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# SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION IN STUDENT AGE AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL PROBLEM

## Abstract

The article examines social media addiction in students based on the psychological characteristics of their emotional-volitional, motivational and communicative spheres of personality. The purpose of the study is to identify opportunities for the prevention and treatment of social media addiction, development of methods and programs for online therapy for students. To solve this goal, I will use the method of describing and summarizing scientific literature on the topic of the study, methods of analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction. A brief overview of scientific research on this topic is provided. The medical, psychological and social difficulties that users face with excessive use of social networks are described. The most significant reasons contributing to the formation of addiction are highlighted. Methods and areas of work on the prevention and therapy of social media addiction in students are proposed.

**Keywords:** social media, social media addiction, student, personality, internet methods of addiction prevention and therapy

**JEL:** D83, D91

## Introduction

The modern world is a world of rapidly developing digital technologies, a qualitatively different world than the one that existed 20–30 years ago. Therefore, it requires special study, research into the influence of the Internet, digital technologies on the life and psyche of an individual.

Today, social media have become an integral part of everyday life. Teenagers, students, and even adults actively use social media for various purposes:

communication, finding friends, self-presentation and self-expression, finding the necessary information, entertainment, etc. And these are, of course, positive aspects of using social media.

Scientists have been counting social media users for many years and claim that it is constantly growing. Thus, at the end of 2023, there were 4.76 billion social media users in the world, which is 60% of the world's inhabitants. The results of research by Meltwater and the We Are Social agency (Kemp, 2023) indicate that in 2023, on average, 8.4 new social media users appeared every second.

However, what is important, of course, is not the fact of using social media, but the time devoted to social media and its content. According to statistics, each subscriber spent on average 2 hours 23 minutes daily on social media in 2023. Instagram is in first place in popularity, WhatsApp is in second place, and Facebook is in third place.

For Android devices, the statistics are slightly different. TikTok is the most popular. The average user spent 34 hours a month on this social platform in 2023, or just over an hour a day. YouTube is in second place with just over 28 hours a month, and Facebook is in third place with almost 20 hours a month.

At first glance, it doesn't seem like much. But if you add up all the time spent on the Internet, it turns out that in 2023, the average person spent 6 hours and 40 minutes a day online. This figure is 1% more than in 2022.

Women aged 16–24 spend the most time on social media, while men aged 55–64 are the least active. According to surveys, 91% of people aged 18–24 use social media daily. Among people over 55, 30% are daily users. In Europe and America, more than 90% of teenagers have access to the Internet via mobile devices, and about 45% admit that they are online almost constantly (Kemp, 2023).

Social media have entered people's lives so quickly, taking up so much time in them, that sometimes even people themselves do not realize how dependent they have become on them. A computer and a phone sometimes replace friends, parents, relatives, school, etc. And even having the opportunity for real communication – for example, at a family dinner, on a trip, in the company of friends – a person prefers to browse social media and communicate virtually. The virtual reality, which is “largely cut off from ordinary real human life” (Tsyglakova et al., 2024), becomes the true reality.

Social media addiction can be defined as a condition in which a person experiences a very strong, irresistible desire to use social media, despite the negative consequences of which he or she is aware. This condition is accompanied by signs similar to other types of addiction: obsessive behavior, characterized by a strong, irresistible desire to constantly check for updates, likes and comments; loss of control over the time spent online; loss of interest in other activities; neglect of everyday personal and professional responsibilities (Voyskunskiy, 2004).

The subject of the study is social media addiction in students based on the psychological characteristics of their emotional-volitional, motivational and

communicative spheres of personality. The purpose is to identify opportunities for the prevention and treatment of social media addiction in students; development of methods and programs for online therapy for students. The hypothesis is the assumption about the possibility of online therapy for addiction to social networks in student age. To solve this goal, I will use in the article the method of describing and summarizing scientific literature on the topic of the study, methods of analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, since this article is theoretical in nature.

## 1. Relevance of Internet addiction research

Excessive use of social media, according to many researchers, negatively affects various areas of a person's life: educational activities, physical and mental health, social skills and abilities, which determines the relevance and practical significance of studying this problem.

The scientific problem of Internet addiction has been studied for over 20 years by scientists from different countries. The first attempts to identify individual psychological characteristics associated with Internet-addicted behavior were implemented in 1998 by K. Young and R.C. Rogers (Young et al., 1998). Every year the number of scientific studies devoted to this topic increases. An analysis of the works of scientists from different countries allows us to identify the main directions of studying addiction to social media.

