# Social media addiction and its relationship with feelings of alienation and cognitive distortions among youth

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* Social media has evolved over the past decade into one of the most engaging forms of online activity, experiencing exponential growth in the number of users. However, this surge can lead to negative psychosocial consequences for participants in network interactions. *Aim.* The *aim* of this study is to investigate the relationship between social media addiction, psychological alienation, and cognitive distortion among youth in Jordan. *Methodology and research methods.* The study involved 784 young individuals aged 18 to 35 years. Scales measuring cognitive bias, social media dependence, and psychological alienation were developed for data collection. *Results.* The results indicated a positive correlation between social media addiction, psychological alienation, and cognitive distortion. Young individuals were found to experience higher levels of psychological alienation compared to older participants in the study. Furthermore, unmarried and divorced individuals exhibited greater levels of cognitive distortion, social media dependence, and psychological alienation than their married counterparts. *Scientific novelty.* The scientific novelty of this study lies in examining the relationships among three key psychological factors – social media addiction, psychological alienation, and cognitive biases – among youth in Jordan. Previous studies have analysed the impact of these forms of social media addiction in isolation. *Practical significance.* Programmes designed to optimise social media use, reduce social isolation, and enhance cognitive flexibility can help mitigate the detrimental effects of excessive internet use. The findings of this study may inform the development of counselling and prevention programmes tailored to specific demographic groups that are at an increased risk.

# Зависимость от социальных сетей и ее связь с чувством отчуждения и когнитивными искажениями среди молодежи

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***Аннотация.*** *Введение.* Социальные сети за последнее десятилетие превратились в один из наиболее привлекательных видов онлайн-активности с экспоненциальным ростом числа вовлеченных потребителей, что может иметь неблагоприятные психосоциальные последствия для участников сетевого взаимодействия. *Цель* данного исследования – изучение природы взаимосвязи между зависимостью от социальных сетей, психологическим отчуждением и когнитивными искажениями среди молодежи в Иордании. *Методология и методы исследования.* В исследовании приняли добровольное участие 784 молодых человека в возрасте от 18 до 35 лет. Были разработаны шкалы когнитивных искажений, а также шкалы зависимости от социальных сетей и психологического отчуждения для сбора данных. *Результаты.* Результаты показали наличие положительной взаимосвязи между зависимостью от социальных сетей, психологическим отчуждением и когнитивными искажениями.

Установлено, что молодые люди испытывают более высокий уровень психологического отчуждения по сравнению с более взрослыми участниками исследования. Кроме того, неженатые и разведенные лица демонстрировали более высокий уровень когнитивных искажений, зависимости от социальных сетей и психологического отчуждения по сравнению с участниками, состоящими в браке. *Научная новизна* заключается в изучении взаимосвязей между тремя ключевыми психологическими факторами – зависимостью от социальных сетей, психологическим отчуждением и когнитивными искажениями среди молодежи в Иордании, – в то время как в более ранних исследованиях анализироваось воздействие данных форм зависимости от социальных сетей в дискретном режиме. *Практическая значимость.* Программы, направленные на оптимизацию пользования социальными сетями, минимизацию социальной изоляции и развитие когнитивной гибкости, могут помочь смягчить вредные последствия чрезмерного использования интернета. Результаты исследования могут способствовать разработке консультационных и профилактических программ, адаптированных к конкретным демографическим группам с повышенным риском.

***Ключевые слова:*** когнитивные искажения, иорданская молодежь, психологическое отчуждение, зависимость от социальных сетей

# Introduction

The rapid technological development has led to a qualitative transformation in various aspects of life, particularly in the field of communication. The internet has become the most important tool of new media in shaping major changes in the modern world of communication. With its ease of access, great flexibility, and the ability to browse some of its content for free, it has become a fertile ground for freedom of information exchange [1, 2, 3].

Social media platforms represent the latest means of communication between individuals and groups allowing users to create personal accounts through which they can connect, make friends, and chat with people they know in real life or virtually. They also enable the publication and exchange of photos, videos, messages, and files [4, 5, 6]. The popularity of these platforms

has increased unprecedentedly, with the number of users continuously increasing. Youth represent an important social category characterised by adventurousness, excitement, and a love for discovery, making them the most attracted to and engaged with the internet. These platforms have brought about significant change in the lives of Arab youth, especially university students, on personal, social, and political levels, as they have opened a space for them to freely express their opinions and stances on various issues and topics [7, 8, 9].

University students are particularly affected by and attached to the internet, being the heaviest users of social media platforms. Universities serve as fertile grounds for shaping young people's ideas and developing their orientations, as is the case with social media. Students find social media a space that fulfills their psychological and social needs and desires, making it an essential part of their daily lives, especially with the availability of mobile access [10, 11, 12].

Mobile phones have revolutionised the way people access and use the internet, enabling constant connectivity and engaging in various online activities. This has led to a rise in social media addiction among students at Jordanian universities These users often exhibit negative behavioural and social manifestations, such as excessive lying during communication, inability to control the number of hours spent online, general indifference, neglect of social relationships, withdrawal from studies, obsession with the internet, negative feelings when stopping the use of social media, and low self-esteem [13, 14].

