

# Psychological Impact on Selected Mental Effects among High School International Students

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## Abstract

The widespread availability of social media has altered the way in which humans converse, learn, and access information in a virtual environment. In this investigation, social media's psychological impact is discussed in Saudi high school students and instructors, with a specific analysis of anxiety, depression, and overall mental well-being. With a mixed-methods study, survey data and interviews are examined to assess social media use behavior and its association with markers of mental wellness. Findings confirm a significant relation between long-term social media use and increased tension, with symptoms including sleep loss, exhaustion, and lowered concentration. As social media opens avenues for communication and information distribution, excessive use is accompanied by cyberbullying behavior, comparing oneself with others, and increased anxiety and depression in students. The study extends present investigations through consideration of Saudi Arabia's educational and cultural environment, in which technology use is becoming increasingly widespread.

**Keywords:** Psychological Impact, Social Media Use Behavior, Cyberbullying, Self-Comparison, Intervention Methodologies

## Introduction

In this digital age, teenagers and adults are entirely bound by technology, having widespread access to personal electronic devices, the internet, and many social media platforms (Kwan I, et al, 2020). This comprehensive digital interaction greatly affects their psychological and social development. (Fahad Faqihi, et al. ,2023). The increase in online interactions presents both positive and negative effects. Former researchers have expressed that the connection between the time used on social media and the increase in mental health problems is directly proportional (Riehm KE,2019). Ivie EJ (2020) stated that people benefit from the internet, the ease of finding information, communicating, and expressing themselves. However, there are negative side effects such as social isolation, internet addiction, exposure to inappropriate content, depression, cyberbullying, and sleep deprivation. Golda S. Ginsburg (2011) argued that a previous study found that generalized anxiety disorder and depression are most prevalent among children and adolescents.

Ostic D (2021) argued that our daily academic protocol depends on the internet and continues to do so as we pursue it. Students spent a lot of their time on the internet, whether on social media platforms, video games, or messaging (Twenge JM, 2019). Grasping the complex link between social media use and adolescent mental health is essential for managing the challenges of today's digital age. Dr. Bill Knopf noted that mental health issues arise in late childhood and early adolescence, affecting about 10% of children and adolescents globally.

The complex influence of social media on the mental health of high school students has left many experts stumped. Although some have tried to project a clearer picture, the evidence remains mixed. And while several studies converge upon the idea that some students may be more at risk than others, a handful of other studies have found no correlation between social media use and mental health outcomes. While standardized tests like GAD-7 and PHQ-9 assess anxiety and depression, they may not fully capture the effects of social media exposure.

It is impossible to rule out the complex interplay between the use of social media and the mental health of adolescents in understanding the challenges of modern times. This study, therefore, tries to identify the most likely impact of social media on adolescents' mental well-being, with a view to Saudi Arabia. Although the topic has been given profound analysis in the rest of the world, it is untouched in Saudi Arabia. As global development unfolds, connectivity is a prerequisite. In Saudi Arabia, 79.3% of its entire population (about 29.1 million people) used social media in 2023 (Simos Kemp, 2023). The key reasons for use are keeping in touch with relatives, time killing, and product discovery. In addition, mental health issues affect approximately 20% of Saudi nationals (Alangari et al., 2020). The information would be based on personal interviewing and interrogating high schoolers in the region over how social media influences the mental health of school-going adolescents. This research aims to answer the following questions:

- How does social media use engagement contribute to the rising cases of anxiety and depression among adolescents?
- What is the relationship between extended social media use and symptoms of anxiety and depression among students?
- How can time usage and the type of content consumed contribute to mental health issues?

### **Literature Review**

Although extensive research has been carried out on the effect of social media on students, a lot of this research has been conducted in modern, advanced countries. Countries such as Switzerland, the UK, and Germany have fully supported and finalized their studies on this topic. Saudi Arabia, in particular, has not caught up in this field. A few researchers have published, such as Norah Alkahtani (2012) and Mohammed Khasawneh (2019).

These include individuals from specific populations to focus on individual platforms that target students and anxiety while not shining a light on depression. Al-Qahtani et al. (2021) studied how Instagram affects student anxiety while only omitting teachers. Al-Hassan (2019) studies depression in high school students without much regard for the simultaneousness of both anxiety and depression. Many rely on single-platform studies and general metrics like

screen time, without digging into the other content type or user engagement. This study puts forward levels of anxiety and depression across students' while evaluating multi-platforms, types of interactions, and employment differences. The completion later tries to fill in the gaps in the literature and provide further insight into the mental health effect of social media in educational settings. Previous research discusses the psychological impacts of social media on high school students. It has been observed as a source of anxiety and stress, leading to poor general well-being. Some studies by Smith (2019) and Williams et al. (2020) in Western settings have perceived such effects; other research has proven that the focus is specifically on students while ignoring or excluding similar experiences of educators. While many studies have been conducted, such as those by Johnson and Lee (2021) and Brown et al. (2022), they fall mainly within the contexts of the West. This geographical specificity in a way creates a cavity in understanding how social media can impact mental health from another socio-cultural perspective—for instance, the Middle East with Saudi Arabia being the case. The present study fills this gap and examines the psychological impacts of social media on high school students in Saudi Arabia. To this end, the current research addresses such variables as anxiety, depression, and academic performance, and in so doing, it reflects a wide-angle perspective relevant to the cultural context of the Saudi educational system in examining the impacts of social media. This outline identifies prior research, and its limitations and establishes the present study's worth in filling those gaps within a particular cultural context.

