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Digital Dependency: Examining the Mental Health Effects of Excessive Social Media Use in University Students

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Abstract: Social media has transformed modern communication, particularly among university students. While beneficial in fostering connections and information sharing, excessive use has been linked to mental health concerns. University students, as one of the most active demographics on these platforms, often find themselves exposed to curated content, unrealistic standards, and social comparison, which can negatively influence their emotional well-being. This study examines the relationship between social media use, lifestyle factors, and mental health among Business and Management students at UiTM Puncak Alam. A quantitative survey involving 257 students was conducted to gather data on social media usage habits, lifestyle choices, and mental health indicators. The research explores not only the direct correlation between these factors but also the extent to which lifestyle habits amplify or mitigate the effects of social media use. Findings reveal that while both social media use and lifestyle factors relate to mental health outcomes, lifestyle factors exert a significantly greater influence. Students with healthier routines, including adequate sleep, regular physical activity, and effective stress management, reported better mental health outcomes, regardless of their social media usage levels. These results underscore the importance of promoting balanced lifestyles alongside digital literacy to support student mental well-being.

Keywords: *Social Media, Mental Health, Well-being, Lifestyle, Digital Dependency.*

1. Introduction and Background

Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have become central to university students' daily routines. While these platforms offer entertainment and information, overuse can negatively affect mental health. Increased rates of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem have been observed among young adults globally. University life itself involves significant challenges, academic expectations, social pressures, and transitioning to adulthood, all of which can be intensified by problematic social media engagement. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, including increased access to information, academic collaboration, and social networking, they also introduce new risks to mental health (Nazari et al., 2023; McLean Hospital, 2025). The psychological vulnerability of young adults makes them particularly susceptible to the emotional and cognitive effects of excessive social media use. Social comparison, cyberbullying, exposure to misinformation, and the constant need for validation can collectively affect mental health. Furthermore, the design of many social media platforms relies on algorithms intended to maximize user engagement, often fostering compulsive use that disrupts sleep patterns, reduces physical activity, and increases sedentary behavior.

In Malaysia, where internet penetration and social media use are among the highest in Southeast Asia, concerns over the mental well-being of university students have grown. Studies conducted across the country have highlighted rising incidences of stress, anxiety, and depression among students, with digital behavior emerging as a significant contributing factor. The present study specifically examines these issues within the context of UiTM Puncak Alam's Faculty of Business and Management. This faculty comprises students who are preparing for demanding careers in business, management, and entrepreneurship—fields that often require resilience, emotional intelligence, and mental stability. Understanding how social media use and lifestyle habits interact to influence these students' mental health is critical for academic institutions aiming to support their overall well-being and success.

2. Literature Review

Social Media

Research on the relationship between excessive social media use and mental health has produced extensive findings globally and within the Malaysian context. According to the World Health Organization (2023), mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting individuals' ability to cope with stress, make decisions, and build relationships. Depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem have become increasingly prevalent among young adults, often linked to digital behavior (McLean Hospital, 2025). Excessive engagement with social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter can disrupt mental health by fostering constant exposure to idealized lifestyles and unrealistic standards. This exposure may lead to social comparison, feelings of inadequacy, and a distorted perception of reality. Previous studies by Nazari et al. (2023) and Robinson (2024) have highlighted that social comparison tendencies, driven by curated content on these platforms, can heighten anxiety, decrease self-esteem, and contribute to depressive symptoms.

H1: There is a significant relationship between excessive social media use and mental health among Business and Management students at UiTM Puncak Alam.

