

Effect of Social Media Addiction on Academic Performance among Adolescent Students

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Abstract

Introduction: Social media addiction has become a pervasive behavioral issue among adolescents. Overuse of social networking sites can negatively affect academic performance through distraction, poor time management, and reduced concentration. Understanding the extent of social media addiction and its association with academic achievement is essential for improving adolescents' educational outcomes.

Methods: This was a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational study involving 1,180 participants aged 13–18 years. The study was conducted in eight secondary schools in Holy Kerbala City, selected using a multistage probability sampling method. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire that included socio-demographic variables, the Arabic version of the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), the Academic Performance Scale (APS) (self-reported), and teacher evaluations using the Teacher Report Form (TRF). Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 27.0.

Results: The findings indicated that 46.2% of students had a moderate level of social media addiction ($M = 15.35$, $SD = 5.253$). Regarding academic performance, 68.4% of students rated their performance as good ($M = 31.65$, $SD = 5.250$), while teachers rated 53.4% of students at a moderate level ($M = 9.06$, $SD = 2.652$). Social media addiction was weakly but statistically significantly correlated with age ($r = 0.112$, $p < 0.001$). A weak negative correlation was found between age and academic performance ($r = -0.084$, $p = 0.004$). Academic performance differed significantly by sex ($p = 0.048$) and family monthly income ($p = 0.015$), while social media addiction varied significantly according to grade level ($p = 0.018$).

Conclusion: A moderate level of social media addiction appears to be common among adolescents and is significantly associated with certain socio-demographic characteristics. Despite the relatively weak correlations, the findings highlight the need to monitor adolescents' digital habits. Educational interventions are recommended to promote balanced social media use and enhance academic performance.

Keywords: Social media addiction; academic performance; teacher Assessment.



1. Introduction

The widespread adoption of digital technologies in everyday life has fundamentally transformed social interactions, particularly among adolescents. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have taken center stage in shaping the ways young people communicate, form identities, and interact with the world (Gashaj, 2025). However, this augmented connectivity does not come without costs. Overuse of social media has gradually become a type of behavioral addiction that can have adverse influences on the development and academic achievement of adolescents (Pellegrino et al., 2022). Social media addiction is characterized by excessive concern with social networking platforms, an inability to control usage, withdrawal symptoms when access is limited, and continued use despite negative impacts on daily functioning (Duman & Turan, 2024). Previous studies have indicated that a significant number of students exhibit moderate social media addiction, with social media being directly related to time spent on technology (Raheem Mansoor & Kareem Al-Juboori, 2025). Research in Iraq has found that over 50% of secondary school students are moderately addicted to social media, highlighting the widespread use of social networking platforms in this population (Jabaar Kareem & Ajeel Yasir, 2025). Similarly, excessive social media use may negatively affect students' psychosocial well-being and educational outcomes among secondary school students (Jabr & Mohammed, 2018). These high rates of social media use raise questions about its impact on important life outcomes, such as academic performance. Academic performance is a key indicator of students' learning outcomes and their ability to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for future success (Alwaely et al., 2023; Azubuike, 2024). During adolescence, academic performance is also closely associated with self-esteem, motivation, and perceived competence (Maliha Mukhtar et al., 2025). However, excessive engagement with social media may interfere with academic activities by reducing study time, increasing procrastination, and impairing concentration (Ladrón de Guevara Rodríguez et al., 2022). Additionally, high exposure to digital distractions and inconsistent patterns of use have been linked to sleep difficulties, which in turn impair cognitive, emotional, and academic functioning (Anjum et al., 2024; MUSIHB et al., 2024). While social media offers advantages, including communication and information sharing, these benefits are often offset by the harms of addictive behaviours (Zhou et al., 2020). Adolescents' academic and environmental factors have a significant impact on their behaviors and performance. It has been demonstrated that educational interventions can effectively enhance adolescents' perceptions and associated behaviours (Dawood & Obaid, 2018). Nurses play a strategic role at the intersection of healthcare and education, enabling early detection of social media addiction, implementation of evidence-based interventions, and promotion of digital literacy among adolescents (Kleib et al., 2024; Shattuck et al., 2024). School nurses are uniquely positioned to conduct comprehensive behavioral and psychological assessments and to collaborate with educators and families to mitigate the adverse effects of technology overuse on academic performance (Avcı & Ünal, 2024). While there is an increasing body of research on social media addiction, few studies have addressed this issue in the Iraqi context in relation to academic performance through self-reports and teacher-based evaluations. This highlights the need for more comprehensive research using multiple sources of assessment.

