

A STUDY OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE ADDICTION AND ADJUSTMENTS IN ADOLESCENTS

Research
Paper

ABSTRACT

This study explored the extent of Social Networking Site (SNS) addiction and the level of adjustment associated with the use of social media among public and private school-going adolescents. Using a purposive sampling method, 500 adolescents were initially approached, and a final sample of N=200 students (100 public schools and 100 private schools) was retained based on inclusion criteria and consent. The sample was further equally divided by gender. Quantitative analysis was carried out using t-tests and ANOVA to examine differences based on school type and gender. Findings revealed that Instagram was the most frequently used SNS, followed by Snapchat, Facebook, and YouTube. Public school students primarily used SNS for entertainment, while private school students engaged more for educational purposes. Despite common motives of socializing across both groups, public school adolescents demonstrated significantly higher levels of SNS addiction. Gender differences emerged in dimensions such as mood modification and withdrawal, where female students exhibited stronger emotional dependence on SNS. The type of school significantly affected both addiction and adjustment levels, suggesting a greater environmental influence over gender in shaping SNS behaviours. However, the interaction effect between gender and school type was not significant. The results underscore the importance of tailoring inclusive interventions that consider both gender and institutional context to mitigate the risks of SNS addiction among adolescents.

Keywords: Behavioural addiction, Adjustment, Adolescents, Social Networking Sites, School type

Introduction

In recent decades, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have become an integral part of modern social life. Rapid advancements in communication technology and the widespread availability of mobile internet have become an everyday presence—constantly accessible and deeply embedded in daily routines. Kaplan described the Social Networking Sites as “Social Networking Sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other”.

Background of the Study

Among young people, social media usage has emerged as one of the most dominant online activities, with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok gaining widespread popularity by offering a

wide array of features, such as online video and audio chats, sharing memes, creating digital identities, photo uploads, and real-time interaction with people across the globe. It's not surprising, then, that a large portion of adolescents spend considerable time—often around 3 to 5 hours a day—engaging with these platforms, as shown by Eynon & Malmberg, Gross, Selfhout et al..

Adolescence, as we all know, is a critical developmental period marked by profound changes in self-perception, identity formation, and emotional regulation. It is during this crucial developmental phase that individuals acquire specific traits, values, and

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experiences that shape their adult lifestyles. Many teenagers today turn to social media, especially platforms like Instagram and Facebook, to build relationships, form connections, express themselves, gain knowledge and exposure, and even boost their self-image, as stated by Boyd (2007). In fact, previous studies demonstrated that Social Networking Sites can help increase self-esteem as well as sense of belongingness, contributing positively to one's psychological Well-Being by Best et al.

However, excessive use of social networking sites has been increasingly linked to various psychological and behavioural concerns. Several studies highlighted a link between compulsive social media engagement and an adverse mental health outcomes such as poor psychological functioning and distress (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015), low self-esteem (Fiovaranti, Dettore, & Casale, 2012) anxiety (Xiuqin et al., 2010) depression (van den Eijnden, 2018), loneliness and even suicidal ideation (Mitchell, Sean M., et al, 2015). Furthermore, overuse of social media can hamper educational outcomes by reducing academic motivation, impairing attention spans, and fostering procrastination, and also hinder the development of social skills, making it harder for adolescents to form and maintain meaningful offline relationships, which may further lead to emotional and social maladjustment

Jenaro et al. highlighted that both problematic and non-problematic use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) are influenced by several factors, including age, gender, demographics, parental supervision, and the way these applications are used (Acier & Kern, Jenaro et al.). Interestingly, studies have shown that males tend to exhibit higher levels of compulsive behaviour and obsession, especially in relation to gaming and SNS platforms (Canan et al.).

Given the enormous presence of social networking sites in a teenager's life, this research aims to study the extent of Social Networking Sites addiction and its implications on adolescents' educational, emotional, social,

and overall adjustment. Additionally, the study delves into gender differences in SNS addiction and how these differences influence various aspects of adjustment. Based on this understanding, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study.

