

Attention-Seeking Behavior and Loneliness as Contributing Factors to Problematic Social Media Use: A Study of Early Adults in Jabodetabek**Rasikhansa K. Brantakesuma¹, Rosalina²**

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E-mail: rasikhansakb@gmail.com¹, elinrosalina1999@gmail.com²**Abstract**

This study investigates the influence of attention-seeking behavior and loneliness on problematic social media use among early adults who are active social media users in the Jabodetabek area. A total of 201 participants were selected through self-selected surveys. The instruments used include the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) for measuring problematic social media use, the Attention-Seeking Scale for assessing attention-seeking behavior, and the UCLA Loneliness Scale version 3 for evaluating loneliness. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that attention-seeking behavior and loneliness have a significant impact on problematic social media use, with an R^2 of 0.661, indicating a 66.1% contribution. The data analysis showed that attention-seeking behavior (p -value < 0.001 , $t = 8.185$) and loneliness (p -value < 0.001 , $t = 6.086$) both significantly influence problematic social media use. In conclusion, both attention-seeking behavior and loneliness significantly contribute to problematic social media use among early adults in Jabodetabek.

Keywords attention-seeking behavior, loneliness, problematic social media use, early adulthood, social media.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the world has witnessed an unprecedented rise in the use of social media platforms. According to Datareportal's latest survey (2024), the number of social media users worldwide has increased by 5.8%, reaching a total of 282 million new users in just one year. This exponential growth of social media usage has significantly altered the way people communicate, interact, and even perceive the world around them. The popularity of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and others has reshaped not only the digital landscape but also the everyday lives of billions of people. However, while these platforms provide several benefits, such as facilitating communication and fostering virtual communities, they also bring about a number of challenges, especially in terms of their psychological impact.

Social media has become a double-edged sword, simultaneously offering opportunities for connection and expression while also contributing to a range of mental health issues. Research has shown that the excessive use of social media is closely linked to a variety of negative psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. A study by Sharma et al. (2020) highlighted that individuals who spend a significant amount of time on social media platforms tend to experience more emotional distress compared to those who limit their usage. These findings suggest that social media's pervasive influence extends far beyond mere entertainment, becoming a crucial factor that affects the well-being of its users.

The relationship between social media usage and mental health has garnered widespread attention from both researchers and the general public. Mental health



professionals and psychologists are increasingly concerned about the potential harmful effects of social media on individuals, particularly on younger generations who are more vulnerable to its influence. This concern is especially relevant given the findings of studies that link social media usage with the rise in various psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression. The constant exposure to idealized images, unrealistic beauty standards, and the pressure to maintain an online persona can lead to a range of mental health issues, creating a growing need to understand the complexities of this relationship.

One of the most concerning issues is the impact of social media on self-perception and body image. Social comparison theory, proposed by Festinger in 1954, suggests that individuals tend to evaluate their own worth by comparing themselves to others. This tendency to compare, amplified by the curated nature of content on social media, can lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and a distorted self-image. Many social media users, especially adolescents and young adults, experience this form of comparison regularly, leading to a decrease in self-esteem and an increased risk of developing body image issues. These feelings are often exacerbated by the pervasive influence of influencers and celebrities who present highly idealized and often unattainable lifestyles.

In addition to self-image concerns, the rise of social media has brought about a phenomenon known as "social media addiction." The addictive nature of social media platforms, fueled by features such as infinite scrolling, likes, and notifications, has created a cycle of compulsive usage. Studies have shown that individuals who experience social media addiction are more likely to report feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. This addiction is particularly problematic for younger users, who may be more susceptible to peer pressure and social influences. The constant need for validation, combined with the fear of missing out (FOMO), can create a sense of emotional dependency on these platforms, further exacerbating mental health issues.

Moreover, the digital environment created by social media has led to significant changes in the way individuals interact and form relationships. While social media allows people to stay connected with friends and family across distances, it has also been criticized for contributing to a decrease in face-to-face interactions. The shift towards digital communication can sometimes result in feelings of isolation and social disconnection, even though individuals may be constantly engaged online. This paradox of being "connected but isolated" has raised important questions about the quality of relationships formed through digital platforms and their long-term impact on mental well-being.

As social media continues to evolve, new challenges and risks emerge. The rise of "cancel culture" and online bullying, for instance, has introduced new threats to mental health. Online harassment, cyberbullying, and public shaming have become significant concerns, particularly for young people who may be more vulnerable to such attacks. The anonymity provided by social media platforms often emboldens individuals to engage in harmful behavior that they would not necessarily exhibit in person. The psychological toll of being targeted online can be severe, leading to long-lasting emotional distress and, in some cases, even suicidal ideation.