The current era is witnessing tremendous developments in the knowledge and technological revolution. This era has produced a flood of knowledge in all fields, contributing to the emergence of advanced means of communication. These means have reshaped human communication, making the world a small village with instant and continuous interaction, primarily through electronic websites. Among these, social media platforms have played a major role in shaping human relationships. The importance of these technological networks

has grown in light of the development and expansion of social media platforms [15, 16].

Recently, I. M. Al-Gayam, B. A. Al-Rawashdeh, A. H. Essa et al. [17] and A. Shehabat, H. Shureteh, M. H. Al Ahmad [18] have monitored the negative effects of these platforms, especially on youths. They have shown that they may expose youths to various psychological, and behavioural disorders. Youths are more susceptible to these disorders due to their developmental stage and emotional instability, which makes them vulnerable to the influence of new behavioural patterns beliefs they adopt through social media.

One of the most dangerous effects is the increasing threat posed by the use of social media to youngsters' psychological well-being. It may lead to poor interaction with others, disturbances in social communication, and the loss of emotional security. It is also associated with feelings of psychological emptiness, and alienation, which are considered some of the most complex psychological issues in adolescence [19, 20, 21].

In this context, numerous studies conducted by L. M. Rababah, N. N. Al-Khawaldeh, M. A. Rababah [22], K. S. Aljedayah, S. Y. Rababa'h, O. F. Alrababah et al. [23] and Y. M. Al-Shurman, F. A. Zainelabdin, K. Shneikat et al. [24] have highlighted the relationship between social media use and feelings of social alienation and psychological alienation among youths. The current study aims to investigate this relationship and the impact of social media use on social alienation and psychological alienation among youths.

### *Problem Statement*

Given the growing importance of the technological network due to the development of social media platforms, and in light of the increasing usage by youths, the need arises to investigate the psychological and social implications of this use. These platforms are no longer just means of communication but also a source of influence on youths' behaviours, ideas, and feelings. This is

particularly relevant given the emergence of a new generation raised in the digital age, whose psychological and social identities are being shaped by social media platforms [25, 26, 27].

Psychologists and educationalists have warned of the potential risks of excessive use of social media, particularly the feeling of alienation which may arise among youths [28, 29, 30]. The present study aims to explore the relationship between social media addiction and psychological alienation among youths. Social alienation refers to the feeling of detachment from society and its institutions, while psychological alienation refers to the loss of identity, emptiness, and lack of emotional satisfaction. The study aims to answer the following question: "Is there a relationship between the feeling of psychological alienation, cognitive distortions, and individuals' addiction to social media platforms?".

### *Significance of the Study*

There is a growing prevalence of social media users and the increasing number of individuals addicted to these platforms; however, there is a scarcity of research on the study variables within the Jordanian society. This study enriches the research field with findings on new variables related to social media addiction and facilitating the identification of individuals at risk of addiction. It provides policymakers with insights to regulate these platforms and establish laws to protect individuals. It also offers awareness programmes to the general public and specifically targeting individuals at risk to prevent falling into the trap of social media addiction.

## Literature Review

### *The Social Media Platforms*

The internet and social media platforms have become an integral part of human life, influencing various fields and becoming an inseparable part of daily

life. However, excessive use of these platforms has led to addiction due to their diversity, excitement, renewal, and development features. This has negatively affected users, especially with improper usage. Technological addiction, or non-substance addiction, involves excessive human-machine interaction and develops when individuals depend on devices for psychological benefits. Social media addiction aligns with technological addiction, considered a subcategory of behavioural addiction, defined as excessive interaction between humans and machines. According to L. Milani, G. La Torre, M. Fiore et al. [31] and H. M. Pontes M. Macur [32], behavioural addiction manifests in symptoms like mood changes, social withdrawal, and inappropriate behaviour.

Frequent and prolonged daily use of social media has become a phenomenon with both positive and negative effects. The negative aspect is habituation, which may lead to addiction, isolation from one's surroundings, and social withdrawal. Social alienation is one of the main criticisms of modern communication technologies, especially social media. O. B. Babalola [33] noted that while these platforms have facilitated easier communication between individuals, they have also contributed to social isolation, diminished interaction within families, and replaced face-to-face meetings and visits with online interactions.

Social media addiction is a type of psychological and behavioural dependence on social networking platforms, characterised by compulsive use that leads to significant impairment in individuals' performance across various life domains over a prolonged period. It has not been officially classified by the World Health Organisation or the DSM-5 as a disorder. J. E. Shanks has approached this question from different perspectives and have not agreed on a single, globally accepted definition [34].

According to A. Özparlak and D. Karakaya [35], the stages of social media addiction include fascination or attraction, disengagement, and balance. Social factors such as broken homes, cultural factors, lack of emotional support,

emotional venting, and psychological disorders can drive individuals towards internet addiction. Social isolation, failure in forming human relationships, mysterious fears, low self-esteem, or fear of mockery can lead to internet addiction, as the virtual world provides an outlet to express fears and anxieties and form vague relationships that offer false intimacy.

