



Loneliness and Social Media Addiction Tendencies among Young Adult Men in Real and Cyberspace Worlds

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between loneliness and social media addiction tendencies among early adult men aged 18–25 years, where social media is often used as a form of compensation for unmet social and emotional needs. The research employed a quantitative correlational design with purposive sampling. The participants consisted of 123 early adult male respondents aged 18–25 years. The results revealed a strong and significant positive correlation between loneliness and social media addiction tendencies ($r = 0.635$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that individuals with higher levels of loneliness tend to show greater tendencies toward social media addiction. These findings support the Need Satisfaction Theory and highlight the importance of addressing loneliness as a preventive effort to reduce the risk of social media addiction among early adult men.

Keywords: early adult males, loneliness, need-satisfaction, social compensation, social media addiction.

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1. Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of daily life for young adults in the digital era. Early adulthood, defined as the age range of 18–25 years, represents a transitional developmental phase from adolescence to adulthood characterized by increasing demands related to identity formation, interpersonal relationships, career planning, and social adaptation [1]. During this period, individuals begin to set long-term goals and assume greater responsibility while adapting to dynamic and competitive social environments.

Advances in digital technology have significantly transformed patterns of social interaction by enabling rapid and widespread connectivity. Although social media offers various benefits, excessive use has been associated with negative mental health outcomes, particularly addictive behaviors [2]. Prolonged social media use is linked to increased dopamine release, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and instant gratification, which reinforces repetitive use patterns and reduces self-regulation [3].

Social media addiction is further associated with dysfunction in the prefrontal cortex, which plays a critical role in executive function and self-control [4]. Excessive dopamine stimulation may impair decision-making, planning ability, and behavioral regulation, thereby increasing vulnerability to compulsive media use [5]. Consequently, addiction to social media extends beyond duration of use and affects psychological well-being, cognitive functioning, and social relationships.

Excessive social media use, commonly defined as usage exceeding 5–6 hours per day, has been categorized as addictive behavior [6]. Such patterns can disrupt daily activities, reduce the quality of face-to-face interactions, and contribute to stress, anxiety, and loneliness [7]. Online interactions often replace direct social engagement, resulting in shallow relationships that fail to meet emotional needs.

In Indonesia, this phenomenon is reflected in national data. Reports indicate that internet penetration reached 79.50% of the population, with social media as the primary purpose of internet use [8]. Young adults aged 18–34 constitute the largest group of social media users, with males demonstrating higher usage intensity and longer daily durations compared to females [9]. These trends highlight young adult males as a high-risk group for problematic social media use.

Empirical observations further support this concern. Preliminary surveys among young adult males revealed high tendencies toward social media addiction, characterized by prolonged daily use, difficulty reducing usage, withdrawal symptoms, and impairment in academic and daily functioning. These behaviors align with established criteria of social media addiction, including compulsive use, tolerance, and negative functional consequences [10].

The vulnerability of young adult males to social media addiction is closely linked to masculine social norms that emphasize emotional restraint, independence, and self-reliance. Such norms discourage emotional expression and help-seeking behaviors, increasing

susceptibility to loneliness and psychological distress [11]. Although masculinity is often perceived as protective, rigid masculine norms may instead function as risk factors when social media is used as a coping mechanism.

Loneliness has been identified as a key psychological factor driving excessive social media use. Loneliness is defined as a subjective experience resulting from a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships, both in quality and emotional depth [12]. Early adulthood is particularly vulnerable to loneliness due to identity exploration, social instability, and increasing life demands [13]. Men tend to experience higher loneliness levels because their social relationships are often less emotionally expressive and supportive [14].

Although social media is frequently used to alleviate loneliness, digital interactions often fail to provide meaningful emotional fulfillment and may exacerbate loneliness while reinforcing addictive behaviors [15]. Previous studies consistently report a positive relationship between loneliness and social media addiction tendencies [16]. However, research specifically focusing on young adult males remains limited, despite their heightened psychological vulnerability.

Therefore, examining the relationship between loneliness and the tendency toward social media addiction among young adult males is essential. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying social media addiction and to inform the development of targeted prevention and intervention strategies for this high-risk population.

