

Pushpita Paul, M.S., Taehwan Park, Ph.D., Jagannath Muzumdar, Ph.D.

Pharmacy Administration and Public Health, College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, St. John's University, Queens, NY

INTRODUCTION

- Social media use is often framed as inherently addictive, yet emerging evidence suggests that addiction may depend on user intentionality. However, little is known about how usage motivations influence social media dependency and how psychological distress arising from use affect real-world social engagement.
- This study examines whether goal-directed social media use reduces dependency and whether social media-related stress leads to neglect of offline social activities.

METHODS

- A cross-sectional survey design was used with a convenience sample of college students at a private university in New York.
- The required sample size was calculated using the standard formula for estimating a population proportion. Assuming a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), a conservative proportion estimate ($p = 0.5$), and a margin of error of 5% ($e = 0.05$), the minimum required sample size was determined to be 384.
- Data were collected between February and March 2025 through both online and in person channels.
- The following items were used to measure the study constructs:
 - Goal-directed social media use^a:
 1. I use social media to meet new people and build a professional network.
 2. I use social media to communicate with many people at the same time.
 3. I use social media to get information.
 4. I use social media to be entertained.

^a 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree
 - Social media dependency (assessed using frequency of use and daily time spent on social media):
 1. How often do you use your social media platform? (1=never, 2=once a month, ..., 6=once a day, 7=several times a day)
 2. On average, how much time per day have you spent on social media over the last three months? (1=less than one hour, 2=between one and three hours, ..., 5=seven hours or more)
 - Social media-related distress^b:

After using social media, how often were you distressed by:

 1. feeling no interest in things.
 2. feeling self-conscious with others.

METHODS (cont'd)

3. feeling uneasy in crowds.
 4. feeling nervous when left alone.
 5. feeling of worthlessness.
- ^b 1=not at all, 2=a little bit, 3=moderately, 4=quite a bit, 5=extremely
- Social engagement^c :
 1. After using social media, I prefer online social interaction over face-to-face communication.
 2. I have missed social engagement or activities because of my social media use.

^c 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree
- Hierarchical multivariate regression analyses were performed while controlling for demographic covariates.

RESULTS

- A total of 399 completed survey was analyzed. Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (n=399)

Variable	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Male	201 (50%)
Female	182 (46%)
Others	16 (4%)
Academic year	
First-year (Freshman)	40 (10%)
Second-year (Sophomore)	90 (23%)
Third-year (Junior)	92 (23%)
Fourth-year (Senior)	108 (27%)
Graduate student (e.g., master's, doctoral)	69 (17%)
Race/ethnicity	
White	158 (40%)
African American	60 (15%)
Asian or Pacific Islander	109 (27%)
Hispanic or Latino	70 (18%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	2 (1%)
Field of Study (College/School)	
Liberal Arts and Sciences	58 (15%)
Business	91 (23%)
Education	89 (22%)
Pharmacy and Health Sciences	79 (20%)
Professional Studies	68 (17%)
Law	14 (4%)

RESULTS (cont'd)

- Hierarchical multivariate regression analyses showed the following results:
 - Goal-directed social media use was negatively associated with social media dependency ($\beta = -0.212, p < 0.001$), suggesting that purposeful, utility-oriented use (e.g., information seeking or networking) may be linked to lower dependency.
 - Greater distress related to social media use was positively associated with neglect of offline social activities ($\beta = 0.283, p < 0.001$), reflecting diminished capacity to sustain real-world social engagement.

DISCUSSION

- The study findings suggest that psychological consequences of social media use may depend on users' motivations and emotional responses.
- Purposeful, goal-directed use was associated with lower social media dependency, suggesting that purposeful and utility-oriented use may be less likely to reflect excessive or habitual patterns of engagement.
- In contrast, social media-related distress was associated with greater neglect of offline social activities, indicating that emotional strain after social media use may interfere with real-world social engagement.
- Together, these findings suggest that social media dependency should be understood not only in terms of time or frequency of use, but also in relation to why individuals use social media and how they emotionally respond to it.

CONCLUSION

- Social media dependency and its adverse outcomes are not universal but may vary by users' motivation and emotional responses.
- Interventions that promote purposeful, utility-driven social media use may help reduce dependency, alleviate distress, and preserve offline social engagement.