According to H. M. Pontes and M. Macur [32], the negative impacts of internet addiction are varied, including weakening the immune system, psychological effects, family effects, family effects, and social effects. Health effects include weakening the immune system, making individuals more vulnerable to diseases, psychological effects, family effects, family effects, and social effects. Internet addiction has been linked to negative social effects, including decreased family communication, shrinking social circles, increased feelings of depression, and loneliness, particularly among participants who visited pornographic websites. Studies have also found a correlation between negative social effects and internet addiction, including exposure to unfamiliar things, strained family relations, inappropriate relationships, improper social behaviour, neglecting studies, and connecting with bad company or drug-related content. Internet addiction can lead to marital breakdown, financial problems, and worsening antisocial behaviour [32].

As stated by A. Özparlak and D. Karakaya, internet addiction has various academic, social, and religious effects, including neglect of studies, poor academic performance, and loss of national identity. It also shapes social behaviour through exposure to other cultures, promoting foreign ideas, values, and habits. It also leads to confusion in beliefs, alienation from religion, traditions, and customs, and the destruction of moral values. Prevention of social media addiction requires raising awareness among parents, teachers, and mental health professionals [35].

As noted in the study conducted by F. Al-Habies, A. Al-Krenawi, doctors recommend regulating online time, aiming for a maximum of two hours per

day. Primary prevention focuses on preventing or reducing addiction through public awareness and guidance for at-risk groups. Secondary prevention focuses on early detection and diagnosis of addiction, while tertiary prevention aims to reduce residual effects and prevent relapse. Treatment approaches include breaking routines, training oneself, learning new skills, practicing physical exercises, planning activities, creating a social fabric of relationships, resisting the urge to sit in front of the internet, cognitive educational invasions, and relaxation skills training. Internet addicts should seek help from psychological specialists through diverse therapeutic programmes, group therapy programmes, relapse prevention, and rehabilitation [16].

### *Alienation and Cognitive Distortions*

H. M. Pontes and M. Macur [32] pointed out that excessive internet use can lead to behavioural addiction, characterised by preoccupation, mood instability, and recurring interpersonal conflicts. Social media addiction is a subtype of addiction, with symptoms manifesting in mood, cognition, physical and emotional responses, and personal and psychological problems. High addiction rates, especially to Facebook, have been observed among university students [32].

According to A. Özparlak and D. Karakaya, social alienation is a condition where an individual's separation from their social environment leads to a loss of self-awareness, leading to a desire to distance themselves from others and disconnect from reality. This can result in withdrawing and isolating from their surroundings, leading to a separate world that excludes others and keeps private details hidden. Excessive exposure to social media can lead to social alienation, as individuals seek to discover their identity and shape their personality through the values of their real society. However, when media dominates the person and shapes their ideas, electronic values become their primary motivator, leading to contradiction and a sense of normlessness [35].

H. M. Pontes and M. Macur noted that alienation is a complex and controversial concept that emphasises the psychological tension between approval and rejection, freedom and oppression, openness and closure, hope and despair, and the fall of humanity and attempts to transcend this fall or deviation. It has various meanings and functions depending on time, place, and philosophical thought. In general, it refers to an unhealthy and abnormal state for the alienated individual, describing a feeling of separation from the self, others, and the external world [32].

As mentioned by L. Milani, G. La Torre, M. Fiore et al., cultural alienation refers to an individual's detachment from their society's culture, rejection, and aversion to it. Political alienation is the feeling of being alienated from their government and political system, as individuals believe that politics and governance are controlled by others for the benefit of others. Psychological alienation is a broad concept referring to states where the unity of the personality is fragmented or weakened due to cultural and social processes within society. Social alienation is characterised by a state of disconnection from one's environment, leading to negative outcomes such as cultural estrangement, feelings of hopelessness, and states of tension and anxiety [31].

This research explores the domains of social alienation, including social isolation, loss of control, lack of belonging, indifference, and loss of meaning. Social alienation is a complex psychological phenomenon that involves the absence of a guiding goal, weak social norms, confusion in values, viewing life as meaningless and absurd, feeling alienated from humanity, rejecting societal obligations, losing belonging to beliefs, religion, or nation, and pursuing materialism. Factors leading to alienation among university students can be divided into three levels: societal, educational and university, and family and self.

H. M. Pontes and M. Macur highlighted societal factors, which include social, cultural, and political disintegration, deterioration of values, dependency,

classism, sectarianism, factionalism, and authoritarianism. University-level factors include the university inability to effectively fulfill its expected role in building an active and productive personality due to the type of education it offers, lack of trust, depth, continuity in the relationship between students and the university, traditional methods and approaches, distance of academic variables from daily life, lack of integration between education and society, issues like university textbook problems, underdeveloped laboratory facilities, shrinking positive student activities, reduced economic and social value of education, and lack of alignment between educational programmes and development plans [32].

Additionally, H. M. Pontes and M. Macur reported that family and self-level factors include a crisis of identity, role conflict, unemployment, dependence on the family, limited hopes for professional success, unmet needs, extremism, authoritarianism, and the inability to meet basic needs due to high living costs. To address these issues, principles should be based on a holistic view of human personality, focusing on the causes and factors that led to the problems rather than just the symptoms. Treatment methods should focus on understanding youth's true interests and essential needs, using positive methods to help them discover their identities and place in society [32].

