Behavioral Addiction and Student Well being: Examining the Mental Health Impact of Social Media

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ABSTRACT: Social media has become an integral part of student life, particularly among undergraduates in Southeast Asia. This study investigates the association between the intensity of social media use and mental health outcomes among students at Universitas Muslim Indonesia. A cross sectional design was employed with a sample of 120 students drawn from seven faculties. Data were collected using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and the General Health Questionnaire 12 (GHQ 12), and analyzed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, Pearson correlation, and linear regression in SPSS version 29. The results revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$) between social media use intensity and psychological distress. Regression analysis indicated that social media intensity significantly predicted GHQ 12 scores ($\beta = 0.372$, $p = 0.001$), explaining 11.7% of the variance in mental health outcomes. These findings suggest that while social media serves communicative and informational functions, its excessive use may adversely affect students' psychological well being. The study underscores the importance of self regulation, coping strategies, and institutional support in moderating the psychological effects of digital engagement. Interventions promoting digital literacy and adaptive coping should be prioritized in university settings. This research contributes to the global discourse on digital health by contextualizing student mental health within the digital behaviors of non Western academic populations.

Keywords: Social Media Use, Psychological Distress, University Students, Digital Mental Health, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a defining aspect of modern student life. Platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok have transformed how university students communicate, socialize, and access information. In Indonesia, where mobile internet penetration continues to rise rapidly, university students are among the most engaged social media users, relying on these platforms not only for entertainment but also for academic, emotional, and social support. However, despite the convenience and connectivity that social media offers, emerging

evidence suggests that prolonged and intense use can adversely impact psychological well being, particularly among young adults navigating the complex transition to higher education. The post pandemic environment has further amplified this digital immersion, raising concerns about the mental health implications of persistent social media engagement.

Recent studies in Southeast Asia have reported strong associations between excessive social media use and adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and poor academic performance (Sujarwoto et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2025). For instance, research conducted during the COVID 19 pandemic in Indonesia revealed that increased time spent on social media was significantly associated with psychological distress and mood disorders (Sujarwoto et al., 2021). Similarly, investigations in Malaysia demonstrated that although social media platforms facilitated social connection during lockdowns, their overuse contributed to emotional fatigue and cognitive overload (DONGKE & Sannusi, 2021). These findings align with broader literature that links digital overexposure to psychological strain, diminished self control, and academic disengagement. Moreover, prolonged digital interaction has been associated with declining spiritual well being and a deteriorating sense of life satisfaction among university students in Southeast Asia (Heng et al., 2021), further emphasizing the urgency to examine the psychological toll of digital hyperconnectivity.

Against this backdrop, the main concern driving recent psychological inquiries is the cumulative impact of social media exposure on students' mental health. University students are particularly susceptible due to their developmental stage, academic demands, and the heightened need for social validation. Psychological distress among students has become an increasingly visible issue, with symptoms ranging from attention deficits and emotional exhaustion to clinical depression. While digital platforms offer opportunities for connection and self expression, their unregulated use often leads to compulsive behavior patterns, disrupted sleep cycles, and feelings of inadequacy. This paradox between social connectivity and emotional vulnerability necessitates a deeper examination of the mechanisms through which social media influences mental health outcomes.

One key theoretical lens for understanding this dynamic is the theory of social comparison. According to this framework, individuals evaluate their self worth by comparing themselves to others. Social media platforms often showcase idealized versions of users' lives, promoting upward comparisons that intensify self criticism and anxiety. Chen and Xiao (2022) argue that this phenomenon can erode self esteem, especially when users internalize unrealistic aesthetic and lifestyle standards. Oleas & Pardo (2024) further explain that students frequently encounter content that triggers negative affect, reinforcing a cycle of self doubt and chronic dissatisfaction. This psychological loop, driven by algorithmically curated content, perpetuates a distorted sense of self and may predispose individuals to long term psychological disorders such as generalized anxiety and depressive episodes. Therefore, understanding how comparative processes operate in social media environments is essential for formulating interventions aimed at reducing psychological harm.