2. Objectives of the study

1. To assess the level of social media addiction and academic performance among adolescent students.
2. To determine the relationship between social media addiction and academic performance among adolescent students.

3. To find out the association between social media addiction, academic performance, and selected socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, grade level, and economic status).

3. Methods

A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was used to assess the effect of social media addiction on the academic performance of secondary school students. The study was conducted from November 2025 to May 2026. The study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, University of Kerbala (approval number: UOK. CON.25.093; 21 October 2025). Prior to data collection, informed written consent was obtained from all participating students and their parents. Participants were clearly informed of the purpose of the study, emphasizing their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences, while ensuring complete confidentiality of the data. All data were stored confidentially and used exclusively for research purposes. The study was conducted in secondary schools in the centre of Holy Karbala city using a two-stage random cluster sampling methodology:

Stage 1: Selection of the initial geographical group. The city centre was randomly selected from the main areas of the province using a random draw.

Stage 2: Selection of schools as secondary clusters. Schools were selected separately from the public and private sectors:

Public schools: Out of a total of 17 public secondary schools (12 female schools, 5 male schools), 20% of each gender were selected randomly. Accordingly, 3 female schools and 1 male school were selected to participate in the study.

Private schools: Out of a total of 41 private secondary schools (17 for female, 24 for male), 10% were randomly selected. Accordingly, 2 female schools and 2 male schools were selected to participate in the study.

Sample and sampling methodology

A sample of adolescent students aged 13-18 years from schools in centre of Holy Karbala city was included in the study. Eight secondary schools (four public and four private) were included. The sample was mainly urban due to the location of the selected schools in the city centre of Holy Karbala. Overall, a multistage probability sampling method was employed. A required sample size of 1,180 participants was determined using the Cochran's formula (with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error). To ensure proportional representation, stratified random sampling was applied, where each school represented a stratum. The number of students drawn from each school was proportional to its total enrolment, and final participants within each school were selected using simple random sampling.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

Students were eligible to participate in the study if they were between 13 and 18 years of age, enrolled in one of the selected public or private secondary schools, provided informed assent along with parental or guardian consent, completed the study questionnaire, and students who did not use

social media were also considered eligible and were classified as non-users for the purposes of analysis

Exclusion Criteria

Students were excluded from the study if they were older than 18 years, absent during the data collection period, declined participation, or submitted incomplete questionnaires. To ensure data quality and integrity, questionnaires containing missing responses on the primary study variables were excluded from the final analysis.

Tools and Techniques of Data collection:

A structured, self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. The instrument was administered after obtaining the necessary permissions from the original developers of the scales. The questionnaire comprised three main sections:

Section One: Sociodemographic data, including 13 items to collect information about the student, their technical habits, and their family characteristics.

Section Two: Social media addiction was measured using the Arabic version of the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), which was translated and psychologically validated for Arabic-speaking populations (Abiddine et al., 2025). The Arabic BSMAS consists of six items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The validation results showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$; McDonald's $\omega = 0.78$).

Section Three: Academic performance was assessed using two complementary sources to enhance the credibility and validity of the measurement: 1. Self-report from the student: using the 8-item Academic Performance Scale (APS) (Birchmeier et al., 2015), The scale showed good internal consistency in this study ($\alpha = 0.89$). 2. Objective assessment by the teacher: using the Teacher Report Form (TRF) developed by Achenbach and Rescorla (2001), which was adapted for the Iraqi context. The adaptation process included the translation of the items by two bilingual experts, a review by a panel of Iraqi educational experts to ensure cultural relevance and content validity, and a pilot test to confirm clarity and feasibility. To assess student performance in core subjects (such as Arabic, Mathematics, and English). This assessment provides an independent external perspective that enhances the objectivity of the results.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the study variables. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K-S) test was performed to assess data normality. As the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests were applied, including Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, Mann–Whitney U test, and Kruskal–Wallis H test. A p-value of ≤ 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

4. Results

Table 1. Distribution of the adolescents students according to their socio-demographic characteristics.