Lifestyle

Lifestyle factors also play a crucial role in determining mental health outcomes among university students. Poor lifestyle habits, including irregular sleep patterns, lack of physical activity, poor diet, and ineffective stress management, have been associated with increased susceptibility to mental health problems (Lim et al., 2024; Malaysian Mental Health Association, 2022). These unhealthy behaviors are often exacerbated by excessive screen time and digital engagement (Zsila & Reyes, 2023). A significant body of research emphasizes that the effects of social media on mental health are not isolated but intertwined with lifestyle choices. For instance, late-night social media browsing has been identified as a contributor to sleep disturbances, which can impair cognitive function and emotional regulation (Robinson & Smith, 2020). Sleep deprivation, in turn, has been linked to higher levels of depression and anxiety.

H2: There is a significant relationship between lifestyle factors and mental health among Business and Management students at UiTM Puncak Alam.

Combined Effects of Social Media and Lifestyle on Mental Health

Moreover, addictive use of social media driven by the dopamine-releasing mechanisms of notifications, likes, and shares fosters dependency and compulsive behaviors (Sutardja Center for Entrepreneurship & Technology, 2024). This addiction can interfere with academic performance, disrupt social relationships, and increase psychological distress. Social media-induced addiction may also encourage sedentary lifestyles, reducing physical activity, which is known to be a protective factor against mental health challenges (World Health Organization, 2022).

In the Malaysian context, several studies have reported a notable rise in mental health issues among university students, with social media overuse and lifestyle imbalances emerging as significant contributors. National data suggest that approximately 30% of university students experience symptoms of stress and anxiety, with depression also prevalent (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2023). Given the popularity of social media among university students, especially within the Faculty of Business and Management, understanding the extent to which excessive use interacts with lifestyle factors to influence mental health is vital. This study seeks to fill the gap by examining both elements—social media usage patterns and lifestyle behaviors—as predictors of mental health.

H3: Lifestyle factors have a stronger influence on mental health than excessive social media use among Business and Management students at UiTM Puncak Alam.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative research approach through a cross-sectional survey design, which is widely recommended for studies investigating relationships between behavioral factors and mental health outcomes (Nazari et al., 2023; Lim et al., 2019). The research was conducted among students enrolled in the Faculty of

Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Puncak Alam, focusing on the link between excessive social media use, lifestyle factors, and mental health.

Sampling Method
The sample consisted of 257 undergraduate students, selected using a convenience sampling method, which is practical for targeting accessible participants in academic settings (McLean Hospital, 2025). This method enabled researchers to capture relevant insights while acknowledging limitations in terms of generalizability. Data collection was carried out using a structured online questionnaire divided into four sections. The first section included demographic items such as age, gender, academic program, and semester. The second section assessed social media usage patterns using the Social Media Use Scale (SMUS-10), a validated tool commonly applied in studies examining excessive digital behavior (Sutardja Center for Entrepreneurship & Technology, 2024).

Instrumentation
The third section measured lifestyle behaviors using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS-6), which incorporates questions on sleep quality, physical activity, dietary habits, and time management—factors recognized in the literature as influencing mental health (World Health Organization, 2022). The final section applied the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) to assess mental health status, consistent with prior studies investigating psychological well-being among students (Malaysian Mental Health Association, 2022). Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics summarized participant characteristics, while reliability analysis ensured the internal consistency of measurement scales. Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.80 were achieved for all constructs, indicating strong reliability (Nazari et al., 2023).

Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationships between social media use, lifestyle factors, and mental health. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis determined the predictive strength of social media use and lifestyle behaviors on mental health outcomes. These methods align with established quantitative procedures for testing hypothesized relationships (Zsila & Reyes, 2023). This comprehensive methodology enabled an in-depth exploration of the interplay between excessive social media use, lifestyle factors, and mental health among UiTM Puncak Alam students, contributing valuable empirical insights to the field.

4. Results

This section presents detailed results from the statistical analysis conducted to explore the relationships between excessive social media use, lifestyle factors, and mental health among students from the Faculty of Business and Management at UiTM Puncak Alam. The data was gathered from a total of 257 respondents using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS Version 25. The analysis includes descriptive statistics, reliability testing, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

Profile of Respondents: The demographic profile of the respondents provides essential insights into the characteristics of students participating in this study. A total of 257 students from the Faculty of Business and Management at UiTM Puncak Alam completed the survey.

