

## *Addiction to Social Media and its Impact on Children's Lives*

إدمان مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وانعكاساتها على حياة الأطفال

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### Abstract :

The research aims to study the phenomenon of social media addiction and its implications on children's lives, through an analysis of the psychological, social, and educational effects that may result from excessive use of these platforms. It reviews the risks that children face due to this addiction, such as sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, and declining academic performance, not to mention weakened social skills and loss of personal communication. It reveals the reasons behind the spread of this phenomenon, such as the easy availability of technology, social influences, and the absence of parental supervision. The research presents realistic solutions to curb the rapid spread of this phenomenon, which include increasing parental supervision, regulating children's internet usage time, and activating awareness programs that encourage safe technology use .

**Keywords:** addiction, social media, children, addiction risks, mental health, digital safety.

### ملخص:

يهدف البحث إلى دراسة ظاهرة إدمان مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وانعكاساتها على حياة الأطفال، من خلال تحليل التأثيرات النفسية، الاجتماعية، والتعليمية التي قد تنجم عن استخدام هذه المنصات بإفراط. ويستعرض المخاطر التي يتعرض لها الأطفال جراء هذا الإدمان، مثل اضطرابات النوم، القلق، الاكتئاب، وتراجع الأداء الدراسي، ناهيك عن ضعف المهارات الاجتماعية وفقدان التواصل الشخصي. ويكشف الأسباب التي وراء الانتشار لهذه الظاهرة، مثل التكنولوجيا المتاحة بسهولة، التأثيرات الاجتماعية، وغياب الرقابة الأسرية. ، يقدم البحث حلولاً واقعية تحد من التفشي السريع لهذه الظاهرة. تتمثل في تكثيف الرقابة الأسرية، وتنظيم وقت استخدام الأطفال للإنترنت، وتفعيل برامج توعية تشجع على الاستخدام الآمن للتكنولوجيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإدمان، مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، الأطفال، مخاطر الإدمان، الصحة النفسية، الأمن الرقمي.

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### Introduction :

-Recently, the use of social media has become increasingly common not only among adults but also among children and adolescents. The excessive use of social media has drawn the attention of academic circles and parents alike, and it can lead to addiction, which may have a significant impact on individuals' lives .

The term "social media addiction" has several synonyms, such as internet social network addiction, problematic social media use, and compulsive social media use .

Social media addiction can be defined as the compulsive use of social media; it is an unbalanced use of social media accompanied by symptoms somewhat similar to those of addictive behaviors and a lack of self-control. It is recognized as a behavioral addiction characterized by an excessive focus on social media, an uncontrollable need to log in or use social media, and the investment of considerable time and energy in social media to the extent that it hinders other essential areas of life. Thus, it is noted that most definitions primarily focus on the compulsive aspect of social media use .

Research on the effects of social media use has significantly increased over the past decade. Many studies have been dedicated to investigating the mechanisms of social media use disorder. Researchers have interpreted the reasons for excessive use from various perspectives and numerous theoretical explanations (attachment theory, self-determination theory, social learning theory, uses and gratifications theory, etc.).

Studies have indicated a relationship between social media addiction and the quality of sleep among adolescents. There is also research investigating the underlying mechanisms of sleep deprivation resulting from social media addiction, in addition to studies examining the links between social media addiction and the development of certain psychological disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder and depression, which have become increasingly common among adolescents today. Furthermore, there is research on how these psychological and physical effects influence the social functioning of adolescents in academic and relational domains.

The significance of investigating this subject becomes increasingly apparent, particularly in examining both the beneficial and detrimental effects of these digital platforms. Recent years have witnessed a dramatic surge in the number of children and adolescents devoting excessive time to these platforms. This growing dependency presents a direct threat to young users' psychological and physical wellbeing, potentially resulting in severe consequences such as sleep disturbances, elevated anxiety and depression levels, and diminished real-world social competencies. Moreover, such compulsive usage adversely impacts academic focus and cognitive development, confronting young individuals with substantial educational and developmental obstacles. In light of the exponential growth in internet accessibility and digital technology adoption, it has become imperative to systematically analyze the root causes of this behavioral addiction, evaluate its long-term implications, and develop comprehensive preventive measures and therapeutic interventions. These solutions should simultaneously safeguard young users from potential harm while fostering healthy, productive engagement with technology. The study further investigates the critical roles of familial and educational institutions in cultivating responsible digital habits among children, emphasizing how structured guidance and digital literacy initiatives can transform these platforms into tools for intellectual growth rather than sources of behavioral maladjustment. By implementing evidence-

based usage frameworks and promoting media literacy, caregivers and educators can effectively mitigate risks while optimizing the educational potential inherent in these digital environments.