2. Methods

The research used in this study is quantitative with a descriptive and inferential statistical design. This study involved one independent variable and one dependent variable: loneliness (X) and social media addiction (Y). The population in this study was young adult males aged 18–25.

The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method. The sampling criteria in this study included: young adult males aged 18–25; having and using social media accounts such as WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and similar platforms; using social media for at least 5–6 hours per day consistently and repeatedly in subsequent days; and experiencing difficulty reducing or stopping social media use despite having the desire to stop. The minimum sample size required for this study was 100 respondents, and this study involved 123 respondents.

Data collection was conducted using a Likert-type scale that included two measurement tools: a social

media addiction scale and a loneliness scale. The validity and reliability of the measurement instrument were tested through a trial run on 30 early adult male subjects. The primary data collection was then conducted by distributing an online questionnaire to 123 early adult male respondents who met the research criteria.

The social media addiction scale was constructed by modifying the measurement instrument developed in [17], which refers to eight aspects of addiction: mood modification, tolerance, displacement, escape, withdrawal, deception, relapse, and conflict. Meanwhile, the loneliness scale was constructed by modifying the measurement instrument developed in [18], which comprises three aspects: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.

Validity testing was performed on each research variable using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software using the Pearson Product Moment correlation method, comparing the item correlation coefficient with the total correlation (r total). The reliability of the measuring instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha.

To address the research questions, data analysis was conducted using Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis to determine the relationship between the independent variable, loneliness, and the dependent variable, social media addiction. The entire data analysis process was conducted using SPSS version 26.0 for Windows. Prior to hypothesis testing, descriptive analysis was conducted to describe the characteristics of the research data, as well as assumption tests, including normality and linearity tests.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Characteristics of Research Subjects

Table 1 Distribution of Research Subjects

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
18	5	4.1%
19	17	13.8%
20	16	13.0%
21	23	18.7%
22	31	25.2%
23	20	16.3%
24	7	5.7%
25	4	3.3%
Total	123	100%
Social Media Accounts Used	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram (dominant)	5	4.1%
TikTok (dominant)	5	4.1%
TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp	10	8.1%
TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube	18	14.6%
TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Twitter (X)	10	8.1%
Multiple accounts (≥ 4 platforms)	70	56.9%
Others (WhatsApp, YouTube, etc.)	5	4.1%
Total	123	100%
Duration per Day	Frequency	Percentage
5–6 hours	72	58.5%

7-9 hours	45	36.6%
10+ hours	6	4.9%
Total	123	100%
Purpose of Use	Frequency	Percentage
Interacting with friends and family	7	5.7%
Seeking information and news	5	4.1%
Entertainment	3	2.4%
Self-expression	3	2.4%
Mixed purposes (more than two purposes)	105	85.4%
Total	123	100%
Efforts to Reduce	Frequency	Percentage
Able to reduce but relapsed	13	10.6%
Able to reduce but relapsed unconsciously	17	13.8%
Reduced usage despite difficulties	53	43.1%
Unable to reduce at all	40	32.5%
Total	123	100%

Based on the survey results, the majority of research subjects were aged 22 years (25.2%), followed by 21 years (18.7%) and 23 years (16.3%), indicating that respondents were predominantly from the early adulthood group. Most subjects used social media with a combination of multiple accounts (more than four platforms) at 56.9%, followed by a combination of TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube (14.6%). In terms of duration, the majority of subjects used social media for 5-6 hours per day (58.5%), followed by 7-9 hours per day (36.6%). The purpose of social media use was dominated by use for multiple purposes simultaneously (85.4%). In addition, the majority of subjects stated they were able to reduce social media use despite experiencing difficulties (43.1%), while 32.5% stated they were unable to reduce it at all.

3.2 Descriptive Test Results

Table 2 Categorization of Social Media Addiction Scale Scores

Score Interval	Category	F	%	Min/Max	Mean/Std. Deviation
X ≥ 76	Very High	0	0.0%		
62- 75	High	24	19.5%		
36- 61	Moderate	76	61.8%	24/73	48.53/13.015
22- 35	Low	23	18.7%		
X ≤ 21	Very Low	0	0.0%		
Total		123	100%		

Based on Table 2 above, the overall scores for the social media addiction variable can be seen. The lowest score was 24 and the highest score was 73. The average social media addiction score was 48.53 with a standard deviation of 13.015. It was found that 61.8% of the study subjects had a tendency toward social media addiction.

