EXCESSIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND MENTAL HEALTH: NEED FOR DIGITAL DETOXIFICATION IN EDUCATION SECTOR

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Abstract
The rapid integration of social media into daily life has transformed communication, learning, and social interaction, particularly among students in the education sector. However, the excessive use of social media platforms has raised growing concerns about its detrimental impact on mental health, including heightened anxiety, depression, reduced attention span, sleep disturbances, and overall psychological distress. This study examined the correlation between prolonged social media usage and mental health issues among students. Using convenient sampling technique to select 189 college students from Multan, Pakistan as sample of the study. Social Media Disorder Scale (Van Den Eijnden et al., 2016) and The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) were use as research instruments. Moreover, results reveal a strong association between high screen time and negative mental health outcomes. The findings underscore the urgent need for implementing digital detoxification strategies within the educational framework. These include structured screen-time regulations, integration of mindfulness practices, awareness campaigns, digital literacy education, and the promotion of balanced offline activities. The study advocates for a collaborative approach involving educators, parents, policymakers, and mental health professionals to foster healthier digital habits and safeguard students' psychological well-being. By addressing the pressing issue of digital overconsumption, this research offers practical recommendations for developing a holistic educational environment that prioritizes mental health, productivity, and meaningful human connection in the digital age.
Keywords: Use of social media, mental health, digital detoxification

INTRODUCTION
In the digital age, social media has become an integral part of daily life, especially among students and young adults. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Snapchat have revolutionized communication, learning, and social interaction. While these platforms offer various educational, social, and entertainment benefits, there is growing concern about the excessive use of social media and its impact on mental health. The

advancement of wireless technologies and the proliferation of mobile devices have established a digital environment characterized by continuous and uninterrupted Internet access. This interplay between technology and daily life has enabled persistent connectivity and information access, regardless of location or time. It is noteworthy that, on a global scale, there exist over 8.89 billion mobile subscriptions, while approximately 5.4 billion individuals, accounting for 67% of the global population, are Internet users (Umoh et al., 2023). Smartphones have revolutionized modern life by providing convenient access to a wealth of information and communication tools, enhancing everyday activities and transforming social interactions (Khan & Ali, 2018; Rather & Rather, 2019). While smartphones offer significant benefits in business, education, health, and personal life (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013; Shahzadi & Ahmad, 2018), it is crucial to manage their usage wisely, so as to avoid Problematic Internet Use (Anderson et al., 2017; Nkegbe & Abor, 2023), to minimize negative impacts such as privacy issues, distraction, health issues, and disrespectful behavior, ensuring that society can fully harness their potential for positive growth (Rod et al., 2018; Jerome, 2019; Kumar & Gupta, 2023). The growing recognition of these negative impacts has led to the emergence of the digital detox movement.

Digital detox refers to a period during which individuals refrain from using digital devices to reduce stress, improve focus, and enhance overall well-being (Salepaki et al., 2025). Research indicates that digital detox can lead to improved mental health, reduced anxiety, and better sleep quality (Hager et al., 2023). Studies have shown that regular digital detox practices can significantly mitigate the adverse effects of excessive smartphone usage and help individuals regain a healthy balance between their digital and offline lives (Clark, 2022; Coyne & Woodruff, 2023; Feng & Qi, 2024). As such, adopting digital detox strategies is becoming increasingly important in managing the pervasive influence of smartphones on daily life. Addictions, both behavioral and technological, share core features traditionally associated with substance-related dependencies. These include salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse (Ahmed et al., 2021; Hun et al., 2024). Behavioral addictions are characterized by excessive and repetitive behaviors that persist despite negative consequences. Examples include gambling, gaming, and more recently, internet and smartphone overuse (Andreassen et al., 2013; Zafar & Younis, 2020).

