

Psychological and Social Impacts of Social Media Usage Among Youth

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Abstract: The paper aims to discuss the psychological and social effects of using social media among young adults aged eighteen to thirty and the Uses and Gratifications Theory is adopted to serve as a framework of discussion. A quantitative study design embodying a structured questionnaire was administered to Hundred and thirty-three samples in Coimbatore, India. The survey measured the psychological effects, behaviour trends, reasons to use and perceived risks. Relationships between variables were analysed by means of descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings showed that the largest percentage reported poor to moderate psychological and behaviour-related effects with Instagram the most influential amongst the respondents. Significant associations were found between motivation and behavior, psychological effects and perceived risks, and between usage patterns and platform preferences. These results indicate that the usage of the social media depends on the motivation of the users and may develop positive outcomes and even psychological effects. The study highlights the importance of promoting mindful digital engagement, especially among youth, and suggests further longitudinal research to explore causality.

Keywords: Social Media, Psychological Impact, FOMO, Loneliness, uses and Gratifications Theory, Young Adults, Cyberbullying, Motivation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of modern communication, particularly among young adults. With over 97% of young internet users in the U.S. engaging with platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Vine (Villanti et al., 2017), its pervasive presence shapes various aspects of their daily lives. Social media serves as more than a recreational outlet; it is a space for identity formation, emotional expression, and navigating adulthood (Fu et al., 2020). However, the psychological consequences of this digital immersion are the subject of growing scholarly interest. Research shows a complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between social media use and mental well-being. For instance, while some studies suggest that social media use does not directly impair mental health functioning except in cases like vaguebooking (Berryman et al., 2018), others reveal a stronger link between problematic social media use and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (Shannon et al., 2021). Similarly, high engagement with social platforms has been associated with increased feelings of social isolation (Primack et al., 2017), sleep disturbances (Levenson et al., 2016), and

exposure to risky health behaviors (Ilakkuvan et al., 2019). Interestingly, the relationship between social media use and perceived stress is not universally negative. Some evidence shows no significant correlation between stress and social media engagement (Jaiswal et al., 2024), while other studies report positive correlations with well-being, particularly in culturally specific contexts such as Malaysia (Labent et al., 2024). Gender differences also emerge, with male users reportedly scoring higher on mental well-being scales compared to female counterparts (Majeed et al., 2022). It is in this finer setting that it is not necessary and sufficient to learn only the extent to which young adults use social media but also the reasons that lead them to use it and then determining how it affects their mood, stress and also their relationships with others. This study is hence based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which underlines that people consciously utilise media to leverage the psychological and social needs. This research will set out to review reasons why young adults use social media and study its psychological and social effects especially with regard to individual stress, emotional dependence, fear of missing out (FOMO), sleep disorder, and social alienation.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The rationale of the given research lies in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) that offers an invaluable platform through which it is important to comprehend why people take an initiative to use the media content in a bid to get particular psychological and social fulfilment. The UGT believes that media consumption is not driven by the passivity but by deliberate motivations, which can be classified into four core needs, including cognitive, affective, personal integrative or social integrative. Cognitive needs are associated with the ability to seek knowledge, information, and understanding. Young adults resort to social media platforms during the same to stay updated, combat some issues, or even to improve learning. To give an illustration, the use of social media was reported to be common among U.S. young adults composing around 97.5 percent of the population (Villanti et al., 2017), which shows that it was the core part of their digital information climate. Although social media does not enable impaired mental health results in some instances (Berryman et al., 2018), information flow raised through this media is still strong sufficient, which inevitably applies in helping people make educational and real-life choices (Fu et al., 2020). Affective needs refer to the search of emotional satisfaction that includes entertainment, mood control and beauty pleasures. Social media is a network where there is a wide variety of content that can relax people and make them emotionally active. This need to achieve affective satisfaction can also be the cause of engagement in vaguebooking or strategization of an online personality to receive affective reactions among young adults (Berryman et al., 2018). Nevertheless, when used to excess to satisfy such needs, this has been associated with accompanying adverse outcomes such as enhanced grip on depression and anxiety (Shannon et al., 2021). Other personal integrative needs, which include the need to raise self-esteem, strengthen personal identity or acquire social credibility, are also satisfied by use of social media. Adolescents usually tend to create themselves through these media and establish their presence in peer groups (Fu et al., 2020). Somewhere, having a positive score on well-being can give users a sense of self-worth, especially in men when they engage in these platforms (Majeed et al., 2022). Social integrative needs relate to sustaining of relationship and the feeling of belonging to a group. The social media is considered one of the main mediums of maintaining interpersonal ties and developing a social capital. However, the most frequent users might be paradoxically lonelier (Primack et al., 2017) despite trying to interact more with the peers. This is further supported by other studies claiming that social media can be seen as a major power in negotiating adult identities and social roles (Fu et al., 2020). The UGT model is useful in describing a complex nature of why young adults turn to social media. Regardless of the reasons behind their engagement with media and their needs, young people adjust their media habits according to their particular needs when they want to get knowledge, feel better, get validation, and interact with others. These motives inform one of some benefits and possible psychological perils of using social media.