**Problem Statement:**

Electronic addiction is not significantly different from substance addiction, and its consequences do not appear to be any less severe; it adversely affects many health, psychological, and educational aspects of children .

Currently, three billion people use social media online, representing about 40% of the world's population. According to some surveys, people spend an average of two hours daily sharing, liking, tweeting, and updating content on these sites. This means that 500,000 tweets and images are sent on Snapchat every minute worldwide. People can see that there is an increasing reliance on social media, but this is, in fact, social media addiction. (Shafiq, H., 2011)

One minute daily on social media, in other words, they stay awake for about one day a week. Given the gravity of these statistics, the following question must be raised: What are the effects of social media addiction on the behavior and development of children? And how can these negative effects be mitigated?

**Definition of Concepts :**

**Social Media :**

It is defined by Murad (2016) as "sites that allow communication between individuals in a virtual community that gathers them in groups based on their interests or affiliations, and this is done through direct communication by sending messages or viewing the personal files available to others ". (Murad, O. S., & Mohasina, O. M., 2016)

It is also defined as "websites on the internet through which millions of people communicate, sharing common interests or specific specialties, allowing members of these networks to share files, images, exchange videos, create blogs, send messages, and conduct instant chats." These platforms represent a digital environment that enables users to interact with one another, enhancing social communication and providing space for expressing opinions and sharing personal activities. However, excessive use of these sites, especially among children, may lead to health and educational problems, such as poor academic performance or harmful psychological effects . (Chen, J., 2023)

**Addiction and Social Media :**

Al-Qarni (2011) defines it as: "a state of lack of control and excessive use of websites; which negatively affects the individual's ability to perform his life tasks normally, resulting in psychological and behavioral disorders. (Al-Qarni, M., 2011)

Jaber defines it as excessive internet use for long hours exceeding 5 hours in a single day, an inability to leave it for a short period, even for one hour, and withdrawing from and not participating in social activities. (Jaber, Z. M., 2019)

### **Characteristics of Social Media**

Social media platforms possess unique characteristics that have positioned them as central elements of contemporary life. They offer "real-time interaction" that eliminates temporal and spatial barriers, facilitating direct communication between individuals and communities across borders. These platforms also enable "content sharing" with unprecedented ease, allowing any user to publish their thoughts and creations with a single click. Most significantly, they create "virtual spaces" that transcend social and geographical constraints, opening new horizons for communication, learning, and self-expression—though this also raises challenges related to digital identity and the boundaries of individual freedom.

Among the most notable features are:

**Interaction and Participation:** Social media allows every member to enrich their personal profile with information on diverse topics such as sports, music, political events, and personal photos. Members can share posts and engage with them through comments and likes, fostering user interaction and contributing to the formation of a dynamic digital community.

Social media platforms possess transformative characteristics that have revolutionized modern communication. These platforms enable continuous dialogue between users and content, effectively converting passive audiences into active participants, as noted by Al-Khatib (2018) in his work *Social Media: Social and Cultural Impacts*. This participatory dynamic thrives on instant feedback mechanisms (e.g., likes) and content-sharing features (e.g., reposts), which collectively foster a sense of community belonging - a phenomenon well-documented in Al-Omar's (2019) research on virtual knowledge-sharing communities. The inherent flexibility of social media communication, marked by its informal nature and minimal regulatory constraints, facilitates organic interactions. The Saudi Communications Ministry's 2021 annual report correlates this flexibility with the widespread adoption of smartphones and communication applications that enable constant platform accessibility, a trend further examined by Al-Hetimi (2015). Moreover, the cost-effective nature of these platforms, with most offering free registration, has significantly lowered barriers to entry. As Abdullah (2016) demonstrates in *Interactive Media and the Economics of Free Content*, this model of free access and open participation represents a fundamental shift in digital economics. Al-Zahrani (2017) additionally highlights how user-friendly interfaces and simplified publishing tools have made these platforms accessible to diverse demographic groups, regardless of technical proficiency or socioeconomic status, thereby contributing to their global proliferation and impact on modern communication paradigms. Registration on most social media platforms is free, as demonstrated in