Hypotheses

1. There would be no significant difference found in the Social Networking Site addiction of public and private school-going adolescents.
2. There would be no significant difference found between the SNS addiction of adolescent girls and boys of public and private schools.
3. No significant difference would be found between the adjustment of adolescents in public and private schools as a result of using Social Networking Sites.
4. Adjustment would not differ significantly among adolescent girls and boys of public and private schools due to using Social Networking Sites.

Methodology

The investigator adopted the Descriptive survey research. A group of 200 students, which consisted of 100 (50 girls and 50 boys), were from public schools, and the remaining 100 (50 girls and 50 boys) were from private schools. The data was collected using Social Networking Addiction Scale, 2021 (SNAS), constructed and standardised by M.G. Shahnawaz and Usama Rehman, 2021, and Adjustment Inventory for School Students, 2013 (AISS), developed and standardized by Sinha, A.K.P., and Singh, R.P.

Findings

The data was analysed using the "Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21".

Hypothesis 1

There would be no significant difference found in the Social Networking Site addiction of public and private school-going adolescents.

Table 1
Showing the Popularity of SNS sites / Purpose of use among public and private school-going adolescents

Popular SNS sites	Public school	Private school
	(N=100)	(N=100)
Instagram	66	80
Facebook	27	20
Snapchat	50	57
Telegram	22	20
YouTube	16	40
Purpose of SNS use		
Entertainment	87	63
Educational	39	73
Social	47	43

Table 1 shows the popularity and purpose of using social networking sites among public and private school adolescents. The results revealed differences in the usage patterns of Social Networking Sites (SNS) among students from public and private schools and notable differences in the purpose of using SNS sites.

Hypothesis 2

There would be no significant difference found between the SNS addiction of adolescent girls and boys of public and private schools.

Table 2
Comparison of Social Networking Site Addiction and its dimensions Between Public and Private School Students, along with Gender-Based Differences

Dimensions	Public School	Private School	t	Boys (Public School, N = 50)	Girls (Public School, N = 50)	t	Boys (Private School, N = 50)	Girls (Private School, N = 50)	t	t boys (public v/s private)	t girls (public v/s private)
	(N =100)	(N = 100)		(Public School, N = 50)	(Public School, N = 50)		(Private School, N = 50)	(Private School, N = 50)		(public v/s private)	(public v/s private)
Salience	17.09	15.94	1.56	17.68	16.22	1.06	16.06	15.82	0.22	1.61	0.35
	-5.56	-5.23		-4.43	-6.17		-5.36	-5.14			
Mood modification	15.25	14.19	2.12*	15.34	15.16	0.27	14.62	13.76	1.13	1.08	1.87*
	-3.24	-3.24		-3.1	-3.41		-3.53	-4.01			
Tolerance	12.9	11.54	1.92*	13.22	12.58	0.63	11	12.08	1.07	0.58	1.05
	-5.04	-5.03		-4.74	-5.36		-5.15	-4.9			
Withdrawal	15.37	14.41	1.25	15.52	15.22	0.3	14.76	14.06	0.6	0.72	1.04
	-4.95	-5.81		-4.84	-5.1		-5.6	-5.99			
Conflict	12.55	11.04	2.06*	11.74	13.36	1.54	10.9	11.18	0.27	0.63	0.39
	-5.27	-5.05		-4.1	-6.17		-5.62	-4.46			
Relapse	17.09	15.89	1.39	18.44	15.74	2.38*	16.6	15.18	1.11	1.7	0.42
	-5.78	-6.38		-4.83	-6.37		-5.88	-6.83			
Overall	88.11	81.02	2.31*	90.72	88.06	0.64	82.12	79.92	0.48	1.57	1.25
	-20.55	-22.78		-20.22	-20.89		-22.18	-23.55			