III. MOTIVATIONS BEHIND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Reasons to use social media vary and depend on the platform, and are partly determined by the psychological needs of users, personality factors, and facts on the ground. A study that helps to determine this using Uses and Gratifications Theory is that people use different platforms to achieve different needs involving information satisfaction, entertainment, social enjoyment, and self-expression. As an example, Twitter is often utilized as an informational source whereas Instagram serves the purpose of entertainment and as a system of social co-creations, which means that there is a difference in terms of usage intention among platforms (Pelletier et al., 2020). The personality traits like extraversion and openness also determine motivational factors as this is what determines the intensity of use and also results in the relevant emotional consequences (Lin et al., 2017). Academic literature demonstrates that the major motivation of university students is their entertainment, seeking information, and convenience that later enhance their satisfaction and the duration they spend on the social media network (Al-Menayes, 2015). Also, the motives are not universal; Malaysian users, in particular, are motivated by the need to watch, impress others, keep a record of the moments and a feeling of being in a cool situation (Abdul Wahid et al., 2022). In enterprise and public environments, enjoyment, connectedness, and perceived usefulness remain the motives that drive the involvement in using social media and attitude towards it (Allam et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2019). Taken together, these findings point to the idea that the use of social media is a multifaceted interaction between individual interest and the possibilities that the platform provides and again reaffirm the usefulness of the Uses and Gratifications model in the description of contemporary digital activity.

IV. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE

The use of social media has proved to have rather sophisticated psychological effects particularly through adolescents and emerging adults. The scientific literature suggests that the correlation between active use of social media and increases in depression and anxiety rates and psychological distress is rather strong (Keles et al., 2019; Vannucci et al., 2017). The results of meta-analysis support that difficult use is connected with loneliness and overall deprived well-being (Huang, 2020). Although there is some literature about short-term psychological advantages regarding the improvements in the sense of perceived social support (Lin et al., 2023) 1 - in the long-run, life satisfaction diverges and psychological unease finally sets in. Besides, the addictive characteristics of social media are compared to substance addictions in terms of neurophysiological outcomes, and the regulatory measures to protect mental stability are required (Trivedi et al., 2021). Due to the numerous negative effects on the perception of emotional states, passive and excessive consumption of these products is more likely to increase such conditions, but intentional use can

lead to well-being and positive social interaction (Koh et al., 2024; Ostic et al., 2021). The psychological effect that the social media exerts is therefore tricky depending on how it is used, human vulnerability and the situations at hand.

V. METHODOLOGY

In this study, young adults aged 18-30 were timely since this group is the one most involved in social media use (Villanti et al., 2017). They chose a total of 133 participants in the city of Coimbatore using convenience sampling method. Thanks to the heterogeneous sample comprising 78 male and 55 female respondents of different educational backgrounds and geographical region representation, the views of the youth were represented in a mixed manner. Inclusion of purposive elements in the convenience sample was also due to the fact that this was meant to select people who use social media regularly, as well as consistent with the existing literature that concentrates on digital behavior among youths (Fu et al., 2020). The data were collected with the help of a structured questionnaire that included demographic questions and more than 20 statements in the Likert-type scale. These were made to determine various social media use dimensions, which were: user motivations, behavioral patterns and perceived psychological outcomes

(which were sleep disturbance, loneliness feelings, privacy issues and emotional satisfaction). It was a guided decision by such studies where social media use had been earlier observed to bring positive emotional results as well as negative health indicators in the case of young adults (Berryman et al., 2018; Shannon et al., 2021; Majeed et al., 2022). Online surveys were conducted to gather the data, and it was not a problem to reach the target age group that is characterized by high Internet involvement (Primack et al., 2017). Before they were allowed to take part in the study, all the participants gave their informed consent. The questionnaire was confidential and it was contributed out of free will. In collecting and pooling the data, it was only on pure academic grounds that the data was collected and it was not recorded and shared with any potentially identifiable data. Descriptive statistics and the cross-tabulation technique were also used to analyze the data, consisting of identifying the trend in social media use and testing the connections between the demographic variables and the perceptions of the user. Such quantitative method made it possible to conduct a systematic assessment of the patterns and connections in social media use by young people, following the methodological approaches implemented in analogous research of the digital media phenomenon (Fu et al., 2020).