L. Milani, G. La Torre, M. Fiore et al. [31] investigated the relationship between internet addiction and the quality of personal relationships among adolescents in Italy. It also aimed to explore the relationship between excessive Internet use and its impact on adolescents' relationship with their parents and their overall quality of daily life. The study relied on a sample of 98 adolescents, with ages ranging between 14–19 years. It also relied on the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and the Quality of Relationships Questionnaire (QRI), which consists of 36 items that measure the quality of personal relationships and the level of satisfaction with them. The results indicated that

excessive use of the internet negatively affects the quality of adolescents' personal relationships with their families and peers.

H. M. Pontes and M. Macur [32] investigated the risks of internet addiction among school students in Slovenia. The study focused on exploring individual and familial risk factors, such as family structure and social relationships, and their connection to internet addiction. The results showed a strong relationship between internet addiction and poor social interactions among adolescents. The study also highlighted that adolescents with strained relationships with their parents and low emotional satisfaction are more likely to suffer from internet addiction, particularly when they do not engage in organised school or extracurricular activities.

O. B. Babalola [33] examined the effect of gender and leisure time on internet addiction among adolescents and youth in Nigeria. The sample included secondary and university students from various schools and universities (public and private) in the southwestern part of the country. The study was conducted using a stratified random sampling method and included 1878 participants (48.2% male and 51.8% female), aged between 13–19 years. The results revealed that there were significant gender differences in internet addiction, with males exhibiting higher levels of addiction compared to females.

J. E. Shanks' [34] study examined the sensations of shame, contentment with social relationships, and cognitive distortions among young adults aged 18 to 25. The study involved 88 young individuals recruited via social media platforms and email connections. Self-report measures were used to assess the level of these components in participants, using before-and-after assessments to examine the effects of a psychoeducational intervention on learning about cognitive distortions on changes in levels of shame and cognitive distortions. Pearson's r tests were used to examine the connections between the variables, while paired t-tests were used to assess the effect of the psychoeducational intervention on levels of shame and cognitive distortions. The results of these

tests revealed a substantial positive association between shame and cognitive distortions in young people, as well as a negative relationship between cognitive distortions and relationships. No relationship was identified between degrees of shame and partnerships. The paired t-tests revealed substantial reductions in both cognitive distortions and levels of guilt following a short intervention centred on learning about cognitive distortions. The benefit of this study will involve how understanding about cognitive distortions might help individuals minimise guilt and possibly enhance relationships in young adults.

A. Özparlak and D. Karakaya [35] investigated the impact of cognitive distortions on internet addiction levels and activities. Data were gathered using a personal information form, the Internet Addiction Scale, and the Children's Negative Cognitive Error Questionnaire. The incidence of internet addiction among teenagers was determined to be 16.9%. Adolescents who use the internet for online gaming, pornographic websites, social media use and discussion, and aimless browsing have greater levels of internet addiction. Catastrophising, personalisation, and selective abstraction cognitive distortions account for 17.5% of the variation in internet addiction.

The findings revealed that online gaming, accessing pornographic websites, utilising and conversing on social media, and internet aimless surfing are all signs of internet addiction. Internet addiction and other internet-related behaviours are linked to cognitive distortions. Mental health nurses should assist teenagers become aware of their cognitive distortions and develop more functioning ideas.

**Methods**

***Study Population and Sample***

The study population consisted of all young university students in Al-Balqa Applied University, aged between 18–35 years. A sample of 784 young students responded to the link provided to them.

*Study Tools*

Three scales were developed and used to collect data. The cognitive distortions scale was developed by reviewing theoretical literature. It consists of 42 items representing 8 main areas of cognitive distortions. The scale was answered using a five-point Likert scale. All items are positive and indicate a single direction. The psychological alienation scale was developed by reviewing theoretical literature. It consists of 20 items measuring 5 domains. The scale was answered using a five-point Likert scale. The social media addiction scale was developed by reviewing theoretical literature. It consists of 18 items measuring the severity of social media usage, including compulsion, failure to stop, tolerance, relapse, and withdrawal. The scale was answered using a five-point Likert scale.

## Results and Discussion

To answer this the first question which states, "Is there a relationship between psychological alienation and social media addiction among individuals?", Pearson's correlation coefficient was used as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Correlation coefficients between psychological alienation and social media addiction

| Domain | Endurance | Failure to stop | Relapse | Withdrawal | Compulsion | Total social media score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nihilism | 0.312 | 0.299 | 0.267 | 0.223 | 0.228 | 0.290 |
| Irregularity | 0.271 | 0.305 | 0.246 | 0.211 | 0.218 | 0.278 |
| Loss of meaning | 0.229 | 0.263 | 0.179 | 0.070 | 0.134 | 0.176 |
| Helplessness | 0.182 | 0.258 | 0.121 | 0.048 | 0.103 | 0.146 |
| Social isolation | 0.292 | 0.312 | 0.270 | 0.294 | 0.248 | 0.316 |
| Rebellion | 0.287 | 0.299 | 0.286 | 0.301 | 0.257 | 0.308 |
| Total psychological alienation score | 0.263 | 0.285 | 0.166 | 0.180 | 0.191 | 0.241 |

The correlation coefficients in Table 1 show a positive relationship of varying strength between the domains of "psychological alienation" and "social

media addiction". The domain "nihilism" emerged as the most strongly correlated domain with social media addiction, recording a correlation coefficient of 0.290 with the total addiction score, and its highest correlation was with the "endurance" domain (0.312). This suggests that individuals who feel their lives lack purpose tend to overuse social media, possibly as a means of escaping feelings of emptiness or meaninglessness.

