Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families in Kathmandu

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families in Kathmandu. Mental health is the dependent variable. The selected independent variables are type of content consumed, peer influence, parental supervision, frequency of social media use and time sent on social media. The primary source of data is used to assess the opinion of respondents regarding type of content consumed, peer influence, parental supervision, frequency of social media use, time sent on social media and mental health. The study is based on primary data of 125 respondents. To achieve the purpose of the study, structured questionnaire is prepared. The correlation and multiple regression models are estimated to test the significance and importance of social media on children, adolescents, and families in Kathmandu.

The study showed a positive impact of time spent on social media on mental health. It indicates that higher the time spent on social media leads to greater impact on mental health. Similarly, the study showed a positive impact of peer influence on mental health. It indicates that social media friend groups can put pressure on people's mental health. However, the study showed a negative impact of parental supervision on mental health. It indicates that strict supervision of parents can help to improve mental health of the children. Further, the study showed a positive impact of frequency of social media use on mental health. It indicates that higher the frequency of social media use lead to reduce the creative capacity of the users. In addition, the study showed a positive impact of type of content consumed on mental health. It indicates that useful content used by the children and adolescents lead to improve mental health.

Keywords: type of content consumed, peer influence, parental supervision, frequency of social media use, time sent on social media, mental health

1. Introduction

Social media refers to a digital platform and applications that enable communication across the globe, connecting people with friends, family, and even strangers, leading to a more interconnected world. Social media allows users to share images, videos, and opinions that can influence public perception. The term "social media" refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allows users to participate on online exchanges contribute user created content or join online communities. According to O'relly (2018), social media (SM) refers to an online technology used by individuals, organizations, and communities to gather information or communicate. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) described social media as a collection of online platforms that facilitate user interaction, ranging from social networking sites to content communities. Social media as a collection of online platforms that facilitate user interaction, ranging from social networking sites to content communities. Intense use of social media is associated with various mental health challenges, including depression and anxiety among youth (Hamm *et al.,* 2015). Young people frequently report turning to sites such as Facebook and Twitter to escape from the external pressures threatening their mental health (Marwick and Boyd, 2014). Social media can affect adolescents' mental health and social development (Keles *et al.*, 2020). According to Twenge and Campbell (2019), there is a concerning link between social media use and increased levels of anxiety and depression

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among adolescents. Social media can amplify peer pressure, leading to both positive and negative outcomes in areas such as body image, academic performance, and risk-taking behaviors (Rosen *et al.,* 2019). High users of screens were significantly more likely to show poor emotional regulation stay calm, argue too much, have difficulty getting along with an inability to finish tasks, lower curiosity, and making friends (Twenge and Campbell, 2018).

Barry *et al.* (2017) examined the adolescent social media use and mental health from adolescent and parent perspectives. The study found that children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of social media due to their developing cognitive and emotional capacities. Similarly, Vannucci *et al.* (2017) investigated social media use and anxiety in emerging adults. The study showed that higher levels of social media engagement are linked to internalizing difficulties such as anxiety and depression. Likewise, Twenge and Campbell (2018) investigated associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents. The study revealed that frequent engagement in social comparison on social media contributes to adolescents feeling inadequate as they attempt to match behaviors and lifestyles portrayed by their peers. Frison and Eggermont (2015) examined the challenges parents face in managing their children's screen time, revealing that conflicts arise due to differing views on technology use. The study highlighted the difficulty of balancing the educational benefits of technology with the need to protect children from risks such as cyberbullying and inappropriate content. Similarly, Orben *et al.* (2019) explored the association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use, asserting that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors on social media, which amplifies feelings of anxiety and depression. Likewise, Primack *et al.* (2017) examined social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults in the US. The study found that both the frequency and duration of social media use are strongly correlated with these negative mental health outcomes, further compounding issues such as anxiety and depression in adolescents.

