

# Social Media Addiction among Young Adults: Differences across certain Sociodemographic and Social Media usage Variables

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## Abstract

This study aimed to examine differences in social media addiction (SMA) among young adults based on sociodemographic variables (sex, relationship status) and social media usage characteristics (platform type, daily usage time). A convenience sample of 120 young adults aged 18–30 years participated in a cross-sectional online survey. Social media addiction was measured using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS). Results indicated that Instagram users exhibited significantly higher SMA scores than Snapchat users, highlighting platform-specific addiction risk. A positive dose-response relationship was found between daily social media use and addiction severity. Relationship status influenced SMA, with individuals in “complicated” romantic situations showing markedly higher addiction scores compared to single or partnered participants. No significant sex differences were observed. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of social media addiction, emphasising the importance of behavioural and contextual factors in understanding and addressing SMA among young adults. Targeted prevention and intervention strategies should consider platform features, usage intensity, and relational contexts.

**Keywords:** Social media addiction, young adults, Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, platform differences, usage time, relationship status, behavioral addiction

## Introduction

### Social Media Use and Young Adulthood

Social media has become an integral component of contemporary life, fundamentally transforming communication, information sharing, entertainment, and social interaction. Young adults constitute one of the most active groups of social media users (Shannon et al., 2022) due to their extensive engagement with digital technologies and their developmental need for social connection, identity exploration, and relationship formation. Social networking platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, and X facilitate interpersonal communication and provide opportunities for self-expression, social participation, and access to information. Although these platforms offer numerous benefits, concerns have emerged regarding excessive and maladaptive patterns of use that may negatively affect psychological functioning and well-being. The increasing prevalence of social media engagement has led researchers to investigate problematic forms of use, commonly referred to as social media addiction (SMA) or problematic social media use (PSMU). Social media addiction is generally characterised by excessive preoccupation with social networking platforms, impaired control over usage, and continued engagement despite adverse consequences for academic, occupational, interpersonal, or psychological functioning (Andreassen et al., 2016). Andreassen and Pallesen

conceptualised social media addiction as excessive concern about social networking sites combined with a strong motivation to use them and a level of engagement that interferes with other important life activities (Zotova & Rozanov, 2020).

### **Conceptualization of Social Media Addiction**

Although social media addiction has received substantial empirical attention, debate remains regarding its diagnostic status. Unlike substance-related disorders, social media addiction is not formally recognised as a distinct psychiatric diagnosis (Eichenberg et al., 2024). Nevertheless, researchers increasingly conceptualise it within the broader framework of behavioural addictions because it shares several characteristics with recognised addictive behaviours, including impaired control, compulsive engagement, withdrawal-like experiences, and functional impairment (Yıldırım, 2025).

Griffiths' Components Model of Addiction provides one of the most influential frameworks for understanding social media addiction. According to this model, addiction consists of six core components: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse (Griffiths, 2013). These components have formed the basis for several widely used social media addiction measures, including the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), which has demonstrated strong psychometric properties and longitudinal measurement stability (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2022).

Uses and Gratifications Theory offers a complementary explanation by proposing that individuals actively engage with media to satisfy psychological and social needs. Social media may fulfil the need for social interaction, entertainment, self-presentation, belongingness, and emotional regulation. However, repeated reliance on social networking platforms to satisfy these needs may increase vulnerability to problematic use. Similarly, the Interaction of Person–Affect–Cognition–Execution (I-PACE) Model suggests that addictive online behaviours emerge through interactions among personal predispositions, affective responses, cognitive processes, and executive functioning mechanisms (Mestre-Bach & Potenza, 2023). These theoretical perspectives collectively

indicate that social media addiction is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by both individual and contextual factors.