Demographic Characteristics	Subgroup	f.	%
Age group	(13 - 14 y)	459	38.9
	(15 - 16 y)	419	35.5
	(17 - 18 y)	302	25.6
	Mean \pm SD= 15.17 \pm 1.76. Min – Max= 13-18 years		
Sex	Male	427	36.2
	Female	753	63.8
Educational level	Intermediate	613	51.9
	Preparatory	567	48.1
Family monthly income	Insufficient	144	12.2
	Marginally sufficient	595	50.4
	Sufficient	441	37.4
School type	Public	884	74.9
	Private	296	25.1
Resident	Urban	1153	97.7
	Rural	27	2.3

f= frequencies, %=Percentages, M = Mean of score, S.D = Standard Deviation, Min= minimum and Max= maximum

Table 1 shows that the mean of ages was 15.17 years for 1,180 adolescents students. Regarding the sex (63.8%) were female, (51.9%) of them at intermediate school level and a family monthly income were marginally sufficient represented (50.4%). According to the school type, (74.9%) were at public schools. The majority were from urban area represented (97.7%).

Table 2. Distribution of the adolescents students according to their behavioural and technological characteristics.

Data	Subgroup	f.	%
Own a phone	Yes	991	84.0
	No	189	16.0
	Total	1180	100.0
Number of hours spent using social media sites	Not used	50	4.2
	One – < three hours	346	29.4
	Three– five hours	490	41.5

Data	Subgroup	f.	%
	More than five hours	294	24.9
	Total	1180	100.0
Mean \pm SD= 4.06 \pm 2.64. Min – Max= 0 - 12 hours			

f= frequencies, %=Percentages, M = Mean of score, S.D = Standard Deviation, Min= minimum and Max= maximum

Table 2 shows that the majority of adolescent students owned a mobile phone (84%). In addition, most students spent 3-5 hours daily using social media sites (41.5%).

Table 3. Total scores of the social media addiction level among adolescents students.

Level	Range	f.	%	Mean	S. D
Not used	6	50	4.2		
Low	7 – 14	475	40.3		
Moderate	15 – 22	545	46.2		
High	23 – 30	110	9.3		
Total	6 – 30	1180	100.0	15.35	5.253

f= frequencies, %=Percentages, M = Mean of score, S.D = Standard Deviation.

Table 3 shows the total scores of the social media addiction level among adolescents students was moderate represented (46.2%), with a mean of 15.35 (Min – Max 6 - 30).

Table 4. Total scores of the academic performance level (filled by adolescents students) among adolescents students.

Level	Range	f.	%	Mean	S. D
Poor	8 – 18	19	1.6		
Moderate	19 – 29	354	30.0		
Good	30 – 40	807	68.4		
Total	8 – 40	1180	100.0	31.65	5.250

f= frequencies, %=Percentages, M = Mean of score, S.D = Standard Deviation.

Table 4 shows the total scores of the academic performance among adolescents students was good represented (68.4%), with a mean of 31.65 (Min – Max= 8 - 40).

Table 5. Total scores of the academic performance level (filled by teachers) among adolescents students.

Level	Range	f.	%	Mean	S.D
Poor	3 – 7	338	28.6		
Moderate	8 – 11	630	53.4		
Good	12 – 15	212	18.0		
Total	3 – 15	1180	100.0	9.06	2.652

f= frequencies, %=Percentages, M = Mean of score, S.D = Standard Deviation.

Table 5 shows the total scores of the academic performance among adolescents students was moderate represented (53.4%), with a mean of 9.06 (Min – Max= 3 - 15).