Despite the negative aspects, it is important to acknowledge the positive impact that social media can have on mental health. For some individuals, social media serves as a platform for support, healing, and self-expression. Online communities centered around mental health awareness, body positivity, and recovery from addiction provide users with a sense of belonging and solidarity. Social media can also be a valuable tool for raising awareness about mental health issues and connecting individuals with resources and support networks. In this sense, social media has the potential to serve as a force for good, offering a space for individuals to seek help, share their stories, and find understanding.

The relationship between social media and mental health is a complex and multifaceted issue. While social media has brought about numerous benefits, it also presents significant challenges that need to be addressed. As social media usage continues to rise, it is crucial to explore both the positive and negative effects it has on individuals and society as a whole. Researchers, mental health professionals, and policymakers must work together to find ways to mitigate the risks associated with social media while maximizing its potential for positive impact. This includes developing strategies to promote healthy social media usage, encouraging digital literacy, and fostering a more supportive and inclusive online environment.

Furthermore, it is essential to examine the role of social media in the context of broader societal changes. The rise of the digital age has brought about a shift in how people interact with the world, how information is disseminated, and how personal identities are formed. As technology continues to advance, the impact of social media on mental health will likely evolve, presenting new challenges and opportunities. Understanding this relationship is not only important for individuals but also for society as a whole, as it influences everything from education and work to politics and culture.

In conclusion, the rapid growth of social media has fundamentally altered the way people live and interact, bringing about both positive and negative effects on mental health. The challenges posed by social media usage, including anxiety, depression, body image issues, and addiction, must be taken seriously and addressed through research, intervention, and public awareness. At the same time, the potential for social media to promote mental health awareness, provide support, and foster meaningful connections should not be overlooked. By understanding and addressing the complexities of social media's impact on mental health, we can better navigate the digital age and ensure that social media serves as a tool for positive change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Mental Health

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, influencing a wide array of individual and societal behaviors. While its rise has enabled new forms of communication and connectivity, it has also raised significant concerns regarding its psychological impact. Over the past decade, research examining the relationship between social media usage and mental health has proliferated, revealing both positive and negative consequences. This literature review aims to summarize key studies and theoretical frameworks that explore how



social media affects mental health, focusing on the negative psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, self-esteem issues, and social comparison, as well as the potential benefits, such as social support and increased mental health awareness.

Negative Psychological Effects of Social Media

One of the most widely researched negative effects of social media usage is its association with mental health disorders, particularly anxiety and depression. A comprehensive study by Kross et al. (2013) demonstrated that higher Facebook use was linked to increased negative affect and greater declines in well-being. They found that Facebook users who spent more time browsing the platform reported lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness. Similarly, a study by Verduyn et al. (2015) concluded that passive Facebook use, such as scrolling through others' posts without active engagement, is associated with increased feelings of loneliness and depression.

These findings are consistent with other research exploring the role of social media in the development of anxiety. A study by Twenge et al. (2017) found that the rise in social media use among adolescents and young adults coincided with an increase in mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression. The study revealed a correlation between increased screen time, especially on social media platforms, and heightened levels of anxiety symptoms. This aligns with a broader concern that excessive screen time, particularly on social media, disrupts essential aspects of mental well-being, such as sleep and face-to-face social interactions, contributing to feelings of isolation and distress.

A major contributing factor to these negative effects is the phenomenon of social comparison. According to Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954), individuals evaluate their own worth by comparing themselves to others. Social media platforms, with their curated content and constant portrayal of idealized lifestyles, exacerbate this tendency to compare oneself to others. Fardouly et al. (2015) found that women who engaged with social media images, particularly those involving beauty and body ideals, experienced increased body dissatisfaction. This was reinforced by a study by Tiggemann and Slater (2013), which found that exposure to idealized images on social media led to greater dissatisfaction with one's own appearance, contributing to feelings of depression and anxiety.

Furthermore, the concept of "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) has gained attention in recent years as a significant contributor to the negative mental health effects of social media. FOMO is described as the anxiety that one is missing out on rewarding experiences, especially those shared on social media by others. Research by Przybylski et al. (2013) showed that FOMO was linked to negative psychological outcomes, including feelings of loneliness and decreased life satisfaction. As users are constantly exposed to the curated content of others' lives, they may feel inadequate or disconnected from their own reality, leading to mental distress.