Technological addictions, such as smartphone addiction, exhibit the same addictive patterns but with unique complexities introduced by the constant availability of devices and digital interfaces. These behaviors often meet psychological needs, such as alleviating anxiety or providing social gratification, which fosters dependency (Saletti et al., 2021). Covert addiction, a subtler form of dependency, arises when functional technologies like GPS navigation systems are used unconsciously and habitually. For instance, studies reveal that users of applications such as Waze demonstrate addiction-like behaviors, including mood modification, conflict, relapse, and withdrawal, due to the utility-driven satisfaction these technologies provide (Laor & Galily, 2022). Studies have highlighted that smartphone addiction mirrors traditional addictions, with withdrawal symptoms when access is restricted, and a prioritization of digital interactions over real-world responsibilities. Furthermore, problematic internet and smartphone use is associated with disruptions in family life and increased loneliness, further entrenching addictive behavior (Yaffe & Seroussi, 2019; Lu et al., 2011). Beyond traditional and technological addictions, the challenges posed by smartphone and media dependency intersect with broader informational and psycho-social issues, such as misinformation and social media misuse. Similarly, Orosz et al. (2022) highlighted the lasting impact of prosocial interventions in counteracting misinformation in informational autocracies, underscoring the need for reflective and critical thinking in digital environments. Furthermore, Hou et al. (2019) identified self-regulation strategies as effective

means of mitigating the adverse effects of social media addiction, such as increased anxiety and reduced academic performance. Throuvala et al. (2019) advocated for school-based prevention programs targeting internet and smartphone addiction, particularly among adolescents, emphasizing awareness and education as key to fostering healthier digital habits. These findings illustrate the potential of holistic interventions addressing both behavioral dependencies and their broader informational implications. Advances in technology have also highlighted potential prevention strategies through early detection systems that monitor users' emotional states. For example, De Choudhury et al. (2013) demonstrated that linguistic and behavioral patterns in social media data could predict signs of depression, offering opportunities for interventions through digital platforms. The parallels between technological and traditional addictions underscore the need for comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies. Excessive smartphone use has been linked to psychological distress, reduced academic performance, and strained social relationships (Saletti et al., 2021).

Interventions must account for the pervasive role of digital devices in daily life, which challenges traditional addiction management strategies. Innovative solutions such as digital detox programs, media literacy education, and mindfulness training are critical in mitigating the negative consequences of smartphone overuse and promoting healthier usage patterns (Saletti et al., 2021). The pervasive presence of smartphones has dramatically reshaped modern society, profoundly influencing various domains. According to Sarwar and Soomro (2013), smartphones have had a substantial impact on sectors such as education, business, and entertainment. In education, for instance, they facilitate access to online resources and e-learning platforms, allowing students to enhance their learning experiences beyond traditional classroom settings. In the business realm, smartphones enable seamless communication, mobile commerce, and access to business tools, thereby boosting productivity and operational efficiency. Entertainment has also been revolutionized, with smartphones providing instant access to multimedia content and social networks, transforming how individuals consume media and interact socially. However, these benefits are accompanied by significant drawbacks. Sarwar and Soomro (2013) highlight that smartphones contribute to issues such as privacy threats, disrespectful behavior, and workplace distractions. Privacy concerns are exacerbated by the extensive amount of personal data collected through various apps, which can be vulnerable to breaches and unauthorized access. The constant connectivity and availability of information also leads to potential distractions in both professional and personal contexts, negatively affecting focus and productivity. The pervasive use of mobile phones raises serious health concerns, particularly related to electromagnetic radiation exposure, which has been linked to potential long-term health risks such as cancer and neurological disorders (Nath & Mukherjee, 2015).