Complementing the social comparison model, the behavioral addiction framework has gained prominence as a compelling explanation for problematic social media use. Research by Moreno et

al. (2022) demonstrated that patterns of compulsive use among young adults mirror those observed in substance addiction, including symptoms of tolerance, withdrawal, and relapse. These parallels suggest that excessive social media use may function as a digital addiction, complete with neuropsychological and behavioral consequences. Alanzi et al. (2024) further validated this framework through intervention studies showing that digital detox strategies significantly reduced anxiety and depressive symptoms. This growing body of literature highlights that the addictive properties of social media stem from its design features, such as variable reward schedules, continuous notifications, and infinite scrolling, all of which encourage sustained user engagement. Such engagement, however, comes at a cost to users' emotional regulation and cognitive resources.

The mental health effects of curated digital environments are further intensified by their aesthetic and affective manipulations. Social media content is often highly curated to present only the most appealing aspects of users' lives. aAjewumi et al. (2024) provide empirical evidence that exposure to such idealized portrayals exacerbates loneliness, envy, and depression. Similarly, Balamurali (2025) observed that repeated exposure to positive only content contributes to a distorted reality, fostering feelings of inadequacy among users. The interaction between addictive behavior and curated content creates a feedback loop: users compulsively return to platforms that continually present unrealistic standards, thereby reinforcing negative self appraisals. The psychological effects of this loop are particularly pronounced in youth populations, who are still developing critical thinking and emotional regulation skills. This interplay underscores the importance of investigating not only how much students use social media, but also how the content they consume affects their psychological state.

Moreover, global trends in digital engagement following the COVID 19 pandemic underscore the persistence and escalation of social media use. Ghanayem et al. (2024) and Lee et al. (2022) documented substantial increases in daily screen time and online interaction, with concurrent rises in mental health issues. Thygesen et al. (2022) reported that the combination of misinformation, constant news exposure, and social isolation during the pandemic significantly amplified psychological stress. These studies suggest that the psychological impact of social media is not merely a function of time spent online, but also of the informational and emotional content encountered. As students increasingly turn to social media for news, entertainment, and peer interaction, they become vulnerable to information overload and cognitive fatigue, further complicating the relationship between digital behavior and mental health.

Despite the mounting evidence from Western and some Asian contexts, a significant research gap remains in understanding the culturally specific dynamics of social media and mental health among Indonesian university students. Much of the extant research has focused on Western populations or employed instruments and constructs developed in those settings. Kong (2022) noted the lack of longitudinal studies tailored to Asian populations, while Taddi et al. (2024) emphasized the need for culturally sensitive metrics that reflect localized experiences and values. Indonesia, with its diverse cultural landscape and unique educational systems, presents a distinct environment where traditional values intersect with digital modernity. Students in Indonesian universities may experience social media differently due to cultural norms surrounding collectivism, academic pressure, and religious values, all of which may modulate their psychological responses to online

interactions. Hence, applying Western based models to this context without adaptation risks overlooking critical variables that shape student behavior and well being.

To address these limitations, this study investigates the relationship between social media use intensity and mental health among students at Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI), located in Makassar, a region with distinct sociocultural characteristics. By examining this relationship within a localized context, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how digital engagement impacts mental health outside Western centric frameworks. It applies validated psychometric instruments, including the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and the General Health Questionnaire 12 (GHQ 12), to assess the correlation between digital behavior and psychological distress.

This study aims to fill a critical knowledge gap by exploring how social media use affects mental health in an under researched academic population. The novelty of the research lies in its contextual focus, which considers cultural and institutional factors unique to Indonesian higher education. The hypothesis underpinning this study posits that greater intensity of social media use is positively correlated with higher levels of psychological distress among university students. The findings are expected to inform the design of culturally appropriate interventions, promote digital literacy, and support institutional mental health policies that account for the realities of student life in Indonesia. Ultimately, this research offers a valuable contribution to the global discourse on digital behavior and mental health, providing empirical insights that can guide both academic inquiry and practical applications in diverse educational settings.

METHOD

This study employed a non experimental, cross sectional quantitative research design to investigate the association between social media use intensity and mental health symptoms among undergraduate students at Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI). The rationale for using a cross sectional design lies in its efficiency and appropriateness for identifying patterns of association between variables at a specific point in time. The selected design aligns with prior empirical work on social media and mental health, which often leverages correlational approaches to quantify relationships without manipulating independent variables (Khan et al., 2023; Phan et al., 2023).