the study (Abdullah, 2016), making them accessible to the largest possible number of users. For example, the statement "Facebook is free and will always be free" appears on its homepage, reflecting the economic policy adopted by these platforms. Al-Zahrani (2017) further notes that simple user interfaces and ease of publishing have made these tools accessible to all segments of society.

It should be noted that using social networks does not require special skills, as most of these networks provide simple and user-friendly interfaces. Many networks also offer official pages in different languages to meet the needs of diverse communities. They enable indirect interaction, allowing members to exchange text messages, photos, or information about movies and music without physical presence, providing a flexible means of communication across distances.

Additionally, user-generated content on social media demonstrates a high level of openness, where anyone can produce and publish content. This enhances members' desire to communicate and participate, unlike traditional media where roles are limited to media professionals as content editors.

On another level, social media enables the creation of groups that bring together people with shared interests or similar religious and social affiliations. For example, Facebook users can create groups for members with specific specialties or interests, facilitating knowledge and resource exchange within these communities. Moreover, these platforms are accessible via mobile phones in addition to computers, significantly enhancing accessibility and interaction. Mobile device manufacturers provide dedicated applications for social networks, allowing users to stay connected anytime, anywhere.

Consequently, social networks have become an alternative to in-person meetings and traditional social gatherings. Individuals can communicate with friends, exchange messages, conduct various transactions, and engage in educational activities without the need for travel. Furthermore, they help eliminate class barriers by enabling direct communication with prominent figures such as scholars, preachers, and writers without intermediaries or restrictions. This facilitates easier and more open access to information and interaction with influential personalities.

#### **Components of Social Media: Social**

networks and social communication tools consist of a range of applications and websites that contribute to enhancing communication between individuals. Among **the most prominent of these components are:**

-Social Networking Sites: These sites allow individuals to create personal pages to connect with their friends and acquaintances, such as "MySpace," which was one of the first sites to enable users to customize their personal pages and interact with others.

-Blogs: Blogs are considered open platforms for individuals or groups to publish their thoughts and personal experiences. They function as personal journals or diaries that reflect the authors' viewpoints and are available for everyone to read and interact with.

-Wikis: These are content pages created and modified by the public through open encyclopedic sites, which are stored on public servers (commercial servers available to everyone for free). One of the most notable of these sites is "Wikipedia," which allows ordinary users to add, update, and modify information and pages on various topics, making it an open-source electronic encyclopedia available for collaboration by anyone.

-Podcasts: Podcast sites allow users to upload or listen to audio clips such as podcasts and radio programs. This service includes downloading audio content or streaming it for later viewing.

- Online Forums: Online forums provide spaces for expressing opinions and writing topics on various issues. Forums often focus on a specific subject, making them suitable for discussions and interactions around shared interests. Forums are considered one of the oldest and most widespread forms of social media due to their simplicity and ease of use. (Al-Sawafi, A. A. R., 2016)

### **Objectives of Social Media:**

Social media platforms pursue multiple objectives that cater to users' needs across social, cultural, political, and commercial domains. From a religious standpoint, these platforms provide spaces for exchanging advice and religious content in audio, visual, and written formats, contributing to the dissemination of moral values (Al-Qurani, 2011). Commercially, they play a significant role in advertising and digital marketing, serving as effective tools for reaching broad audiences (Al-Hetimi, 2015).

Politically, these networks have become powerful instruments for political propaganda and information exchange. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have played central roles in disseminating global news and facilitating coordination among political activists. Educationally, they enhance learning processes through the exchange of educational materials and experiences, fostering self-directed learning and academic collaboration. Furthermore, they provide entertainment through shared music and video clips while enriching the literary scene through the publication of creative works.