Tiggemann and Slater (2014) explored the internet and body image concerns in preteenager girls. The study found that exposure to violent, sexualized, or idealized representations on social media often leads to negative psychological outcomes, including body dissatisfaction and poor self-esteem, particularly among young users. Similarly, Sherman *et al.* (2018) examined the peer influence via instagram: Effects on brain and behavior in adolescence and young adulthood. The study showed that constant exposure to the curated experiences and achievements of peers on social media leads to increased feelings of inadequacy and the fear of missing out. Likewise, Twenge and Campbell (2018) investigated the associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents. The study concluded that frequent engagement in social comparison on social media contributes to adolescents feeling inadequate as the attempt to match behaviors and lifestyles portrayed by their peers. Further, Keles *et al.* (2020) examined the systematic review: The influence of social media on depression, anxiety, and psychological distress in adolescents. The study stated that the visibility of peers engaging in exciting or socially desirable activities increases adolescents' sense of urgency to participate, making them more susceptible to peer pressure.

Subrahmanyam and Šmahel (2011) analyzed the adolescents' digital worlds. The study found that while social media allows for instant connectivity, it lacks the emotional depth and nonverbal cues of face-to-face communication, leading to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. This can negatively impact relationships during adolescence. Similarly,

Undiyaundeye (2014) investigated the impact of social media on children, adolescents and families. The study concluded that many parents who did not grow up with social media, struggle to connect with their children's digital experiences, leading to communication barriers and misunderstandings that hinder effective parenting. Likewise, Wright and Wachs (2021) examined the youths' coping with cyber hate: roles of parental mediation and family support. The study showed that active parental involvement, including monitoring social media use and setting boundaries, significantly reduces the risks associated with online activities, such as cyberbullying and excessive screen time. Further, O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) explored the impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families. The study found that parents are unaware of their children's online behaviors, which leads to a lack of appropriate supervision which increases the likelihood of adolescents engaging in harmful online behaviors, exacerbating mental health issues.

In the context of Nepal, Khadka and Acharya (2022) examined the internet addiction and its associated factors among undergraduate students in Kathmandu, Nepal. The study found that children and adolescents in Nepal are increasingly exposed to harmful content, such as cyberbullying and unrealistic portrayals of life, which further exacerbates their mental health struggles. Similarly, Niroula and Upadhaya (2023) assessed the impact of social media on the lifestyle of youths in Nepal. The study showed that active parental involvement significantly reduces the risks associated with excessive screen time, thus helping to mitigate potential negative effects on adolescent mental health. Likewise, Paudel *et al.* (2023) investigated the association between social media and psychological effects among adolescents. The study found that peer dynamics play a critical role in shaping adolescents' social media behaviors. Further, Rajbhandari and Aryal (2024) analyzed the relationship between social media use and anxiety levels among school adolescents: A cross-sectional study in Kathmandu. The study showed that children and adolescents in Nepal who are exposed to excessive screen time and social media are more likely to experience social isolation, as virtual interactions replace face-to-face communication, leading to a decline in social skills and increased loneliness which can lead to mental health.

The above discussion shows that empirical evidences vary greatly across the studies on the impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families. Though there are above mentioned empirical evidences in the context of other countries and in Nepal, no such findings using more recent data exist in the context of Nepal. Therefore, in order to support one view or the other, this study has been conducted.

The major objective of the study is to examine the impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families in Kathmandu. Specifically, it examines the relationship of type of content consumed, peer influence, parental supervision, frequency of social media use and time sent on social media with mental health.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: section two describes the sample, data, and methodology. Section three presents the empirical results and final section draws the conclusion.

2. Methodological aspects

The study is based on the primary data which were collected from 125 respondents through questionnaire. The study employed convenience sampling method. The respondents' views were collected on type of content consumed, peer influence, parental supervision,

frequency of social media use and time sent on social media and mental health. This study is based on descriptive as well as causal comparative research designs.