The study population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in UMI during the 2024 2025 academic year. Participants were recruited from seven faculties to reflect institutional diversity and ensure the generalizability of findings within the university context. A total of 120 students who reported using social media for at least one hour per day were selected through purposive sampling. This non probability sampling technique was deemed appropriate because the research aimed to investigate patterns of behavior in a specific subpopulation characterized by habitual digital media engagement. As such, the sample included students from the Faculties of Medicine, Economics and Business, Engineering, Law, Public Health (FKM), Industrial Technology, and Pharmacy, with the largest proportion drawn from the Faculty of Public Health. The gender distribution comprised

48 male students (40%) and 72 female students (60%), reflecting the overall gender composition of the university.

The study utilized two well established instruments for data collection: the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and the General Health Questionnaire 12 (GHQ 12). The BSMAS is a six item instrument developed to assess behavioral addiction related to social media use, incorporating criteria such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Each item is rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very rarely) to 5 (very often), with higher scores indicating more problematic use. The scale has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties in international research, including in Southeast Asian contexts. Internal consistency estimates for the BSMAS generally range between 0.80 and 0.90, and confirmatory factor analyses have consistently supported a unidimensional structure with strong model fit indices (e.g., CFI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08) (Alanzi et al., 2024; Moreno et al., 2022).

The GHQ 12 is a 12 item screening instrument designed to assess psychological distress, particularly symptoms associated with anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction. It has been widely used in cross sectional studies due to its brevity, ease of administration, and robust validity across cultural settings. Each item is scored using a four point Likert scale, where higher total scores represent greater psychological distress. Numerous studies have validated the GHQ 12 among university populations in Asia, reporting Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80 and confirming factorial structure through exploratory and confirmatory analyses (Wojujutari et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2022). The GHQ 12's consistent performance in student settings renders it a reliable tool for capturing the mental health status of the present study's respondents.

Data collection was conducted from March 10 to March 24, 2025, using an online questionnaire platform accessible via smartphones and laptops. Prior to distribution, ethical clearance was obtained from the university's Faculty Ethics Committee to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. All participants provided informed consent digitally before proceeding with the survey. Respondents were assured of the anonymity and voluntary nature of their participation, and duplicate entries were filtered out by checking IP address identifiers. The data collection period was chosen to avoid examination schedules and institutional holidays, ensuring greater availability and attentiveness among participants.

Upon completion of data collection, responses were exported to SPSS version 29 for analysis. Preliminary data screening was conducted to assess completeness, response time, and outliers. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to evaluate the normality of distribution for the primary variables. The results indicated that the data were normally distributed (Asymp. Sig = 0.065), allowing for the use of parametric statistical procedures.

To examine the relationship between social media use intensity and mental health symptoms, a Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted. This statistical method was chosen due to its suitability for assessing the strength and direction of association between two continuous variables. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting

that higher social media engagement was associated with greater psychological distress. This result is consistent with earlier findings in both regional and global studies (Ghanayem et al., 2024).

Subsequently, a simple linear regression analysis was employed to determine the extent to which social media use intensity could predict psychological distress scores. The analysis produced a standardized beta coefficient (β) of 0.372 (p = 0.001), indicating a statistically significant predictive effect. The model explained 11.7% of the variance in GHQ 12 scores ($R^2 = 0.117$), a modest yet meaningful proportion given the multidimensional nature of mental health. These results corroborate the hypothesis that social media use contributes to mental health challenges, although they also underscore the need to consider additional variables such as academic stress, social support, and coping mechanisms in future research (Rüther et al., 2023).

Overall, the methodology employed in this study aligns with best practices in digital mental health research. By integrating psychometrically validated instruments, culturally relevant sampling strategies, and rigorous statistical techniques, the study offers reliable insights into the relationship between digital behavior and psychological well being among university students in Indonesia. Future studies may build on these findings by employing longitudinal designs, incorporating additional psychosocial variables, and expanding the scope to include comparative samples across institutions and regions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented in accordance with four primary subsections: demographic characteristics of respondents, normality testing, correlation analysis, and regression modeling. Each analytical phase is situated within a broader empirical and theoretical context, drawing upon literature in digital mental health to ensure interpretive coherence and statistical robustness.