Ultimately, these communication platforms help break down geographical barriers and alleviate social isolation, thereby strengthening human connections and fostering a sense of belonging to virtual communities that transcend physical boundaries; Al-Sawafi, A. A. R., 2016; Nursalam, N., & Efendi, F., 2019).

### **Impacts of Social Media:**

The advent of social media networks has revolutionized communication and interaction patterns among individuals, extending far beyond technological boundaries to profoundly impact human,

social, economic, and political dimensions. These virtual platforms have become deeply embedded in various aspects of daily life, significantly influencing real-world dynamics. Within the social sphere, these networks play an increasingly vital role in individual development and socialization. They provide powerful tools for behavioral modification and habit formation through organized group interactions, while simultaneously expanding personal experiences and fostering self-responsibility through continuous peer engagement (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Research from the University of Texas demonstrates that individuals utilize platforms like Facebook for authentic self-expression, fulfilling fundamental human needs for identity presentation and social recognition - corresponding to the third tier in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Joinson, 2008). In the educational domain, the early 21st century witnessed progressive nations systematically reviewing and continuously evaluating their educational strategies to enhance strengths and address weaknesses. This paradigm shift catalyzed growing interest in e-learning, defined as education delivered through interactive information and communication technologies, enabling flexible, self-directed learning opportunities (Al-Buhairi, 2016). While initial e-learning models faced criticism for their isolated nature, the emergence of Web 3.0 technologies and social networks revitalized the field. These platforms facilitated dynamic exchanges of ideas and educational materials between students and instructors, supported multimedia integration, and enabled educational institutions to disseminate knowledge through dedicated pages. The group functionality of these networks proved particularly valuable, allowing for efficient communication, resource sharing, and collaborative problem-solving among academic communities (Selwyn, 2012).

#### **Advantages of Social Media:**

Social media platforms represent a dynamic digital environment that offers significant opportunities for children's development when used responsibly under proper guidance. These platforms contribute to enhancing social, educational, and psychological growth by facilitating communication skills development through peer interaction and idea sharing (Al-Eissaoui, 2020), though careful monitoring is required to prevent exposure to inappropriate content (Al-Khalifa, 2019). They serve as valuable educational resources, providing access to interactive learning materials that complement formal education (Al-Ghamdi, 2021), while also helping children acquire essential digital literacy skills for the modern world (Al-Hussein, 2018). The platforms foster creativity and self-expression through features that allow sharing of artistic works (Al-Zaid, 2020) and promote cultural awareness by connecting users across geographical boundaries (Abdullah, 2019). Additionally, they offer psychological support through specialized communities that help reduce feelings of isolation (Al-Qahtani, 2021). However, researchers caution against potential risks including cyberbullying - with 34% of Saudi users reportedly affected (Saudi Youth Research Center,

2022) - and digital addiction, evidenced by average daily usage of 2.5 hours. Experts recommend implementing protective measures such as user education, time management strategies, enhanced parental supervision, and stricter platform regulations to ensure safer online experiences while maintaining the benefits of these digital tools.

### **Negative Implications of Social Media**

The use of social media among children can create a range of negatives and risks. It is important to have appropriate supervision and guidance to mitigate these negatives and ensure actual benefits. Among these negatives are :

-The use of social media can lead to children's addiction to screens, which may affect their study time, daily activities, task performance, and sleep. Studies have found that insomnia is associated with the duration of social media use. Some research has identified that teenagers who spend more than an hour daily(Xiangyu, Wu.2023) on social media are at a greater risk of insomnia. The likelihood of insomnia increases daily; most studies consistently show that using social media for more than five hours a day is significantly linked to sleep deprivation .

-Children may be exposed to inappropriate or harmful content online, including violence, pornography, or harmful messages, which can affect their mental health .

- Children may experience bullying or harassment online, which can lead to psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and loss of self-esteem.

-Children may not be fully aware of the risks associated with sharing personal information online. Unconsidered disclosure of personal information can lead to issues related to privacy and security.

