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Original Research Article

PATTERN OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN MEDICAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social media has become an indispensable part of medical students' daily lives in today's competitive world, not merely as a medium for knowledge and socializing, but rather as a way to deal with academic pressure, and utilize its influencer culture to gain name and fame .This study explores multifaceted patterns of social media in medical students. The objective is to study pattern of social media use in medical students.

Materials and Methods: This study was conducted among medical students from four batches enrolled in the institution, with 320 students selected through simple random sampling from a Medical college in Uttar Pradesh. Data was collected through a semi structured online survey.

Results: Majority of participants were aged 21-25 years (64.4%),with females (54.7%) out numbering males. Most were first-year medical students (36.25%), and belonged to nuclear families (75.3%). Majority used Social Media mainly for entertainment (76.9%) and education (70%), with WhatsApp (99.7%), Snapchat (63.7%), and Instagram (62.8%) being used by most, outperforming YouTube (22.8%), reflecting its multifaceted utility among students. Majority spent 2-4 hours (48.8 %) daily, especially between 8 PM–12 AM (62.5%), indicating leisure-time usage. Majority spent ₹201-500 (57.5%) on internet monthly , with 1–2 GB daily data consumption (55%), kept phones on (42.5%) or next to their beds (37.5%). Many checked their phones as first thing in morning routine (33.44%) and reported checking 10–20 times a day (53.12%). The most common duration of use was 5-7 years (46.8%) across multiple platforms (54.4%). These findings highlight the widespread, ingrained use of social media and its frequent engagement in medical students' everyday lives.

Conclusion: Students exhibit extensive and frequent use of social media, with high daily engagement, late-night activity, and integration into daily routines. These patterns reflect the deep-rooted role of social media in shaping their lifestyle and behavior.

Keywords: Social media, Medical students, Pattern

INTRODUCTION

Social media is a digital technology that allows community members to share information, ideas, text, and visuals through virtual networks. Social media use has become widely popularized in modern society and because of that, human connections have experienced substantial transformation. The concept of social networking came into being in the 1990s with the introduction of Open Diary by Bruce and Susan Abelson in 1998 and Six Degrees by Andrew Weinreich in 1997, following widespread internet use.[1,2] But social networking did not become very successful until the middle of the 2000s when it accomplished remarkable success using well-known platforms like Facebook and Twitter that have reshaped its essence. Since then, many additional platforms have emerged quickly, including networks for professionals such as LinkedIn and collaborative sites like Trello, and educational sites like Wikipedia that provide useful knowledge. Virtual worlds, social games, and video game streaming services like

Twitch are all included in social media.[3] Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are examples of social media, which allow users to create and share content in virtual communities.[4] Accessible social media affects economic and political connections, beliefs, and behaviors worldwide. The way it has evolved as a necessity in contemporary society, taking the place of in-person interactions with emails, real-time video calls for interaction with people, and the 'Metaverse', a concept that will expand user interaction and immersion.[3]

As of January 2019, 310 million people (about 23 percent of India's population) and 3.48 billion people (roughly 45 percent of the global population) were active social media users.[5]

The reasons why so many individuals choose to devote more time online can be explained by a few basic characteristics. A user's desire to remain online for work or educational purposes comes first. Second, the availability of the internet from places like homes, offices, and schools as well as public areas like Internet cafés, coffee shops, and libraries has made it possible for more people to access it at any time and place they choose. As a result of this ease of use, many more people will use social media and may inadvertently get addicted.[6]

Research in India suggests that there appears to be a perceived shift towards an individualist culture that places greater value on solitary pursuits with convenient internet connection. The results of this research can be categorized into three areas: usability, convenience entertainment, and accessibility. One of the main reasons individuals are so motivated to stay online for extended periods of time is for entertainment, especially during their leisure time. Some people may utilize the internet to express themselves and control their mood swings. However, some Individuals utilize the internet to avoid communicating with others in person or to isolate themselves. Because socially disconnected behavior is looked down upon in Indian society, it may result in social humiliation and condemnation, which would increase social isolation and reliance on technology.[6]

