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Impact of Parenting Styles on Social Media Addiction among Young Adults

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of parenting styles on social media addiction among young adults. A quantitative research design was employed, involving a sample of 200 participants aged between 18–30 years, selected through convenience sampling. Standardized tools were used to assess the participants' perception of their parents' parenting styles and their level of social media addiction. The results revealed that individuals raised under authoritarian parenting exhibited higher levels of social media addiction, with a particularly notable trend among males. Conversely, those from authoritative parenting backgrounds showed lower levels of addiction, indicating the protective nature of this parenting style. Participants raised by permissive parents demonstrated significant dependency on social media, despite the freedom and emotional warmth they experienced. Gender differences were also observed, with females reporting higher social media usage overall. These findings highlight the critical role of parenting approaches in shaping digital behavior and suggest that promoting balanced, responsive, and structured parenting may help mitigate the risks of social media addiction among young adults.

Keywords: Parenting style, social media addiction, digital behavior, technology use, behavioral addiction.

Introduction

The proliferation of social media over the past decade has reshaped the landscape of communication, self-expression, and information consumption, particularly among young adults. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok have become embedded in the daily routines of millions. While these platforms offer undeniable benefits—ranging from enhanced social connectivity to opportunities for creativity and advocacy—excessive and uncontrolled use can lead to social media addiction. This behavioral concern is characterized by compulsive checking, preoccupation with online validation, neglect of offline responsibilities, and withdrawal symptoms when access is restricted (Andreassen, 2015) ^[1]. Understanding the psychosocial precursors to such patterns is vital for prevention and intervention, and one key factor gaining attention is parenting style.

Parenting style, defined by Baumrind (1966) ^[2], refers to the manner in which parents interact with their children and impose discipline, affection, and autonomy. Her model includes four primary types: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved, based on the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1991) ^[3]. Parenting styles play a foundational role in shaping children's emotional development, self-regulation, and decision-making—traits that are closely linked with behavioral outcomes such as digital dependency and problematic technology use.

Research has shown that authoritative parenting, which combines warmth and structure, tends to foster self-discipline, emotional security, and healthier lifestyle choices in children and adolescents (Steinberg *et al.*, 1994) ^[10]. In contrast, authoritarian parenting, marked by high control and low warmth, is associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and externalizing behaviors (Lamborn *et al.*, 1991) ^[6]. These emotional vulnerabilities may predispose individuals to maladaptive coping strategies in adulthood, including excessive reliance on social media for emotional regulation and social validation (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2019) ^[4].

A study by Sahithya and Raman (2021) ^[9] revealed that Indian children raised in authoritarian households exhibited greater tendencies toward anxiety and digital overuse. Similarly, Vijay *et al.* (2022) ^[11] found that adolescents who perceived their parents as authoritarian or permissive reported higher levels of psychological distress and screen addiction. These findings were echoed in an Iranian study by Rezaei *et al.* (2021) ^[8], which showed that both permissive and authoritarian parenting styles correlated positively with problematic internet use, while authoritative parenting showed a protective effect.

Further evidence from a meta-analysis by Pinquart (2017) ^[7] concluded that harsh or neglectful parenting styles are moderately associated with higher levels of internet and social media addiction across diverse populations. In contrast,

parenting practices involving open communication, emotional warmth, and consistent discipline were inversely associated with digital addiction. The mediating influence of autonomy and monitoring was also observed, suggesting that adolescents and young adults raised in overly permissive or neglectful environments may lack the necessary internal controls to self-regulate social media use (Kuss & Griffiths, 2015) [5].

Despite the growing body of literature, limited empirical work has focused exclusively on the Indian young adult population in the context of parenting styles and social media addiction. Most existing studies focus on adolescents or broader internet usage without isolating the unique psychological and behavioral dynamics of social media platforms, which are designed to be particularly engaging and potentially addictive. Thus, the current study aims to examine how different parenting styles-authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive-are associated with levels of social media addiction among Indian young adults aged 18–30 years. By narrowing the focus to this age group, the study captures the transitional phase between adolescence and full adulthood, where individuals often renegotiate autonomy, identity, and coping strategies. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for psychoeducational interventions, parental awareness programs, and clinical efforts aimed at curbing the rise of social media addiction in India.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is a cross-sectional survey design. This approach is commonly used to collect data from a population at a single point in time to analyze the relationships between variables. In this context, the population of interest is young adults aged between 18 and 30 years, and the focus is on assessing the impact of different parenting styles on their levels of social media addiction. The study utilizes self-report standardized questionnaires to assess participants' perceptions of their parents' parenting styles and their own social media usage patterns. The purpose of employing a cross-sectional survey is to estimate the prevalence of social media addiction and to examine its association with various parenting styles.

Data was collected through a self-administered Google Form survey, designed to ensure accessibility and convenience. The form included demographic questions and standardized tools to measure the key variables. Participants were recruited through various channels, including academic institutions, social media platforms, and peer networks.

Screening and Selection

Screening and selection of participants for this study involved specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the appropriate sample for the research objectives.