The irregularity domain showed relatively high correlation coefficients, especially with "failure to stop" (0.305). This indicates that instability or lack of order in one's life is associated with an inability to control social media use, which may be interpreted as a form of psychological or behavioural dependence on these platforms. The domain "loss of meaning" showed a moderate to weak correlation with addiction components, with the highest correlation being with the domain "failure to stop" (0.263) and the lowest with "withdrawal" (0.070). This implies that loss of meaning may moderately drive excessive social media use, but it is not one of the strongest predictors of addictive behaviour.

The "helplessness" domain had the weakest correlations across all components, not exceeding 0.258. This suggests that feelings of helplessness are not strongly linked to social media addiction, and that other variables may play a more significant role in explaining the relationship. The "social isolation" domain showed relatively strong correlations, particularly with "Withdrawal" (0.294) and the total addiction score (0.316). This indicates that individuals who feel socially isolated may turn to social media as a substitute for real-life relationships, which could lead to addiction. The rebellion domain also showed relatively high correlations with most components, especially "withdrawal" (0.301) and the total score (0.308). This reflects that individuals inclined to rebel against societal or familial norms may use social media as a platform for self-expression outside the traditional social framework.

The total psychological alienation score recorded its highest correlation with "failure to stop" domain (0.285), followed by "endurance" domain (0.263),

suggesting that a general sense of alienation is moderately associated with social media addiction. These results indicate a moderate relationship between some domains of psychological alienation – especially nihilism, social isolation, and rebellion – and social media addiction, reflecting the role of these platforms in filling emotional and social voids among youth. Meanwhile, the relationship was weak for domains such as helplessness and loss of meaning, indicating that not all forms of alienation directly lead to addictive behaviour. These findings highlight the importance of reinforcing identity, meaning, and social belonging as protective factors against digital behavioural addiction.

To answer the second question which states, "Is there a relationship between cognitive distortions and social media addiction?", Pearson's correlation coefficient was used as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation coefficients between cognitive distortions and social media addiction

| Correlation between distortions and social media | Endurance | Failure to stop | Relapse | Withdrawal | Compulsion | Total social media score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Selective abstraction | 0.142 | 0.127 | 0.116 | 0.105 | 0.089 | 0.128 |
| Personalisation and blame | 0.176 | 0.166 | 0.158 | 0.159 | 0.127 | 0.170 |
| Emotional reasoning | 0.132 | 0.138 | 0.143 | 0.138 | 0.068 | 0.129 |
| Neglecting positives | 0.138 | 0.110 | 0.127 | 0.106 | 0.083 | 0.128 |
| Dichotomous thinking | 0.149 | 0.154 | 0.133 | 0.121 | 0.110 | 0.138 |
| Must statements | 0.153 | 0.148 | 0.138 | 0.106 | 0.074 | 0.131 |
| Jumping to conclusions | 0.187 | 0.154 | 0.181 | 0.180 | 0.132 | 0.181 |
| Catastrophic thinking | 0.143 | 0.159 | 0.143 | 0.121 | 0.127 | 0.148 |
| Overgeneralisation and minimisation | 0.224 | 0.230 | 0.202 | 0.197 | 0.182 | 0.225 |
| Total cognitive distortions score | 0.170 | 0.165 | 0.165 | 0.149 | 0.111 | 0.164 |

The correlation coefficients in Table 2 reveal weak to moderate positive relationships between domains of cognitive distortions and components of social media addiction, indicating that the more cognitive distortions an individual has, the higher their likelihood of developing addictive behaviours toward social media. The domain of vergeneralisation and minimisation recorded the highest correlations with all addiction domains, with the strongest

being with "failure to stop" domain (0.230), followed by the total addiction score (0.225). Individuals who generalise outcomes or downplay positive aspects are more likely to fall into compulsive patterns of social media use, as their thinking style leads to persistent engagement without recognising real-world consequences or achievements.

The domain "jumping to conclusions" showed relatively high correlations, especially with "relapse" domain (0.181), "withdrawal" domain (0.180), and the total score (0.181). This suggests that individuals who interpret situations quickly and without sufficient evidence may overuse social media as an impulsive or inaccurate reaction to perceived situations.

The domain "dichotomous thinking" correlations were moderate, with the highest value with "failure to stop" domain (0.154) and the total score (0.138). Black-and-white thinking or "all-or-nothing" mentality can lead to a rigid addiction pattern, where the individual may see social media as the only outlet for interaction or enjoyment.

Personalisation and blame domain was moderately associated with most addiction domains, with the highest correlation with "endurance" domain (0.176) and the total score (0.170). Those who irrationally blame themselves or others may turn to social media as a form of escape or to validate their negative emotions.

The "catastrophic thinking" domain had notable correlations with "Failure to Stop" (0.159) and the total score (0.148). Individuals who expect the worst-case scenarios may use social media to alleviate anxiety or as a mental distraction. Must statements domain showed moderate correlations, mainly with "endurance" (0.153) and the total score (0.131). Thinking in terms of "musts" and "shoulds" creates internal pressure, possibly driving individuals to use social media as a form of relief. Emotional reasoning domain had relatively weak correlations across domains, with the lowest value with "compulsion" (0.068). Relying on emotions as evidence of reality is not a strong predictor of

social media addiction, though a relationship still exists. Disqualifying the positive domain showed relatively low correlations with addiction, the highest being with "endurance" (0.138). Ignoring achievements or positive aspects hinders appreciation of healthier alternatives, leading to excessive digital engagement.