### **Psychological Consequences of Social Media Addiction**

A substantial body of research has linked social media addiction to adverse psychological outcomes (Dowd et al., 2022). Among the most frequently investigated consequences are depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, emotional disturbance, and diminished well-being. Haand and Shuwang (2020) reported a significant positive relationship between social media addiction and depression among university students, suggesting that excessive engagement with social networking platforms may contribute to poorer mental health outcomes (Шейнов, 2021). Similar findings have been reported among adolescents, where higher levels of social media addiction were associated with elevated depressive symptoms and poorer psychological adjustment (Shannon et al., 2022).

Recent evidence suggests that emotional processes may play an important role in explaining these associations. Chen et al. (2023) found that social media use and fear of missing out (FoMO) may be risk factors for increased negative emotions (Chen et al., 2023). Individuals who engage excessively with social media may become increasingly concerned about missing rewarding social experiences, thereby intensifying emotional distress and reinforcing continued platform use. Beyond emotional outcomes, social media addiction has also been associated with cognitive functioning. Zhang et al. (2023) demonstrated that social media addiction was negatively related to executive functioning among young adults, and that emotional disturbance and poor sleep quality partially explained this association (Zhang et al., 2023). These findings suggest that problematic social media use may affect not only emotional well-being but also cognitive processes essential for academic and occupational performance.

### **Sociodemographic Differences in Social Media Addiction**

Given the increasing prevalence of social media addiction, researchers have sought to identify demographic groups that may be particularly vulnerable. Sex represents one of

the most frequently examined demographic variables. However, the findings remain inconsistent. Some studies report higher levels of social media addiction among females, often attributing these differences to greater use of social networking platforms for communication, relationship maintenance, and social comparison (Eichenberg et al., 2024). Other studies have reported higher addiction levels among males or have found no significant sex differences. These inconsistencies suggest that sex-related differences may vary across cultures, age groups, and social media contexts.

Relationship status has also received growing attention. Social media plays an important role in maintaining interpersonal relationships, facilitating communication, and expanding social networks. Single individuals may use social networking platforms to establish new relationships and broaden social connections, whereas individuals in committed relationships may use them primarily for communication and relationship maintenance (Andreassen et al., 2016). Nevertheless, evidence regarding the association between relationship status and social media addiction remains limited and inconclusive, highlighting the need for further investigation.

### **Social Media Usage Variables and Social Media Addiction**

Among social media usage characteristics, time spent on social networking platforms has consistently emerged as one of the strongest predictors of social media addiction (Alade et al., 2026). Individuals who spend longer periods on social media are more likely to exhibit symptoms such as compulsive use, impaired control, and psychological dependence. Studies have shown that social media addiction levels vary significantly according to the amount of time spent online, suggesting that prolonged exposure may increase vulnerability to addictive patterns of use.

The platform type may also influence addiction risk (Foroughi et al., 2021). Different social networking platforms provide distinct user experiences, interaction patterns, and reinforcement mechanisms. Platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat emphasise visual communication, social comparison, and immediate feedback through likes, comments,

and stories. These features may strengthen reward-related processes and encourage repeated engagement. Previous research examining Internet addiction has similarly identified social networking services as important contributors to problematic online behaviour.

### **Research Gap and Present Study**

Although the literature has established important associations between social media addiction and psychological well-being, several gaps remain. First, findings regarding sociodemographic variables such as sex and relationship status remain inconsistent across studies (Mamun & Griffiths, 2018). Second, while time spent on social media has been widely examined, comparatively fewer studies have investigated platform-specific differences in social media addiction (Al-Samarraie et al., 2021). Third, many investigations have focused primarily on psychological outcomes rather than identifying demographic and usage-related characteristics associated with addiction risk. Finally, evidence from developing-country contexts remains relatively limited despite rapid increases in social media adoption among young adults.

Addressing these limitations is important because young adulthood represents a developmental period characterised by extensive social media engagement and heightened vulnerability to both the benefits and risks of digital technologies. Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine whether social media addiction differs according to selected sociodemographic variables (sex and relationship status) and social media usage variables (time spent on social media and type of platform used) among young adults. By investigating these factors simultaneously, the study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of social media addiction and inform future prevention and intervention efforts.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To assess gender differences in social media addiction among young adults
2. To examine differences in social media addiction based on the platforms used.
3. To assess the differences in social media addiction based on the time spent on social media.