The model

The model used in this study assumes that mental health depends upon time spent on social media, frequency of social media use, peer influence, parental supervision and type of content consumed. Therefore the model takes the following form:

Mental health = *f* (time spent on social media, frequency of social media use, peer influence, parental supervision, type of content consumed)

More specifically,

$MH = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TSSM + \beta_2 FSMU + \beta_3 PI + \beta_4 PS + \beta_5 TCC + e$

Where,

MH = Mental health

TSSM = Time Spent on social media

FSMU = Frequency of social media use

PI = Peer influence

PS = Parental supervision

TCC = Type of content consumed

Mental health was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "Spending time on social media makes me feel stressed or anxious.", "I often compare myself to others after seeing their posts on social media.", "I feel more isolated or lonely after using social media", "Social media use negatively affects my ability to focus on important tasks (e.g., homework, family time)", and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.842$).

Time spent on social media was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I spend more than 2 hours a day on social media", "I find it difficult to limit the time I spend on social media", "My time on social media negatively impacts my daily responsibilities (e.g., schoolwork, and chores)", and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.823$).

Frequency of social media use was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I use social media at least once every day", "I check social media multiple times a day, even if I don't have any new notifications", "I use social media more frequently during my free time (e.g., weekends, holidays)" and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.844$).7

Peer influence was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents

were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I feel pressure from my friends to post content on social media", "My peers influence the type of content I watch or follow on social media", "I feel the need to share posts or images that match the trends my friends are following", and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing Cronbach's alpha (α =0.860).

Parental supervision was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include *"*I believe that setting time limits on children's social media use helps improve overall well-being*", "*Having open discussions with children about their social media use strengthens our relationship"*, "* Having rules around social media use helps prevent negative emotional outcomes, like frustration or sadness."*, and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.897).*

The type of content consumed was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I often watch content related to lifestyle or fashion on social media", "I frequently view posts about celebrities or influencers on social media", "The content I consume on social media makes me feel more self-conscious about my appearance", and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.717).

The following section describes the independent variables used in this study along with the hypothesis formulation.

Time spent on social media

Time spent on social media refers to the amount of time an individual spends interacting with social media platforms, which may include activities such as browsing, posting content, messaging, liking, commenting, and watching videos. Coyne *et al.* (2020) showed that increased time spent on social media is not associated with increased mental health issues across development when examined at the individual level. Similarly, Riehm *et al.* (2019) found that adolescents who spend more than 3 hours per day on social media may be at heightened risk for mental health problems, particularly internalizing problems. Likewise, Vogel *et al.* (2014) investigated the social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. The study revealed that time spent on social media, where people often present idealized versions of their lives. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H_1: There is a positive relationship between time spent on social media and mental health.

Parental supervision

Parental supervision refers to the active involvement of parents in monitoring and guiding their children's activities, behaviors, and interactions, both in real life and in the virtual world. Livingstone *et al.* (2017) investigated the maximizing opportunities and minimizing risks for children online: The role of digital skills in emerging strategies of parental mediation. The study found that active parental involvement in children's online activities can reduce potential risks such as online exploitation or excessive screen time which is linked to negative outcomes like poor sleep quality, academic decline, and mental health issues. Similarly, Woods and Scott (2016) found that adolescents who reported higher levels of parental involvement in their social media activities, such as monitoring their

content consumption and setting time limits, had better mental health outcomes. Likewise, O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) stated that parents who actively discuss the content their children consume online and encourage them to question it tend to have children who are more resilient to online pressures. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H_2: There is a positive relationship between parental supervision and mental health.

Peer influence

Peer influence refers to the impact that a child's or adolescents social group, especially their friends or peers, can have on their behavior, attitudes, values, and decision-making. Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis (2015) investigated the frequent use of social networking sites is associated with poor psychological functioning among children and adolescents. The findings suggested that adolescents often experience intense pressure to conform to peer norms or gain social approval through likes, shares, and comments on their social media profiles which creates pressure to fit in Similarly, Valkenburg *et al.* (2017) concluded that peer comparison on social media platforms is associated with increased feelings of depression and social isolation, as adolescents who compared themselves unfavorably to others were more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes. Likewise, Rosen *et al.* (2019) found that digital peer pressure can lead to issues such as social comparison, body image concerns, and risky behaviors like cyberbullying. Further, Fardouly *et al.* (2016) found that pressure to conform to these digital expectations can contribute to anxiety, depression and a decline in self-esteem, particularly when online validation falls short which can make adolescents feel compelled to fit into specific molds set by their peer groups, which may not necessarily reflect their authentic selves. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H_3: There is a positive relationship between mental health and peer influence.