Social media use by young people increased from 12% in 2005 to 90% in 2015 according to the Pew Research Center.[7] Due to the ubiquitous usage of social media sites such as Facebook, which has over 2.89 billion users worldwide and is used by More than 90% of youth between the ages of 19-28 (and nearly universally amid the COVID-19 outbreak), rather than genetic causes, social factors might be responsible for these increases.[8] Lockdowns during the COVID-19 outbreak have increased usage of social media in the previous years. A survey of a sample of Belgian people conducted in April 2020, in lockdowns used social media more as a way to cope with anxiety, social isolation, and loss.[9] Many people were compelled to endure previously unusual rise of social isolation, detachment, and anguish as a result of widespread lockdowns and stay-at-home directives. Numerous physical activities were either outlawed or moved online. Social media became a mainstream channel that dominated social support and information acquisition as a result of individuals spending more time on it during the COVID-19 lockdown. Hence this study was conducted to study pattern of social media use in medical students, a group with unique needs that is less researched.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted over a period of one year, from August 1, 2023, to July 31, 2024, among MBBS students of a Medical College in Uttar Pradesh after getting clearance from Institutional ethical committee. The study population included students from all four academic batches enrolled at the institution. Those students who were willing to participate in the study and fulfilling the inclusion criteria were selected for the study and written informed consent was taken. Confidentiality was assured during this process.

Inclusion Criteria

Students who were fulfilling the following criteria were included:

- Students with written and informed consent.
- Students aged over 18 years.
- Students using social media continuously for at least past 6 months.

Exclusion Criteria

- Students with a diagnosis of any prior psychiatric illness.
- Students with any known medical illness like Diabetes, Hypertension, Bronchial Asthma, Tuberculosis, obstructive sleep apnoea, thyroid disorders or any other medical illness.

Methodology: Total 320 Students out of 700 were selected according to sample size formula for cross-sectional study in finite population by Simple Random Sampling using online Random Number Generator, by dividing them proportionately amongst four batches which consisted of 116 students from First year and 68 students from second, third, fourth year each, as first year had total 250 students and second, third, fourth year had 150 students each. In each session about 30 Students from one batch at a time were gathered together in a Demo room or Lecture Theatre. They were briefed and, under supervision in separate sessions completed online semi structured self-administered questionnaire consisting of Socio-demographic and clinical data sheet including socio-demographic details like – age, gender, religion, type of family, Year of medical college ,the pattern of social media use was assessed by the frequency, and Time spent daily on social media (in hours), social media platforms used , purpose of social media use (e.g., entertainment, information, communication etc.), money spent per month, data spent per day, Time of day when social media is accessed most, Where do you keep your phone at night, First thing in the morning, any other habits, Years of Social Media Use. Each session

required 15-20 minutes. Data from one batch were collected at a time. Similarly, data from all four batches were collected. Then all the data was compiled and assessed and appropriate statistical tools were applied.

Statistical Analysis: The collected data was coded , cleaned and compiled on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then it was imported into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences); licensed version 23.0. Descriptive analysis was done by calculating frequency and proportion. Depending on the type and distribution of data, Chi-square test was applied. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered significant.

RESULTS

The majority of participants were aged 21–25 years (n=206, 64.4%), followed by ≤20 years (n=113, 35.3%), and >25 years (n=1, 0.3%), with a significant age distribution (χ^2=198, p<0.001). The majority identified as Hindu (n=299, 93.7%), followed by Muslims (n=14, 4.4%), Sikhs (n=4, 1.3%), Christians and Others each with n=1 (0.3%), showing a significant difference (χ^2=1090, p<0.001), reflecting a predominance of younger medical students and the demographic profile of the region or institution where the study was conducted.

The chi-square test (χ^2=2.81, p=0.094) revealed no statistically significant difference in gender distribution with Female (n=175,54.7%) and Male (n=145 ,45.3%). This indicates a relatively balanced representation of male and female participants in the study.

Table 1: Distribution of year of Medical College.

Year of medical college	Frequency	Percentage
1st year	116	36.25 %
2nd year	68	21.25 %
3rd year	68	21.25 %
Final year	68	21.25 %
Total (n)	320	100%

χ^2=21.6, p=<0.001

[Table 1] represents the distribution of participants based on their year of medical education. The chi-square test (χ^2=21.6, p<0.001) indicates a significant difference in distribution across medical years, with a skew toward 1st-year students.