The physical and psychological effects of prolonged smartphone use are significant, with studies indicating that excessive use can contribute to poor posture, eye strain, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. For example, Haand and Shuwang (2020) found a positive correlation between social media addiction and depression, with depression being a significant predictor of social media addiction. Moreover, research by Rod et al. (2018) indicates that considerable overnight smartphone use among young adults is associated with shorter sleep duration and higher body mass index, which can lead to a range of health problems, including obesity and metabolic disorders. This underscores the importance of developing technologies that minimize these health risks and promote healthier usage patterns.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL DETOX

The widespread availability of social networking sites on smartphones poses significant distractions, particularly for younger age groups, leading to potential problematic usage

behaviors, even addiction (Schmuck, 2020). These platforms can lead to problematic usage behaviors, such as compulsive checking and extended screen time, which can disrupt daily routines and negatively impact mental health. The potential for smartphone addiction is a growing concern, characterized by an inability to control phone usage, preoccupation with online activities, and withdrawal symptoms when not using the device. This addiction can lead to negative outcomes such as reduced academic performance, impaired interpersonal relationships, and heightened levels of stress and anxiety. In response to these challenges, the concept of "digital detox" has gained traction in mainstream culture and, more recently, in academic research (Hager et al., 2023) exploring abstinence or temporary disengagement from digital technologies to mitigate the negative effects.

The need for "digital detox" arises from the growing awareness of the negative impacts of excessive digital device usage on mental health, productivity, and overall well-being. Research reveals that a significant proportion of young people exhibit high levels of smartphone addiction, primarily driven by social networking applications. Research highlights fear of missing out as a key predictor of addictive behavior and identifies poor sleep quality as a consequential impact. These findings underscore the critical need for digital detox initiatives to mitigate excessive smartphone usage among young people (Handa & Ahuja, 2020). According to Miksch and Schulz (2018), young adults actively employ strategies to limit digital technology interaction across professional, private, and social contexts. Their motivations include maintaining self-control, enhancing performance, and fostering real life relationships. These findings provide insights into how young adults navigate their digital lives, which can be viewed as both encouraging in terms of awareness and proactive management and concerning in terms of the challenges posed by digital technology use. Green et al. (2022) claim that the exploration of smartphone disconnection practices suggests that fostering periods of digital detox could empower teenagers to regain control over their personal technologies. Moving forward, integrating digital disconnection regimes in educational and social settings may align with emerging research on the benefits of mindful engagement and contribute to discussions on children's digital rights in the post-COVID era.

Coyne and Woodruff (20230 explored the effects of digital detox periods on mental health, focusing on reduced smartphone and social media usage. Their findings showed significant improvements in addiction levels, sleep quality, stress reduction, and overall life satisfaction among participants. Qualitative insights underscored increased mindfulness and awareness of the negative impacts of excessive digital consumption, suggesting that structured detox interventions may support healthier technology habits and improve wellbeing. Schmuck (2020), grounded in self-regulation theory, examined the impact of social networking sites use on problematic smartphone use and well-being among 500 young adults (aged 18–35). Findings show a substantial portion (41.7%) use digital detox apps. Non-users of these apps exhibited a positive association between social networking sites use and problematic smartphone use, negatively impacting well-being. In contrast, digital detox app users did not show this association, suggesting these apps may mitigate harmful effects of social networking sites use by reducing compulsive smartphone use. In conclusion, as smartphones continue to reshape society with their pervasive influence, the need for balanced and mindful use becomes increasingly evident. Issues such as privacy risks, workplace distractions, and health concerns highlight the complexities of modern digital engagement. Recent research on "digital detox" underscores its potential for mitigating these challenges and promoting healthier technology habits (Schmuck, 2020).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rapid proliferation and excessive use of social media platforms among students and educators have raised serious concerns regarding their mental health and overall well-being. While these platforms offer opportunities for connectivity, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, their overuse has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, low self-esteem, and reduced academic performance. The constant exposure to online validation, cyberbullying, and digital comparison fosters an environment that can be detrimental to psychological health, particularly among impressionable youth. In the education sector, where focus, mental clarity, and emotional stability are essential, the unchecked use of social media often disrupts learning processes, weakens interpersonal communication, and contributes to digital fatigue. Despite growing evidence of these negative impacts, there is a lack of structured awareness and implementation of digital detoxification strategies within academic institutions. This calls for an urgent need to explore effective interventions that can mitigate the harmful effects of social media and promote healthier digital habits among students and educators alike.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In recent years, the proliferation of social media platforms has significantly transformed how individuals communicate, share information, and engage with the world. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, such as increased connectivity and access to educational content, there is growing concern over their excessive use—especially among students and educators within the education sector. Numerous studies have shown that prolonged exposure to social media can lead to adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep disorders, and reduced attention spans. In educational settings, where focus, emotional stability, and cognitive well-being are crucial for academic performance and personal development, the excessive use of social media is emerging as a serious challenge. Students often struggle with distractions, cyberbullying, and unrealistic social comparisons, while educators face burnout and digital fatigue. Despite the growing recognition of these issues, limited efforts have been made to integrate structured digital detoxification strategies into educational environments. This study is thus essential to explore the extent of social media overuse in the education sector and its impact on mental health. More importantly, it seeks to highlight the urgent need for digital detoxification practices—such as screen time awareness, scheduled offline periods, and mindfulness interventions—to promote a healthier digital culture. By identifying these issues and proposing actionable solutions, the research aims to contribute to the development of more balanced and mentally supportive educational ecosystems.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This quantitative study was completed by employing a correlational research design to investigate the correlation between use of social media and mental health of the students. Population of the study was comprised on college students. Sample of 189 students were recruited by using convenient sample technique. Survey was administered as a method of data collection with the help of questionnaires.