- To examine differences in social media addiction based on relationship status

### Hypotheses

- There is a significant difference in social media addiction based on sex.
- There is a significant difference in social media addiction based on the platform used.
- There is a significant difference in social media addiction based on the time spent on social media.
- There is a significant difference in social media addiction based on the participants relationship status.

### Method

#### Participants

The present study's sample comprised young adults aged 18–30 years ( $n = 120$ ). These individuals were selected using a convenience sampling method, recruiting those who were easily accessible and willing to participate via online platforms. Data were collected using an online survey administered through Google Forms, with the survey link disseminated via digital media to reach the target population. The sample included individuals of both sexes.

#### Measures

#### Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) was developed by Andreassen et al. in 2016 (Balcerowska et al., 2020) as a generalised adaptation of the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS), replacing the platform-specific term "Facebook" with "social media" across all items. The BSMAS assesses problematic social media use behaviours using six items, with each item corresponding to one of the six core components of behavioural addiction (Shin, 2022). Concerning reliability and validity, studies have consistently confirmed the unidimensionality of the BSMAS and reported good psychometric properties. These properties have been investigated across several countries. (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2022). Construct validity has been further supported by associations between the BSMAS and measures of anxiety, depression, Internet gaming disorder, and stress. For scoring, the total possible scores range from 6 to 30, with higher scores indicating higher levels of problematic social media use, and

researchers have proposed cutoff scores to indicate a risk of social media addiction (Chen et al., 2019; Schivinski et al., 2020).

### Results

**Table 1 shows the mean, SD, and t-values of social media addiction based on the platforms used.**

Variable	Platforms Used	n	M	SD	t	p (2-tailed)
Social Media Addiction	Instagram Users	80	27.31	14.72	2.73	.007**
	Snapchat Users	40	20.03	13.87		

Note. \*\* $p < .01$

Table 1 displays the outcomes of independent-samples t-tests assessing mean differences in social media addiction (SMA) scores between Instagram ( $n = 80$ ) and Snapchat users ( $n = 40$ ). Instagram users ( $M = 27.31$ ,  $SD = 14.72$ ) exhibited significantly higher SMA scores than Snapchat users ( $M = 20.03$ ,  $SD = 13.87$ ), resulting in  $t(118) = 2.73$ ,  $p = .007$ . This substantial difference, significant at the  $\alpha = .01$  level, with a mean difference of 7.28 points on the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), suggests a notable platform-based disparity in addictive social media engagement. Both groups showed similar within-group variability in SMA scores (Instagram  $SD = 14.72$ ; Snapchat  $SD = 13.87$ ), indicating that the observed group difference was not due to differing variance patterns. Notably, Instagram users demonstrated higher SMA scores, consistent with its larger sample size ( $n = 80$ ) and prevalent use among adults aged 18–29 (Machado et al., 2024).

Instagram's infinite scroll, aspirational content, and feedback mechanisms activate dopaminergic pathways, reinforcing addiction components, as per Griffiths' (2005) and the I-PACE model (Brand et al., 2019; Kolas & Mühlenen, 2024). Regression analyses identify Instagram ( $\beta = 2.646$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as a stronger predictor of addiction than Snapchat ( $\beta = 2.652$ ,  $p = .022$ ). Passive consumption on

Instagram perpetuates addiction more effectively than Snapchat’s interactive communication, with passive use associated with poorer mental health outcomes (Godard & Holtzman, 2023). The BSMAS effectively captures compulsive patterns driven by Instagram’s algorithmic design (Andreassen et al., 2016; Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2018). The differentiation between platform effects—Snapchat linked Instagram to SMA—reflects distinct constructs: SMA focuses on behavioural addiction to the platform, while nomophobia pertains to anxiety about smartphone availability for social connection. This pattern is consistent with the I-PACE model, which posits platform-specific affective and cognitive pathways shaped by reinforcement schedules and interpersonal contingencies (Brand et al., 2019).