Most participants n=241 (75.3%) were from nuclear families, followed by joint (n=78,24.4%) and other types (n=1,0.3%).The chi-square test (χ^2=282, p<0.001) demonstrates a statistically significant difference in family type distribution, highlighting a predominance of nuclear family structures in the study population.

Table 2: Distribution of Purpose of social media use

Purpose of social media use	Frequency	Percentage
Leisure	168	52.5 %
Education	224	70.0 %
Chatting	191	59.7 %
Dating	39	12.2 %
Contact Building	74	23.1 %
News	145	45.3 %
Gaming	108	33.8 %
Entertainment	246	76.9 %
Research	111	34.7 %
Earning Money	38	11.9 %
Shopping	188	58.8 %
All of the Above	40	12.5 %

[Table 2] highlights the various purposes for which participants used social media. The primary purposes of social media use were entertainment n=246 (76.9%) and education n=224 (70.0%), with lesser engagement in dating n=39 (12.2%) and earning money n=38 (11.9%). The variety of uses reflects its integration into both professional and personal aspects of life.

Table 3: Distribution of Time spent per day in hours

Time spent per day in hours	Frequency	Percentage
<2 hr	60	18.8 %
2-4 hr	156	48.8 %
4-6 hr	78	24.3 %
>6 hr	26	8.1 %
Total (n)	320	100%

χ^2=114, p=<0.001

[Table 3] illustrates the distribution of participants based on the time spent on social media per day. The chi-square test result (χ^2=114, p<0.001) indicates a statistically significant difference in the time spent with moderate usage (2-4 hours) being most common.

In this study, the majority of participants spent ₹201–500 (n = 184, 57.5%), followed by ₹100–200 (n = 59, 18.4%), ₹501–1000 (n = 42, 13.2%), less than ₹100 (n = 27, 8.4%), and more than ₹1000 (n = 8, 2.5%). There is a statistically significant difference (χ^2=303, p<0.001) in expenditure categories, indicating a predominant mid-range spending pattern among the participants.

Table 4: Distribution of Time of day when social media is accessed most

Time of day when social media is accessed most	Frequency	Percentage
4-8 am	8	2.5 %
8-12 am	16	5.0 %
12-4 pm	5	1.6 %
4-8 pm	72	22.5 %
8-12 pm	200	62.5 %
12-4 am	19	5.9 %
Total (n)	320	100%

χ^2=540, p=<0.001

[Table 4] details the time of day when participants most frequently accessed social media. The chi-square test (χ^2=540, p<0.001) indicates a statistically significant variation in usage patterns, highlighting a strong preference for evening and late-night hours.

Most participants used 1-2 GB of data daily (n=176 , 55%), n = 78 (24.4%) used 2-4 GB, n = 39 (12.2%) used up to 1 GB, and n=27 (8.4%) used 4 GB per day. There is a statistically significant difference in daily data usage patterns among participants. (χ^2=171, p<0.001). These findings suggest that moderate data consumption (1-2 GB) is the most common.

Table 5: Distribution of Where do you keep your phone at night

Where do you keep your phone at night	Frequency	Percentage
Another room	3	0.9 %
Away from bed	61	19.1 %
Next to bed	136	42.5 %
On bed	120	37.5 %
Total (n)	320	100%

χ^2=138, p=<0.001

[Table 5] highlights the distribution of participants based on where they keep their phones at night. The chi-square test (χ^2=138, p<0.001) indicates a statistically significant difference in these preferences, reflecting a strong tendency to keep phones within immediate reach during night-time.

Table 6: Distribution of First thing in morning

First thing in morning		Frequency	Percentage
Check your phone		107	33.44 %
Brush		111	34.68 %
Tea/Coffee		2	0.63 %
Use toilet		91	28.44 %
Others	Switch Alarm off	2	0.63 %
	Drink water	2	0.63 %
	Drinking warm water	1	0.31 %
	Finding Spex	1	0.31 %
	Meditation	1	0.31 %
	Read newspaper	1	0.31 %
	Surya namaskaar	1	0.31 %
Total (n)		320	100%

χ^2=882, p=<0.001

[Table 6] outlines the distribution of participants based on their first activity in the morning. The chi-square test (χ^2=882, p<0.001) indicates a statistically significant difference in morning habits. The predominance of phone-checking as one of the first activities highlights its ingrained presence in daily routines.

