Social Media Addiction as an Emerging Clinical Disorder: A Psychological-Behavioral Analytical Approach

إدمان وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كاضطراب عيادي ناشئ: مقاربة نفسية-سلوكية تحليلية

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- **Abstract:** social media has become so widespread that it is now an integral part of daily life; however, in some cases, this intensive use can develop into a compulsive behavioral pattern with addictive characteristics. This study addresses a central issue: the ambiguity surrounding the clinical classification of social media addiction, as debate continues regarding whether it constitutes an independent mental disorder or merely a symptom associated with other disorders.

The study adopts a theoretical analytical approach grounded in a psycho-behavioral perspective, through a review of recent scientific literature and an analysis of concepts related to behavioral addiction, particularly regarding reinforcement mechanisms, loss of control, and withdrawal symptoms. It also seeks to compare this type of addiction with other forms of non-substance-related addiction, such as internet and digital gaming addiction.

The study concluded that social media addiction exhibits clear characteristics of behavioral addiction, manifested in compulsive use, constant preoccupation, and negative effects on mental health, including anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. It also revealed that this behavioral pattern is linked to complex psychological mechanisms, such as the search for social acceptance and immediate reinforcement through digital interaction.

The study's scientific contributions include providing a conceptual framework that helps frame social media addiction as an emerging clinical disorder and proposing an explanatory model that clarifies the mechanisms underlying its development and persistence. The study also opens the door to further empirical and clinical research to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and develop effective intervention strategies.

- **Keywords:** social media addiction, behavioral addiction, mental health, anxiety, depression, loss of control, digital reinforcement.

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- **الملخص:** تشهد وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي انتشارًا واسعًا جعلها جزءًا أساسيًا من الحياة اليومية، غير أن هذا الاستخدام المكثف قد يتحول في بعض الحالات إلى نمط سلوكي قهري يحمل خصائص الإدمان. تنطلق هذه الدراسة من إشكالية مركزية تتمثل في غموض التصنيف العيادي لإدمان وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، حيث لا يزال الجدل قائمًا حول ما إذا كان يمثل اضطرابًا نفسيًا مستقلاً أو مجرد عرض مرتبط باضطرابات أخرى.

تعتمد الدراسة على مقاربة تحليلية نظرية تستند إلى المنظور النفسي- السلوكي، من خلال مراجعة الأدبيات العلمية الحديثة وتحليل المفاهيم المرتبطة بالإدمان السلوكي، خاصة فيما يتعلق بآليات التعزيز، فقدان السيطرة، وأعراض الانسحاب. كما تسعى إلى مقارنة هذا النمط من الإدمان بأشكال أخرى من الإدمان غير المرتبط بالمواد، مثل إدمان الإنترنت والألعاب الرقمية.

توصلت الدراسة إلى أن إدمان وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يُظهر خصائص واضحة للإدمان السلوكي، تتجلى في الاستخدام القهري، الانشغال المستمر، والتأثيرات السلبية على الصحة النفسية، بما في ذلك القلق، الاكتئاب، واضطرابات النوم. كما تبين أن هذا النمط السلوكي يرتبط بآليات نفسية معقدة، مثل البحث عن القبول الاجتماعي والتعزيز الفوري عبر التفاعل الرقمي.

تتمثل الإسهامات العلمية للدراسة في تقديم إطار مفاهيمي يسهم في تأطير إدمان وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كاضطراب عيادي ناشئ، واقتراح نموذج تفسيري يوضح آليات تشكله واستمراره. كما تفتح الدراسة المجال أمام مزيد من البحوث التجريبية والعيادية لفهم هذه الظاهرة بشكل أعمق وتطوير استراتيجيات تدخل فعالة.

- **الكلمات المفتاحية:** إدمان وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الإدمان السلوكي، الصحة النفسية، القلق، الاكتئاب، فقدان السيطرة، التعزيز الرقمي..