The demographic composition of the study population, as detailed in Table 1, included 120 undergraduate students from Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI), with participants distributed across seven faculties. Gender wise, the sample consisted of 48 male students (40%) and 72 female students (60%). The largest proportion of respondents (20.8%) originated from the Faculty of Public Health (FKM), followed by the Faculty of Engineering (15%) and the Faculty of Medicine (16.7%). This diversity facilitated the identification of engagement patterns influenced by disciplinary affiliation and academic environment. These findings resonate with prior literature emphasizing that demographic variables such as gender, faculty, and academic year significantly affect social media usage patterns (Igbeneghu et al., 2021; Lakho et al., 2025).

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Respondents (n = 120)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	48	40.0
	Female	72	60.0
Faculty	Medicine	20	16.7
	Economics & Business	17	14.2
	Engineering	18	15.0
	Law	15	12.5
	Public Health (FKM)	25	20.8
	Industrial Technology	12	10.0
	Pharmacy	13	10.8

These demographic distributions affirm broader trends in digital mental health research, wherein female students are more likely to engage with social media platforms for emotional expression and social maintenance (Alnjadat et al., 2019), while engagement levels across faculties vary depending on academic demands and digital resource availability (Akther, 2023; Athukorala, 2018).

In preparation for inferential analysis, a Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test was conducted to assess the normality of the dataset. This non parametric test compares the empirical cumulative distribution of the sample against a theoretical normal distribution to determine deviations. The K–S test yielded a significance value (Asymp. Sig) of 0.065, which exceeds the standard 0.05 threshold. Accordingly, the null hypothesis of normal distribution could not be rejected. These results confirm the data's suitability for parametric analysis, reinforcing the validity of the Pearson correlation and linear regression procedures subsequently employed. The application of the K–S test is consistent with best practices in psychological and behavioral research, particularly where normality underpins assumptions for inferential statistics (Emmanuel et al., 2020; Topdemir et al., 2024).

The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 2. A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$) was observed between social media use intensity and GHQ 12 scores, indicating that greater social media engagement is associated with increased psychological distress. This moderate effect size is consistent with empirical findings from both regional and international research contexts, such as those reported by Sujarwoto et al. (2021), Alfaya et al. (2023), and Uyaroğlu et al. (2022).

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Between Social Media Intensity and Mental Health

Variables	Social Media Intensity	Mental Health (GHQ 12)
Social Media Intensity	1	0.342**
Mental Health (GHQ 12)	0.342**	1
Note: n = 120; **p** < 0.01		

These findings corroborate the notion that problematic digital engagement particularly in the form of compulsive social media use correlates with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and psychological discomfort. Moreover, the magnitude of the observed correlation aligns with estimates reported in prior studies, where r values between 0.30 and 0.50 are common in assessments of digital behavior and mental health (David et al., 2024; Taha et al., 2023).

A linear regression analysis was subsequently performed to evaluate the extent to which social media intensity predicts psychological distress, operationalized via GHQ 12 scores. The regression model, as summarized in Table 3, indicates a statistically significant beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.372$, $p = 0.001$). The corresponding R squared value ($R^2 = 0.117$) demonstrates that approximately 11.7% of the variance in mental health scores is explained by the intensity of social media use. This proportion reflects a modest yet non trivial effect, confirming that while social media use is a significant predictor, it is not the sole determinant of psychological well being.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression Coefficients

Model	Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
1	Constant	10.215	1.842		5.544	<0.001
	Social Media Intensity	0.365	0.109	0.372	3.388	0.001

Table 4. Regression Model Summary

R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error
0.342	0.117	0.110	3.720

The interpretation of these results benefits from contextualizing β values within the broader literature. According to guidelines for psychological effect sizes, a standardized beta of 0.372 constitutes a moderate effect, suggesting meaningful predictive utility without overstating causality (Lovakov & Агадуллина, 2021). Nonetheless, researchers caution against viewing this relationship as deterministic. The observed variance of 11.7% implies that other variables, including academic stress, coping mechanisms, and peer relationships, likely play critical roles in shaping mental health outcomes among university students (Alsoudi et al., 2021; Mizumoto, 2022).