Most students reported no other habits (n=239,74.7%); n=41 (12.8%) had the habit of drinking tea, n=30 (9.5%) coffee, and others (<1%) included cigarettes, cold drinks, sweets etc. The chi-square test (χ^2=2103,p value <0.001) demonstrates a statistically significant difference in these habits. Tea and coffee emerged as the most common additional habits.

Table 7: Distribution of Social Media Platforms used

Social Media Platforms used	Frequency	Percentage
WhatsApp	319	99.7 %
Snapchat	204	63.7 %
Facebook	191	59.7 %
Instagram	201	62.8 %
YouTube	73	22.8 %
Twitter	36	11.3 %
LinkedIn	10	3.1 %
Keek	2	0.6 %

[Table 7] illustrates the distribution of social media platforms used by participants. WhatsApp was the most used platform (n=319 ,99.7%), YouTube (n=73 ,22.8%), and LinkedIn (n=10 ,3.1%) were less common.

Table 8: Distribution of Years of Social Media Use

Years of Social Media Use	Frequency	Percentage
2	2	0.6 %
3	3	0.9 %
4	32	10.0 %
5	75	23.4 %
6	62	19.4 %
7	76	23.8 %
8	49	15.3 %
9	16	5.0 %
10	4	1.3 %
11	1	0.3 %
Total (n)	320	100%

χ^2=272, p=<0.001

[Table 8] highlights the distribution of participants based on the number of years they have used social media. The chi-square test (χ^2=272,p<0.001) demonstrates a statistically significant variation in years of social media use. There was predominance of mid-range usage durations (5-7 years). Majority of students used three platforms (n=174,54.4%), followed by four (n=88, 27.5%) and two (n=42, 13.1%) .Smaller shares used one (n=1,0.3%), five (n=13,4.1%), or six (n=2 ,0.6%) platforms. The chi-square test (χ^2 = 429, p-value < 0.001) indicates a statistically significant variation in the number of platforms used with most participants using three to four platforms.

In this study, majority of participants checked social media frequently (10–20 times/day) n=170 (53.12%), followed by very frequently (20+ times/day) n=75 (23.44%), moderately (5–10 times/day) n=64 (20%), and occasionally (<5 times/day) n=11(3.44%).The chi-square test (χ^2=164, p <0.001) demonstrates a statistically significant difference in checking frequency among participants. These results highlight a predominant trend of frequent to very frequent social media engagement.

DISCUSSION

Social media is a dynamic medium for connection, entertainment, and communication that is utilized across the globe. Around 755 million Indians utilise social media as of 2024, which amounts to almost 51% of the country's total population.[11] Over 65% of internet users are in the 12- to 29-year-old age range.[12] Excessive use of social media has been linked to several negative health outcomes, including anxiety and depression.[13]

In our study, a total 320 medical students were enrolled, and it was found that n=206 (64.4%) were aged 21–25 years, only a negligible fraction n=1(0.3%) aged above 25 years. Our findings align with Ghanate et al. (2019),[10] who reported 51.8% in the 21–25 age group, and Barman et al. (2018),[14] with a mean age of 21.6 ± 1.8 years. Similarly, Selvamani et al. (2022), [15] had a mean of 20.52 ± 1.25 years, this suggests that the sample population predominantly comprises younger medical students, primarily those in their early twenties, which may reflect the typical age range of medical students enrolled in undergraduate training.

In the present study, the majority of participants (n=300,93.7%) were Hindu, reflecting the region's demographic composition. Sharma A et al. (2014), [16] reported 84.4% Hindus with smaller proportions of other religions, indicating a similar but slightly lower Hindu majority in their study. This dominant representation of Hindu participants reflects the demographic profile of the region or institution where the study was conducted.

Our study found, n=175 (54.7%) participants were female and n=145 (45.3%) male. This is similar to Barman et al. (2018), [17] and Ghanate et al. (2019),[10] who reported nearly equal gender distribution (51% males/49% females and 53.14% females/46.8% males, respectively).