The frequency distribution of data for the loneliness scale is as follows:

Table 3 Loneliness Scale Score Categorization

Score Interval	Category	F	%	Min/Max	Mean/Std. Deviation
X ≥ 108	Very High	0	0.0%		
90-107	High	25	20.3%		
55-89	Moderate	74	60.2%	42/105	72.41/17.563

37-54	Low	24	19.5%
X ≤ 36	Very Low	0	0.0%
Total		123	100%

Based on table 3 above, the overall score results of the loneliness variable can be seen, the lowest score is 42 and the highest score is 105. The average loneliness score is 72.41 with a standard deviation of 17,563. It is known that 60.2% of research subjects who have a tendency to be lonely are in the moderate category.

3.3 Assumption Test Results

Table 4 Normality Assumption Test Results

Variable		Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig.	p-value	Interpretation
Social Media Addiction	Media	0.200	0.057	Normal
Loneliness		0.200	0.071	Normal

Based on the results of the normality test in Table 4, it can be explained that the normality assumption test on the social media addiction variable shows a Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value of 0.200 with a p value = 0.057 ($p > 0.05$), which indicates that the distribution of the social media addiction variable data is normally distributed. Furthermore, the normality test on the loneliness variable also produces a Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value of 0.200 with a p value = 0.071 ($p > 0.05$), thus indicating that the distribution of the loneliness variable data is normally distributed. Thus, it can be concluded that both research variables, namely social media addiction and loneliness, have normal data distribution because the significance value obtained is greater than 0.05. Therefore, this research data has met the assumption of normality and can be further analyzed using parametric statistical techniques.

Table 5 Linearity Assumption Test Results

Variable Relationship	F-value (Calculated)	F-value (Table)	p-value	Interpretation
Loneliness - Social Media Addiction	1.323	3.91	0.138	Linear

Based on table 5 above, the results of the linearity assumption test between social media addiction and loneliness show a deviation from linearity F value of 1.323 with a significance of 0.138 ($p > 0.05$). With 123 research subjects, the F table value at a significance level of 0.05 is 3.91. Because the calculated F (1.323) < F table (3.91) and the p value (0.138) > 0.05, it can be concluded that the relationship between social media addiction and loneliness is linear.

3.4 Hypothesis Test Results

Table 6 Pearson Product Moment Correlation Results between Social Media Addiction and Loneliness

Variable Relationship	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
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Loneliness – Social Media	0.6	0.0	Significant
Addiction	35	00	

An r value of 0.635 indicates a strong relationship between social media addiction and loneliness. A p value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) indicates a significant relationship. This means that the higher the tendency for social media addiction, the higher the level of loneliness experienced by the study subjects.

Table 7 Partial Test Results

Addiction Dimension	Loneliness Dimension	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Mood Modification	Cognitive (X1)	0.491	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Affective (X2)	0.485	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Psychomot or (X3)	0.397	0.000	Low correlation
Tolerance	Cognitive (X1)	0.459	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Affective (X2)	0.348	0.000	Low correlation
	Psychomot or (X3)	0.304	0.001	Low correlation
Displacement	Cognitive (X1)	0.440	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Affective (X2)	0.349	0.000	Low correlation
	Psychomot or (X3)	0.356	0.000	Low correlation
Escape	Cognitive (X1)	0.466	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Affective (X2)	0.471	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Psychomot or (X3)	0.426	0.000	Moderate correlation
Withdrawal	Cognitive (X1)	0.436	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Affective (X2)	0.400	0.000	Low correlation
	Psychomot or (X3)	0.457	0.000	Moderate correlation
Deception	Cognitive (X1)	0.445	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Affective (X2)	0.447	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Psychomot or (X3)	0.360	0.000	Low correlation
Relapse	Cognitive (X1)	0.449	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Affective (X2)	0.458	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Psycho motor (X3)	0.3	0.00	Low correlation
Conflict	Cognitive (X1)	0.436	0.000	Moderate correlation
	Affective (X2)	0.302	0.001	Low correlation
	Psychomot or (X3)	0.262	0.003	Low correlation