-Engaging in social media may reduce real-life social interactions, affecting personal relationships and fostering social isolation. It remains a contentious issue whether the use of social media can cause symptoms of depression and isolation. However, previous studies have identified symptoms of depression as a potential negative outcome of social media use. (Wu, X., 2023) (Chou, H. T. G., & Edge, N., 2012) (Bányai, F., Zsila, Á., Király, O., Maraz, A., Elekes, Z., Griffiths, M. D., ... & Demetrovics, Z., 2017)

-Excessive use of social media can lead to distractions and reduced focus, which may negatively impact children's academic performance.

-The images and content published online can affect how children evaluate their self-image, potentially leading to issues related to self-esteem and physical appearance.

-Children may be exposed to advertisements that target them directly, which can influence their purchasing decisions and critical thinking regarding consumption.

-Continuous interaction on social media platforms can lead to feelings of anxiety and stress due to the need for constant engagement and pressure to meet others' expectations.

-Children may be subjected to an overwhelming amount of information, which can be confusing and affect their ability to analyze and filter important information.

Therefore, it is reiterated that it is essential to guide and teach children how to use social media safely and healthily. Parents and educators should monitor children's online activity and provide a supportive environment that helps them effectively navigate these challenges.

The Role of Family and School in Guiding the Use of Social Media:

Guiding children's use of social media requires ongoing coordination and collaboration between the family and the school to ensure a balance between benefiting from the advantages of technology and minimizing its risks. Through conscious monitoring, awareness, and alternative activities, children can be assisted in using these platforms safely and responsibly, serving their academic and social development.

First: The Role of the Family

The family plays a pivotal role in positively guiding children's use of social media. Among the key tasks they can undertake are:

-Monitoring children's digital activities and being aware of the type of content they are exposed to.

-Providing clear guidance on the risks of inappropriate use of social media, such as cyberbullying or digital addiction.

-Setting specific times for the use of electronic devices and social media platforms, emphasizing the importance of moderation and balancing digital activities with other life activities.

-Opening continuous communication channels with children to discuss their experiences on social media and to listen to their concerns or challenges.

-Serving as positive role models in the use of social media, encouraging children to emulate them.

**Second: The Role of the School**

The school occupies a fundamental position in guiding children towards the proper use of social media and can play an effective role by:

-Allocating classes or educational programs to teach children how to use the internet and social media appropriately, which would preserve their safety and security from potential risks.

- Monitoring any negative impacts of social media use on students' behavior within the school, such as bullying or lack of focus.

-Organizing sports and cultural activities within the school to encourage children to engage in direct social interaction instead of being excessively occupied with digital platforms.

-Holding regular meetings with parents to discuss the impact of technology on children and to exchange ideas on the best guidance methods.

-Guiding students to use social media for educational purposes, such as researching academic information or participating in educational groups.

### **Conclusion**

Children's addiction to social media represents a complex phenomenon posing significant challenges at both individual and societal levels. The current study reveals negative consequences including deteriorating mental health, declining academic performance, and diminishing social skills. It also identifies key challenges in addressing this issue: balancing technology's benefits and risks, families' limited digital awareness, and digital platforms' dominance over children's lives. These challenges necessitate comprehensive strategies involving enhanced scientific research, effective awareness programs, protective digital policies, and healthier educational/leisure alternatives. Addressing this issue requires coordinated efforts from all stakeholders - families, schools, government institutions, and tech companies - to ensure safe, moderate technology use that maximizes benefits while preventing digital addiction, ultimately fostering a balanced generation capable of leveraging technology positively.

The findings highlight the need for longitudinal studies tracking excessive platform use's neurodevelopmental and cognitive impacts across childhood stages. They also open new research avenues examining algorithms' influence, platform design's role in addictive behaviors, and cultural factors shaping usage patterns. Combating this phenomenon faces substantial methodological and practical challenges: developing accurate diagnostic tools for digital addiction, designing individualized preventive interventions, and balancing digital access freedom with harm protection. This context demands an integrated theoretical framework combining neuroscience, developmental psychology, and technology studies, emphasizing evidence-based interventions grounded in deep understanding of diverse cultural and social contexts. Crucially, researchers must prioritize cross-cultural validation of assessment tools and examine socioeconomic factors influencing vulnerability to digital addiction, while policymakers should consider age-specific platform regulations and digital literacy curricula starting from early education.

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