Furthermore, the significance of this result underscores the need for context specific policy interventions. For example, promoting digital literacy programs and facilitating peer support networks may buffer the negative psychological consequences of excessive social media use. By combining statistical inference with contextual interpretation, the study provides a foundation for nuanced mental health strategies that address both individual behavior and institutional support systems.

Taken together, the analyses presented in this section offer a statistically robust and theoretically grounded understanding of how social media use intensity correlates with mental health among students in an Indonesian university setting. The consistency of results with regional and international literature strengthens the generalizability of the findings, while the modest effect sizes

highlight the multifactorial nature of psychological well being. The application of parametric statistical techniques was validated through normality checks, and the analytical sequence from demographic description to predictive modeling was designed to ensure methodological rigor. Future studies may explore longitudinal designs or incorporate additional predictors such as digital fatigue, academic performance, or family environment to expand on these initial findings.

The results of this study confirm a statistically significant relationship between the intensity of social media use and the presence of psychological distress among undergraduate students at Universitas Muslim Indonesia. This finding aligns with previous research conducted across diverse cultural contexts that associates excessive social media engagement with increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and psychological dysfunction (Alfaya et al., 2023; Sujarwoto et al., 2021; Uyaroğlu et al., 2022). However, the strength of this association, with an R^2 value of 0.117, also indicates that over 88% of the variance in mental health outcomes remains unexplained, suggesting that this relationship is influenced by a complex array of interacting factors.

One of the key elements affecting the variability of outcomes is the role of moderating variables, such as individual self regulation and coping strategies. The importance of these factors has been highlighted in several empirical studies (Shiraly et al., 2023; Wolenski & Pettit, 2024), which emphasize that students with higher self regulatory capacity are less susceptible to the psychological harm of intense digital engagement. Students with greater self discipline and emotional control are more likely to set healthy boundaries in their social media usage and use online platforms for positive reinforcement and informational purposes. In contrast, individuals lacking these competencies may experience maladaptive usage patterns marked by avoidance, compulsive scrolling, or emotional rumination, all of which can exacerbate mental distress.

Wolenski & Pettit (2024) further identify that coping strategies play a crucial role in mediating the mental health impacts of social media. Students who rely on adaptive strategies such as emotional regulation, seeking social support, or active problem solving are better equipped to handle the emotional overload often caused by exposure to curated and often idealized digital content. Conversely, maladaptive coping mechanisms, including withdrawal or denial, tend to intensify emotional disturbances and deepen psychological vulnerabilities. These findings imply that the correlation between social media use and mental health is not deterministic but is shaped by how users respond to the stimuli and social comparisons presented through these platforms.

Furthermore, the type and purpose of social media usage also influence psychological outcomes. For instance, platforms that facilitate connection and knowledge sharing may have beneficial effects when used constructively. However, platforms oriented toward image centric content or driven by algorithmic engagement loops often foster increased social comparison and negative self evaluation. The theory of social comparison explains this phenomenon effectively, as students exposed to idealized portrayals of success, beauty, or lifestyle are more prone to experiencing self doubt and dissatisfaction (Chen et al., 2022; Oleas & Pardo, 2024). This psychological loop reinforces low self esteem and fosters cycles of envy and inadequacy that can manifest in chronic anxiety or depression.

Institutional and cultural contexts are also essential to understanding how social media use translates into mental health outcomes. The Makassar setting, where this study was conducted, features distinct sociocultural dynamics that may influence both media engagement and its emotional repercussions. Compared to metropolitan centers with more individualized cultures, Makassar's academic and social environments are generally more communal. This communal orientation may both buffer and complicate social media experiences, as students may rely more heavily on digital platforms to sustain peer interactions and social obligations. Moreover, institutional factors such as access to mental health services, digital literacy training, and campus policies on screen usage can mediate the effect of social media use on student well being (Cai et al., 2024; Watat & Bonaretti, 2022).