Introduction:

Over the past two decades, social media has experienced unprecedented growth, becoming an integral part of the daily lives of millions of people around the world due to its potential for instant communication, information sharing, and building social relationships. This proliferation has reshaped patterns of social interaction and human behavior, such that these platforms now fulfill psychological and social functions that go beyond mere communication to include identity expression, the acquisition of social support, and the attainment of psychological satisfaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

However, this intensive use has seen a gradual shift from a normal behavioral pattern to an addictive one among some individuals, manifesting as what is known as social media addiction, which is characterized by compulsive use, a loss of control, and constant preoccupation with these platforms, even at the expense of other daily

activities (Andreassen, 2015). This shift is linked to complex psychological and behavioral mechanisms, including the immediate reinforcement resulting from digital interaction (such as likes and comments), which contributes to activating the brain's reward system, thereby reinforcing the repetition of the behavior and increasing the likelihood of its development into an addictive pattern (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Psychologically, numerous studies indicate that excessive social media use is associated with a range of mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances, as well as reduced self-esteem and increased feelings of social isolation (Twenge, 2019; Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Furthermore, the constant social comparison inherent in these platforms may lead to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with oneself, particularly among young people (Festinger, 1954; Jamal, 2018).

Despite growing research interest in this phenomenon, there remains scientific debate regarding the classification of social media addiction, as it has not been officially listed as a distinct disorder in diagnostic manuals such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), with the exception of partial recognition of certain forms of behavioral addiction, such as gaming disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This ambiguity in classification raises questions about the nature of this behavior: Is it a standalone clinical disorder, or a symptom of other mental disorders?

Based on this, the significance of this study lies in its aim to provide a psycho-behavioral analytical interpretation of social media addiction by situating it within the framework of behavioral addiction and analyzing its psychological and clinical dimensions. It also aims to contribute to the scientific debate regarding the possibility of classifying it as an emerging clinical disorder and to propose an explanatory framework that aids in understanding its mechanisms and effects, thereby paving the way for the development of more effective diagnostic tools and therapeutic interventions.

1-Research Problem:

The research problem of this study stems from the growing tension between the normal use of social media and use that takes on a pathological character, as it has become difficult to distinguish between acceptable daily digital behavior and behavior that reflects an addictive pattern that may have psychological and clinical consequences. With the widespread prevalence of these platforms, intensive use is no longer a sufficient indicator of a disorder, raising methodological and epistemological challenges regarding the delineation of boundaries between functional and pathological use (Andreassen, 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

In this context, a number of researchers suggest that excessive use may, in some cases, be merely an adaptive response to the demands of contemporary digital life, without rising to the level of a clinical disorder (Billieux, Maurage, Lopez-Fernandez, Kuss, & Griffiths, 2015). Conversely, other studies confirm that some individuals exhibit symptoms consistent with the criteria for behavioral addiction, such as loss of control, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms, supporting the possibility of classifying social media addiction as an emerging mental disorder (Griffiths, 2005; Andreassen, 2015).

The issue becomes even more complex in the absence of scientific consensus on the clinical classification of this phenomenon, as social media addiction remains not officially included in major diagnostic classifications, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), despite the recognition of some related behavioral disorders, such as gaming disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This ambiguity makes it difficult to develop accurate diagnostic tools and establish clear criteria for distinguishing between normal and pathological use.

Based on this, the central issue of this study revolves around the following question:

Is social media addiction merely excessive behavior reflecting adaptation to the digital environment, or does it represent a genuine clinical disorder falling under the category of behavioral addictions?

This question gives rise to sub-issues concerning the nature of the symptoms associated with this behavioral pattern, the extent of overlap between it and other mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, and the adequacy of current theoretical models in explaining this phenomenon.

The significance of this issue lies in its aim to move beyond a superficial understanding of social media addiction and toward a deeper analysis that integrates psychological, behavioral, and clinical dimensions, thereby contributing to a more accurate scientific understanding of this growing phenomenon.

2. Research Questions:

Based on the study's research question, this paper seeks to answer a set of research questions that explore the clinical and behavioral nature of social media addiction:

• What criteria can be used to distinguish between normal and pathological use of social media?

• What are the most prominent psychological and behavioral symptoms associated with social media addiction, and how do they intersect with the characteristics of behavioral addiction?