**Table 2 displays Mean, SD and t-Values of Social Media Addiction based on Sex**

Variables	Sex	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p (2-tailed)
Social Media Addiction	Female	60	24.77	13.947	1.039	0.309
	Male	60	28.41	17.259		

Table 2 displays the mean, standard deviation (SD), and t-values for Social Media Addiction (SMA) based on sex. The analysis indicates no statistically significant difference between sexes in SMA, although males exhibited a numerically higher mean. Specifically, male participants (M = 28.41, SD = 17.26) had higher SMA scores than female participants (M = 24.77, SD = 13.95); however, this difference was not statistically significant (t(118) = 1.04, p = .309). The mean difference of 3.64 BSMAS points is relatively modest, and the greater variability observed in the male group (SD = 17.26) compared to the female group (SD = 13.95) is noteworthy, as it suggests a wider range of addiction severity among males.

In contrast, no significant sex differences were found for SMA, consistent with evidence of measurement invariance across genders and

mixed-gender effects in previous studies (Yao et al., 2025). While some studies report higher SMA in females associated with emotion-focused coping and fear of missing out (FoMO), others indicate higher male SMA or no differences, reflecting varied findings likely influenced by sample characteristics and usage patterns (Andreassen et al., 2017; Su et al., 2019; Brailovskaia et al., 2023). The non-significant trend towards higher male SMA in the current study may be attributed to limited statistical power (n = 60 per group) and sample-specific factors. Larger and more detailed samples are necessary to elucidate the sex differences in SMA within this population.

**Table 3 shows the mean, SD, and F-values of social media addiction based on time spent on social media.**

Variables	Time spent on social media	N	Mean	Standard deviation	F-value	Significance
Social Media Addiction	0-2hrs	42	22.67	16.382	3.692	0.029
	3-4hrs	56	24.90	17.670		
	More than 4 hrs	22	26.46	15.645		

Note. \*\*p < .05

Table 3 displays the mean scores, standard deviations, and one-way ANOVA results for social media addiction across three categories of daily social media use: 0–2 hours, 3–4 hours, and more than 4 hours. The sample comprised 120 participants, unevenly distributed among the groups, with the highest number (n = 56) in the 3–4 hour category and the lowest (n = 22) in the more than 4 hours category. A similar trend was observed for social media addiction. The ANOVA yielded significant results, F(2,117) = 3.692, p = .029. Mean addiction scores increased progressively with usage duration: 22.67 (SD = 16.38) for the 0–2 hour group, 24.90 (SD = 17.67) for the 3–4 hour group, and 26.46 (SD = 15.65) for the more than 4 hour group. The relatively large standard deviations suggest considerable individual variability within each usage category. Nonetheless, the significant p-value indicates that individuals who engage in more

than four hours of daily social media use tend to report higher levels of problematic use compared to those with less usage. Collectively, both dependent variables exhibit a dose-response relationship with time spent on social media, aligning with the compensatory internet use theory, which suggests that excessive online activity may function as a maladaptive coping strategy for underlying anxieties such as nomophobia (Wolniewicz et al., 2019).