The researchers linked the following personality traits with internet-addicted behavior: S.E. Allison (Allison et al., 2006) – with schizoid tendencies, S.E. Caplan (Caplan et al., 2009) – with introversion and feelings of loneliness, aggressiveness and hostility, S. Chiu (Chiu et al., 2004), M. Mehroof, M.D. Griffiths (Mehroof et al., 2010) – with sensation seeking, E.J. Kim (Kim et al., 2008) – with decreased self-control and narcissistic personality traits, S. Ko (Ko et al., 2005) – with low self-esteem, S. Peters, L. Malesky (Peters et al., 2008), Y. Hamburger (Hamburger et al., 2000) – with neuroticism, J. Parker (Parker et al., 2008) – with low emotional intelligence, E.J. Jeong, D.H. Kim (Jeong et al., 2010) – with low self-efficacy in real life compared to high self-efficacy in virtual life, R.F. Teperik, M.A. Zhukova (Teperik et al., 2009) – with the level of empathic abilities. A.Yu. Yegorov (Yegorov et al., 2005) – with low self-esteem and depression.

American psychologist K. Young (Young, 1997; Young, 2004) identified the main prerequisites and stages of development of this type of addiction. Young (Young, 1998) proposed diagnostic criteria for Internet addiction. Dr. M. Orzack (Orzack et al. 1999) identified physical and psychological symptoms characteristic of Internet addiction. M. Griffiths (Griffiths, 1996) considered the possibility of Internet addiction developing on the basis of other forms of addictive behavior. R. Davis (Davis, 2001) proposed a cognitive-behavioral model of pathological Internet use. A.Ye. Voyskunskiy (Voyskunskiy et al., 2000) developed his own

criteria for this addiction. V.D. Mendelevich (Mendelevich et al., 2003) identified types of Internet-addicted personalities. V.A. Loskutova (Loskutova, 2004) studied the cultural characteristics of Russian-language Internet users. A.Ye. Zhichkina (Zhichkina et al., 1999), A.Yu. Yegorov (Yegorov, 2005) studied the personality traits of Internet-addicted users. M.I. Drepa (Drepa, 2010) was engaged in the development of methods, techniques, and technologies for overcoming addiction on social media. M.S. Fabrikant (Fabrikant, 2024) studied psychological factors of safe behavior on the Internet.

However, effective ways to prevent Internet addiction have not been sufficiently studied to date. There are also no developed methods for preventing and treating social media addiction using online technologies. There are no developed and tested programs for preventing this type of addiction specifically among students, as the most vulnerable age group. There is no clear answer to the question of what comes first: Internet addiction or the user's psychological and social difficulties. Does excessive use of social media lead to mental and social problems or is addiction a consequence of them? What are the predictors of social media addiction and how can they be ranked by importance? Can social media be used as a platform for treating social media addiction? These issues require further scientific research and understanding.

## 2. Medical problems

A number of scientific researchers (Balovskyak, 2008; Ganizheva, 2021; Medvedev et al., 2018) note the negative impact of long-term use of phones and computers on the physical health and psyche of users. Here are the most common physical health problems.

1. Deterioration of vision caused by great strain on the retina and eye muscles. If a person looks at flickering pictures on the screen at a close distance for a long time, the eye muscles practically do not work, which leads to myopia, which is becoming younger every year. In adolescents, this problem is most pronounced, since their eyes, the muscles that control them, are not yet strong.

2. Posture disorder and curvature of the spine caused by the almost motionless posture in which a person sits at a computer. At the same time, the neck, head muscles, shoulders and arms are under tension. Prolonged static tension leads to back pain.

3. Obesity caused by a sedentary lifestyle, as well as the fact that browsing social media while eating food leads to overeating.

4. Overload of the wrist joints. The nerve endings of the fingertips are damaged by constant impacts on the keys. Numbness and weakness in the fingers occur. This can lead to damage to the joint and ligament apparatus of the wrist (carpal tunnel syndrome), and in the future, hand diseases can become chronic.

5. Headaches, dizziness, tinnitus, nausea caused by prolonged tension of the cranial muscles, facial muscles, as well as chronic mental stress.

6. Sleep disorders. A large flow of information, its frequent change can provoke problems with falling asleep and the quality of sleep.

### 3. Psychological problems

In addition to medical problems, prolonged use of social media can lead to psychological difficulties.

1. Reduced concentration. The rapid change of bright pictures on the screen when viewing social networks causes distraction and a deterioration in the ability to concentrate on any type of activity. It teaches you to quickly grasp the essence, sometimes mistakenly, and not to dwell on details. But it is in the subtle nuances that something new and unknown lies. In order to understand, study, and remember something, a person needs to concentrate on one topic for a long time, and not quickly jump from topic to topic.

2. Reduced empathy. Frequent, cursory viewing of news, pictures containing descriptions and images of disasters, calamities, etc. leads to a decrease in empathy for the participants of these events. Suffering becomes habitual for a person, since he sees it on the screen every day.