• What are the psychological mechanisms underlying the development of this pattern of use into addictive behavior, particularly in light of reinforcement theories and the reward system?

• To what extent can social media addiction be classified as an independent clinical disorder, as opposed to being a symptom of other mental disorders such as anxiety and depression?

3-Study Objectives:

This study aims to provide a psycho-behavioral analytical interpretation of the phenomenon of social media addiction by achieving a set of interrelated scientific objectives:

• To clinically frame the concept of social media addiction by situating it within the behavioral addiction framework and exploring the extent to which its criteria apply to this pattern of digital use, particularly in light of addiction models based on concepts such as salience, tolerance, and loss of control (Griffiths, 2005; Andreassen et al., 2016).

• Analyze the psychological and behavioral symptoms associated with social media addiction, including compulsive use, persistent preoccupation, and withdrawal symptoms, as well as its effects on mental health such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Kross et al., 2013).

• Linking the phenomenon to behavioral addiction theories, particularly cognitive-behavioral models that explain addiction through reinforcement mechanisms, reward seeking, and the interaction between cognitive and affective factors, which helps to understand how normal use evolves into addictive behavior (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Andreassen, 2015).

• To assess the possibility of classifying social media addiction as an independent clinical disorder by comparing its characteristics with recognized addiction criteria and analyzing the ongoing debate regarding the use of the term "addiction" versus "problematic use," given the absence of a unified definition and definitive scientific consensus (Billieux et al., 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Overall, this study aims to construct an integrated explanatory framework that helps understand social media addiction as a complex psycho-behavioral phenomenon and to determine whether it warrants classification as an emerging clinical disorder.

4-Theoretical Framework:

A. Theories of Behavioral Addiction:

Behavioral addiction provides a fundamental theoretical framework for understanding the phenomenon of social media addiction, as it refers to patterns of compulsive behavior that are not associated with the use of chemical substances but exhibit characteristics similar to traditional addiction, such as loss of control, continuation despite negative consequences, and withdrawal symptoms (Griffiths, 2005). This conceptual expansion has led to the inclusion of certain forms of behavioral addiction, such as video game disorder, within modern clinical classifications, thereby reinforcing the possibility of studying digital addiction within this framework (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

• Non-substance-related addiction:

Non-substance-related addiction (Behavioral Addiction) refers to a set of behaviors that provide the individual with a form of psychological or emotional gratification, leading to their compulsive repetition. Griffiths (2005) argues that this type of addiction is based on six core components: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse.

In this context, the use of social media can be understood as a form of this addiction, as digital platforms become a primary source of psychological gratification, particularly regarding the attainment of social acceptance and constant interaction (Andreassen, 2015).

• The reward system (dopamine):

Behavioral addiction is closely linked to the brain's reward system, particularly regarding the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that plays a central role in reinforcing behaviors associated with pleasure and motivation.

Studies indicate that interaction with social media- such as receiving likes or comments- activates this system, thereby enhancing the sense of reward and increasing the likelihood of repeating the behavior (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This

pattern of neural reinforcement is one of the key factors explaining how normal use transitions into addictive behavior, as the individual becomes increasingly driven to seek the same level of satisfaction, leading to escalating use over time (Volkow, Wang, Fowler, & Tomasi, 2011).

• Immediate reinforcement:

Immediate reinforcement is one of the most important psychological mechanisms explaining social media addiction, as these platforms provide rapid and immediate responses (such as notifications and interactions), which directly reinforce the behavior.

According to behavioral models, behaviors that are immediately reinforced are more likely to be repeated and become ingrained habits (Skinner, 1953). In the digital environment, this effect is amplified by platform designs that rely on providing unexpected and intermittent rewards (variable reinforcement), which increases the strength of addictive behavior and makes it harder to resist (Alter, 2017).

Ultimately, behavioral addiction theories clarify that social media addiction cannot be reduced to mere excessive use; rather, it is the product of a complex interaction between:

• Psychological mechanisms (reinforcement, seeking acceptance)

• Neural mechanisms (the reward system and dopamine)

• Design features of the digital environment

This supports the possibility of framing it as an addictive phenomenon with clear clinical dimensions.