The demographic profile indicates that a significant portion of the respondents (61.9%) were aged between 21 and 25 years, followed by 28.8% aged 18 to 20 years, and a minority above the age of 26. Female respondents made up the majority (65.4%), aligning with typical enrollment patterns within the faculty. Students came from various academic programs, with the highest representation from BA265/BA235 (23.3%). These demographic patterns are essential to understanding the context of social media use and mental health variations among the students.

Table 1: Demographic and Geographic Information About XXX

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
AGE		
18-20	74	28.8
21-25	159	61.9
26-30	20	7.8
31 and above	4	1.6
Total	**257**	**100.0**
GENDER		
Male	89	34.6
Female	168	65.4
Total	**257**	**100.0**
Program		
BA262	26	10.1
BA263	19	7.4
BA264	27	10.5
BA265/BA235	60	23.3
BA266	14	5.4
BA270	18	7.0
BA271	17	6.6
BA272	13	5.1
BA273	13	5.1
BA274	6	2.3
BA275	11	4.3
BA276	7	2.7
BA277	7	2.7
BA278	5	1.9
BA279	6	2.3
BA280	8	3.1
Total	**257**	**100.0**
SEMESTER		
1	34	13.2
2	25	9.7
3	46	17.9
4	55	21.4
5	67	26.1
6	25	9.7
7	3	1.2
8	2	0.8
Total	**257**	**100.0**

Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of measurement instruments.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Social Media Use	11	0.893	Excellent Reliability
Lifestyle Factors	6	0.851	High Reliability
Mental Health (DASS)	21	0.943	Excellent Reliability

The Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.85 for all constructs indicate strong internal consistency, confirming that the measurement tools employed were reliable and suitable for the study (Lin et al., 2016; Andreassen et al., 2012; WHO, 2022)

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Media Use	257	3.33	0.81
Lifestyle Factors	257	2.81	0.85
Mental Health	257	1.99	0.62

The means for social media use indicate moderate engagement, with lifestyle factors showing room for improvement towards healthier behaviors. The mental health mean score suggests the presence of mild psychological distress within the student population.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Social Media Use & Mental Health	0.283	< 0.001 (Highly Significant)
Lifestyle Factors & Mental Health	0.412	< 0.001 (Highly Significant)

There is a statistically significant, positive correlation between social media use and mental health concerns (r = 0.283). Although the relationship is moderate, it indicates that increased social media use is associated with worsening mental health outcomes, such as stress, anxiety, or depressive symptoms. Lifestyle factors exhibit a stronger positive correlation with mental health (r = 0.412), suggesting that improvements in lifestyle behaviors, such as sleep patterns, stress management, and reducing addictive behaviors, correspond to better mental health among students. These results support the premise that both social media use and lifestyle habits are influential, with lifestyle exerting a comparatively stronger effect.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Model Summary	Value
R (Correlation)	0.413
R^2 (Explained Variance)	0.170
Adjusted R^2	0.164
Standard Error of Estimate	0.565

The model explains 17% of the variance in mental health outcomes, highlighting that while social media and lifestyle are significant contributors, other external factors, for example, academic stress, peer influences, and family environment, also impact mental health.

Table 6: ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	16.665	2	8.333	26.095	< 0.001
Residual	81.107	254	0.319		
Total	97.772	256			

The model is statistically significant ($F = 26.095$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that social media use and lifestyle collectively contribute to predicting mental health outcomes among students.