Inclusion Criteria

- i). Participants should be between the ages of 18 to 30 years.
- ii). Participants must be active users of at least one social media platform.
- iii). Participants must give informed consent to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

- i). Participants below the age of 18 or above the age of 30.
- ii). Participants who have not been active social media users in the past six months.

- iii). Participants with diagnosed psychological disorders that may interfere with self-perception or social media usage (self-reported).
- iv). Incomplete or duplicate responses were excluded from the final data analysis.

Sampling

The study employed a purposive sampling method to recruit a total of 200 participants (100 males and 100 females) who met the inclusion criteria. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate given the focus on a specific age group actively engaged in social media, and capable of identifying their childhood parenting experiences. This non-probability sampling method allowed for the intentional selection of participants based on characteristics aligned with the research objective.

Participants were selected from diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds to enhance variability and ensure broader generalizability of the findings within the young adult population. Although purposive sampling limits population representativeness, the sample composition ensured relevance and alignment with the study goals.

Tools

The study employed the following standardized tools to measure the key constructs:

- i). **Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) by Buri (1991):** This 30-item self-report instrument was used to assess perceived parenting styles-authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Each parent (mother and father) is rated separately on a five-point Likert scale. The PAQ is widely used in psychological research and demonstrates good reliability and validity.
- ii). **Social Media Addiction Scale – Student Form (SMAS-SF) by Şahin (2018):** This scale consists of 29 items assessing addictive patterns of social media use across dimensions such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scale shows high internal consistency and has been validated in young adult populations.
- iii). **Demographic Questionnaire:** Information related to age, gender, educational qualification, relationship status, and daily average time spent on social media was collected for descriptive and control analysis.

Procedure

The present study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between parenting styles and social media addiction among young adults. A comprehensive review of literature was conducted to identify research gaps and frame the objectives and hypotheses. A sample of 200 participants, aged 18 to 30 years, was selected using convenience sampling from universities and social media platforms. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Standardized tools, namely the Parenting Style Questionnaire and the Social Media Addiction Scale, were used to collect data through Google Forms. Participants were instructed to complete the questionnaires independently. The collected data was coded and analyzed using statistical software, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings were interpreted in relation to the existing literature and presented in the Results and Discussion section.

Results

The study comprised a sample of 200 young adults, including 100 males and 100 females, aged between 18 and 30 years. Participants were recruited from various universities and social media platforms through convenience sampling. All participants were active users of at least one social media platform, with the most commonly used platforms being WhatsApp (98%), Instagram (92.5%), and Snapchat (68%). A majority of participants reported using multiple platforms simultaneously, indicating a high level of digital engagement. As shown in Table 1, authoritative parenting was the most prevalent style reported by participants for both mothers (52%) and fathers (51%). Fewer participants identified their parents as authoritarian (19% mothers, 25% fathers) or permissive (29% mothers, 23% fathers).

Table 1: Parenting Styles Distribution among Participants

Parenting Style	Mothers (n = 200)	Fathers (n = 200)
Authoritative	104 (52%)	102 (51%)
Authoritarian	38 (19%)	50 (25%)
Permissive	58 (29%)	46 (23%)

The most frequently reported parenting style for both mothers and fathers was authoritative, indicating a structured but nurturing approach to parenting. This style was identified in over half of the participants' mothers and slightly over half of the fathers. Authoritarian parenting was more commonly attributed to fathers (25%) than mothers (19%), suggesting a tendency for stricter discipline from paternal figures. Permissive parenting, characterized by leniency and minimal boundaries, was more often reported in mothers (29%) compared to fathers (23%).

These distributions suggest a general trend of balanced and responsive parenting, with a noteworthy minority experiencing either overly strict or overly lenient parental approaches.

Levels of Social Media Addiction

Participants' addiction levels, based on the Social Networking Addiction Scale (SNAS), were categorized into mild, moderate, or full addiction. As shown in Table 2, 30% of the sample fell within the "Addiction" category (28% males, 32% females), indicating a slightly higher prevalence among females.

Table 2: Social Media Addiction Categories

Addiction Level	Male (n = 100)	Female (n = 100)	Total (n = 200)
Mild (21–62)	40	38	78
Moderate (63–84)	32	30	62
Addiction (85+)	28	32	60

The results show that 60 participants (30%) met the criteria for social media addiction, with a slightly higher proportion among females (32%) than males (28%). Moderate levels were also prevalent, affecting 62 participants (31%), while mild use was the most common, with 78 participants (39%). These findings reflect significant digital engagement among young adults and underscore the potential for problematic usage, especially in the context of emotional or social factors that could influence online behavior.

Addiction by Parenting Style and Gender

Table 3 illustrates the mean social media addiction scores disaggregated by parenting style and gender.