Based on the partial test results, the mood modification aspect (Y1) showed the highest correlation with the cognitive aspect of loneliness (X1), with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.491$, indicating a moderate correlation. The affective aspect (X2) also showed a moderate correlation with a p value of 0.000

and $r = 0.485$, while the psychomotor aspect (X3) showed a low correlation with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.397$.

For the tolerance aspect (Y2), the cognitive aspect (X1) had the highest correlation with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.459$, indicating a moderate correlation. The affective (X2) and psychomotor (X3) aspects each showed low correlations, with r values of 0.348 ($p = 0.000$) and 0.304 ($p = 0.001$), respectively.

Furthermore, in the displacement aspect (Y3), the cognitive aspect (X1) had the highest correlation with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.440$, which is considered a moderate correlation. Meanwhile, the affective (X2) and psychomotor (X3) aspects showed a low correlation, with r values of 0.349 and 0.356, respectively ($p = 0.000$).

In the escape aspect (Y4), all three aspects of loneliness showed a moderate correlation. The affective aspect (X2) had the highest correlation with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.471$, followed by the cognitive aspect (X1) with $r = 0.466$ and the psychomotor aspect (X3) with $r = 0.426$.

In the withdrawal aspect (Y5), the psychomotor aspect (X3) showed the highest correlation with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.457$, which is considered a moderate correlation. The cognitive (X1) and affective (X2) aspects also showed a moderate correlation with r values of 0.436 and 0.400, respectively.

For the fraud aspect (Y6), the affective aspect (X2) had the highest correlation with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.447$, which falls into the moderate correlation category. The cognitive aspect (X1) also showed a moderate correlation with $r = 0.445$, while the psychomotor aspect (X3) showed a low correlation with $r = 0.360$.

For the relapse aspect (Y7), the affective aspect (X2) showed the highest correlation with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.458$, indicating a moderate correlation. The cognitive aspect (X1) also showed a moderate correlation with $r = 0.449$, while the psychomotor aspect (X3) showed a low correlation with $r = 0.387$.

Finally, in the conflict aspect (Y8), the cognitive aspect (X1) has the highest correlation with a p value of 0.000 and $r = 0.436$, which is classified as moderate. Meanwhile, the affective (X2) and psychomotor (X3) aspects show a low level of correlation, with r values of 0.302 ($p = 0.001$) and 0.262 ($p = 0.003$), respectively.

3.5 Discussion

The measurement results showed that the tendency for social media addiction was in the moderate category (61.8%), with a minimum score of 24, a maximum score of 73, a mean of 48.53, and a standard deviation of 13.015. Meanwhile, loneliness was also in the

moderate category (60.2%), with a minimum score of 42, a maximum score of 105, a mean of 72.41, and a standard deviation of 17.563. These findings indicate that in early adulthood, social media use has become a dominant part of daily activities and has the potential to develop into addictive behavior.

These findings are consistent with Paputungan [19], who reported that early adulthood is a developmental phase in which individuals actively construct their identity and social relationships through social media. Furthermore, the results align with previous studies by Che *et al.* [20], Wu *et al.* [21], and Wang *et al.* [22], which demonstrated that social media addiction among young adults generally falls within the moderate range and is closely associated with cognitive and emotional needs, particularly among individuals experiencing loneliness. For lonely individuals, social media use also serves as an escape mechanism to seek virtual interactions that fulfill their emotional needs [23].

Hypothesis testing using Pearson correlation showed an r value of 0.635 with $p < 0.05$, indicating a strong and significant relationship between loneliness and the tendency for social media addiction. This means that the higher the level of loneliness experienced by early adult males, the greater their tendency to experience social media addiction. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research Praditha and Wulanyani [24], who identified two primary categories of factors influencing social media addiction as internal (intrapersonal) and external (environmental). Loneliness emerges as a significant internal factor in this framework. Internal factors, including fear of missing out (FOMO), Big Five personality traits, loneliness, social anxiety, boredom, stress, and narcissism, shape individuals' patterns of social media engagement and contribute to addictive tendencies. These observations are further corroborated by Azizah and Widyastuti [25], who demonstrated a significant correlation between psychological factors such as loneliness and social media addiction.