In the present study, n=116 (36.25%) of medical students were in the 1st year, followed by 21.25% each in the 2nd, 3rd, and final years. Parmar et al.[18] (2024), reported 28.2% in the 4th year, 26.5% in the 2nd year, 23.2% in the 3rd year, and 22% in the 1st

year, showing a more senior-student-dominant distribution. Nisar et al.(2022), [19] found 39.6% of students in the preclinical phase and 60.4% in the clinical phase, highlighting a shift toward senior students, unlike our study, which had a higher proportion of first-year students.

In our study, n=241 (75.3%) of participants were from nuclear families, which reflects urban and semi-urban societal trends. Parmar et al. (2024),[18] observed smaller family sizes (48.6% had 4–6 members), similar to nuclear families, partially supporting our results. Pevekar et al. (2023), [20] reported lower nuclear family prevalence (35%), showing regional differences.

It was found, participants used social media most frequently for entertainment n=246 (76.9%), education n=224 (70.0%), chatting n=191(59.7%), and shopping n=188 (58.8%). This distribution underscores the multifaceted role of social media in the lives of medical students, spanning academic, personal, and recreational uses. This is consistent with AlFaris E et al. (2018),[21] who reported 95.8% for entertainment and 40% for academic use, with YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter being popular for education. Our study showed a higher reliance on social media for academic purposes n=224 (70%) compared to AlFaris E et al. Parmar et al. (2024),[18] found 49.5% used internet for social media use, 13.2% for games, and 3.3% for entertainment, indicating lower engagement compared to our findings, which included multiple purposes for social media use rather than focusing solely on specific preferences. The variety of uses reflects its integration into both professional and personal aspects of life.

We found that n=156 (48.8%) of participants spent 2–4 hours per day on social media, which was the most common usage category, indicating that most medical students fell into the moderate usage category, with fewer spending either excessive or minimal time. This aligns with Parmar P et al. (2024),[18] who found 70.3% used social media for 1–5 hours, with 9.8% exceeding 5 hours, indicating moderate usage, though Parmar et al. included a broader range for daily usage, combining 1–5 hours into one category, while our study specifically divides it into 2–4 and 4–6-hour intervals. AlFaris E et al. (2018) ,[21] reported that 55% spent 1–4 hours daily, supporting frequent engagement. Kadavala BN (2021),[22] showed 48.54% used social media for less than 2 hours, a higher percentage than our findings, while 43.07% spent 2–4 hours. Mogalgiddi et al. (2022),[23] found 47.3% used it for 2–4 hours, aligning with our findings, but their broader categories make comparisons to heavier usage difficult. Aryal N & Rajbhandari A.(2024),[24] reported 43.6% used it for 4–8 hours, indicating a higher proportion of heavy users compared to our study. Overall, our study closely mirrors Parmar et al. and AlFaris E et al., while Aryal N & Rajbhandari A. show a heavier use pattern.

It was reported that majority of participants n=184 (57.5%) spent ₹201–500 per month on internet usage, indicating moderate spending. Rashmi R et al. (2022)[25] reported 61% spent less than ₹300, and 30.2% spent ₹300–600, partly aligning with our ₹100–200 category n=59 (18.4%) and the combined ₹201–500 group n=184 (57.5%). This reflects socio-economic differences, likely due to Rashmi R et al.'s sample demographics. Kadavala BN (2021),[22] found 61.68% spent ₹100–300 and 26.46% spent less than ₹100, contrasting with our lower proportion in that category n =27 (8.4%).

In our study, the majority of participants n=200 (62.5%) accessed social media most frequently between 8–12 pm. This indicates a clear preference for evening and late-night usage. Rashmi R et al,[25] (2022) and Mogalgiddi et al. (2022) ,[23] reported high night time internet use (57.8% and 59.3%, respectively), aligning with our findings. Kadavala BN. (2021),[22] found 71.35% accessed social media during leisure hours, partially matching our 8–12 pm and 4–8 pm time slots.

In our study, the majority of participants (n=176,55.0%) used 1–2 GB of data daily , reflecting data usage. Kadavala BN. (2021),[22] showed moderate data usage in the 1–2 GB range, based on internet expenditure, supporting our results. These results suggest intensity of online engagement, as reflected in data usage.