**Table 4 shows Mean, SD and F-values of Social Media Addiction based on relationship status of participants**

Variables	Relationship status	N	Mean	SD	F-value	Sign
Social Media Addiction	Single	53	25.69	15.623	3.957*	0.021
	In a relationship	42	25.97	15.314		
	Complicated	25	35.85	11.949		

Note. \*\* $p < .05$

Table 4 presents the mean, standard deviation (SD), and F-values for social media addiction categorised by participants' relationship status. A significant effect was observed for social media addiction,  $F(2,117) = 3.957$ ,  $p = .021$ . Participants with a "complicated" relationship status exhibited significantly higher scores ( $M = 35.85$ ,  $SD = 11.95$ ) compared to both single individuals ( $M = 25.69$ ,  $SD = 15.62$ ) and those in relationships ( $M = 25.97$ ,  $SD = 15.31$ ). It is noteworthy that the means for single and partnered individuals were nearly identical, whereas the "complicated" group demonstrated an increase of approximately 10 points. This pattern indicates that an ambiguous romantic status, rather than being single, constitutes a stronger risk factor for problematic social media use. The findings suggest that relationship uncertainty may lead to compensatory social media engagement and increased phone dependency. Individuals in complicated romantic situations may resort to social media for partner monitoring, validation

seeking, or alleviating jealousy and anxiety, thereby elevating addiction scores. Clinically, assessing relationship clarity could be pertinent when screening for digital addictions. These results are consistent with recent literature indicating that romantic relationship status and uncertainty are significant factors in problematic digital engagement and social media use. Additionally, research by Wang and Chen (2025) suggests that young adults in undefined romantic situations engage more frequently in social media surveillance behaviours, such as checking a partner's online activity, and report higher levels of nomophobia (Navas-Echazarreta et al., 2023), particularly when direct communication is perceived as unavailable. The marked elevation in the "complicated" relationship status group corroborates findings that ambiguous relationship status increases addiction scores.

### Discussion

The study's findings reveal significant differences in social media addiction (SMA) among young adults based on platform usage, time spent on social media, and relationship status, while no statistically significant sex differences were observed. Instagram users exhibited higher SMA scores than Snapchat users, consistent with the platform's design features that promote passive consumption and continuous engagement, which align with Griffiths' Components Model and the I-PACE framework. This platform-specific effect underscores the importance of considering distinct social media environments when assessing addiction risk. Moreover, the positive dose-response relationship between daily social media usage time and addiction levels supports the compensatory internet use theory, suggesting that prolonged use may serve as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Relationship status also emerged as a significant factor, with individuals in "complicated" romantic situations showing markedly higher SMA scores than single or partnered participants. This finding highlights the role of relational uncertainty in driving excessive social media engagement, potentially as a means of monitoring or seeking reassurance. The absence of significant sex differences aligns with prior mixed evidence, indicating that sex effects on SMA may depend on contextual and sample-

specific factors. Collectively, these results contribute to a nuanced understanding of SMA by integrating sociodemographic and usage-related variables, emphasising the multifaceted nature of social media addiction among young adults.

### Conclusion

This study confirms that social media addiction among young adults varies significantly with platform type, time spent on social media, and relationship status but not with sex. Instagram's unique features appear to foster greater addictive engagement compared to Snapchat, while increased daily social media use correlates with higher addiction levels in a dose-dependent manner. Additionally, relationship ambiguity is a critical risk factor for problematic social media use, surpassing the risk associated with being single or in a stable relationship. These findings underscore the need to consider both behavioural and contextual variables in understanding and addressing social media addiction. By elucidating these associations, the study provides valuable insights for developing targeted prevention and intervention strategies tailored to specific user profiles and social contexts.

### Limitation and Future Suggestions

Future research should employ longitudinal designs with larger, more diverse samples to enhance causal understanding and generalisability of social media addiction patterns. Expanding the scope to include additional social media platforms and usage behaviours will provide a more comprehensive assessment of addiction risk factors. Investigating the psychological mechanisms underlying the heightened addiction observed in individuals with complicated relationship statuses could inform tailored intervention approaches. Incorporating objective usage data alongside self-reports may improve measurement accuracy. Moreover, exploring the interplay between sociodemographic variables, personality traits, and emotional regulation strategies will deepen insights into vulnerability and resilience factors. Finally, intervention-focused studies are recommended to translate these findings into practical prevention and treatment programs targeting young adults at risk of social media addiction.

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