3. Reduced emotionality. The rapid change of topics and stories on social media does not allow one to fully experience all the joy, pain, anxiety and other emotions caused by these topics.

4. Standardization of thinking. The computer teaches how to solve a problem using algorithms, embedded software, and standards. At the same time, creative, unconventional thinking does not develop.

5. Problems with long-term memory caused by easy access to information. Searching for the necessary information on the Internet sometimes takes a few seconds, so the psychological attitude towards the need and duration of memorizing information is not formed.

6. Problems with the perception of large texts and books. Frequently using social media, a person gets used to a brief summary of the material and is often unable to make long efforts to concentrate and maintain attention, perceive and mentally analyze large texts. Sometimes students find a summary of the content of a book on 1–2 pages, since they cannot read the entire book.

7. Decreased self-esteem. Ö.B. Köse and A. Doğan found a moderate negative correlation between self-esteem and social media addiction. The correlation coefficient is higher for users with more than 500 subscribers (Köse et al., 2019). The results of the study by N.S. Hawi and M. Samaha showed that excessive use of social media negatively affects self-esteem, and the latter – on life satisfaction. Additional

analysis revealed that self-esteem determines the impact of social media addiction on life satisfaction (Hawi et al., 2017).

8. Increased levels of anxiety and depression. J. Brailovskaia and J. Margraf found in a study conducted in Germany that social media addiction correlates with depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms (Brailovskaia et al., 2021). Social media use is significantly associated with increased depression (Lin et al., 2016). Depression significantly predicts the development of social media addiction (Haand et al., 2020). There is a positive correlation between students' level of social media addiction and their level of social anxiety (Baltaci, 2019).

9. Reduced subjective well-being and life satisfaction. A negative moderate correlation was found between life satisfaction and social media addiction. Social media addiction was confirmed to be negatively associated with subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Shensa et al., 2017).

## 4. Social problems

Excessive use of social networks also leads to the emergence of social risks.

1. Prevents the development of real social interactions.
2. Negatively affects the development of communication skills and social abilities.
3. Leads to decreased academic performance. Excessive use of social media has been linked to decreased academic performance in school and college students (Lau, 2017). Similarly, a study by J.J. Al-Menayes found that the amount of time a student spends on social media is negatively correlated with their academic performance (Al-Menayes, 2015).
4. Problems of self-identification of the individual. This is especially important for students, since it is at this age that the active process of self-identification occurs. The use of social media can have a negative impact, creating a distorted picture of the surrounding reality, the assimilation of false ideals and standards.
5. Social isolation. Excessive communication in the virtual world can lead to devaluation of communication itself, loss and impoverishment of contacts with people around a person and isolation from the real world.

## 5. Causes of Internet addiction

There are a number of reasons, both social and psychological, that lead students to social media addiction. Let's look at them in more detail.

1. Lack of real communication and social connections, social isolation. Many students experience a lack of communication in real life, which prompts them to seek contacts in the virtual space. But interaction with virtual friends absorbs a person's attention and time, which he could spend with his loved ones, which he could spend on finding friends and like-minded people in real life, which ultimately further increases a person's social isolation. According to M. Aksoy (Aksoy, 2018), the main reason for addiction to social networks is the need for communication, while male participants are more interested in making new friends, and female participants are more interested in communicating with their real friends.

2. Feeling of subjective loneliness. It has been scientifically proven that the risk of developing social media addiction is higher if a person experiences loneliness (Caplan et al., 2009). A positive correlation between the level of social media addiction and the level of loneliness is also found in students (Baltaci, 2019). Moreover, it turned out that loneliness (as well as depression) are important predictors of social media addiction (Dalvi-Esfahani et al., 2019). Loneliness is positively associated with both social media addiction and video game playing (Andreassen et al., 2017).

3. Need for approval, recognition and support. Likes and comments under social media posts create the illusion of recognition and support, which can contribute to the development of addiction.

4. Boredom and laziness. Scrolling through social media for hours provides an easy way to fill the day, to waste time without burdening yourself.

5. Procrastination. Social media are often used as a means of avoiding important tasks. People with poorly developed self-control and low anxiety levels tend to exhibit procrastination.

6. Lack of social support. In the virtual world of social media, a user can seek support that he does not receive in real life. At the same time, it is sometimes easier to find it in the virtual world, through the creation of your own ideal image on your page. Unpleasant users are ignored, deleted from the contact list, and their place is quickly taken by others. A person does not need to build and then develop not always simple relationships with people around him for a long time.

7. The presence of other addictions. A person who already has an addiction forms a new one more easily and quickly. The habit of smoking, drinking alcohol, and eating unhealthy food turned out to be companions of addiction to social media (Pruthvi et al., 2018).