INSTRUMENTS

Social Media Disorder Scale (Van Den Eijnden et al., 2016) was used to measure the excessive use of social media. The reliability coefficient of the SMDS in the sample at hand was 0.82. We obtained a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.90. According to the common standards, in the sample investigated, the internal consistency of the SMDT can be considered good. We found statistically significant correlation coefficients between the SMDT and the Social Media Disorder Scale (SMDS, $r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), as well as the weekly social media usage time ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$). Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale -

21 Items (DASS-21) The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale - 21 Items (DASS-21) is a set of three self-report scales designed to measure the emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress. Each of the three DASS-21 scales contains 7 items, divided into subscales with similar content. The depression scale assesses dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest / involvement, anhedonia and inertia. The anxiety scale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. The stress scale is sensitive to levels of chronic nonspecific arousal. It assesses difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, and being easily upset / agitated, irritable / over-reactive and impatient. Scores for depression, anxiety and stress are calculated by summing the scores for the relevant items (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the correlation between excessive use of social media platforms and mental health of students. Findings of the study reveal that there is significant positive relationship among TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, depression, anxiety and stress. Moreover, results depict that excessive use of social media platforms are the positive predictors of depression, anxiety and stress. In addition, excessive use social media platforms negatively predict mental health of students.

Table 1: Correlation matrix among TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Depression, Stress and Anxiety

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	TikTok	1	.471**	.383**	.463**	.297**	.308**	.518**	.305**	.294**
2	Facebook		1	.291**	.393**	.401**	.307**	.392**	.572**	.601**
3	YouTube			1	.206**	.275**	.291**	.630**	.608**	.790**
4	Instagram				1	.472**	.409**	.418**	.735**	.637**
5	Twitter					1	.306**	.591**	.520**	.502**
6	Snapchat						1	.713**	.496**	.609**
7	Depression							1	.719**	.693**
8	Anxiety								1	.618**
9	Stress									1

DISCUSSION

The emergence of digital detox strategies reflects a growing recognition of the need to manage smartphone usage effectively. Recent studies ((Schmuck, 2020; Coyne & Woodruff, 2023) underscore the potential of digital detox in mitigating the adverse effects of excessive smartphone use, such as addiction, reduced sleep quality, and impaired well-being. Findings of the current study reveal that there is significant positive relationship among TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, depression, anxiety and stress. Moreover, results depict that excessive use of social media platforms are the positive predictors of depression, anxiety and stress. In addition, excessive use social media platforms negatively predict mental health of students. Excessive smartphone use has been linked to psychological distress, reduced academic performance, and strained social relationships (Saletti et al., 2021). Digital detox refers to a period during which individuals refrain from using digital devices to reduce stress, improve focus, and enhance overall well-being (Salepaki et al., 2025). Research indicates that digital detox can lead to improved mental health, reduced anxiety, and better sleep quality (Hager et al., 2023). Studies have shown that regular digital detox practices can significantly mitigate the adverse effects of excessive smartphone usage and help individuals regain a healthy balance between their digital and offline lives (Coyne & Woodruff, 2023). As such, adopting digital detox strategies is becoming increasingly