In present study, 80% (n=256) of participants kept their phones either on bed n=120 (37.5%) or next to the bed n=136 (42.5%),which indicates a strong preference for keeping phones close during sleep (χ^2=138, p<0.001). This behavior was also noted by Barman et al. (2018), [14] who found 50.6% checked their phones first, with 33% reporting anxiety.

We found, 74.7% (n=239) of participants reported no other habits, while 12.8% (n=41) were habitual consumers of tea, 9.5% (n=30) to coffee. This contrasts with Bani Mustafa et al.(2018),[26] who found 98.4% of students at the University of Jordan consumed caffeinated beverages, with tea being the most common followed by coffee, and Gangwal et al. (2024), [27] who reported 86% of medical students in a sub-Himalayan medical school consumed caffeine, with 73% consuming tea and 60% consuming coffee. The low prevalence of other habits highlights the overall minimal habitual tendencies in this study population.

It was found, 54.4% (n=174) of participants used three social media platforms, and 27.5% (n=88) used four, indicating a strong preference for multi-platform engagement, with a strong preference for three or four platforms. This aligns with Kadavala BN (2021),[22] who found that 83% of users, both addicted and non-addicted, used multiple platforms. This consistency highlights the growing trend of multi-platform usage among young adults for diverse purposes such as communication, socialization, and entertainment. This aligns with our study, where most participants used multiple platforms, with high usage rates for WhatsApp n=319 (99.7%), followed by

Snapchat n=204 (63.7%), Instagram n=201 (62.8%), Facebook n=191(59.7%), highlighting a strong preference for instant messaging and visually rich platforms among medical students. The preference for WhatsApp and Instagram is consistent across both studies, reflecting their widespread adoption among young adults for communication and social interaction.

In our study, most participants n=213 (66.6%) reported 5–7 years of social media use. A smaller proportion reported usage for less than 4 years (11.5% combined), and only n=5 (1.6%) had 10+ years of usage. Kadavala BN. (2021), [22] found that 53.65% of non-addicted users and 50.0% of addicted users had 1–5 years of use, while 14.6% of non-addicted and 14.71% of addicted users had more than 5 years. Compared to our findings, Kadavala BN. (2021), [22] study suggests a shorter average duration of social media usage, as the majority of our participants reported usage exceeding 5 years.

In the present study, 53.12% (n=170) of participants checked social media 10–20 times per day, and 23.44% (n=75) checked it over 20 times daily, indicating high engagement, reflecting its centrality in daily routines. Mogalgiddi et al.(2022),[23] reported similar findings with 38% checking 8–23 times per day ,17.3% checked it hourly. The slightly lower percentages in Mogalgiddi et al.'s study may reflect regional or demographic differences. Pevekar et al. (2023),[20] found 35% had moderate usage, aligning with our 20% checking 5–10 times/day.

STUDY LIMITATIONS : The study's limitations include its cross-sectional design, limiting causal inference, and its single-center setting, which may affect generalizability. Self-reported data may introduce recall and social desirability bias, and while the sample size is statistically adequate, it may not capture the full spectrum of social media use. Nonetheless, the study offers valuable insights and lays groundwork for future research

CONCLUSION

Majority of participants were aged 21-25 years (64.4%), with more females (54.7%). Most were first-year medical students (36.25%) from nuclear families (75.3%). Social media use was mainly for entertainment (76.9%) and education (70%), with WhatsApp (99.7%), Snapchat (63.7%), and Instagram (62.8%) as top platforms, reflecting its multifaceted utility among students. A large portion spent 2-4 hours daily on social media, especially between 8 PM–12 AM (62.5%), indicating leisure-time usage. Majority (57.5%) spent ₹201-500 on internet monthly; 55% used 1-2 GB data daily. 42.5% kept phones on or next to their beds (37.5%). Many checked phones as a morning routine (33.44%) and had frequent social media engagement (53.12% checked 10-20 times/day). Most participants had used social media for 5-7 years (46.8%) across multiple platforms (54.4%). These findings highlight the widespread and ingrained social media usage, frequent engagement, and its potential impact on daily habits of medical students.

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