Research by N. Hawi and M. Samaha showed that agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability, self-esteem, and Internet use were predictors of both Internet addiction and social media addiction (Hawi et al., 2016). Age, life satisfaction, and self-esteem did not predict Internet addiction and social media addiction, while extroversion predicted only Internet addiction, and female gender, posting updates, and number of friends predicted only social media addiction (Hawi et al., 2019).

Positive correlations have been found between social media addiction and depression, anxiety, stress, neuroticism, emotional problems, low self-esteem, cyber victimization, physical health problems, mental disorders, loneliness, procrastination, smartphone and Internet addiction, and infidelity in relationships. Negative correlations have been found between social media addiction and life satisfaction, academic performance of schoolchildren and students, and labor productivity (Sheynov, 2021).

Despite the undeniable theoretical and practical significance of these scientific works, studies conducted at different times often contradict each other. Therefore, additional scientific research is needed. Of course, methods for preventing the formation of social media addiction are also needed. To be effective, they must be comprehensive.

## 6. Methods, program for preventing the formation of social media addiction

I propose the following methods, which are still theoretically formulated and require further empirical testing of their effectiveness:

1. Information campaigns that aim to raise students' awareness of the risks of social media addiction and ways to prevent and treat it. Such campaigns may include:

- Lectures and seminars. Conducting educational events for students, parents and teachers.
- Information materials. Distribution of booklets, posters and publications on social media with recommendations for preventing the development of addiction.

2. Developing awareness and goal setting, including the ability to analyze actions and their consequences, set specific goals and objectives for using social media.

3. Developing self-regulation and time management skills, which helps to manage time effectively and, as a result, reduces the risk of addiction. Key strategies are:

- Time management – setting clear time limits for your social media use.
- Priorities – identifying the most important tasks and implementing them consistently.
- Self-observation – keeping a diary of your social media use to analyze your behavior and identify problem areas.

4. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is one of the key factors in preventing addiction. The main recommendations are:

- Physical activity – regular exercise and sports.

- Healthy sleep – maintaining a sleep regimen has a beneficial effect on all mental activity of a person.
5. Psychological support plays an important role in preventing and overcoming addiction. It includes:
- Counseling with psychologists – providing access to professional help for students experiencing addiction problems.
  - Group trainings – conducting trainings on developing communication skills, stress resistance, reducing anxiety, etc.
  - Hobbies and interests – organizing clubs of interest, encouraging students to participate in various extracurricular activities, which will create favorable conditions for real communication.
6. Technological solutions – using technology to control time spent on social media. These include:
- Applications and extensions – installing applications and extensions for browsers that restrict access to social media (for example, Stay Focused, Forest).
  - Modes and settings – using “Do Not Disturb” modes and notification settings to minimize distractions.

Based on the above, it can be argued that social media addiction is a real problem that requires both study and finding solutions. As a solution, I propose creating a special online therapy program for social media addiction in students on the social media themselves. I have an ambitious idea to transform social media addiction into a useful pastime for students to acquire new knowledge, skills and abilities, to develop awareness and purposeful use of time. Since the best way to get rid of an enemy is to turn him into a friend or, at least, an ally. To do this, it is possible to organize various events, competitions, promotions, training courses and seminars, etc. on social media, which will contribute to the development of a number of useful skills and abilities of students:

- development of self-presentation skills – creation of an attractive profile on social media that allows the student to better describe himself, his achievements, interests; development of CV writing skills;
- development of the cognitive sphere of the individual – use of social media to participate in online courses, webinars and master classes on topics of interest; joining professional communities and interest groups in order to exchange knowledge and experience with people with similar interests; development of skills in writing articles, essays and other texts;
- development of social and communication skills – how to better interact with the audience, respond to messages, positive and negative comments, negotiate;
- development of skills in creating and processing photo and video materials posted on social media, which will allow students to master the skills of photography and video editing, creating high-quality visual content;

- development of creative abilities. Social media can act as a platform for creative expression, where students can post art, music and other creative materials.

## Conclusion

A. Voyskunskiy believes that the influence of social media should not be absolutized only as negative or positive. Virtual communication experience entails not only negative transformations of personality, but, to a certain extent, provides the opportunity for the positive development of individual abilities and personal qualities (Voyskunskiy et al., 2000).

Thus, social media addiction is a truly relevant scientific issue. Prevention of addiction requires a comprehensive approach, joint efforts of educational institutions, psychologists, parents and, of course, the students themselves. This will help transform excessive ineffective time spent on social networks, which is harmful to physical and mental health, into a source of new opportunities and achievements that can significantly improve the quality of life and contribute to both personal and professional growth of a student in the digital age. Of course, this will require constant self-control and reflection, desire and readiness for development and positive transformations.

Social media provide each user with unique opportunities. Their active use can contribute to both the emergence of addiction and be a powerful tool for self-education and personal growth.

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