The assumption test showed that the data were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$) and the relationship between variables was linear ($F\text{-test} < F\text{-table}$; $p > 0.05$), thus the use of parametric statistical analysis was deemed appropriate. This normality and linearity strengthen the validity of the correlational findings in the study.

Theoretically, the findings of this study can be explained through Deci and Ryan's Need-Satisfaction Theory, which states that individuals will seek compensation when their basic need for social connectedness is not met. Loneliness, as a form of

unmet need, drives individuals to seek pseudo-fulfillment through social media, ultimately reinforcing addictive patterns of use.

Partial analysis showed that the cognitive and affective aspects of loneliness had a more consistent and stronger correlation with various dimensions of social media addiction, such as mood modification, tolerance, displacement, escapism, withdrawal, deception, relapse, and conflict. Meanwhile, the psychomotor aspect showed a lower but still significant correlation, indicating that physical symptoms act as additional triggers compared to cognitive and emotional factors.

Current literature indicates that the relationship between loneliness and social media addiction varies in strength across different dimensions. It shows stronger associations with emotion regulation and escapism behaviors [26], as well as online self-presentation [27]. This is consistent with Sudarman [28], who stated that individuals experiencing loneliness also struggle with negative self-perception, feeling useless, feeling like failures, feeling uncared for, feeling downcast, and experiencing various other negative emotions. Loneliness can trap individuals in a state of inner emotional isolation, even when surrounded by crowds [29]. However, the link is weaker for habit-based dimensions or social conflict aspects, which are more influenced by external factors [30].

The difference between a strong total correlation and moderate to low partial correlations can be explained because the total correlation represents the accumulated contribution of all aspects of loneliness to social media addiction. In contrast, partial analysis assesses the unique contribution of each aspect after controlling for the influence of other aspects, resulting in smaller correlations.

This study has several limitations, including the exclusion of control variables such as education level and marital status, the use of a cross-sectional design, and the use of a self-report method, which could potentially introduce subjective bias. Furthermore, the study only involved young adult males in one specific region and did not include other psychological variables such as FOMO, social support, and emotion regulation.

Therefore, future research is recommended to use a longitudinal design, add control variables and mediators, and expand the sample size to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. Nevertheless, this study makes an important contribution in explaining that loneliness is an internal factor that plays a strong role in driving social media addiction tendencies in young adult males, and confirms the relevance of Need-Satisfaction Theory in the context of contemporary digital behavior.

4. Conclusions

Based on the results of the data analysis and discussion that has been conducted, it can be concluded that there is a positive, strong, and significant relationship between loneliness and the tendency of social media addiction in early adult males. The results of the Pearson correlation test showed a value of $r = 0.635$ with $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), so the research hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that the higher the level of loneliness experienced by early adult males, the higher their tendency to experience social media addiction. Descriptively, the majority of respondents are in the moderate category for both the loneliness and social media addiction variables. This shows that although the level of each variable is not in the high category, the pattern of relationships between variables remains consistent and statistically significant, confirming that loneliness is an important psychological factor in excessive social media use. The results of the partial analysis show that the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of loneliness have a significant relationship with all dimensions of social media addiction, although the correlation strength varies from low to moderate. The cognitive aspect of loneliness tends to have a stronger relationship with dimensions such as mood modification, tolerance, displacement, and conflict. The affective aspect plays a dominant role in the escape and relapse dimensions, while the psychomotor aspect is more prominent in the withdrawal dimension, although it generally has a lower correlation than the other aspects. Thus, this study confirms that loneliness is an internal factor that plays a significant role in driving the tendency towards social media addiction in young adult males. Social media serves as a means of psychological escape that provides temporary satisfaction, but does not address the underlying source of loneliness and has the potential to reinforce the cycle of addiction.

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