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SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACTS ON SOCIETY AND MENTAL HEALTH: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHENNAI CITY

Dr. KANIMOZHI. R,
Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce (Accounting & Finance),
Sri Kanyaka Parameswari Arts & Science College for Women, Chennai – 01.
kanimozhi1111993@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

This study aims to analyze the effects of social media on mental health and societal behavior, with a specific focus on the urban population of Chennai. Using a structured questionnaire administered to 174 respondents, the research examines demographic patterns of social media usage, the relationship between screen time and psychological well-being, and the perceived societal effects of digital engagement. The study found that platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube dominate usage - primarily for social connection and entertainment. Further, there is no statistically significant correlation between time spent on social media and mental health indicators such as anxiety, loneliness, or pressure. The study concluded with recommendations for healthier digital habits, including algorithmic transparency, content moderation, and features that promote mindful usage. These insights aim to inform strategies that foster mental well-being and social harmony in the digital age.

Keywords: Social media, Mental health, Society.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become an integral part of daily life, influencing how individuals communicate, consume information, and perceive the world around them. Particularly in urban centers like Chennai, the proliferation of platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube has significantly transformed social interactions and lifestyle patterns. While these platforms create opportunities for connection, learning, and entertainment, they also raise important concerns about their influence on mental well-being and social harmony *(American Psychological Association, 2023).*

This study investigates the multifaceted effects of social media on users in Chennai, focusing on both psychological outcomes and broader social implications. With a sample of 174

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respondents, the research captures demographic patterns, usage behaviors, and emotional responses associated with digital engagement. Although the statistical analysis found no direct correlation between time spent on social media and negative mental health outcomes, user perceptions suggest a nuanced reality - where issues like comparison, misinformation, and content overload contribute to emotional strain *(Le Blanc-Brillon et al., 2025).* By examining these dynamics, the study seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for promoting healthier digital habits and increasing mental health awareness. Ultimately, it aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion about how social media can be shaped into a more positive, safe, and socially responsible environment for everyone, recognizing that the effects of social media depend largely on patterns of use, individual vulnerabilities, and contextual factors *(WHO, 2024).*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bhiri and Mapfunde (2025) found a negative association between excessive social media use among teenagers and their mental health in Hwange, Zimbabwe. It causes anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, FOMO, and cyberbullying. Teenagers find it difficult to keep their offline and online lives apart, which leads to stress and addiction. The study suggested community awareness, safe peer support spaces, critical thinking education, alternate offline activities, and open communication as ways to lessen these effects. These measures seek to reduce harm and promote healthy digital habits while enhancing mental well-being among Hwange's youth.

A systematic review conducted by **Maduka (2025)** examined how social media affects young adults' mental health in Nigeria. In addition to addressing negative impacts, such as anxiety, depression, addiction, cyberbullying, and sleep disturbance, it highlights positive aspects, such as improved communication, education, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement. The review highlights the connection between Nigerian healthcare issues and social media. Therefore, the researcher recommended more family and institutional support, mental health education, and counseling services to provide more guidance to young people.

In this quasi-experimental study, **Saha *et al.* (2025)** examined the effects of COVID-19 on the mental health of 173 college students in the United States by examining more than 1.2 million Reddit posts during the three stages of the pandemic: isolation, normalization, and vaccination. The results showed that an increase in suicidal thoughts, anxiety, depression, and stress during

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isolation, a decline during normalization, and a resurgence in the vaccination phase. The study highlights the necessity of flexible support networks that cater to students' evolving needs both during and after crises, assisting colleges in promoting long-term mental health and readiness for upcoming disruptions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine demographic patterns of social media usage in Chennai.
2. To explore the relationship between time spent on social media and mental health outcomes.
3. To assess the perceived societal impact of social media.
4. To provide recommendations for healthier digital habits and mental health awareness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the multifaceted impact of social media on mental health and societal behavior, with a specific focus on Chennai city.

The primary data collection tool for this study is a **structured questionnaire** to be administered to **174 respondents** in Chennai City via **Google Forms**. The questionnaire is divided into three key sections: **Section A** gathers demographic information such as age, gender, education, occupation, and marital status; **Section B** explores patterns of social media usage, including preferred platforms, purposes of use, and average daily time spent; and **Section C** assesses the psychological and societal impacts of social media through a series of Likert-scale statements.

