Social Media Addiction And Its Relation To Psychological Alienation Among School-Aged Adolescents

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Abstract:

This study investigates the relationship between social media addiction and psychological alienation among school-aged adolescents in Algeria. Using a descriptive method, the study employed a random sample of 100 adolescents and utilized the Social Media Addiction Scale and Psychological Alienation Scale. The results showed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.531$) between social media addiction and psychological alienation. However, no significant gender differences were found in either social media addiction or psychological alienation. The study highlights the need for awareness and intervention regarding the psychological impacts of social media use among adolescents.

Keywords: Social Media Addiction ;Psychological Alienation; Adolescents ;Gender Differences; Secondary School Students; Algeria; Internet Addiction; Psychological Well-being.

1. Introduction:

In recent years, the rapid rise of social media platforms has had a profound impact on society, particularly on adolescents. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become deeply embedded in the daily lives of young people, influencing their social interactions, academic performance, and mental health (Odgers & Robb, 2020). While these platforms offer numerous benefits, such as connectivity and social engagement, their excessive use has been linked to psychological issues, including feelings of isolation and alienation, which are characteristic of modern adolescent experiences (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Psychological alienation refers to the sense of disconnection and detachment from the surrounding environment, and it has become an increasingly important topic in the field of adolescent psychology (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008).

The addictive nature of social media has been shown to exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression among adolescents, contributing to a heightened risk of psychological alienation (Twenge, 2019). Adolescents, often referred to as the "Internet Generation," are particularly susceptible to these issues due to the pervasive influence of the internet and social media on their lives (Smith, 2018). Research by Kuss and Griffiths (2017) demonstrated that adolescents who are heavily involved in social media use are more likely to experience negative psychological outcomes, including increased

alienation, which negatively affects their cognitive development and academic performance.

In Algeria, the issue of social media addiction and its effects on psychological well-being among adolescents has received limited attention. While there is a growing body of research on social media use and its psychological impact in other contexts (Pew Research Center, 2020), few studies have specifically focused on Algerian adolescents. Given the increasing prevalence of social media use among young people in Algeria, it is important to examine the relationship between social media addiction and psychological alienation among high school students in this region.

The present study aims to explore this relationship among Algerian high school students and address the following research questions:

- Is there a statistically significant correlation between social media use and psychological alienation among school-aged adolescents?
- Are there statistically significant differences in social media addiction based on gender?
- Are there statistically significant differences in psychological alienation based on gender?

Research Hypotheses:

1. There is a statistically significant correlation between social media addiction and psychological alienation among school-aged adolescents.
2. There are statistically significant differences in social media addiction scores based on gender.
3. There are statistically significant differences in psychological alienation scores based on gender.

2. Theoretical Framework

Social Media Addiction:

Social media can be defined as communication tools that rely on the internet, enabling people to interact with each other by sharing information. Among the most popular platforms are Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram, among others. Social media refers to websites and applications that use the internet to facilitate communication between users, allowing information exchange through computers or mobile devices. These platforms can be used for social purposes, such as fostering interaction between friends, family members, and others regardless of their location. They can also serve commercial purposes, as these platforms have become essential marketing hubs for businesses aiming to attract more customers (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).

Ward (2011) defines social media addiction as the emotional state characterized by an overwhelming desire to browse social media platforms, with excessive use of the virtual world at most times. This addiction often results in a distorted sense of time and the inability to resist the urge to engage in social media, leading adolescents in secondary education to neglect other social activities (Fadlallah, 2011). It is operationally defined as

excessive use of social media for more than 30 hours per week, as measured by the Social Media Addiction Scale by Basma Hussein Eid Younis (2016).

Psychological Alienation

Psychological alienation is defined as an individual's feeling of disconnection, loss of trust, and rejection of social values and norms. It is characterized by psychological distress and the weakening or breakdown of the individual's sense of self, influenced by cultural and social processes within society (Raghda Naissa, 2012). Some psychologists and psychiatrists describe mental alienation as the symptoms in which an individual seems estranged from the society they live in (Sadiq Adel, 2005). It is operationally defined as the experience of an adolescent feeling a loss of belonging, disengagement, and a lack of direction, as indicated by their total score on the Psychological Alienation Scale by Raghda Naissa (2012).

The Emergence and Evolution of Social Networks

The emergence of social networking sites began in the late 1990s, with platforms such as Classmates in 1995 for connecting classmates and Friendster in 1997, which focused on direct connections between people. These sites primarily featured user profiles and the ability to send private messages to friends. The main focus of early social media platforms was private messaging among friends (Zahran, 2002). The completion of social networks began with the launch of Facebook, followed by an increasing number of users joining global networks. This growth corresponded with the rise of internet users worldwide. The true birth of social networks as we know them today came in 2002 with the appearance of Friendster, which was so successful that Google attempted to acquire it in 2003. In 2005, MySpace emerged as one of the largest and earliest social networks, competing with Facebook (Ramadan, 2000).