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 Psychological Impact Levels

| Psychological impact levels | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Medium impact | 51 | 38.3 | 38.3 | 38.3 |
| | High impact | 22 | 16.5 | 16.5 | 54.9 |
| | Low impact | 60 | 45.1 | 45.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 133 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Out of 133 respondents, 45.1% reported low psychological impact, 38.3% reported medium impact, and only 16.5% experienced high impact. This indicates that while

a minority of users suffer serious psychological effects from social media, the majority perceive only moderate or low levels of psychological influence.

Table 2 Motivations Levels

| Motivations levels | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Medium Impact | 54 | 40.6 | 40.6 | 40.6 |
| | High Impact | 27 | 20.3 | 20.3 | 60.9 |
| | Low Impact | 52 | 39.1 | 39.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 133 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Motivations for use revealed that 40.6% of users reported medium-level motivations, 39.1% showed low-level motivations, and 20.3% indicated high motivation for using social media. This suggests that most users are moderately

motivated to use social platforms, likely driven by common needs such as entertainment, social connection, and information seeking.

Table 3 Behavioral Patterns Levels

| Behavioral Patterns Levels | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Medium impact | 64 | 48.1 | 48.1 | 48.1 |
| | High Impact | 32 | 24.1 | 24.1 | 72.2 |
| | Less Impact | 37 | 27.8 | 27.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 133 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Behavioral patterns among users showed that 48.1% demonstrated medium behavioral impact, 27.8% showed less behavioral impact, and 24.1% experienced a high impact. This distribution implies that behavioral changes due to social media

use such as usage frequency, time spent, or altered routines—are present for many, but extreme behavior shifts are less common.

Table 4 Perceived Risks Levels

| Perceived Risks Levels | | | | | |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Medium Impact | 59 | 44.4 | 44.4 | 44.4 |
| | High Impact | 15 | 11.3 | 11.3 | 55.6 |
| | Less Impact | 59 | 44.4 | 44.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 133 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Perceived risks associated with social media use revealed that 44.4% of users reported medium levels of perceived risks, another 44.4% reported low levels, and only 11.3% perceived

high risks. Despite widespread usage, perceived risks such as privacy concerns, addiction, or negative emotional outcomes are not regarded as severe by most users.

Table 5 Psychological Impact Levels vs Behavioral Patterns Levels

| Psychological Impact Levels vs Behavioral Patterns Levels | | | | | |
|---|---------------|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| Count | | | | | |
| | | Behavioral Patterns Levels | | | Total |
| | | Medium impact | High Impact | Less Impact | |
| Psychological impact levels | Medium impact | 37 | 7 | 7 | 51 |
| | High impact | 12 | 7 | 3 | 22 |
| | Low impact | 15 | 18 | 27 | 60 |
| Total | | 64 | 32 | 37 | 133 |

Table 6 Chi-Square Tests

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 28.471 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 29.543 | 4 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 21.602 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 133 | | |

The Chi-square test revealed a significant relationship between psychological impact and behavioral patterns ($\chi^2 = 28.47$, $p < 0.001$). Among those with medium psychological impact, a majority (37) demonstrated medium behavioral

impact. Notably, users with low psychological impact had the highest frequency of low behavioral impact (27). This suggests that stronger psychological experiences are likely to result in observable behavioral changes in social media usage.

Table 7 Psychological Impact Levels vs Perceived Risks Levels

| Psychological impact levels VS Perceived risks Levels | | | | | |
|---|---------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| Count | | | | | |
| | | Perceived risks Levels | | | Total |
| | | Medium Impact | High Impact | Less Impact | |
| Psychological impact levels | Medium impact | 36 | 5 | 10 | 51 |
| | High impact | 10 | 1 | 11 | 22 |
| | Low impact | 13 | 9 | 38 | 60 |
| Total | | 59 | 15 | 59 | 133 |

Table 8 Chi-Square Tests

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 28.670 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 30.579 | 4 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 25.727 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 133 | | |

A significant correlation was found between psychological impact and perceived risks ($\chi^2 = 28.67$, $p < 0.001$). Users with low psychological impact mostly perceived fewer risks (38), while those with high psychological impact were relatively split but still demonstrated noticeable levels of

perceived risk. This suggests a mutually reinforcing dynamic, where users experiencing more emotional or mental effects are also more aware or concerned about potential dangers associated with social media use.