Overall cognitive distortions index had a moderate overall relationship, with the highest correlation being with "endurance" (0.170), followed by "failure to stop" (0.165), and the lowest with "compulsion" (0.111). There is a moderate positive relationship suggesting that increased cognitive distortions predict a greater tendency toward social media addiction, particularly in cases of psychological endurance and impaired self-control.

The findings indicate that certain distorted thinking patterns (like overgeneralisation, hasty judgment, and blame) are influential psychological factors contributing to the tendency toward social media addiction. These correlations highlight the significance of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as an effective tool to modify irrational thinking patterns and prevent or treat behavioural addictions among youth.

To answer the third question which states, "Are there statistically significant differences in psychological alienation, social media addiction, and cognitive distortions according to the age group of respondents?", the means and standard deviations for cognitive distortions, social media addiction, and psychological alienation were calculated across different age groups of the respondents. It was found that there were apparent differences in the means for cognitive distortions, social media addiction, and psychological alienation based on age group. To determine whether these differences were statistically significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level, one-way ANOVA was calculated for the performance on cognitive distortions, social media addiction, and psychological alienation across age groups as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

One-way ANOVA for means on cognitive distortions, social media addiction, and psychological alienation by age group

| Measure | Source of variance | Sum of squares | Degrees of freedom | Mean square | F-value | Sign. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cognitive distortions | Between groups | 2.74 | 212 | 1.37 | 2.19 | 0.17 |
| | Within groups | 3.42 | 257 | 0.69 | | |
| | Total | 3.44 | 258 | | | |
| Social media addiction | Between groups | 2.89 | 232 | 1.45 | 2.62 | 0.11 |
| | Within groups | 284.12 | 258 | 0.62 | | |
| | Total | 287.01 | 259 | | | |
| Psychological alienation | Between groups | 5.81 | 233 | 2.91 | 9.38 | 0.00 |
| | Within groups | 158.46 | 246 | 0.32 | | |
| | Total | 164.27 | 243 | | | |

The One-Way ANOVA in this table highlights the differences among age groups across three variables: cognitive distortions, social media addiction, and psychological alienation. There are no statistically significant differences in cognitive distortions among age groups. This means distorted thinking patterns such as overgeneralisation or jumping to conclusions do not vary with age among the participants. It is likely that cognitive distortions are more closely tied to stable cognitive or personality traits rather than age, at least within the age range represented in this study.

No statistically significant differences were found between age groups regarding the level of social media addiction. This may suggest that excessive use of social media is prevalent across all youth age segments, regardless of minor age differences, especially considering the widespread integration of technology into daily life. There are statistically significant differences between age groups in psychological alienation, making this variable distinct from the previous two. The result suggests that age influences the experience of psychological alienation, with younger individuals possibly being more prone to feelings of alienation due to limited real-life social interaction or an unclear self-identity, as compared to those at more stable life stages.

These findings imply that psychological alienation may be more sensitive to age-related developmental changes, whereas cognitive and behavioural addiction may be more influenced by personality traits or environmental factors.

It is recommended to give special attention to younger age groups when designing psychological interventions aimed at reducing alienation, particularly given the widespread use of technology and digital social isolation. To determine the sources of these differences, a post-hoc analysis using the Scheffé test was performed as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Scheffé test for determining differences in psychological alienation among youth based on age group

| Measure | Age group 18-25 years | Age group 26-35 years | Difference | Sign. | Difference | Sign. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological Alienation | 18–25 years | 0.055 | 0.83 | 0.273* | 0.00 | 0.270* |
| | 26–35 years | - | - | 0.218* | 0.00 | 0.234* |

Psychological alienation was highest among the 18–25 age group. This group is often in a transitional phase between adolescence and adulthood – a stage marked by instability, identity exploration, and academic and social pressures. It is therefore natural for them to be more prone to feelings of confusion, social detachment, or lack of purpose and meaning.

Relative decline in alienation for the 26–35 age group. This age stage is typically characterised by the onset of professional and family stability, which contributes to reduced feelings of isolation or detachment from oneself or others, despite the persistence of some professional and social challenges. Psychological alienation is significantly higher among youth aged 18–25 compared to older age groups. This finding highlights the importance of providing targeted psychological and community support programmes for young people in this age group, including: career counseling, psychological guidance, identity development, and the strengthening of real-life social bonds. The results also reflect the impact of rapid changes during this life stage on mental health, which calls for direct educational and community-level interventions. To determine whether these differences were statistically significant at ($\alpha = 0.05$), one-way ANOVA was conducted as presented in Table 5.