Table 2 examines the dimension of social networking usage among public and private school-going adolescents. The t-values indicate a significant difference on the variable of mood modification ($t=2.12$, $p<0.05$), tolerance ($t=1.92$, $p<0.05$), conflict ($t=2.06$, $p<0.05$), and overall Social Networking Sites addiction ($t=2.31$, $p<0.05$), hence the hypothesis is rejected. The results indicate that public school-going adolescent exhibit higher overall levels of Social Networking Site addiction compared to their private school counterparts. However, a significant gender difference in public schools is observed only in the relapse dimension

($t=2.38$, $p<0.05$), with boys displaying a higher tendency to return to excessive use after attempts to control it. Both boys and girls in public schools exhibit comparable levels of Social Networking Site addiction across most dimensions. Results also showed a negligible mean difference in SNS addiction between the two groups, namely, boys and girls of the private school.

Hypothesis 3

No significant difference would be found between the adjustment of adolescents in public and private schools as a result of using Social Networking Sites.

Table 3
Comparison of adjustment and its dimensions between social networking adolescent users of public and private schools along with gender based differences

Area of Adjustment	Public School (N =100)	Private School (N = 100)	t	Boys (Public School, N = 50)	Girls (Public School, N = 50)	t	Boys (Private School, N = 50)	Girls (Private School, N = 50)	t	t boys (public v/s private)	t girls (public v/s private)
Emotional adjustment	16.57	14.2	3.15**	17.12	16.02	1.08	15.22	13.18	1.86	1.79	2.70**
	-5.07	-5.55		-5.02	-5.11		-5.57	-5.39			
Social adjustment	17.47	13.26	5.91**	17.68	16.26	2.25*	14.16	12.36	2.01*	4.55**	3.95**
	-17.47	-4.56		-5.4	-5.34		-4.47	-4.95			
Educational adjustment	19.3	13.56	7.50**	20.7	17.9	2.48*	14.24	12.88	1.36	6.02**	4.75**
	-19.3	-7.5		-5.71	-5.56		-4.99	-5.02			
Overall	53.34	41.02	7.35**	56.5	50.18	2.69**	43.62	38.42	2.29*	5.72**	4.92**
	-12.11	-11.56		-11.9	-11.05		-10.55	-12.05			

*Significant at 0.05 level ** Significant at 0.01 level

Table 3 indicates a difference at a significant level on the dimensions of emotional adjustment ($t=3.15$, $p<0.01$), social adjustment ($t=5.91$, $p<0.01$), educational adjustment ($t=7.50$, $p<7.50$), and total adjustment level ($t=7.35$, $p<0.01$), hence the hypothesis is rejected. Mean values depicted better adjustment in private school adolescents in comparison to public school-going adolescents.

Hypothesis 4

Adjustment would not differ significantly among adolescent girls and boys of public and private schools as a result of using Social Networking Sites.

Table 4
Analysis of variance between public and private school, gender, and their interaction on the variable of Social Networking Site addiction and adjustment

Dimensions of SNS addiction	Type of school	Gender	Type of school x Gender
	F value		
Saliency	2.25	0.86	0.37
Mood modification	4.49*	1.08	0.46
Tolerance	3.63*	0.09	1.45
Withdrawal	1.56	0.42	0.06
Conflict	4.28*	1.69	0.21
Relapse	1.98	5.84*	0.56
Total score	7.39**	0.62	0.02
Areas of adjustment			
Emotional adjustment	10.07**	4.41*	0.39
Social adjustment	36.22**	9.10**	0.19
Educational adjustment	58.16**	7.63**	0.91
Overall adjustment	56.98**	12.45**	0.11

Table 4 shows the interaction effect between the type of school and the gender of adolescents on the variable of social networking addiction and adjustment. Type of school and gender significantly influenced all the dimensions of adjustment. The type of school was more influential on the variables of mood modification, tolerance, conflict, and total SNS addiction. However, the interaction between gender and school type was not statistically significant, suggesting that while both factors independently impact outcomes, their combined effect is limited.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Instagram emerged as the most frequently used SNS across both school types, followed by Snapchat, Facebook, and YouTube (Table 1). The result aligns with existing literature, noting the dominance of Instagram among youth users according to Cohen et al.. It supports prior findings suggesting that SNSs have become integral to young people's social lives due to their ability to facilitate continuous interaction, emotional expression, and consumer behaviour (Watson et al., ; Mäntymäki & Salo).