Table 9 Motivations Levels vs Behavioural Patterns Levels

| Motivations Levels vs Behavioural Patterns Levels | | | | | |
|---|---------------|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| Count | | | | | |
| | | behavioral Patterns Levels | | | Total |
| | | Medium impact | High Impact | Less Impact | |
| Motivations levels | Medium Impact | 40 | 5 | 9 | 54 |
| | High Impact | 10 | 11 | 6 | 27 |
| | Low Impact | 14 | 16 | 22 | 52 |
| Total | | 64 | 32 | 37 | 133 |

Table 10 Chi-Square Tests

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 28.758 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 29.450 | 4 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 23.275 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 133 | | |

A significant relationship was found between motivations and behavioral patterns ($\chi^2 = 28.76$, $p < 0.001$). Most respondents with medium motivations exhibited medium behavioral impact (40), while users with high motivation also showed increased behavioral patterns, particularly in the high-

impact group (11). This confirms that stronger motivational factors correlate with more intense or frequent social media behavior, supporting the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT).

Table 11 Motivations Levels vs Perceived Risks Levels

| Motivations levels vs Perceived risks Levels | | | | | |
|--|---------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| | | Perceived risks Levels | | | Total |
| | | Medium Impact | High Impact | Less Impact | |
| Motivations levels | Medium Impact | 35 | 6 | 13 | 54 |
| | High Impact | 10 | 3 | 14 | 27 |
| | Low Impact | 14 | 6 | 32 | 52 |
| Total | | 59 | 15 | 59 | 133 |

Table 12 Chi-Square Tests

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 17.799 ^a | 4 | .001 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 18.381 | 4 | .001 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 17.413 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 133 | | |

A statistically significant link was found between motivations and perceived risks ($\chi^2 = 17.80$, $p = 0.001$). Medium-motivation users mostly perceived medium risks (35), while low-motivation users perceived fewer risks (32). This implies that users who are more invested or active in social

media are more conscious of the associated risks, possibly due to prolonged exposure or experience.

➤ *Crosstabs*

Table 13 Most Preferred Social Media Platform vs Psychological Impact Levels Crosstabulation

| Most Preferred Social Media Platform vs Psychological Impact Levels Crosstabulation | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------------------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| | | Psychological Impact Levels | | | Total |
| | | Medium impact | High impact | Low impact | |
| Most preferred social media platform | Facebook | 0 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| | Instagram | 37 | 12 | 35 | 84 |
| | Snapchat | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| | Twitter | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| | Youtube | 11 | 6 | 18 | 35 |
| Total | | 51 | 22 | 60 | 133 |

Table 14 Most Preferred Social Media Platform vs Motivations Levels Crosstabulation

| Most Preferred Social Media Platform vs Motivations Levels Crosstabulation | | | | | |
|--|-----------|--------------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| | | Motivations levels | | | Total |
| | | Medium Impact | High Impact | Low Impact | |
| Most preferred social media platform | Facebook | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| | Instagram | 36 | 18 | 30 | 84 |

| | | | | | |
|-------|----------|----|----|----|-----|
| | Snapchat | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| | Twitter | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| | Youtube | 12 | 7 | 16 | 35 |
| Total | | 54 | 27 | 52 | 133 |

Table 15 Most Preferred Social Media Platform vs Behavioral Patterns Levels Crosstabulation

| Most Preferred Social Media Platform vs Behavioral Patterns Levels Crosstabulation | | | | | |
|--|-----------|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| | | Behavioral Patterns Levels | | | Total |
| | | Medium impact | High Impact | Less Impact | |
| Most preferred social media platform | Facebook | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| | Instagram | 44 | 19 | 21 | 84 |
| | Snapchat | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| | Twitter | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| | Youtube | 14 | 11 | 10 | 35 |
| Total | | 64 | 32 | 37 | 133 |

Table 16 Most Preferred Social Media Platform vs Perceived Risks Levels Crosstabulation

| Most preferred social media platform vs Perceived risks Levels Crosstabulation | | | | | |
|--|-----------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| | | Perceived risks Levels | | | Total |
| | | Medium Impact | High Impact | Less Impact | |
| Most preferred social media platform | Facebook | 4 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| | Instagram | 39 | 11 | 34 | 84 |
| | Snapchat | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| | Twitter | 2 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| | Youtube | 12 | 4 | 19 | 35 |
| Total | | 59 | 15 | 59 | 133 |