Positive and Negative Aspects of Social Media

- Positive Aspects of Social Media:

- **A Window to the World:** Social networks provide millions of users with an open window to explore ideas and cultures from across the globe.
- **Self-expression and Communication:** Social media platforms serve as a new venue for self-expression, allowing individuals to voice their opinions and engage with others of diverse viewpoints. Many users find the courage to talk about themselves and share their thoughts through these platforms, which often receive significant support and admiration, boosting self-confidence.
- **Increased Openness to Others:** Social media fosters communication with others, regardless of differences in religion, belief, culture, or traditions. Users may connect with individuals from vastly different backgrounds, broadening their social horizons.

-Negative Aspects of Social Media:

- **Reduced Interpersonal Interaction:** Despite the ease of communication, social media reduces the time spent in face-to-face interactions among individuals and groups.
- **Lack of Privacy:** One of the main challenges of social media is the absence of privacy, which has led to various emotional and psychological issues among young users, sometimes extending to financial damage.
- **Addiction:** Social networks create an environment of entertainment and excitement that can make individuals addicted to them. Studies have shown that a significant number of young people spend over seven hours a day on these platforms.

Types of Alienation

- Psychological Alienation: Psychological alienation is a broad concept that refers to situations where the unity of an individual's personality is fractured or weakened by the cultural and social processes occurring within society, ultimately affecting the individual's sense of self. It signifies a distortion in the development of human personality, where the individual loses a coherent sense of existence and continuity.

-Social Alienation: Social alienation refers to the feeling of disconnection between an individual and others, marked by a lack of affection, emotional support, and limited empathy and participation. This alienation leads to a breakdown in social bonds and relationships.

-Political Alienation: Political alienation involves the feeling of powerlessness in relation to political participation, particularly in elections that are supposed to reflect the will of the people. It also involves feelings of isolation from meaningful participation in decision-making processes that directly affect the individual's interests, due to the belief that their opinions are not valued or heard.

Manifestations of Psychological Alienation

- **Social Isolation:** This refers to an individual withdrawing from the prevailing cultural trends in their community, experiencing loneliness and emotional emptiness, even when among others. They seek to distance themselves from others. This term is often used when discussing alienation to describe the intellectual and cultural isolation of thinkers or intellectuals who feel detached from mainstream societal values (Raghda Naissa, 2012).
- **Rebellion:** Rebellion reflects a lack of direction, where individuals feel they have no clear or defined goals in life, and they live only for the present moment without future aspirations. This leads to behavioral disruptions and a chaotic lifestyle.
- **Lack of Belonging:** This is the feeling of not being part of one's primary social group, rejecting its values and culture, and experiencing a general sense of alienation, powerlessness, and not belonging.

3 . Methodological Procedures of the Study

- Study Method

Given the nature of the topic under study, its hypotheses, and the variables involved, it was essential to choose an appropriate method. This led to the adoption of a descriptive method, which aims to answer the fundamental question of the science's nature and the phenomenon under research. The descriptive method includes analyzing the phenomenon, its environment, and the relationship between its components. It may also involve examining opinions and trends, meaning that the descriptive method extends to understanding how the phenomenon operates.

Study Boundaries

The current study is confined to the following boundaries:

- **Temporal Boundaries:** The study was conducted during the academic year 2024/2025.

- **Spatial Boundaries:** The study was carried out at the Khanour El-Sayed Secondary School, located in the municipality of Bordj Menaïl, in the Wilaya of Boudouas.

Sample of the Study

The study relied on a random sampling method. With this approach, each element of the original population has the same chance of being included in the sample. Simple random sampling is advantageous due to its ease of application and the fact that its results are generalizable to the original population, provided the sample size is relatively large. The study sample consisted of 100 adolescent students.

Study Tools:

- **Social Media Addiction Scale:** The study used the Basma Hussein Eid Younis Social Media Addiction Scale, which consists of 30 items. Each item reflects the level of social media addiction experienced by the students. The response options are scored using a 3-point Likert scale, where "+" represents agreement. No incorrect statements are included in the scale.

- **Scoring Method:** The score for this scale ranges from 0 to 60. A "Yes" answer is worth two points, a "Somewhat" answer is worth one point, and a "No" answer is worth zero points.

- **Psychological Alienation Scale:** The study used Raghda Naissa's (2012) Psychological Alienation Scale, which consists of seven dimensions: loss of sense of belonging, lack of commitment to norms, helplessness, lack of value, loss of purpose, loss of meaning, and self-centeredness.

- **Scoring Method:** For each item, respondents answer using one of five options: (Strongly Agree, Agree, Sometimes, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Positive statements are scored as follows: (5, 4, 3, 2, 1), while negative statements are scored in reverse (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The highest score a student can achieve on this scale for all items is 350 points, while the lowest is 70 points. The mean score of the scale is 210 points, which allows for an assessment of the extent to which psychological alienation is prevalent among adolescents.