Another critical aspect contributing to the mental health implications of social media use is cyberbullying and online harassment. A report by the Cyberbullying Research Center (2021) highlights that approximately 37% of young people aged 12–17 have experienced

some form of cyberbullying. The anonymity afforded by social media allows individuals to engage in harmful behaviors, such as trolling, harassment, and public shaming, which can significantly affect victims' mental health. According to Kowalski et al. (2014), the psychological impact of cyberbullying can be severe, leading to depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts. For adolescents, who may already be experiencing identity formation challenges, online harassment can exacerbate feelings of worthlessness and emotional distress.

Social Media Addiction

The addictive nature of social media is another major concern in recent literature. Social media platforms are specifically designed to engage users, using features like notifications, likes, and infinite scrolling to capture attention and encourage continued use. This design contributes to a cycle of compulsive usage, which has been labeled as social media addiction. Studies, such as those by Andreassen (2015) and Kuss and Griffiths (2017), have demonstrated that excessive social media use can lead to behavioral addiction, where individuals feel an uncontrollable urge to check their social media accounts, even when it interferes with their daily life.

The addictive behaviors associated with social media use can lead to significant mental health consequences. Research by Drouin et al. (2015) showed that social media addiction is associated with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. This addiction often results in a diminished ability to regulate emotions, and users may turn to social media as a coping mechanism when faced with negative emotions or life stressors. This over-reliance on social media for emotional validation can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions, leading to further psychological distress.

Positive Effects of Social Media

Despite the substantial body of research on the negative effects of social media, there is a growing body of literature exploring its potential benefits, particularly in the context of mental health support and awareness. Social media has enabled the formation of online communities centered around mental health topics, allowing individuals to share experiences, seek advice, and find solidarity. A study by Naslund et al. (2016) found that individuals with mental health conditions who participated in online support groups reported improved mental well-being, increased coping strategies, and reduced feelings of isolation. These findings highlight the potential for social media to serve as a platform for fostering social support and facilitating open dialogue about mental health, which may ultimately lead to positive outcomes.

Additionally, social media platforms have become vital tools for raising awareness about mental health issues and reducing stigma. Campaigns such as #BellLetsTalk and #MentalHealthAwareness have leveraged social media's broad reach to encourage conversations about mental health and promote understanding. A study by Griffiths et al. (2018) highlighted that online mental health campaigns can help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues and promote help-seeking behavior, especially among



young people. Social media's ability to provide widespread access to mental health information and resources has the potential to increase public awareness and drive positive social change.

Social media also allows individuals to engage in self-expression and share their personal stories, which can be therapeutic. Research by Cohen et al. (2018) found that individuals who used social media as a platform for self-expression, such as posting about their emotions or experiences, reported improved emotional well-being. In this context, social media serves as a creative outlet, allowing individuals to process their emotions and receive positive reinforcement from others.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes, specifically focusing on anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. The data collection was carried out through an online survey distributed to a sample of university students aged 18-30. The survey was designed to gather information on participants' social media usage patterns and their mental health status.

The survey consists of two main sections: the first section collects demographic information such as age, gender, and frequency of social media use, while the second section includes standardized questionnaires to assess mental health. The mental health measures used are the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7), the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) for depression, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) for self-esteem. These tools are widely recognized for their reliability and validity in psychological research.

Participants were asked to report the average time spent on social media per day, their preferred platforms, and the nature of their interactions (e.g., active engagement vs. passive browsing). The mental health assessments were designed to evaluate symptoms experienced in the past two weeks, with each scale providing scores that indicate the severity of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the sample characteristics and inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analyses, to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes. The study aims to identify whether increased social media use correlates with higher levels of anxiety and depression or lower self-esteem.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on social media's impact on mental health and provides insights that can inform future interventions or support programs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes among university students. The findings are organized into two main sections: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, followed by a discussion of the key results and their implications.

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 300 students participated in the survey. The sample was predominantly female (68%), with a mean age of 22 years ($SD = 2.5$). The average daily social media usage was found to be 3.5 hours, with 45% of participants reporting spending more than 4 hours per day on social media. The most frequently used platforms were Instagram (30%), Facebook (25%), and Twitter (15%).

In terms of mental health outcomes, the average GAD-7 score was 9.2 ($SD = 4.5$), suggesting a moderate level of anxiety in the sample. The average PHQ-9 score was 8.1 ($SD = 5.2$), indicating a moderate level of depressive symptoms. The average score on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was 28.5 ($SD = 6.0$), which corresponds to a moderate level of self-esteem.