For data analysis, the responses were compiled and processed using **SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)**.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.831	**10**

Table 1 presents the reliability test results. The results showed that all Cronbach’s alpha values were greater than 0.70, confirming their internal consistency and reliability.

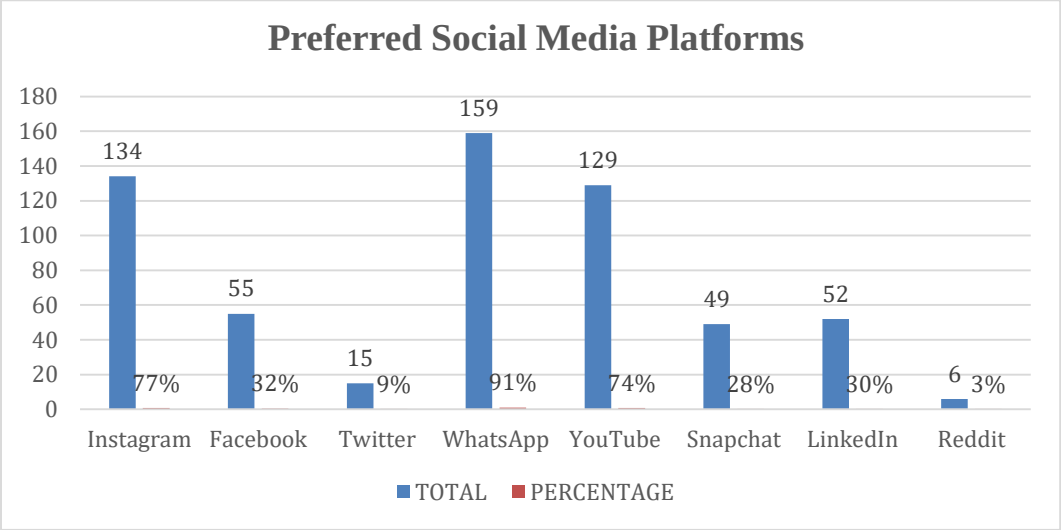
Table 2: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

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Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency (N=174)	Percentage
Age Group	Under 18	13	7.5%
	18-24	**81**	**46.6%**
	25-34	52	29.9%
	35-44	19	10.9%
	45-54	7	4.0%
	55 and above	2	1.1%
Gender	Male	50	28.7%
	Female	**124**	**71.3%**
Education Level	No formal education	3	1.7%
	High school diploma or equivalent	7	4.0%
	Undergraduate degree	**113**	**64.9%**
	Postgraduate degree	51	29.3%
Occupation	Student	69	39.7%
	Employed full-time	**78**	**44.8%**
	Employed part-time	3	1.7%
	Self-employed	8	4.6%
	Unemployed	1	0.6%
	Retired	1	0.6%
	Homemaker	10	5.7%
	Other	4	2.3%
Marital Status	**Single**	**106**	**60.9%**
	Married	68	39.1%
Average daily time spent on social media	Less than 1 hour	29	16.7%
	1-2 hours	**85**	**48.9%**
	3-4 hours	50	28.7%
	5-6 hours	7	4.0%
	More than 6 hours	3	1.7%

