiencing cyberbullying, and being cybervictimization.

4. Discussion

The majority of students included in the study were within the age group 20-21 year, this result is similar to studies by ((Cimke & Cerit, 2021); Lee et al., 2023; Lopez Rosales et al., 2020) who found that the mean age was 20.09- 21.98 as the participants are college students .

The gender distribution of the study's sample revealed that two third of them were females (66.7%) whereas 33.3% were males. However this result is even with studies of (Al-Darawshah et al., 2019; Thumronglaohapun et al., 2022) who found that more than half of participants are females 53% and 54.59% respectively

Regarding marital status, the results showed that 93.8% of students are still unmarried and only 4.9% of them are married, this result is consistent with (Thumronglaohapun et al., 2022) in which most of the participants were singles 81.6% and only 18.4% with partners .

The highest percentage of students were in the fourth academic year,+ this is consistent with the studies of (Xiang & Hasbullah, 2020; Zorlu, 2023) in which the major of respondents were stage four ,36.4% 28.2% respectively.

The present study shows that 31.3% of students use social media at least five or six hours per day. This result is in agreement with (Lee et al., 2023; Thumronglaohapun et al., 2022; Zorlu, 2023) or exceeding this range to 7 hours according to (Azami & Taremian, 2021). However university students use social media for many purposes such as searching for information , online study groups and entertainment.

Regarding purpose of social media use, 41.1% of the students use social media for entertainment, 25.8% uses for communication with family and friends, whereas 18% uses for exploring news and events, The findings of current study contrast the results reported by previous literature that showed contact with friends (36.2%), entertainment (16.7%) (Lopez Rosales et al., 2020).

The study illustrates that students have moderate awareness about social media use addiction as reported by 56.7% of them ($M \pm SD = 31.85 \pm 5.464$) and about one third of them have high awareness as reported by 39.6% of them. However it is vital to increase user's awareness in order to reduce the risk of addiction and facilitate safe social media use (Sedek, 2021).

Considering the limited research on this topic the author relies on the existing results that mention the awareness of social media use .Study of (Karci, 2022) revealed that aims to discover the extent of the students' awareness of their social media usage about whether it is problematic or not uses Griffiths' core features of addiction the students were aware of their SM usage in some extent, almost all of the students reported they disapprove simulating on social media another study (Sedek, 2021) found that low level of social media addiction among students therefor two public awareness campaigns designed to increase the level of awareness about the hazards of social media , however campaigns have significantly increased the awareness of users of the risk/seriousness of addiction to social media sites and its negative consequences. Study. (Xiang & Hasbullah, 2020) that uses Cybersecurity awareness scale which consisted of four dimensions which were password security, browser security, social media use awareness and cyberbully awareness, more than half of study members have low awareness 54.9%, university students develop awareness due to knowledge acquired in lectures , using social media to search for information and research studies that contribute to spreading awareness of social media risks and cyberbullying .another study of revealed that the internet addiction is negatively correlated with emotional self-awareness and self-confident (Tolan et al., 2022).

The study results demonstrate significant relationship between students' awareness about social media addiction and daily hours use of social media at $p\text{-value} = .046$, however Taking into account the difference in methodology and poor literature the author relies on the existing results that mention the social media addiction , study of (Cimke & Cerit, 2021) found that the students who spent 5 h or more a day on social media had a higher level of social media addiction, it was determined that the level of social media addiction increased as the time spent on social media increased. A study of Kareem, Hassan, & Ali, Eqbal. (2017) that conducted at Al-Diwanyah city among adolescent students of preparatory schools found that the psychological health domain are significantly impacted by smartphone use.

4. Study Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that the participants were exclusively recruited from a single university, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population or other similar settings. The results may not reflect the awareness or social media usage patterns of university students across the entire country or in different cultural or educational contexts, another one is the cross-sectional nature of the study that limited the tracking of the effect of the awareness on social media addiction also the current study did not differentiate between social media platforms where addiction most occurred, which may overlook platform-specific dynamics. finally the study did not investigate other potential mediating factors, such as family background or pre-existing mental health conditions.

5. Conclusion

The results of the study show that students have moderate awareness about the social media use addiction as reported by 56.7%, according to the survey also the amount of time they spend on social media each day is significantly associated with the social media addiction, however universities should offer classes that are especially centered on the dangers of excessive social media use in order to combat the growing issue of social media addiction. To provide more thorough insights, future study should also examine the factors driving social media addiction in greater detail, especially by using larger and more diverse sample groups.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that they do not possess any identifiable conflicting financial interests or personal affiliations that may have seemed to impact the research presented in this article.

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