This is followed by the works of Alqahtani et al. in 2020, Alshehri in 2019, Bin Mahfouz in 2021, and Alzahrani et al. in 2022, which have also examined or explored the effect of social media. Their works have focused on its overall psychological consequences on students. Whereas Alharbi (2018) and Bin Mahfouz (2021), respectively explored the role that social media plays in shaping Saudi secondary students' behavioral patterns of dependency and distraction. Conversely, Alqahtani et al. (2020) explore the impact of using social media on students' development and their stress levels. However, in these studies, the diverse effect of social media on the total or the connected mental health among students was not analyzed. The study has therefore bridged that gap by delving into the interconnectedness of mental health effects of social media among high school students. The dual focus makes this study different from the earlier research because the perspective is more encompassing.

### **Methodology**

-This research uses a methodology aimed at testing how social media usage may affect the psychological health of students in Saudi Arabia. The study is based on Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which states that individuals judge their abilities and emotions by comparing themselves to others. Also, the suggested methodology hopes to discover how patterns of social media usage are connected to psychological factors such as anxiety, self-esteem, and academic performance.

-To achieve the study's objectives, this data collection focuses on analyzing social media usage behaviors, including frequency, duration, and preferred platforms, alongside key mental health indicators such as stress, anxiety, and self-perception. The objective of the quantitative analysis process is to gain new information on the social media usage habits of high school students. It focuses on how much time they spend on social media, their primary reasons for using it—whether for entertainment, education, business, or social connection—the

platforms they use most frequently, such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, or Twitter, and their typical engagement activities, including creating content, liking, sharing, and commenting. The study sample includes 33 high school students.

-A quantitative data search is taken on for this study. Creswell (2014) said that this approach is useful in identifying relationships between variables without altering them. In this context, the study seeks to examine the correlation between social media exposure and the mental stability of students. This comprehensive approach enhances the effectiveness and reliability of the findings.

-The GAD-7 anxiety test and the PHQ9 depression tests are applied to detect whether the overuse of social media can contribute to mental problems such as lowered self-esteem, social anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Also, the study specifies common social media behaviors observed among high school students in Saudi Arabia.

-The participants in the experiment are selected and chosen with 3 key points in mind. Firstly, the participants must be either enrolled students or employed staff at a Saudi high school. Secondly, they should be actively using social media for at least one year. Lastly, they must be willing to provide confessed information about their mental health and social media habits.

-This study examines the influence of high-stakes exams on cognitive abilities, including critical thinking, creativity, and long-term knowledge retention, as well as the physical health consequences of exam-related stress. Data was collected through surveys analyzing social media usage, psychological well-being, and stress symptoms. The results highlight significant patterns in social media engagement, stress levels, and their correlation with academic performance and mental health.

- This data visualization displays how much time daily is spent on social media by students. Most of the participants spend their time on social media for 4–6 hours on average, demonstrating high digital activity.

	0-2 hours	2-4 hours	4-6 hours	6-8 hours	8 hours and above
Daily social media hour usage	0	12	14	8	3

-This chart would probably reflect the largest reasons for activity on social networking websites by students. All of these reasons listed in the research include entertainment, friendship with friends and family members, and browsing through things to purchase.

	Entertainment	Education	Business	Social Connection
Main reason for social media usage	26	1	1	5