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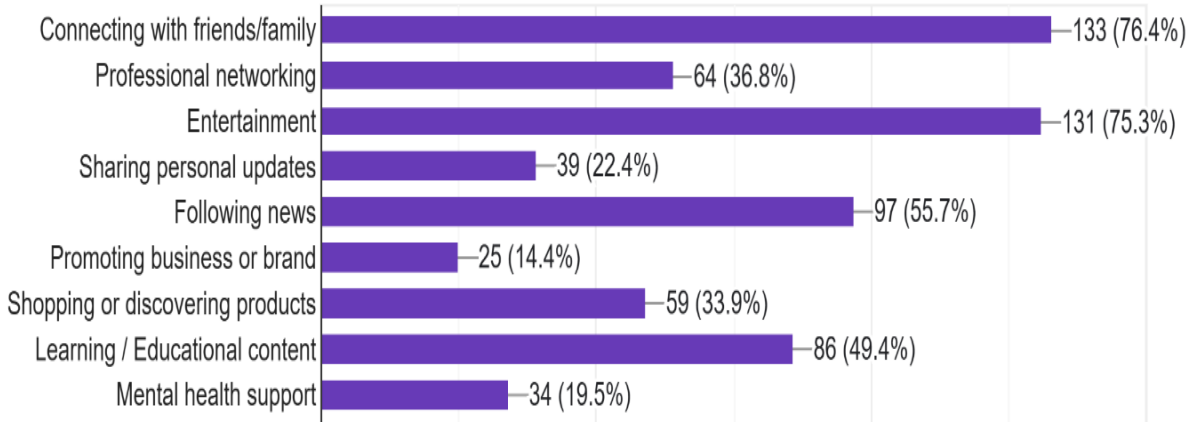
Table 2 revealed that the majority are young adults, with 46.6% aged 18–24 and 29.9% aged 25–34. Females constitute a significant majority at 71.3%. Most participants hold an undergraduate degree (64.9%), followed by those with postgraduate qualifications (29.3%). In terms of occupation, full-time employment is most common (44.8%), while students also represent a substantial portion (39.7%). A majority of respondents are single (60.9%). Regarding social media usage, nearly half (48.9%) spend 1–2 hours daily, and 28.7% spend 3–4 hours, indicating moderate engagement.



The chart showed that WhatsApp is the most widely used social media platform among the surveyed group, with 91% of users actively engaged. Instagram and YouTube also show high popularity, with 77% and 74% usage, respectively, indicating a strong preference for visual and multimedia content. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Snapchat fall into a moderate usage range, each attracting around 28–32% of users, likely reflecting their more specialized roles in social networking, professional engagement, and ephemeral messaging.

PURPOSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE

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The chart revealed that most people use social media primarily for connecting with friends and family (76%) and entertainment (75%). It's also widely used for following news (56%) and learning (49%). Professional networking (37%) and shopping (34%) are moderately common, while fewer users engage in sharing personal updates (22%), mental health support (20%), or promoting a business (14%).

Table 3: CORRELATION ANALYSIS

		Average daily time spent on social media	Positive	Comparison	Loneliness	Anxiety	Pressure
Average daily time spent on social media	Pearson Correlation	1	-.102	-.076	.056	-.071	-.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.181	.321	.466	.352	.185
	N	174	174	174	174	174	174
Positive	Pearson Correlation	-.102	1	.562**	.394**	.251**	.431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.181		.000	.000	.001	.000
	N	174	174	174	174	174	174
Comparison	Pearson Correlation	-.076	.562**	1	.336**	.371**	.624**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.321	.000		.000	.000	.000

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	N	174	174	174	174	174	174
Loneliness	Pearson Correlation	.056	.394**	.336**	1	.615**	.581**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.466	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	174	174	174	174	174	174
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.071	.251**	.371**	.615**	1	.616**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.352	.001	.000	.000		.000
	N	174	174	174	174	174	174
Pressure	Pearson Correlation	-.101	.431**	.624**	.581**	.616**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.185	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	174	174	174	174	174	174
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							

The correlation analysis showed that the average daily time spent on social media has ***no significant relationship*** with the measured mental health outcomes—positive feelings, comparison, loneliness, anxiety, and pressure.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving mental health and social harmony through social media requires a thoughtful and multi-layered approach. Many people believe that limiting screen time, reducing exposure to distressing or misleading content, and promoting positive, motivational, and educational posts. There is a strong demand for banning fake news, sexual and vulgar content, and implementing stricter privacy controls and content moderation. Users advocate for shifting the focus from validation-seeking and comparison to genuine connection, empathy, and support. Further, it includes algorithmic transparency, verified accounts, and features that encourage breaks and mindful usage. Some believe social media should be used responsibly and optimistically, while others emphasize the need for government regulation and platform accountability. Overall, the goal is to transform social media into a safer, more uplifting space that fosters real relationships, protects mental well-being, and promotes social responsibility.

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