Usage patterns differed notably between public and private school-going students. Public school adolescents reported using SNS primarily for entertainment purposes, while private school students engaged with these platforms more often for educational reasons. Socializing remained a common motive for both

groups. These differences in usage context may influence the risk of developing addictive behaviour. While educational use may mitigate the likelihood of SNS addiction, excessive use for entertainment is associated with compulsive usage patterns and adverse psychological outcomes, according to Luciana and Segalowitz.

Further, public-school students exhibited significantly higher overall SNS addiction scores than their private school counterparts. It was especially true in addiction components such as mood modification, tolerance, and conflict dimensions that were significantly elevated in the public-school group. Previous studies also found that adolescents with greater SNS use were more likely to receive a diagnosis of addiction (Saikia et al.).

Gender played a significant role in specific dimensions of SNS addiction, particularly mood modification and withdrawal, where female students scored higher than males, indicating a more substantial emotional reliance on SNS for emotional regulation and escape, which aligns with findings by Muscanell and Guadagno, who reported that women predominantly use social networking platforms to maintain existing relationships, reflecting their emphasis on social connectivity. In contrast, male students, especially those from public schools, reported the highest scores in relapse and salience, suggesting they may experience more difficulty in resisting SNS use and are more prone to habitual or compulsive patterns of engagement. These patterns are consistent with research indicating that men are often more motivated by gratification or escapism, using SNS to form new connections or for entertainment purposes.

These findings are supported by Griffiths, who identified six core components of addiction: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. The current study affirms these dimensions as relevant in adolescent SNS addiction, particularly among students facing fewer academic or extracurricular demands, as may be the case in public school environments.

Previous literature has emphasized the importance of individual differences such as age, gender, emotional regulation, and self-esteem in the development of SNS

addiction (Alzougool; Blachnio et al). Emotional instability and social isolation factors that contribute to excessive SNS engagement may also play a role in aggressive behaviour and sleep disturbances (Antheunis et al). These outcomes were more commonly reported by public school students, many of whom also exhibited poorer adjustment scores.

When comparing adjustment scores, private school students demonstrated significantly higher emotional, social, and educational adjustment. It was especially evident among private school girls, who consistently showed the highest adjustment levels. Public school boys, conversely, reported the lowest scores in these domains, reflecting a dual burden of higher addiction and lower psychosocial adjustment. These disparities may be influenced by contextual factors such as parental supervision, academic structure, and digital accessibility. Private school students may be subject to stricter academic routines and guidance, which could promote healthier digital habits. In contrast, public school students may experience greater freedom, fewer resources, or less structured environments, potentially increasing vulnerability to problematic SNS use.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) further supported these findings. Type of school significantly influenced both SNS addiction and adjustment levels, suggesting school environment plays a more dominant role in the development of addictive SNS behaviors than gender alone. Gender was more influential in adjustment than addiction. However, the interaction between gender and school type was not statistically significant, suggesting that while both factors independently impact outcomes, their combined effect is limited.

Conclusion

The present study explored the influence of usage of Social Networking Sites (SNS) on adolescents' emotional, social, and educational adjustment, with a focus on the role of type of school (public vs. private), gender, and their interaction effects. Collectively, the results underscore the role of educational environments and gender in shaping patterns of SNS addiction and adjustment capacities among adolescents. Emotional, social, and academic challenges associated with SNS overuse may be better addressed by tailoring interventions to specific school settings and gender-based needs.

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