Frequency of social media usage

Twenge *et al.* (2019) examined the more time on technology, less happiness? Associations between digital-media use and psychological well-being. The study found that prolonged use of social media platforms has been linked to disrupted sleep patterns, reduced physical activity, and feelings of loneliness. Similarly, Fardouly *et al.* (2018) found that increased frequency of social media use exacerbates social comparison tendencies, especially when adolescents are comparing themselves to idealized images of beauty, success, or lifestyles often presented on platforms like Instagram or Facebook. Likewise, Donnelly and Kuss (2016) stated that compulsive checking of social media platforms, feelings of restlessness when not using social media, and an inability to control usage was linked to negative outcomes, including increased levels of stress and a decline in overall mental well-being. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H_4: There is a positive relationship between frequency of social media usage and mental health.

Type of content consumed

Excessive consumption of negative or distressing content, such as news related to violence or political unrest, can increase feelings of anxiety and stress (Frison and Eggermont, 2015). Kowalski *et al.* (2014) found that exposure to negative content, such as cyberbullying is found to be strongly associated with increased anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem in children and adolescents. Similarly, Nixon (2014) showed that adolescents who are

frequently exposed to cyberbullying or toxic online communities reported increased feelings of helplessness, isolation, and reduced self-worth leading to negative effects on their mental well-being. Likewise, Best *et al.* (2014) investigated the online communication, social media and adolescent wellbeing. The study found that children and adolescents who interacted with positive, motivational content showed improved emotional resilience and higher self-esteem. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H_5: There is a positive relationship between type of content consumed and mental health.

3. Results and discussion

Correlation analysis

On analysis of data, correlation analysis has been undertaken first and for this purpose, Kendall's tau correlation coefficients along with mean and standard deviation has been computed and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients matrix

This table presents Kendall's Tau coefficients between dependent variable and independent variables. The correlation coefficients are based on 125 observations. The dependent variable is MH (Mental health). The independent variables are TSSM (Time spent on social media), FSMU (Frequency of social media use), PI (Peer influence), PS (Parental supervision) and TCC (Type of content consumed).

Variables	MEAN	SD	MH	TSSM	PS	FSMU	PI	TCC
MH	3.302	0.814	1					
TSSM	3.646	0.684	0.242**	1				
PS	3.739	0.649	-0.169**	0.170**	1			
FSMU	3.698	0.640	0.144*	0.143*	0.094	1		
PI	3.430	0.877	0.302**	0.209**	0.098	0.287**	1	
TCC	3.693	0.593	0.409**	0.321**	0.090	0.166*	0.392**	1

Notes: The asterisk signs (**) and (*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent levels respectively.

Table 1 shows Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients of dependent and independent variables. The study shows that time spent on social media is positively correlated to mental health. It indicates that higher the time spent on social media leads to greater impact on mental health. Similarly, peer influence is positively correlated to mental health. It indicates that social media friend groups can put pressure on people's mental health. However, parental supervision is negatively correlated to mental health. It indicates that strict supervision of parents can help to improve mental health of the children. Further, frequency of social media use is positively correlated to mental health. It indicates that higher the frequency of social media use lead to reduce the creative capacity of the users. In addition, type of content consumed is positively correlated to mental health. It indicates that useful content used by the children and adolescents lead to improve mental health.

Regression analysis

Having indicated the Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients, the regression analysis has been carried out and the results are presented in Table 2. More specifically, it shows the regression results of time spent on social media, parental supervision, frequency of social

media use, peer influence and type of content consumed on mental health.

