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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AND ANXIETY OF YOUNG ADULTS FROM THE AREAS FACING PERIODIC INTERNET BAN AND NORMAL AREAS

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to study the comparison of young adults' social media addiction and anxiety from places subject to recurring internet bans with regular locations. An online survey, which included two measurements (the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale and the Beck Anxiety Inventory) and a demographic questionnaire, was handed in by a sample of one hundred young adults from Manipur and Delhi. An independent sample T- test revealed there is no significant difference in the social media addiction levels and anxiety levels of those areas that faced periodic internet ban compared to the normal areas. Although, a moderate positive association was observed between social media addiction and anxiety level. The findings of this research will contribute to our understanding of how restricted internet access can affect social media addiction and anxiety levels among young adults.

Index Terms – Manipur, Internet access, anxiety, social media addiction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Internet bans have been employed on several occasions in India to manage political instability, including social unrest. Human rights are directly impacted by internet shutdowns, which are viewed as a breach of human rights (Kumar & Author_Id, 2021). However, little attention has been paid to the psychological effects on those who rely significantly on the internet for daily tasks or communication. Further research should be done to determine whether social media addiction can change in response to such circumstances given the anxiety that results from the disturbance.

In one such instance, the longest internet outage in 2023—spanning more than 5,000 hours—was implemented in Manipur, India (The Global Cost of Internet Shutdowns 2023 Report, 2024). The purpose of these internet shutdown orders was to forbid any disturbances. But it is important to strike a balance between freedom of expression via social media and national security, an approach involving the government, social media platforms, and citizens (Gunasekara, 2019).

The target sample for this study were young adults. Young Adults are vulnerable to social media addiction due to high expectations, identity issues, and the need for constant social presence (Liliana et al., 2023). These social media addicts are vulnerable to anxiety (Reed & Haas, 2023) and FOMO (Rahardjo & Soetjningsih, 2022), which may eventually affect the life satisfaction levels of the individual (Yilmaz & Tekin, 2023). The recent internet ban has had a significant impact on young adults, as it has limited their access to social media and other online platforms. This situation provides a unique opportunity to study the correlation between internet access, social media addiction, and anxiety levels.

1.1 Impact of Internet ban

Throughout the State of Manipur, during the period between April 27, 2023 and Oct. 18, 2023, India experienced the second longest Internet shutdown which lasted for 200 days (Internet Shutdowns Tracker By - SFLC.in, n.d.). Government had decided to impose Internet ban due to communal riots that had erupted on May 3, 2023. This had disrupted the online communications between the families and cut access to news updates, which aggravated the anxiety of these people as they were left in the dark during the chaotic situation in Manipur. Evidence exists demonstrating the effects of earlier internet outages on internet users. The purpose of the study by Sedera and Lokuge (2020) was to determine how Sri Lanka's government-imposed ban on social media use affected the country after anti-social and racial disturbances in March 2018. People in Sri Lanka found themselves in an

unusual circumstance where their regular social media engagements were absent due to the abrupt ban on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Viber, and WeChat, potentially causing psychological distress.

1.2 Social Media addiction

According to research, social media addiction is a kind of behavioural addiction linked to unfavourable consequences like anxiety, despair, insomnia, and a decline in life satisfaction (Benavides et al., 2023). Many elements, including as sleep difficulties, anxiety, melancholy, family issues, and stress from job or school, have been identified by studies as potentially contributing to the development of social media addiction (Şimşek et al., 2019). Furthermore, 18% of the sample in a study on Indian users was at danger of becoming addicted to social media, with salience, mood modifications/tolerance, and relapse all playing important roles in this behaviour (Arora et al., 2022).

There are lots of evidence that Anxiety and social media addiction mutually influence each other in individuals (Reed & Haas, 2023). Social media addiction is associated with poorer mental health through internet addiction and phubbing, particularly impacting stress and anxiety, with depression linked to internet addiction only (Ergün et al., 2023). There is a rising need for awareness among the masses and exploration by medical professionals about the impact of social media on anxiety in young adults and General Practitioner's perceptions of this relationship (Anto et al., 2023). Anxiety due to no internet access can lead to increased social media usage as individuals may rely on social media for connection and distraction, exacerbating nomophobia levels (Ayar et al., 2018). Although this raises concerns, methodological shortcomings in the current body of research mean that the empirical evidence does not fully support the presence of a separate psychiatric disorder known as "social media addiction."