For example, Watat & Bonaretti (2022) discuss how the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) can be adapted to reflect infrastructure limitations and policy variations in resource constrained institutions. Similarly, Cai et al. (2024) argue that localized opportunity structures, such as the presence of supportive digital learning ecosystems, influence both academic performance and psychological resilience. These studies collectively emphasize that the institutional ecology of a university shapes the digital practices and mental health profiles of its student body.

Cultural dimensions further compound this complexity. In collectivist societies like Indonesia, the normative emphasis on social harmony and group affiliation can intensify pressures related to online impression management. Aksar & Firdaus (2021) highlight that patriarchal and collectivist cultural values may deepen gendered disparities in social media experiences. Female students, in particular, may encounter heightened self presentation anxiety, as well as exposure to online harassment or unrealistic beauty norms. These culturally contextualized stressors are often overlooked in universal models of digital behavior and must be accounted for in designing targeted interventions.

In light of these multifactorial influences, the current findings suggest that mental health interventions for university students should not focus solely on regulating social media use but must also strengthen students' psychological resilience and contextual awareness. Panneer et al. (2023) recommend integrated campus programs that combine psychological support services with digital education and life skills training. Structured interventions such as peer counseling, mindfulness sessions, and emotion regulation workshops could help mitigate the psychological burdens exacerbated by digital overexposure. Furthermore, preventive education that fosters critical awareness about digital content for instance, recognizing curated realities, resisting social comparison, and managing algorithmic manipulation can empower students to navigate social media in healthier ways.

Similarly, educational frameworks can be revised to include digital and media literacy modules as part of the standard university curriculum. Greenhow & Galvin (2020) advocate for pedagogical models that incorporate social media as a teaching tool while emphasizing its risks and promoting self regulation. By guiding students to use digital platforms constructively e.g., for academic collaboration or community service institutions can repurpose these tools to serve educational rather than purely recreational ends. Taibi et al. (2023) further highlight the importance of

developing students' capacities to detect and resist harmful online content, a skill increasingly essential in the era of information overload and digital misinformation.

Ultimately, while the observed effect size in this study is modest, it provides an important empirical anchor for advancing conversations around student mental health and digital engagement. The findings affirm that social media use is not a neutral or uniformly experienced phenomenon. Rather, its impact on mental health is shaped by a constellation of personal, institutional, and cultural variables that interact in dynamic and sometimes contradictory ways. This necessitates a multi layered approach to intervention, one that moves beyond behavioral regulation to address deeper psychosocial and structural determinants. The study thus adds to the growing body of evidence advocating for interdisciplinary strategies to support student well being in a hyperconnected world.

The limitations of the current study, including its cross sectional design and reliance on self reported measures, should encourage caution in interpretation and stimulate future research. Longitudinal studies that track changes over time, especially during critical academic transitions or social disruptions, would offer richer insights into causal relationships. Moreover, mixed methods approaches that incorporate qualitative data could better illuminate the lived experiences behind the observed statistical patterns. These future directions are vital for building a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how digital culture intersects with youth mental health in the Global South.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between social media use intensity and mental health among university students in Indonesia, specifically at Universitas Muslim Indonesia. The results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between social media engagement and psychological distress, with social media intensity explaining 11.7% of the variance in GHQ 12 mental health scores. While this effect size is modest, it underscores the relevance of digital behaviors in shaping emotional well being in academic settings. The discussion further established that this relationship is moderated by individual, institutional, and cultural factors, including coping strategies, self regulation, and the sociocultural environment of the university.

These findings contribute to the growing body of literature affirming the psychological risks associated with unregulated social media use. Importantly, they highlight the need for context specific interventions that combine digital literacy education, psychological support services, and culturally informed mental health programs. The study also reinforces the utility of behavioral addiction and social comparison frameworks in explaining the mechanisms through which social media affects psychological outcomes.

While the cross sectional design limits causal inference, this research provides an empirical basis for designing longitudinal and mixed methods studies that can uncover more nuanced dynamics. Future research should incorporate a broader array of predictors and explore resilience

mechanisms that can buffer against digital overexposure. Overall, this study enhances our understanding of the digital lives of students in non Western contexts and offers actionable insights for educational and public health policy.

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