Table 3: Mean Social Media Addiction Scores by Parenting Style and Gender

Parenting Style	Gender	Mean Score	SD	Addiction Level
Authoritative (Mother)	Male	73	6.4	Moderate
	Female	65	7.2	Mild
Authoritarian (Mother)	Male	81	7.5	Moderate
	Female	99	6.8	Addicted
Permissive (Mother)	Male	79	5.9	Moderate
	Female	85	6.3	Addicted
Authoritative (Father)	Male	69	6.2	Mild
	Female	64	6.5	Mild
Authoritarian (Father)	Male	93	6.8	Addicted
	Female	88	7.1	Addicted
Permissive (Father)	Male	83	6.9	Moderate
	Female	93	7.4	Addicted

Participants who reported authoritative parenting had lower mean scores, indicating more regulated social media use, particularly among females. In contrast, authoritarian parenting was associated with significantly higher scores, especially among females (mean = 99), suggesting a link between stricter, less communicative parenting and compulsive digital behaviors.

Similarly, permissive parenting was linked with elevated addiction scores, especially in daughters, indicating that lack of boundaries may also foster excessive social media use. These results highlight how both extremes—rigidity and leniency—are associated with problematic social media behavior.

ANOVA Results

A one-way ANOVA confirmed that differences in social media addiction scores across parenting styles were statistically significant.

Mothers' Parenting Style

- $F(2, 197) = 12.45, p < .001$
- Significant differences found between:
 - Authoritative vs. Authoritarian ($p < .001$)
 - Authoritative vs. Permissive ($p = .003$)

Fathers' Parenting Style

- $F(2, 197) = 15.72, p < .001$
- Significant differences found between:
 - Authoritative vs. Authoritarian ($p < .001$)
 - Authoritative vs. Permissive ($p = .001$)
 - Authoritarian vs. Permissive ($p = .034$)

These ANOVA results confirm that parenting style has a statistically significant impact on social media addiction levels. Participants with authoritative parents consistently had lower addiction scores than those with authoritarian or permissive parents, affirming the hypothesis that a balanced and communicative parenting approach supports healthier digital behavior.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between parenting style (numerically coded) and social media addiction.

Table 4: Correlations between Mother's and Father's Parenting Styles and Levels of Addiction with p-values.

Variable Pair	Pearson's r	p-value
Parenting Style (Mother) & Addiction	-0.42	< .001
Parenting Style (Father) & Addiction	-0.47	< .001

The negative correlations indicate that as parenting styles shift away from authoritative (coded as 1) toward permissive (2) and authoritarian (3), social media addiction scores increase. The relationship is moderate in strength and statistically significant for both mothers and fathers, with a slightly stronger correlation observed for fathers. This implies that authoritative parenting is a protective factor against excessive social media use, whereas authoritarian and permissive styles may increase vulnerability to addiction.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that parenting style plays a critical role in shaping digital behavior among young adults, particularly in the context of social media use. Participants who perceived their parents as authoritative exhibited significantly lower levels of social media addiction. This supports existing literature suggesting that high responsiveness combined with firm yet democratic control fosters psychological resilience and healthy habits.

In contrast, authoritarian parenting, characterized by strict control and low warmth, was associated with the highest addiction scores, particularly among females. This may stem from a lack of open communication and emotional support, leading individuals to seek validation and autonomy in digital spaces. Similarly, permissive parenting, with its lack of structure and oversight, appeared to facilitate unregulated screen time and compulsive behaviors.

The gender difference—wherein females scored slightly higher in addiction under both authoritarian and permissive parenting—might reflect the social-relational use of platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, which are heavily used for social comparison and identity expression.

The statistical findings, including significant ANOVA results and moderate negative correlations, reinforce the conclusion that parenting style is a strong predictor of social media addiction. Authoritative parenting consistently emerged as a protective factor, highlighting the importance of balanced control and emotional nurturance.

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between parenting styles and social media addiction among young adults aged 18 to 30 years. The findings revealed a clear association between parenting style and digital behavior, with authoritative parenting emerging as a protective factor against excessive social media use. Participants who perceived their parents—especially mothers—as authoritative exhibited significantly lower addiction scores. In contrast, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were associated with higher addiction levels, particularly among female participants. The results from the ANOVA and correlation analyses further confirm that parenting style significantly influences social media addiction tendencies. Females raised by authoritarian or permissive parents showed the highest levels of social

media dependence, suggesting a potential gender sensitivity in the impact of parenting. These insights underscore the critical role of early familial environments in shaping digital habits, even into young adulthood. Given the growing concern over digital dependency and its mental health consequences, these findings highlight the importance of fostering balanced, communicative, and supportive parenting approaches to help young individuals develop healthier online behaviors.

Limitations

Despite the valuable insights offered by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional nature of the research limits the ability to draw causal conclusions between parenting styles and social media addiction; longitudinal studies would be more effective in capturing these dynamics over time. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response biases, such as social desirability and recall inaccuracies, which may affect the accuracy of participants' reports on both parenting and social media usage. The use of convenience sampling, primarily from universities and social media platforms, also restricts the generalizability of the findings to a wider, more diverse population. Furthermore, cultural differences in parenting practices and the perception of digital behavior were not accounted for, which may influence how participants interpret and respond to the survey. The study also did not control for potential confounding variables such as mental health status, personality traits, academic pressures, or peer influences, all of which may affect social media use. Lastly, while common platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat were identified, the study did not distinguish between addiction levels across different platforms, which could have provided more nuanced insights into specific usage patterns.

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