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Population and Sample

The sample ($n=100$) for the study included young adults belonging to the age group 18-25 years. Purposive Sampling was used to gather responses from areas facing periodic internet ban (Manipur) and normal areas (Delhi NCR). 13 out of 63 participants from Manipur reported that they had access to internet during internet ban in the state. As there was internet shutdown imposed by the Manipur Government in the Churachandpur district during the month of the data collection, participants from that district were excluded in the study.

As shown in Table 1, the sample of young adults consisted of 14% male and 36% female respondents in Internet Access group ($n = 50$) while 19% male and 31% female respondents were present in No Internet Access group ($n = 50$). The average age of the participants was 22.5 years ($SD = 1.40$) and 22.86 years ($SD = 2.29$) in the respective two groups. The data was collected from young adults in two different states of India that included Manipur ($n = 63$) and Delhi-NCR ($n = 37$). These participants were mostly students (73%) and others were either full time employed (8%) or part time employed (6%) or unemployed (13%) young adults.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants

| Sample Characteristics | Internet Access | | | | No Internet Access | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|----|----------|-----------|--------------------|----|----------|-----------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> | % | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Gender | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 14 | 14 | | | 19 | 19 | | |
| Female | 36 | 36 | | | 31 | 31 | | |
| Employment status | | | | | | | | |
| Student | 35 | 35 | | | 38 | 38 | | |
| Full Time Employed | 4 | 4 | | | 4 | 4 | | |
| Part Time Employed | 3 | 3 | | | 3 | 3 | | |
| Unemployed | 8 | 8 | | | 5 | 5 | | |
| Location | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Manipur | 13 | 13 | 50 | 50 | |
| Delhi (NCR) | 37 | 37 | 0 | 0 | |
| Age | | 22.50 | 1.403 | 20.86 | 2.295 |

Note. N = 100 (n = 50 for each condition)

A google form link with the description of the purpose of the study was shared among the people who fit the criteria for the survey through online platforms during the month of January and February. In the form, it was made sure that the participants were willingly taking part in this survey.

2.2 Design and measures

Survey method was used for this study. The questionnaire for the survey included 6 items Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale and 21 items Beck Anxiety Inventory along with a demographic details form. As shown in Table 2, the maximum and minimum score of the first scale range from 6 to 30, with an internal consistency of Cronbach's α value as 0.88. The Likert scale employed by the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale has five points, ranging from 1 (very rarely) to 5 (very often). In the survey, the scores of the participants on first scale, overall were in the range of 6-27. The second scale's maximum and minimum scores ranged from 0 to 63, with an internal consistency of Cronbach's α value as 0.92 and Likert scale ranging from 0(Not at All) to 3(Severely – it bothered me a lot). Participants' overall second scale scores in the study fell between 0 and 43. The Independent Variables in the study were Social Media Addiction and Anxiety whereas Internet Access was the Dependent Variable.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)

| Scale | M | SD | Potential range | Actual Range | Cronbach's α |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale | 17.03 | 4.73 | 6-30 | 6-27 | 0.88 |
| Beck Anxiety Inventory | 12.53 | 10.76 | 0-63 | 0-43 | 0.92 |

Note. N = 100

2.3 Procedure

Purposive sampling method was used for the selection of the samples from Manipur and Delhi. An online google form questionnaire which included the demographic details, consent form and the two scales was circulated among the people who fit the criteria for the study. The means of the scores of the sample on the two scales were compared across the two groups of dependent variables namely those who had internet access and those who did not have internet access throughout the period of May 2023 to December 2023, through Bi-variate correlation method of statistical analysis and a two tailed Correlation analysis to find the association between the two measures. Both test were run on IBM SPSS (version 2020). The result of the statistical analysis was compared with hypothesis and a conclusion was drawn from it.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hundred young adults were surveyed about their levels of Social Media Addiction ($M = 17.03$, $SD = 4.73$) and their anxiety levels ($M = 12.53$, $SD = 10.76$). The variable on which these two measures were compared was Internet Access, thus forming two groups namely, Internet Access group ($n = 50$) and No Internet Access group ($n = 50$).