B. Clinical Perspective:

The clinical perspective views social media addiction as an emerging behavioral disorder that exhibits a set of symptoms similar to those of traditional addictions, allowing for a diagnostic approach comparable to other addictions, such as internet addiction or gaming addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

• Symptoms of Addiction:

Clinical studies indicate that social media addiction is characterized by a set of core symptoms:

- Loss of Control: Difficulty stopping the use of digital platforms despite the desire to do so or awareness of the resulting psychological and social harm (Andreassen, 2015).
- Withdrawal: The emergence of feelings of anxiety, tension, or depression when attempting to limit use or discontinue digital interaction (Griffiths, Kuss, & Demetrovics, 2014).
- Tolerance: The need to increase usage time or interaction levels to achieve the same degree of satisfaction or psychological pleasure (Billieux et al., 2015).

• Similarities with Other Digital Addictions:

Researchers note that social media addiction shares characteristics with general internet addiction and video game addiction, specifically:

• Repetitive and compulsive behaviors that disrupt daily activities.

• Negative effects on academic or professional performance.

• Disturbances in mood and the ability to concentrate (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010).

This similarity underscores the validity of applying clinical diagnostic models of behavioral addiction to the study of social media use, while taking into account the unique characteristics of each digital platform and its interactive behaviors.

Accordingly, the clinical perspective clarifies that social media addiction possesses a clear symptomatic structure, including loss of control, withdrawal symptoms, and tolerance, which makes it amenable to study within the framework of behavioral addictions, with the possibility of linking it to internet or video game addiction to enhance theoretical and clinical interpretation.

C. The Psychological and Social Dimension:

The psychological and social dimension plays a pivotal role in understanding social media addiction, as it intersects with individual characteristics and social

contexts that drive excessive use, making the phenomenon more complex than mere compulsive behavior.

• Social Anxiety:

Studies indicate that individuals with high levels of social anxiety tend to rely on social media as a means of communication in lieu of direct, face-to-face interactions (Andreassen et al., 2016). This reliance provides a sense of psychological safety, but it increases the likelihood of falling into a cycle of excessive use, which may lead to addictive symptoms.

• Social Isolation:

Studies have found that social isolation is a contributing factor to social media addiction, as isolated individuals seek digital interaction to compensate for a lack of real-life relationships (Shensa et al., 2018). Over time, constant digital reliance can exacerbate feelings of loneliness, creating a vicious cycle between isolation and compulsive use.

• Social Comparison:

Social psychology models suggest that social comparison via digital platforms plays a key role in driving continuous use. Individuals compare their daily lives to the images and content presented by others, which may lead to lower self-esteem and increased psychological stress, thereby driving them toward excessive use as a means of relief or escape (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014).

• Self-Esteem:

Impaired self-esteem is an important psychological indicator of digital addiction; individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to seek social validation through likes and comments, which reinforces compulsive usage behavior and increases the likelihood of addiction symptoms (Andreassen, 2015; Meier & Reinecke, 2020).

Scientific evidence indicates that the psychological and social dimension constitutes an important explanatory framework for social media addiction, as social

anxiety, isolation, social comparison, and self-esteem interact with neural and behavioral reinforcement mechanisms, contributing to the development of compulsive use that may reach the level of clinical addiction.

5-Methodology:

A-Type of Study:

This study is a theoretical/analytical study aimed at exploring social media addiction as an emerging clinical disorder by integrating modern psychological and behavioral theories with clinical and research evidence. This approach allows for an understanding of the phenomenon on multiple levels: psychological, behavioral, and social (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Andreassen, 2015).

B. Methodology:

The study relied on psycho-behavioral analysis to examine the relationship between individual characteristics, behavioral patterns, and the neural mechanisms associated with digital addiction. This analysis includes an examination of:

• Psychological traits: social anxiety, isolation, self-esteem, and social comparison (Shensa et al, 2018; Vogel et a., 2014).

• Digital behaviors: compulsive use, withdrawal, loss of control, and tolerance (Griffiths, 2005; Billieux et al, 2015).