important in managing the pervasive influence of smartphones on daily life. Recent research on digital detox underscores its potential for mitigating these challenges and promoting healthier technology habits (Schmuck, 2020). Coyne and Woodruff (20230 explored the effects of digital detox periods on mental health, focusing on reduced smartphone and social media usage. Their findings showed significant improvements in addiction levels, sleep quality, stress reduction, and overall life satisfaction among participants. Qualitative insights underscored increased mindfulness and awareness of the negative impacts of excessive digital consumption, suggesting that structured detox interventions may support healthier technology habits and improve wellbeing

CONCLUSION

The study underscores a growing concern regarding the excessive use of social media platforms among students and educators, highlighting its significant impact on mental health within the education sector. While social media has undoubtedly transformed communication, learning, and collaboration, its overuse has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, poor sleep quality, reduced academic performance, and overall psychological distress. This research emphasizes that constant connectivity and digital overstimulation can lead to emotional exhaustion, digital fatigue, and impaired cognitive functioning. Students, in particular, are vulnerable to negative social comparisons, cyberbullying, and distraction, all of which adversely affect their academic engagement and well-being. Similarly, educators are experiencing burnout and increased pressure to remain constantly available and responsive online. Given these findings, there is a critical need to integrate digital detoxification strategies within educational frameworks. Educational institutions must adopt a proactive approach by promoting digital literacy, encouraging mindful usage of technology, and incorporating mental health support systems. Policies that advocate for screen-free periods, encourage physical interaction, and provide awareness programs about the psychological effects of social media are essential. Furthermore, the study advocates for collaboration between policymakers, educators, parents, and mental health professionals to create a balanced digital environment. By fostering a healthier relationship with technology, the education sector can not only mitigate the mental health risks associated with social media overuse but also enhance academic outcomes and emotional resilience among students and staff. In conclusion, while social media remains a powerful tool for education and connection, its unchecked usage poses a tangible threat to mental health. A structured and sustainable digital detox strategy is no longer optional—it is a necessary step toward creating a healthier, more focused, and emotionally balanced educational environment.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study offers a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding mental health and digital well-being, particularly within the context of the education sector. The key contributions are as follows:

Raising Awareness on the Psychological Impact of Social Media Use: The study highlights the correlation between excessive social media use and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, reduced attention span, sleep disturbances, and low self-esteem among students and educators. By doing so, it sheds light on an urgent but often overlooked aspect of digital engagement in academic settings.

Bridging the Gap between Technology and Mental Health in Education: While digital tools are widely embraced in education, the mental health repercussions of their overuse are seldom addressed. This study bridges that gap by examining how constant connectivity and social media exposure affect emotional and cognitive well-being in schools, colleges, and universities.

Introducing the Concept of Digital Detoxification in Academia: One of the unique contributions is the introduction and advocacy of digital detoxification as a strategic tool within educational institutions. The study encourages the development of structured digital detox programs, policies, and practices that promote balanced tech use, mindfulness, and mental resilience.

Providing a Framework for Policy and Curriculum Integration: The research offers a foundation for integrating mental health awareness and digital well-being into the academic curriculum. It suggests actionable steps for educators, administrators, and policymakers to implement interventions that foster healthier digital habits among students.

Empirical Support for Institutional Change: Through surveys, case studies, or statistical analysis (depending on the methodology used), the study provides empirical evidence supporting the need for institutional reforms. These include creating "tech-free" zones, encouraging offline activities, and incorporating mental health education into academic programs.

Supporting Holistic Student Development: Ultimately, the study contributes to a broader understanding of student well-being by emphasizing the importance of balancing digital engagement with emotional and mental health. It supports a more holistic approach to education that considers both academic success and psychological wellness.

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