Table 5

One-way ANOVA for averages of cognitive distortions, social media addiction, and psychological alienation based on educational level

| Measure | Source of variance | Sum of squares | Degrees of freedom | Mean square | F-value | Sign. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological alienation | Between groups | 0.71 | 211 | 0.24 | 0.38 | 0.86 |
| | Within groups | 319.45 | 455 | 0.71 | | |
| | Total | 320.16 | 445 | | | |
| Cognitive distortions | Between groups | 2.84 | 277 | 0.95 | 1.67 | 0.21 |
| | Within groups | 279.02 | 455 | 0.62 | | |
| | Total | 281.86 | 448 | | | |
| Social media addiction | Between groups | 1.08 | 244 | 0.36 | 1.11 | 0.43 |
| | Within groups | 159.10 | 453 | 0.35 | | |
| | Total | 160.18 | 446 | | | |

The results of the one-way ANOVA statistical test indicate a comparison of the means of psychological alienation, cognitive distortions, and social media addiction according to educational level. There are no statistically significant differences in levels of psychological alienation based on educational level. This suggests that the feeling of alienation is not directly linked to education level, and that other factors (such as age, marital status, psychological or social conditions) may play a more prominent role in shaping this experience.

No statistically significant differences were found among individuals from different educational levels in the means of cognitive distortions. Distorted or irrational thinking (such as overgeneralisation or black-and-white thinking) appears to be prevalent regardless of education level, possibly because these patterns are formed early in life and are more influenced by upbringing than formal education.

No significant differences were observed in levels of social media addiction based on educational attainment. This implies that addiction to social media is not strongly influenced by academic achievement, but rather may be

linked to other factors such as free time, psychological stress, or daily routine – factors that may be shared across educational levels.

None of the three variables (psychological alienation, cognitive distortions, social media addiction) showed statistically significant differences based on educational level. This indicates that education alone is not a sufficient indicator for explaining differences in these psychological and behavioural aspects. It is recommended to explore other variables such as age, gender, marital status, economic background, or overall mental health for more accurate explanations. To determine whether these differences were statistically significant at ($\alpha = 0.05$), one-way ANOVA was conducted as presented in Table 6.

Table 6

One-way ANOVA for averages of cognitive distortions, social media addiction, and psychological alienation based on marital status approximately

| Measure | Source of variance | Sum of squares | Degrees of freedom | Mean square | F-value | Significance level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological alienation | Between groups | 25.42 | 1 | 12.71 | 21.03 | 0.00 |
| | Within groups | 294.11 | 244 | 0.66 | | |
| | Total | 319.53 | 245 | | | |
| Social media addiction | Between groups | 34.29 | 1 | 17.14 | 34.67 | 0.00 |
| | Within groups | 247.90 | 248 | 0.56 | | |
| | Total | 282.19 | 249 | | | |
| Cognitive distortions | Between groups | 4.78 | 2 | 2.39 | 7.63 | 0.00 |
| | Within groups | 154.36 | 242 | 0.32 | | |
| | Total | 159.14 | 244 | | | |

The results of the one-way ANOVA test examine differences in psychological alienation, cognitive distortions, and social media addiction based on marital status (married, single). There are statistically significant differences in psychological alienation based on marital status. The results indicate that unmarried individuals (singles, divorced, widowed) experience higher levels of psychological alienation compared to those who are married. This may be attributed to the lack of emotional and social support typically found in marital relationships, which leaves individuals more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness and psychological marginalisation.

There are significant differences in cognitive distortions depending on marital status. Unmarried individuals, especially those who are divorced or widowed, may be more prone to cognitive distortions such as catastrophic thinking or negative generalisation due to challenging emotional experiences or social isolation, leading to unrealistic or pessimistic thought patterns. Differences in social media addiction according to marital status are also statistically significant. The findings suggest that unmarried individuals experience higher levels of social media addiction. This may be explained by their increased reliance on the internet to meet emotional and social needs in the absence of a partner or family support, which heightens the risk of addiction.

Marital status plays a significant role in shaping individuals' psychological, cognitive, and behavioural health. Unmarried individuals are more prone to feelings of alienation. They are more involved in distorted thinking patterns. They show higher levels of social media addiction. It is essential to design psychological and social support programmes targeting vulnerable groups (singles, divorced, widowed) to reduce the effects of alienation and both cognitive and digital addiction. To determine the sources of these differences, Scheffé's post hoc test was conducted as displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Scheffé test for determining differences in psychological alienation among youth based on marital status

| Measure | Category | Single | Married | Difference | Sign. |
|---------|----------|--------|---------|------------|-------|
| Social media addiction | Married | 0.29 | 0.26 | 0.42 | 0.80 |
| | Single | - | - | 0.75 | 0.79 |
| Psychological alienation | Married | -0.18 | 0.63 | 0.61 | 0.77 |
| | Single | - | - | 0.77 | 0.79 |
| | Married | 0.30 | 0.07 | 0.28 | 0.78 |
| Cognitive distortions | Single | - | - | -0.03 | 0.75 |

Scheffé test results indicate an attempt to identify differences in psychological alienation, social media addiction, and cognitive distortions among youth based on marital status (single, married). The differences among

the groups (single, married) in psychological alienation were not statistically significant (Sign. > 0.05), with values ranging from 0.61 to 0.79. Although ANOVA previously indicated significant differences in psychological alienation based on marital status, the Scheffé test did not reveal significant pairwise differences, suggesting that overall differences may stem from a general effect rather than clear-cut pairwise disparities.