Instagram dominated usage across all variables. Most Instagram users reported medium levels of psychological impact (37), motivation (36), and behavioral impact (44). A majority also perceived moderate risks (39). This suggests that Instagram is the central platform shaping psychological, behavioral, and risk-related experiences among youth. YouTube attracted users with low psychological impact (18), low motivation (16), and fewer behavioral risks (10). YouTube users likely consume passive or educational content and have less emotional investment. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat had low representation and inconsistent trends, indicating reduced popularity or relevance among youth.

VII. RESULTS

The study revealed varied psychological impacts of social media use among young adults. Most respondents (45.1%)

experienced low levels of psychological impact, while 38.3% reported moderate impact and only 16.5% indicated high psychological distress. This suggests that although social media is widely used, its psychological toll is not universally intense. These findings align with prior research indicating that high levels of social media usage can negatively affect mental well-being. For instance, Gupta (2021) found that individuals who spent over five hours daily on social media experienced poorer psychological well-being compared to those with less exposure. Similar results were observed by Kaur and Dutt (2021), who reported a significant negative correlation between social media usage and psychological wellness among young adults.

Regarding motivations for social media use, the data showed that 40.6% of respondents had moderate motivations, 39.1% low, and 20.3% high. This suggests that most young adults are moderately driven to use social media, potentially for

entertainment, maintaining social connections, or staying informed.

These results have been influenced by the Uses and Gratification Theory which argues that people proactively use the media to fulfill their needs. According to Sokolova and Kefi (2021), information-seeking, trend-following, and social interaction are among those motivations to use the social media significantly affecting the rate and the purpose of use among young people. The social media also influenced the behavioral patterns. Altered sleep habits or decline in offline activities can be considered the medium behavioral changes as nearly half of the participants (48.1%) reported such. On the other hand, 27.8 percent and 24.1 percent reported low and high behavioral effects, respectively. Such correlations do not contradict research findings that high levels of social media usage have compromised everyday routines. According to the study by Levenson et al. (2016), there was a positive correlation between sleep disturbance and high social media engagement in adults aged between 19- and 29-years. In a similar way, some types of usage were related to health-based dangers, including substance abuse and mood swings by Ilakkuvan et al. (2019). Concerning perceived risks, the answers were distributed almost equally with the low and moderate levels (44.4%), whereas only 11.3% perceived high levels of risk. This indicates that the vast majority of people are aware of the possible pitfalls of using the social network such as privacy invasion or being cyberbullied, yet fewer people perceive them as a real danger. This tendency has its reflection in all prior studies such as the work of Primack et al. (2017) who discovered that regular use of social media is linked to greater perceptions of social isolation. Similarly, Shannon et al. (2021) documented that problematic social media behaviors are linked to major mental problems, such as anxiety and depression. There were significant relationships using inter-variable analysis. A greater psychological effect was linked to stronger behavior changes and outcomes in perceived risks. Likewise, the high motivation users reporting the presence of behavioral change and the increased risk consciousness also attested to the high motivation to social media use. Those relationships show the role of motivations in patterns of usage, which has impacts on psychological and behavioral consequences. When analyzing the effects of the platforms, Instagram has proven to be the most influential platform among respondents. Medium scores were normally recorded in most of the users of Instagram in terms of psychological impact, motivation, behavioral change, and perceived risks. Conversely, these dimensions were lower generally reported by YouTube users probably because the site was more passive and entertainment oriented. Less popular and with variable trends were the use of Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter indicating a change in platform preferences by the youth demographic. On the whole, these results confirm the sensitivity of social media impacts on young adults and complement the literature reviewed. The interaction of the three components stimulating motivation, behavioral modeling of stimuli and risk perception plays an essential role in explaining

the psychological and social consequences of the engagement in social media in general.