All the statistical analysis was performed in IBM SPSS (version 2020). Significance was set at $p < 0.05$. As shown in Table 3, the mean score for Internet Access group on Social Media Addiction scale was $M = 16.76$, $SD = 4.73$, and for No Internet Access group, $M = 17.3$, $SD = 4.76$. While, for the anxiety test, Internet Access group mean score was $M = 11.44$, $SD = 10.06$ and for No Internet Access group, $M = 13.62$, $SD = 11.41$. The t- test revealed no significant difference between the two groups for Social Media Addiction and Anxiety test, $t(98) = .56$, $p = .57$ and $t(98) = 1.01$, $p = .31$. The effect size for the difference for the first measure was very small ($d = 0.11$) and for the second measure was small ($d = 0.20$). Thus, there is no significant difference between the means of the two samples as the p values were greater than 0.05.

Table 3

Internet Access based comparison of measures

| Measures | Internet Access | | No Internet Access | | <i>t</i> (98) | <i>p</i> | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|----------|------------------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | | |
| Social Media Addiction test | 16.76 | 4.73 | 17.3 | 4.76 | .56 | .57 | 0.11 |
| Anxiety test | 11.44 | 10.06 | 13.62 | 11.41 | 1.01 | .31 | 0.20 |

The hypothesis for the study were following:

H1: There will be a significant difference in levels of anxiety between people who experienced internet ban and those who did not.

H2: There will be a significant difference in levels of Social Media Addiction level between people who experienced internet ban and those who did not.

H3: There will be a significant correlation between the Social Media Addiction level and anxiety level

Pearson product correlation of Social Media Addiction and anxiety level was found to be moderate positive correlation and statistically significant ($r = .368$, $p < .01$) for the whole sample. For the two groups, as shown in Table 4, the Pearson product correlation between the two variables indicate a moderate positive correlation ($r = .36$ for Internet Access group and $r = .37$ for No Internet Access group). Hence, hypothesis 3 was supported. This shows that an increase in Social Media Addiction level is associated with higher levels of anxiety among young adults.

Table 4

Intercorrelation Between Social Media Addiction, Anxiety and Internet Access

| Variables | 1 | 2 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1. Social Media Addiction | - | .36** |
| 2. Anxiety | .37** | - |

Note. The results for the Internet Access sample ($n=50$) are shown above the diagonal. The result for the No Internet Access sample ($n=50$) are shown below the diagonal

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

IV. DISCUSSION

In this study, the approach of comparing means of the two groups of Internet Access and No Internet Access on the two measures, Social Media addiction and Anxiety and observing if there is any correlation between the two measures was utilized. The emphasis was on studying how can the availability or non-availability of internet services affect the social media usage frequency and if there was any role of anxiety too. Here, in the case of sample from Manipur, the source of anxiety was assumed to be the social unrest in the state due to communal riots. Due to lack of clear distinction and criteria for the grouping and smaller sample size, the results may not be the best representative of the actual scenario. But, with a larger sample size and a longitudinal study design (Sedera & Lokuge, 2020) instead of a comparison with normal areas, could yield more reliable results. Although, the results indicate a moderate positive association between social media addiction and anxiety levels, the internet access variable may or may not be a factor strongly influencing these measures to some extent.

Researchers have looked into the connections between social media addiction and avoidance of experiences, anxiety, and intolerance of ambiguity (Samhita et al., 2023). Moreover, research has examined at the link between social media addiction, automatic thought patterns, psychological health, and social appearance anxiety. This shows how these factors can predict social media addiction (Zhang & Xiang, 2023). But, in this study, an attempt has been made to understand the role of internet Accessibility in Social Media Addiction and Anxiety respectively.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, through this study we can arrive to a conclusion that Social Media addiction and anxiety level have a significant positive association between them. Factor like Access to internet or no availability of internet services for a long period of time has minimal effect on the social media addiction levels among young adults. This means that people who experience periodic internet ban have almost the same level of social media addiction as those who has a continuous access to internet. Although, this addiction may have some impact on the anxiety level of a person. These finding will be crucial for building on and exploring more on the impact on the mental health when sudden internet shutdowns occur, leaving the heavily internet dependent masses in an unexpected condition. If we try to imagine living days without internet, we will be left handicapped and helpless in many of the daily life activities. Understanding the consequences of such a condition and equipping ourselves with healthy ways to cope with them will be beneficial, especially for the upcoming generation, as they would have been brought up in an environment surrounded by internet related activities throughout their lives.

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