• Neural mechanisms: the dopamine-related reward system and immediate reinforcement (Volkow et al, 2011; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

C. Literature Review:

The latest scientific studies and clinical reports on digital addiction were reviewed, including:

• Scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals on social media, internet, and digital gaming addiction (Andreassen et al., 2016; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

• Clinical reports and diagnostic guidelines from scientific associations such as the APA and WHO (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2019).

D. Data Sources:

The study drew on:

1. Recent studies: Research articles published between 2015 and 2023 covering the psychological, behavioral, and social aspects of digital addiction.
2. Clinical reports: Clinical evidence and laboratory reports on the diagnostic features of digital behavioral addiction.

This integrated approach, which combines psycho-behavioral analysis with a review of the scientific literature, enables the construction of a comprehensive framework for understanding social media addiction as an emerging clinical disorder, with a focus on psychological, neurological, and behavioral dimensions, thereby enhancing the reliability of the results and qualifying them for publication in indexed scientific journals.

6-Analysis:

A- Manifestations of Addiction:

The results indicate that social media addiction manifests through a set of behaviors characteristic of behavioral addiction, which can be observed at the psychological and behavioral levels:

• Compulsive Use:

Individuals with digital addiction rely on constantly checking digital platforms, reflecting a repetitive compulsive behavior that goes beyond the natural desire for social interaction (Andreassen, 2015). This pattern leads to a drain on time and neglect of daily responsibilities, whether academic or professional.

• Loss of control:

Users lose the ability to determine the duration or extent of their use, even when they are aware of the negative consequences (Griffiths et al., 2014). Loss of control is a key indicator that normal use has shifted to addictive behavior, requiring psychological or behavioral intervention.

• Constant preoccupation:

The study shows that individuals with this type of addiction constantly think about digital platforms even when they do not have actual access to them, indicating a persistent digital obsession (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This preoccupation reflects intense activation of the neural reward system, as the brain constantly seeks motivational cues associated with digital social interaction.

The findings suggest that compulsive use, loss of control, and persistent preoccupation represent central features of social media addiction, and they overlap with symptoms described for other behavioral addictions, such as internet or digital gaming addiction (Billieux et al., 2015). This analysis underscores the need to view digital addiction as an integrated clinical phenomenon in which psychological, behavioral, and neurological dimensions overlap.

B. Psychological Effects:

The results indicate that social media addiction is associated with several negative psychological effects, reflecting the constant psychological stress resulting from compulsive use of digital platforms:

• Anxiety:

Anxiety is particularly prominent among excessive users, who experience constant stress when unable to interact with the platforms or follow news and updates (Andreassen et al., 2016). Studies have shown that this digital anxiety is linked to increased levels of social anxiety and feelings of fear of missing out (FoMO) (Przybylski et al., 2013).

• Depression:

Research confirms that excessive use of social media is linked to higher rates of depression, particularly when individuals constantly compare themselves to others or are exposed to negative content (Shensa et al., 2018). Digital interaction may exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation, leading to a decline in overall mood.

• Low self-esteem:

The relationship between excessive use and self-esteem is clear: individuals who rely on social media for social validation (likes and comments) tend to experience lower self-esteem when these cues are absent (Meier & Reinecke, 2020). Furthermore, constant social comparison across digital platforms reinforces this decline.

The results indicate that anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem represent the primary psychological effects of social media addiction. These effects support the hypothesis that excessive use goes beyond being a normal behavior to the level of a psychological and behavioral disorder requiring clinical and psychological intervention (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

C. Behavioral Effects:

The results indicate that social media addiction is not limited to psychological dimensions but extends to include clear behavioral effects that impact individuals' daily lives:

• Social Isolation:

Individuals' sense of social isolation increases with excessive reliance on digital interaction rather than real-life relationships (Shensa et al., 2018). This pattern weakens traditional social networks and increases psychological isolation, reinforcing the cycle of dependence on social media.

• Sleep Disorders:

Evidence suggests that intensive screen use, particularly before bedtime, leads to sleep disturbances such as difficulty falling asleep, frequent awakenings, and reduced sleep quality (Levenson, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz, & Primack, 2016). These disturbances are associated with increased daily fatigue and reduced ability to concentrate, which affects an individual's overall performance.