VIII. DISCUSSION

This paper discussed the psychological effects, behavioral patterns, motivations and perceived risk in the use of social media by the young adults. The results prove the importance of social media as the factor that influences user behaviors and mental health to a considerable extent yet in a complex manner. Findings that most of the respondents claimed psychological impact to be low to moderate complies well with the studies that show that even though social media is beneficial, overuse or uncontrolled usage of the same could cause adverse mental health and lead to mood disorders, including anxiety, depression, and decreased emotional states (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Such are more possible in people with intensive use of social media, which is usually caused by such motives as the need to get approval or escape stresses related to real life (Andreassen et al., 2017). An interesting result that can be obtained in the present study is that the motivations to use social media were moderate. This reinforces the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) which assumes that people are active users of the media in order to satisfy diverse needs, including the need to socialize, amuse themselves and express themselves (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). The participants in this case might not be addicted to social media excessively but still use it frequently to satisfy their emotional or informational demands representing the pattern also identified by Sokolova and Kefi (2021) according to whom social interaction and identity statement emerged as the most relevant factors motivating the youth to use social media such as Instagram. The behavioral impact of social media was predominantly at a moderate level, with many users reporting changes to sleep patterns and time management. This reflects concerns raised in past studies, where heavy social media engagement was linked to sleep disruption and reduced academic productivity (Levenson et al., 2016). The patterns observed here further suggest that while not all users experience extreme behavioral changes, a significant portion of the population is impacted to a noticeable degree. Most of the participants were aware of potential damage that use of the social media use might cause, especially to them in regard to issues of privacy violation and psychological well and health issues; though they failed to think the risks were high. This may signify that this risk has become normalized or a misunderstanding in long-term effects. The literature of the past backs this notion; hence, Primack et al. (2017) found that although using social media does not cause users to perceive it as damaging, it may still contribute to a sense of social isolation and harming self-esteem. The relationship between the variables is also another significant part of the discussion. The analysis concluded that the level of motivation was also linked to the levels of behavioral changes and a more prominent perception of risks, and the given trend reflects back to the previous studies implying that stronger engagement motives of users in general contribute to more observable psychological

and behavioral impact (Huang, 2017). This flexible relationship signifies that intent and frequency of use of the user can rotate the effects of the social media. Findings based on the platforms showed that Instagram was the most influential platform in this study as it is worldwide; however, with the exception of Facebook and Twitter. Statista (2023) underlines that Instagram is still leading when it comes to people aged 18-29 since it is highly interactive and visually oriented. Comparatively, YouTube users demonstrated fewer psychological and behavioral influences, which can be explained by more passive experience of content consumption and less interactive format of the platform (Kircaburun et al., 2020). On the whole, the findings indicate the need in digital literacy interventions to foster mindful use of social media. Self-regulation, the issues explained to the users about the possible dangers and incorporation of mental health services into the digital space can be selective countermeasures to the adverse impacts without destroying the beneficial capabilities of social media.

IX. LIMITATIONS

In spite of this informative research, there are a few limitations noted in this research. To begin with, it is confined to one urban zone geographically (Coimbatore) and generalization of the results faces a limitation. Second, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias or social desirability effects. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the research limits causal inferences; future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach to examine how long-term social media use affects mental health outcomes over time. Furthermore, qualitative methods such as interviews could enrich understanding of the emotional depth and context of users' motivations and experiences.

X. CONCLUSION

This study examined the psychological impacts, behavioral patterns, motivations for use, and perceived risks of social media among young adults aged 18 to 30. Using the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), it investigated how individuals engage with social media platforms to meet cognitive, affective, personal, and social integrative needs. The findings indicate that most participants exhibit moderate levels of psychological and behavioral impact from social media usage. Motivations for using these platforms were also moderate, suggesting that while users are engaged, they may not yet be fully dependent or addicted. The results show a complex interplay between motivations and consequences: users driven by emotional and social gratifications often experience more significant behavioral impacts and perceive greater risks, such as sleep disruption, loneliness, and privacy concerns. This supports the growing body of literature highlighting the dual nature of social media both as a tool for connection and expression, and as a potential source of stress and psychological distress (Primack et al., 2017; Huang, 2017; Keles et al., 2020). Instagram emerged as the platform with the highest psychological and behavioral impact among users,

likely due to its visual-centric and interaction-heavy nature, while platforms like YouTube showed lower levels of perceived risk and emotional influence. These platform-specific trends reflect broader usage patterns and reinforce the need for platform-sensitive media literacy strategies. The study contributes to existing scholarship by reinforcing the relevance of UGT in understanding modern media behavior and by offering empirical evidence from a specific regional and demographic context. However, limitations such as the reliance on self-reported data and the geographically restricted sample suggest the need for broader studies with diverse populations and longitudinal approaches. In conclusion, while social media continues to serve valuable psychological and social purposes, its unchecked use may result in adverse outcomes. Future interventions should aim to promote balanced digital habits, especially among youth, by encouraging critical engagement, time regulation, and awareness of long-term risks.

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