Statistical Methods Used to Analyze Results:

- **Pearson Correlation Coefficient (R):** This parametric statistical measure is used to study the strength and direction of the relationship between two quantitative variables. The correlation coefficient is useful when the researcher hypothesizes that a change in one variable will be followed by a change in the other.
- **Mean:** The arithmetic mean of the scores of the sample members on the scale items is calculated. The mean is a measure of central tendency that indicates how close the individual scores are to one another and to the average.
- **Standard Deviation:** The standard deviation is an important measure of dispersion, calculated as the square root of the average squared differences from the mean. It helps in understanding the distribution and consistency of the sample scores.
- **T-Test:** The T-test is a parametric test based on the normal distribution of the studied samples. It is used to determine the statistical significance of differences between groups, such as gender differences in the study.

4. Presentation, Discussion, and Interpretation of the Study Results

Presentation and Analysis of the First Hypothesis:

The first hypothesis of this study is: "There is a statistically significant correlation between social media addiction and psychological alienation among school-aged adolescents." Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyze the results, which are represented in the following table:

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Between Social Media Addiction Scale and Overall Psychological Alienation Score Among the Sample

Variables	Sample Size	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Social Media Addiction	100	0.531	0.05
Psychological Alienation			

It is evident from Table 1 that there is a strong positive and statistically significant correlation between the levels of social media addiction and psychological alienation at the 0.05 significance level. The Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.531, which indicates that as the level of social media addiction increases among adolescents, their feelings of psychological alienation also increase. Conversely, as social media addiction decreases, so does psychological alienation.

Referring to the theoretical framework, this result aligns with numerous studies, including Eid's (2016) research, which found that excessive use of social media leads to addiction, causing psychological problems. Social media use provides an escape from reality, allowing adolescents to live in a "dream world." This excessive use causes a sense of disconnection from the real world, which fits the definition of psychological alienation (Eid Younis, 2016).

No one can deny the fact that an adolescent spending hours a day on social media automatically enters a cycle of addiction, creating an ideal world that differs from reality. However, the adolescent soon encounters reality, feeling the gap created between them and their surroundings, resulting in a sense of not belonging. This is also confirmed by Griffiths (2001), who found that social media addiction, particularly among adolescents, leads to feelings of loneliness. Additionally, Khidr (2009) noted that the negative effects of Facebook outweigh the positive ones, including anxiety, lack of focus, occasional depression, and the decline of face-to-face social interactions.

Presentation and Analysis of the Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis of this study is: "There are statistically significant differences in the mean scores of social media addiction based on gender." A T-test was used to calculate the differences, and the results are shown in the table below:

Table 2: Gender Differences in Social Media Addiction

Variable	Gender	Sample Size	Standard Deviation	Mean Score	Degrees of Freedom	T-value	Significance Level
Social Media Addiction	Males	50	13.25	138.50	85	0.55	0.05
	Females	50	13.22	137.23			

From Table 2, it can be seen that the mean score for social media addiction among males is 138.50 with a standard deviation of 13.25, while the mean score for females is 137.23 with a standard deviation of 13.22. The T-value is 0.55, which is not statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level, indicating that there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of social media addiction. In fact, in today's reality, males and females are equally engaged in the use of smartphones and various social media platforms.

This finding is consistent with Shapira's (1998) study, which conducted an in-depth examination of 14 individuals (both males and females) who spent significant time online, resulting in social problems such as the breakdown of relationships, school dropout, and disengagement from other activities. The study found no significant gender differences in social media addiction (Mujahid Fatima, 2010).

Presentation and Analysis of the Third Hypothesis

The third hypothesis of this study is: "There are statistically significant differences in the mean scores of psychological alienation based on gender." A T-test was used to calculate the differences, and the results are shown in the table below:

Table 3: Gender Differences in Psychological Alienation

Variable	Gender	Sample Size	Standard Deviation	Mean Score	Degrees of Freedom	T-value	Significance Level

Psychological Alienation	Males	50	12.016	115.94	98	0.33	0.05
	Females	50	13.631	115.30			

From Table 3, it is clear that the mean score for psychological alienation among males is 115.94 with a standard deviation of 12.016, and the mean score for females is 115.30 with a standard deviation of 13.631. The T-value is 0.33, which is not statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level, meaning there are no significant differences between males and females in psychological alienation. In fact, in today's world, both males and females experience similar levels of psychological alienation.

Reports indicate that both genders, when using the internet, tend to become addicted in the same manner, much like how others become addicted to substances like alcohol or drugs, resulting in deficiencies in physical and psychological well-being, particularly in the weakening of social relationships and the feeling of psychological alienation (Karima Younis, 2012).

5. Conclusion

It is evident from the current study that the world today faces challenges that significantly impact society, particularly youth. One of the most prominent developments and challenges is the internet and social media, and the negative psychological effects it has become increasingly apparent, especially among adolescents. This has led to various psychological disorders, particularly those related to a lack of social relationships, with the most prominent being the feeling of psychological alienation or a sense of not belonging. This phenomenon is a serious issue, and as researchers, it is imperative for us to deepen our studies on this subject and raise awareness at schools and youth centers to ensure that our children do not fall into the trap of social media addiction.

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