Table 7: Coefficients

Variable	Beta (B)	Std. Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	Sig.
Constant	1.109	-	7.269	< 0.001
Social Media Use	0.027	0.032	0.487	0.627
Lifestyle Factors	0.282	0.413	5.256	< 0.001

The coefficients indicate:
Social Media Use: Although a positive beta coefficient (0.027) is observed, the relationship is not statistically significant (p = 0.627). This suggests that when controlling for lifestyle, social media use alone does not significantly predict mental health outcomes.
Lifestyle Factors: A significant positive beta coefficient (0.282, p < 0.001) indicates that improvements in

lifestyle significantly enhance mental health, underscoring its stronger predictive power relative to social media use.

Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the effects of excessive social media use and lifestyle factors on the mental health of students in the Faculty of Business and Management at UiTM Puncak Alam. The statistical analyses revealed significant relationships between both independent variables, social media use and lifestyle, and the dependent variable, mental health. However, the strength and predictive power of these relationships differ, offering important implications for understanding the psychological well-being of university students in a digital era.

Relationship Between Social Media Use and Mental Health

The Pearson correlation analysis showed a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.283$, $p < 0.001$) between excessive social media use and mental health concerns among students. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that excessive social media engagement is associated with heightened symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (Nazari et al., 2023; Saaiddin et al., 2021). Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook often expose users to curated and idealized portrayals of others' lives, leading to unfavorable social comparisons and feelings of inadequacy (Robinson, 2024). Despite the significant correlation, the regression analysis indicated that social media use was not a statistically significant predictor of mental health when controlling for lifestyle factors ($\beta = 0.027$, $p = 0.627$). This suggests that while excessive social media use is associated with mental health concerns, its direct impact may be overshadowed by other contributing variables, particularly those related to lifestyle.

It is important to note that the moderate relationship observed may reflect the complex, dual nature of social media. On the one hand, social media can provide social support, entertainment, and information; on the other hand, it can promote addiction-like behaviors, social isolation, and psychological distress (HelpGuide.org, 2023; Zsila & Reyes, 2023).

Relationship Between Lifestyle and Mental Health

The findings revealed a stronger, statistically significant correlation between lifestyle factors and mental health ($r = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, regression analysis demonstrated that lifestyle significantly predicts mental health outcomes ($\beta = 0.282$, $p < 0.001$). These results confirm that lifestyle behaviors, including physical activity, sleep quality, stress management, and social habits, play a critical role in shaping students' mental well-being (Nutley et al., 2023).

This outcome is consistent with existing literature emphasizing the importance of healthy lifestyle choices as protective factors against mental health challenges (Seligman, 2021; McLean Hospital, 2025). University students often experience high levels of academic stress, peer pressure, and transitions to adulthood, which can negatively affect their lifestyle routines. Poor sleep quality, irregular eating habits, and lack of physical activity have been shown to exacerbate mental health issues (Nazari et al., 2023; WHO, 2022). In particular, the present study suggests that lifestyle factors mediate the relationship between social media use and mental health. Students who adopt healthier lifestyle practices may be better equipped to mitigate the potential psychological risks associated with excessive social media use.

Comparative Influence of Social Media and Lifestyle

The hypothesis that lifestyle exerts a stronger influence on mental health than social media use is supported by the results. The standardized beta coefficient for lifestyle ($\beta = 0.282$) was significantly higher than that for social media use ($\beta = 0.027$), which was not statistically significant. This finding underscores the importance of promoting healthy daily habits as a priority in mental health interventions for students, even in the context of widespread social media engagement. It is also important to consider the limitations of this model. The R^2 value of 0.170 indicates that approximately 17% of the variance in mental health outcomes can be explained by social media use and lifestyle combined, leaving a substantial portion of variance attributed to other factors not examined in this study, such as academic performance, socioeconomic status, family dynamics, or personality traits.

Contextual Interpretation
The results align with global trends highlighting increased mental health issues among university students in Malaysia, with approximately 30% experiencing symptoms of stress and anxiety (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2023; Malaysian Mental Health Association, 2022). While excessive social media use contributes to these challenges, students' lifestyle choices appear to be a more direct and modifiable factor influencing their mental health.