The effect may be cumulative or gradual, such that differences appear in overall means, but fail to reach significance in pairwise comparisons due to internal variance or proximity of values between groups. All differences among the three groups (single, married) were not significant (Sign. > 0.75). No significant differences were found in levels of social media addiction based on marital status in pairwise comparisons. Social media may be widely used among all groups regardless of marital status, which could explain the similarity in addiction scores. This reflects the role of technology as a unifying source of social interaction amid weak real-world alternatives.

The difference between singles and married individuals in cognitive distortions was not significant (Sign. = 0.75). No statistically significant differences were found between singles and married individuals regarding cognitive distortions. It is possible that internal or personality-related psychological factors – such as mood traits or early experiences – have a greater influence on distorted thinking than marital status itself, which explains the similar levels.

Although the overall ANOVA showed significant differences based on marital status, the Scheffé test did not confirm clear pairwise differences between the groups in any of the three variables. This suggests that overall differences may be due to non-uniform distribution or high internal variance, rather than strong, direct differences between specific groups.

The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between cognitive distortions and social media addiction. This finding is consistent with the

studies of L. Milani, G. La Torre, M. Fiore et al. [31] and H. M. Pontes M. Macur [32], but it was clear in these studies that loneliness as a mediating factor affects the relationship. The current study clarified this by indicating a direct relationship between these variables. The direction of the relationship is not yet specified, meaning it is unclear which variable rises first and which follows, but this significant relationship emphasises the importance of addressing and modifying these cognitive distortions.

The results indicate a positive correlation between psychological alienation and addiction to social media sites. This aligns with the studies of O. B. Babalola [33] and J. E. Shanks [34], who also found a positive correlation between psychological alienation and social media addiction among young people. This relationship is logical, as social media addiction increases the individual's feelings of loneliness and isolation from the real world and social surroundings, which in turn leads to feelings of alienation. On the other hand, the reverse may also be true, where the individual's feeling of alienation from their reality leads them to seek out a virtual community through these platforms as compensation for the alienation they experience.

The results in this regard show no significant differences across different age groups concerning cognitive distortions and social media addiction, even though there were apparent differences in the means. However, these differences were not statistically significant. The results did show significant differences in psychological alienation across age groups, with individuals aged 18–25 showing higher levels of psychological alienation compared to those aged 26–35. This may be explained by the fact that older age groups tend to have greater psychological, familial, and social stability, and life experiences help individuals better cope with feelings of alienation.

The results show that although there were apparent differences in the means across educational levels, there were no significant statistical differences regarding the study variables among the different educational levels. Education

does not appear to play a significant role in these variables. This may be because these variables have a general impact independent of the level of education, and individuals across all educational levels may not have the protective background to manage feelings of alienation or the cognitive distortions associated with social media addiction.

The results indicate that there were no significant differences between the sample members concerning cognitive distortions and social media addiction based on marital status. However, significant differences were found in psychological alienation based on marital status, with these differences being statistically significant. The results showed that married individuals reported lower levels of alienation and fewer cognitive distortions, and were less addicted to social media. In contrast, unmarried, divorced, and widowed individuals experienced greater alienation and higher levels of cognitive distortions and social media addiction. This could be explained by the fact that married individuals tend to have more emotional and social stability, allowing them to seek support from their spouse when experiencing loneliness or psychological distress. Moreover, single, divorced, or widowed individuals may experience more free time and fewer family responsibilities, leading them to seek solace in social media platforms.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The results have shown that there is statistically significant relationship between psychological alienation and social media addiction, indicating that individuals who exhibit addictive behaviours toward these platforms tend to experience higher levels of detachment from their social environment. This highlights the role of these platforms in exacerbating, rather than alleviating, feelings of separation. The findings also revealed a reciprocal relationship between psychological alienation and cognitive distortions, whereby each reinforces the other, creating a cycle of negative behaviours and emotions that

increase the likelihood of developing behavioural addiction. Furthermore, the results emphasised that the use of social media cannot be isolated from the psychological and social variables that influence youth, who are particularly sensitive to feelings of belonging and self-acceptance.

The study supports important psychological theories, such as cognitive-behavioural theory, which emphasises the role of distorted thoughts in shaping negative behaviours, as well as alienation theory, which explains how psychological and social factors may lead to a person's disconnection from self and society. The study highlights the need to reconsider explanatory models of addiction to include the complex interaction between distorted cognition and feelings of alienation, particularly in modern digital contexts. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how behavioural addiction develops – not only through external stimuli but also through the individual's underlying cognitive structures – making cognitive factors an effective entry point for prevention and treatment.

These results yield a number of recommendations and practical implications that can contribute to enhancing users' psychological and social well-being. Chief among them is the need for psychological counselors in educational institutions to implement cognitive-behavioural therapy programmes that address cognitive distortions and help individuals reshape negative thought patterns. The findings also underscore the need for awareness campaigns to highlight the dangers of excessive social media use and its hidden effects on mental health, such as the deterioration of social relationships, feelings of loneliness, and decreased self-esteem.

The results may serve as a valuable reference for educators and trainers in designing educational and training programmes that aim to enhance social skills and critical thinking among young people and strengthen their psychological resilience against the effects of the digital world. Accordingly, the study recommends the development of alternative or complementary social platforms that promote real-life interaction and foster feelings of acceptance and

belonging through positive digital tools, potentially reducing overreliance on existing platforms.

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