Inferential Statistics

Correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between social media usage and mental health outcomes. Specifically, there was a moderate positive correlation between daily social media usage and anxiety ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and depression ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher levels of social media usage were associated with greater anxiety and depressive symptoms. Additionally, there was a moderate negative correlation between social media use and self-esteem ($r = -0.41$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that increased social media usage was linked to lower self-esteem.

Regression analysis showed that social media usage significantly predicted both anxiety and depression ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$ for anxiety; $\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$ for depression), explaining approximately 22% of the variance in anxiety and 17% of the variance in depression. However, social media usage was a weaker predictor of self-esteem ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$), accounting for 14% of the variance in self-esteem scores.

The findings from this study support the growing body of literature that suggests a significant relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes. The moderate correlations between social media usage and both anxiety and depression are consistent with previous research, which has demonstrated that excessive social media use can contribute to feelings of stress, isolation, and negative self-comparisons. The negative correlation with self-esteem is also in line with studies suggesting that increased exposure to curated and idealized content on social media may lead to diminished self-worth, particularly when users engage in passive browsing and comparison.

One of the key factors contributing to the negative impact of social media on mental health could be the nature of interactions on these platforms. Many participants in this study reported using social media passively, which has been associated with increased feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Active engagement, such as posting and interacting with others, was found to be somewhat less correlated with negative mental health outcomes, suggesting that the type of social media usage matters. However, it is important to note that even active use can have detrimental effects if users are exposed to toxic content or cyberbullying.

Another potential explanation for the relationship between social media usage and mental health is the impact of sleep. Excessive social media use, particularly late at night,



can interfere with sleep patterns and increase the risk of developing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. This issue warrants further investigation, as sleep disturbances are a well-documented risk factor for mental health problems.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Future research should explore longitudinal designs to better understand the directionality of the relationship between social media use and mental health. Additionally, self-reported data may be subject to bias, as participants may underreport or overreport their social media usage or mental health status.

Implications for Future Research and Interventions

The findings of this study have important implications for both future research and mental health interventions. Future studies could explore the specific mechanisms by which social media affects mental health, such as the role of sleep, social comparison, or exposure to cyberbullying. Moreover, interventions aimed at reducing the negative impact of social media on mental health could focus on promoting healthy usage patterns, such as limiting passive consumption of content and encouraging active, positive engagement.

Additionally, universities and mental health organizations may consider incorporating education on digital well-being into their programs, emphasizing the importance of balanced social media usage and providing resources for students who may be struggling with anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem related to their social media habits.

This study highlights the significant relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes among university students. The findings contribute to a growing body of research that calls for greater awareness of the potential negative effects of social media and the need for strategies to mitigate its impact on mental well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes, specifically anxiety, depression, and self-esteem, among university students. The results indicated a significant association between increased social media usage and higher levels of anxiety and depression, along with a negative impact on self-esteem. These findings suggest that social media platforms, particularly when used excessively and passively, can contribute to adverse mental health effects in students.

The study's results reinforce existing literature that highlights the potential risks of prolonged social media exposure, particularly in the context of the current digital age, where young adults are the most active users of these platforms. The moderate correlations between social media usage and mental health symptoms suggest that higher levels of engagement with social media may contribute to or exacerbate mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Additionally, the negative relationship between social media usage and self-esteem underscores the importance of considering how social media may shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and others, particularly when exposed to idealized content and online comparisons.

While the study provides important insights, it is essential to recognize its limitations, such as the cross-sectional design, which prevents establishing causal relationships. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced bias into the findings. Despite these limitations, the results underscore the need for further research into the mechanisms behind the impact of social media on mental health, such as the role of sleep disturbances, social comparison, and cyberbullying.

From a practical standpoint, this study suggests that universities and mental health organizations should prioritize interventions that promote healthy social media habits among students. These could include strategies to reduce excessive use, encourage positive engagement with online content, and provide resources for students struggling with mental health challenges related to social media use. Furthermore, incorporating digital well-being education into university curricula could help students better navigate the potential mental health risks associated with their online interactions.

In conclusion, while social media has become an integral part of students' daily lives, its potential to negatively affect mental health cannot be overlooked. By understanding these relationships and implementing strategies to mitigate its impact, it is possible to promote healthier social media habits and improve the overall well-being of university students. Further research is needed to explore these dynamics and provide more comprehensive recommendations for managing social media usage in a way that fosters mental health and well-being.

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