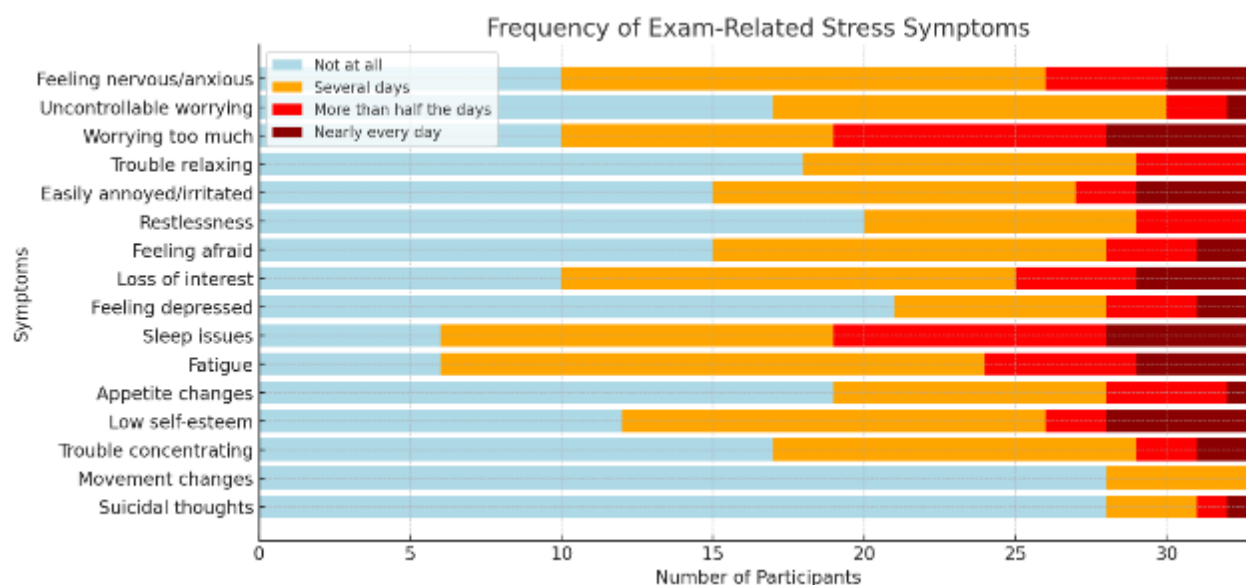
-This figure depicts the favorite social networking websites of the participants. As evident from the results, more people favored Instagram than other websites like YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook.

	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram	TikTok	Twitter
Most used social media app	6	0	19	8	0

-This graphic would likely describe how learners interact with materials on social networking websites. Most of the subjects spend more time on passive activities like sharing or simply liking posts than on actively posting or commenting on posts.

	Creating	Liking	Commenting	Sharing
How participants engage with social media content	5	15	2	11

Psychological data reveals a concerning prevalence of stress-related symptoms, with fatigue, sleep disturbances, and concentration difficulties among the most commonly reported issues. Notably, 21 participants reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless at least once in the last two weeks, and 5 reported experiencing such thoughts nearly every day. A smaller but significant group also indicated suicidal thoughts, though the majority reported experiencing these feelings only rarely or not at all.



High-stakes exams appear to negatively impact cognitive functions such as long-term knowledge retention and critical thinking. The data suggests that students struggling with anxiety and stress tend to have difficulty concentrating, which can impair memory and problem-solving skills. Creativity may also be stifled, as the emphasis on exam preparation often replaces exploratory learning with rote memorization, a phenomenon commonly observed in high-pressure educational environments. Stress-induced symptoms such as fatigue, poor sleep, and appetite changes were frequently reported, supporting the idea that

exam pressure has tangible health effects. Cultural factors, such as the emphasis on academic achievement in Saudi Arabia, may intensify these stressors, as students feel immense pressure to succeed in a competitive environment.

### **Interpretation of Results**

The findings underscore the profound impact of exam stress on both mental and physical health. The prevalence of anxiety-related symptoms highlights the need for academic institutions to implement stress management strategies. Schools should consider integrating counseling services, relaxation techniques, and academic flexibility to mitigate these issues. Providing students with structured guidance on managing stress, such as mindfulness programs and study-life balance techniques, could be beneficial in reducing psychological burdens. Furthermore, the reliance on social media for entertainment and distraction suggests that students may be using digital platforms as a coping mechanism for academic stress. While social media provides a temporary escape, excessive use may contribute to further stress, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic focus. This highlights the necessity of promoting healthier stress-relief alternatives, such as physical exercise, peer support networks, and structured leisure activities that can offer more effective, long-term benefits for students facing exam pressure.

### **Conclusion**

This study's aim was to investigate the occurrence of a certain phenomenon. The researchers wanted to know how or to what extent a phenomenon happened among certain people in a specific time and place. In this case, the phenomenon studied was the effects of social media on the mental health of a specific group of people—high school students in Saudi Arabia. The time frame was now (indicated by "the effects of social media"). The researchers did not study the past effects of social media within this group. They looked only at the present. As for the place, the samples were taken from different public and private high schools in cities throughout Saudi Arabia. phenomenon studied was the effects of social media on the mental health of a specific group of people—high school students in Saudi Arabia. The time frame was now (indicated by "the effects of social media"). The researchers did not study the past effects of social media within this group. They looked only at the present. As for the place, the samples were taken from different public and private high schools in cities throughout Saudi Arabia. The study highlights the urgent need for students to have an even exposure to social media—an exposure that's as close to balance as possible. For them to achieve digital well-being, they must be aware of a few "red flags" that, when popped, could signal a serious threat to one's mental health. If students really want to attain "Zen" levels of peace in the constantly connected world that we're living in, high schools and universities need to better equip them with the knowledge to do so via programs that manage stress, teach digital literacy skills, and more readily supply the kind of psychological supports that so many students seem to need these days. The findings offer a clear and urgent call for educators and administrators at all grade levels to better arm their students for a world that's only going to grow increasingly virtual.



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