Table 6. The relationship between social media addiction with their academic performance among adolescents students (filled by adolescents students and teachers).

N=1180	Level of used	Academic performance (filled by adolescents students)			Academic performance (filled by teachers)		
		Mean	Cc	Sig.	Mean	Cc	Sig.
Social media addiction	Not used	4.31	-.297	.000	3.03	-.096	.000
	Low	4.11			3.14		
	Moderate	3.85			2.94		
	High	3.64			2.89		

Cc= Spearman's Correlation coefficient, P=probability value, NS: Non-Significant at $P \geq 0.05$.

Table 6 shows there is significant statistical negative correlations between social media addiction with their academic performance among adolescents students ($p < 0.001$). The correlation between social media addiction and student self-reported academic performance was moderate ($r = -0.297$), while the correlation with teacher-evaluated academic performance was weak ($r = -0.096$).

Table 7. The association of social media addiction, and academic performance with adolescents students' socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, grade level, and economic status).

Data	Subgroup	Social media addiction			Academic performance filled by adolescents students			Academic performance filled (by teachers)		
		M	Analys	Sig.	M	Analys	Sig.	M	Analys	Sig.
Age		2.56	.112	.000^a	3.96	-.084	.004^a	3.02	-.096	.000^a
Sex	Male	2.61	-1.738	.082	3.89	-1.975	.048	3.32	-8.222	.000
	Female	2.53			3.99			2.85		
	Intermediate	2.50	-2.358	.018^b	4.01	-2.793	.005^b	2.99	-.872	.383 ^b

Data	Subgroup	Social media addiction			Academic performance filled by adolescents students			Academic performance filled) (by teachers		
		M	Analys	Sig.	M	Analys	Sig.	M	Analys	Sig.
Grade level	Preparatory	2.62			3.90			3.05		
	Insufficient	2.32	21.946	.000	4.05	10.432	.015	2.76	21.489	.000 c
	Marginally sufficient	5.08		c	7.99		c	5.97		
	Sufficient	2.64			3.87			3.14		

P=probability value, NS: Non-Significant at $P \geq 0.05$. a=P. value was calculated by Spearman's correlation coefficient. b=P. value was calculated by Mann-Whitney U. c=P. value was calculated by Kruskal-Wallis H

Table 7 shows there are highly significant statistical positive correlation between social media addiction with adolescents students' age at $P < 0.001$. And there is a significant statistical difference between social media addiction with adolescents students' grade level at $P < 0.018$. Also, the results show there are highly significant statistical negative correlation between academic performance (filled by adolescent students) with adolescent students' age at $P < 0.001$. And there are significant statistical differences between academic performance (filled by adolescents students) with adolescent students' sex, and economic status at $P < 0.048$, $P < 0.015$ respectively.

5. Discussion

Table 1 The results of this study revealed that most participants were female and lived in urban areas. It is worth noting that the sample was predominantly composed of urban participants (97.7%) compared with rural participants (2.3%), which reflects the actual demographic composition of Holy Karbala city, where the majority of secondary schools and student populations are concentrated in urban areas, it accurately represents the study setting and is consistent with the urban-focused scope of the research, and a large number of them reported marginally sufficient income. These traits may enhance access to computers and internet connections, which in turn may increase social media use. This finding is supported by other studies, which suggest that female students and those residing in urban areas are more likely to be high users of social media (Mahdi, 2024). Furthermore, socioeconomic background may impact technology accessibility, which may lead to different technology use among adolescents. Table 2 our findings showed that the majority of respondents owned mobile devices and spent several hours a day on social media. This is indicative of the digitized nature of adolescents. The same pattern has emerged in local and global studies that emphasize that high screen time is prevalent among adolescents and may be a risk factor for problematic use (Abdullah et al., 2024; Al-Samarraie et al., 2022). As such, the omnipresence of mobile phones may influence adolescents' behaviors. Table 3 the present study revealed that a moderate level of social media addiction was the most prevalent among participants. This indicates a normalization of excessive use among teenagers. These results align with prior studies, which suggest that moderate levels of digital addiction are prevalent among adolescents (Ağlar & Arslan, 2025; Al-Maswdy &

Nawam, 2024; Duman & Turan, 2024). This may be due to the ongoing exposure to social media platforms and the growing dependency on them for social interaction and entertainment.