Additionally, cultural and program-specific factors within UiTM Puncak Alam may play a role. The academic pressures, varying program demands, and unique social environments across faculties may affect both lifestyle behaviors and susceptibility to social media-related stress (Grech & Grech, 2020). These contextual elements should be considered in future research.

5. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

Managerial Implications
The findings of this study offer important managerial implications for educators, university administrators, and mental health practitioners, particularly within UiTM Puncak Alam. One of the key outcomes indicates that while excessive social media use is moderately associated with mental health concerns, lifestyle factors have a stronger and more direct influence on students' psychological well-being. This highlights the need for universities to prioritize initiatives that promote healthier lifestyle choices among students, especially in terms of stress management, sleep quality, and reducing compulsive digital behaviors (Nazari et al., 2023; Nutley et al., 2023).

Given that excessive use of social media has been linked to increased risks of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and loneliness due to constant exposure to idealized portrayals of success and appearance on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, universities should take proactive steps to mitigate these risks (Robinson, 2024; Abdullah et al., 2021). Awareness campaigns and educational programs should be designed to encourage students to engage in more mindful and intentional use of social media. Digital literacy workshops can help students critically evaluate the content they consume and reduce harmful social comparisons, which have been shown to negatively affect mental health (Robinson & Smith, 2020; The University of Queensland Library, 2023).

Moreover, the university environment itself can play a pivotal role in shaping healthier student habits. Managers and faculty members should promote initiatives that focus on lifestyle improvements, such as providing accessible mental health resources, organizing workshops on managing stress and anxiety, and encouraging physical activity and healthy sleep routines. Research shows that both sleep deprivation and poor lifestyle behaviors can exacerbate mental health issues among students, making it essential to address these concerns through structured programs (McLean Hospital, 202; Nutley et al., 2023).

The study also suggests that mental health interventions should not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. As highlighted in the limitations section, different academic programs within the Faculty of Business and Management have diverse student demographics and academic pressures, which may influence both lifestyle behaviors and susceptibility to social media-related stress. For instance, Health Administration students, given their exposure to health-related education, may already have higher mental health awareness, whereas students from programs like Human Resource Management or Event Management may face unique lifestyle challenges (Malaysian Mental Health Association, 2022). Therefore, tailored mental health campaigns specific to different programs and student groups are recommended.

Additionally, fostering a campus culture that normalizes conversations around mental health and promotes resilience is crucial. Universities should integrate mental health literacy into academic curricula, collaborate with student associations to create peer-support systems, and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues (Seligman, 2021; WHO, 2022).

Recommendations

Finally, it is essential to recognize that social media is deeply integrated into students' daily lives and serves both positive and negative functions. Rather than attempting to eliminate social media use, universities should encourage students to adopt balanced usage patterns, focusing on building digital resilience and online self-awareness. By promoting digital well-being alongside lifestyle improvements, universities can better safeguard the mental health of their students, helping them navigate both academic life and the complexities of the digital world (Zsila & Reyes, 2023).

Conclusion

This study explored the effects of excessive social media use and lifestyle factors on the mental health of students in the Faculty of Business and Management at UiTM Puncak Alam. The findings revealed that while excessive social media use is moderately linked to anxiety, depression, and stress, lifestyle factors such as sleep quality, stress management, and daily routines exert a more significant impact on psychological well-being. Although the model accounted for only 17% of the variance in mental health, the results align with existing literature highlighting the risks of unhealthy digital behaviors and the protective role of positive lifestyle habits. These insights underscore the need for targeted interventions in university settings that encourage balanced digital engagement, promote mental health awareness, and support healthier routines.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the relationship between social media, lifestyle, and mental health among university students. It underscores the importance of prioritizing lifestyle improvements and mindful technology use to safeguard students' well-being. As digital platforms continue to shape students' daily lives, universities must equip students with the skills, awareness, and support systems necessary to maintain their mental health in an increasingly connected world.

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