Table 2

Estimated regression results of time spent on social media, parental supervision, frequency of social media use, peer influence, and type of content consumed.

The results are based on 125 observations using a linear regression model. The model is $MH = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TSSM + \beta_2 PS + \beta_3 PI + \beta_4 FSMU + \beta_5 TCC + e$ where the dependent variable is MH (Mental health). The independent variables are TSSM (Time spent on social media), FSMU (Frequency of social media use), PI (Peer influence), PS (Parental supervision) and TCC (Type of content consumed).

Models	Intercepts	Regression coefficients of					Adj. R_bar^2	SEE	F- Value
		TSSM	PS	FSMU	PI	TCC			
1	1.554 (4.269) **	0.479 (4.883) **					0.156	0.748	23.842
2	2.641 (6.221) **		-0.177 (1.851)				0.012	0.809	25.1
3	2.678 (6.280) **			0.169 (1.874)			0.01	0.81	22.11
4	1.667 (6.556) **				0.477 (6.634) **		0.427	0.676	44.01
5	0.484 (1.620)*					0.763 (7.431)**	0.304	0.679	55.219
6	1.270 (2.597) **	0.464 (4.647) **	-0.09 (0.852)				0.154	0.7491	12.258
7	1.222 (2.167)*	0.459 (4.420) **	-0.088 (0.829)	0.021 (0.191)			0.147	0.752	8.12
8	0.950 (1.866)	0.301 (3.081)**	-0.100 (1.049)	0.16 (1.533)	0.43 (5.475)**		0.312	0.675	15.043
9	0.079 (0.147)	0.211 (2.206)*	-0.086 (0.955)	0.137 (1.384)	0.276 (3.251)**	0.458 (3.781)**	0.38	0.641	16.228

Notes:

i. Figures in parenthesis are t-values.
ii. The asterisk signs (**) and (*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent levels respectively.
iii. Mental health is the dependent variable.

Table 2 shows that the beta coefficients for time spent on social media are positive with mental health. It indicates that time spent on social media has a positive impact on mental health. This finding is similar to the findings of Coyne *et al.* (2020). However, the beta coefficients for parental supervision are negative with mental health. It indicates that parental supervision has a negative impact on mental health. This finding is consistent with the findings of Livingstone *et al.* (2017). In contrast, the beta coefficients for frequency of social media use are positive with mental health. It indicates that frequency of social media use has a positive impact on mental health. This finding is consistent with the findings of Twenge *et al.* (2019). Likewise, the beta coefficients for peer influence are positive with mental health. It indicates that peer influence has a positive impact on mental health. This finding is consistent with findings of Valkenburg *et al.* (2017). Further, the beta coefficients for type of content consumed are positive with mental health. It indicates that type of content consumed has a positive impact on mental health. This finding is similar to the findings of Nixon (2014).

4. Summary and conclusion

Social media refers to a digital platform and applications that enable communication across the globe, connecting people with friends, family, and even strangers, leading to a

more interconnected world. Social media allows users to share images, videos, and opinions that can influence public perception. The term "social media" refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allows users to participate on online exchanges contribute user created content or join online communities. Social media (SM) refers to an online technology used by individuals, organizations, and communities to gather information or communicate. Similarly, social media as a collection of online platforms that facilitate user interaction, ranging from social networking sites to content communities. Social media as a collection of online platforms that facilitate user interaction, ranging from social networking sites to content communities. Intense use of social media is associated with various mental health challenges, including depression and anxiety among youth (Hamm et al., 2015). Young people frequently report turning to sites such as Facebook and Twitter to escape from the external pressures threatening their mental health (Marwick and Boyd, 2014). Social media can affect adolescents' mental health and social development.

This study attempts to examine the impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families in Kathmandu. The study is based on primary data of 125 respondents.

The major conclusion of the study is that type of content consumed, peer influence, frequency of social media use and time sent on social media have positive impact on mental health. However, parental supervision has a negative impact on mental health. The study also concludes that type of content consumed is the most significant factor followed by peer influence that influence mental health.

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