Tables 4 and 5 one of the key findings of this study is the discrepancy between students' self-reported performance and teacher evaluations. While most students rated their performance as good, teachers tended to rate it as moderate level. This difference may be attributed to the subjective nature of self-assessment, where students' perceptions are influenced by confidence and personal expectations. In contrast, teachers' evaluations are typically based on standardized criteria and classroom performance. This discrepancy may also reflect a social desirability bias, whereby students tend to overestimate their academic abilities when self-reporting. In the Iraqi educational context specifically, students may equate academic performance with effort and attendance rather than actual achievement outcomes, which could further inflate self-ratings relative to teacher evaluations. Previous studies have also reported discrepancies between self-reported and teacher-evaluated academic performance, highlighting the importance of using multiple assessment methods to obtain a more accurate evaluation (Brandmiller et al., 2024; Brandmo & Gamlem, 2025; Kolovou et al., 2021; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2021). Table 6 in this study, there was a significant negative relationship between social media addiction and academic performance. This indicates that increased use of social media is associated with lower academic performance. This finding is consistent with several recent studies showing that high levels of social media use are associated with poor academic performance among students due to distraction, reduced study time, and decreased attention

(Aquino-Blanco et al., 2025; Essien, 2025; Fabris et al., 2024; Oakley, 2025; Raheem Mansoor & Kareem Al-Juboori, 2025). The present findings highlight the important role of school nurses in the early identification of social media addiction and the promotion of healthy digital behaviors among adolescents (Kleib et al., 2024; Shattuck et al., 2024). These findings confirm that excessive Internet use can have a negative effect on the academic performance of adolescents. Table 7 the findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between social media addiction and both age and grade level, suggesting that older students may be more vulnerable to excessive use. This could be related to increased stress and access to technology. Moreover, the results showed that academic performance was significantly related to sex and family income, with females and students from a higher socio-economic family background performing better. This is in line with other research that shows demographic and socio-economic factors are significant factors affecting both technology use and academic performance (Abrar, 2025; Aleankushiu & Radhi, 2025; Lin et al., 2025; Oakley, 2025; Vlachopanou et al., 2025; Yigiter, 2025).

6. Limitations

- The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between study variables.
- Data were collected using self-report questionnaires, which may lead to response bias.
- Despite the use of probability sampling, the data collection period coincided with several official school holidays for various reasons, as well as school trips, resulting in a temporary decline in student attendance and, consequently, in data collection
- The study was conducted in secondary schools located in the city centre of Holy Karbala; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to students in rural areas or other regions of Iraq.

7. Conclusion

Moderate levels of social media addiction are common among adolescents and are significantly associated with certain socio-demographic characteristics. Although the correlations with academic performance were low, the findings indicate that adolescents' digital habits should be monitored, and educational interventions should be applied to promote moderate use of social media and enhance academic performance.

8. Recommendation

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are proposed. School nurses should integrate standardized screening questions about social media use into routine adolescent health assessments, and a structured multi-session digital wellness program should be implemented within school health services to address time management, responsible social media use, and study skill development. School administrators are recommended to incorporate digital literacy into the formal curriculum as a compulsory component, with classroom guidelines limiting non-academic device use consistently enforced, while parents should be engaged through structured workshops offered at least twice per academic year to promote boundary-setting around screen time. The Ministry of Education is recommended to develop a national digital literacy framework for secondary schools across Iraq, and the Ministry of Health is encouraged to establish school-based counseling services to identify and manage social media addiction among adolescents. Future research should include longitudinal studies to examine causal relationships between social media addiction and academic performance, interventional studies to evaluate the effectiveness of school-based digital wellness programs, and qualitative studies to explore adolescents' perceptions of social media use within the Iraqi educational context.

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