• Decline in Performance:

Studies confirm that excessive use of social media is linked to a decline in academic or professional performance, resulting from loss of focus, constant

preoccupation with digital platforms, and long hours of use (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This decline is clearly evident in reduced productivity and an increase in errors in daily tasks.

The findings indicate that isolation, sleep disturbances, and decreased performance represent the most prominent behavioral effects of social media addiction. These behavioral indicators reinforce the understanding of digital addiction as a multidimensional phenomenon that combines psychological and behavioral symptoms, underscoring the need for preventive and therapeutic interventions (Andreassen, 2015; Levenson et al., 2016).

D. Psychological Mechanisms:

The findings suggest that social media addiction is influenced by a set of psychological mechanisms that drive individuals toward excessive digital engagement, forming the basis for understanding the phenomenon as a behavioral-psychological disorder:

• Seeking acceptance:

The pursuit of acceptance from others through likes and comments represents one of the main psychological drivers of excessive use (Andreassen, 2015). Through this interaction, individuals seek to boost their sense of self-worth, as the number of digital interactions is directly linked to psychological satisfaction, thereby reinforcing compulsive usage behavior.

• Escape from Reality:

Analysis shows that individuals use social media as a means of escaping daily pressures or psychological problems (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). The digital world provides a virtual space through which one can avoid direct confrontation with real-world problems, leading to increased psychological dependence on digital platforms.

• Digital reinforcement:

Digital reinforcement, such as notifications, likes, and comments, is a powerful psychological mechanism that motivates continued use (Volkow et al., 2011). The

brain responds to these cues similarly to reinforcements in traditional behavioral addictions, with the reward system releasing dopamine, which enhances feelings of temporary pleasure and increases the likelihood of returning to continued use.

The findings demonstrate that the search for acceptance, escapism, and digital reinforcement constitute central psychological mechanisms leading to compulsive social media use. These mechanisms support the theory that digital addiction is not merely a voluntary behavior, but an integrated psycho-behavioral process in which internal drives interact with external stimuli, thereby increasing the likelihood of normal use transforming into a potential clinical disorder.

7-Discussion:

The results indicate that social media addiction represents a complex phenomenon combining psychological, behavioral, and social dimensions, raising several questions about its nature and its classification as an independent clinical disorder.

A. The Nature of Addiction: An Independent Disorder or a Secondary Symptom?

Opinions vary on whether digital addiction is an independent disorder or merely a symptom of other disorders such as anxiety or depression (Andreassen, 2015). Evidence from this research suggests that compulsive behaviors, loss of control, and persistent preoccupation manifest independently of other psychological symptoms, supporting the hypothesis that social media addiction can be considered a standalone digital behavioral disorder.

B. Comparison with Traditional Internet Addiction:

Social media addiction resembles general internet addiction in terms of compulsive frequency and psychological dependence on digital interaction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). However, social media platforms are characterized by:

• Direct and immediate social interaction.

• Continuous psychological reinforcement mechanisms through likes, comments, and notifications.

• Linking behavior to digital identity and social networks, which increases the severity of psychological dependence compared to some other forms of internet addiction (Shensa et al., 2018).

C. Criticism of the Lack of Full Official Recognition:

Despite the proliferation of studies, social media addiction remains not officially recognized as a disorder in the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5), with the exception of references to certain behavioral addictions such as digital gaming addiction (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This absence reflects:

• The limitations of traditional scientific understanding of digital addiction.

• The need for further clinical studies to define diagnostic criteria and core symptoms.

D. Study Proposal: Social Media Addiction as a Digital Behavioral Disorder:

This study confirms that social media addiction can be interpreted as an independent digital behavioral disorder, characterized by specific psychological, behavioral, and neurological features, and distinct from normal use or as a secondary symptom of other disorders. From this perspective, this proposal opens avenues for the development of:

• Specialized treatment strategies focused on digital behavior control.

• Precise diagnostic frameworks that can be adopted in future clinical guidelines.

• Comparative research between traditional and digital forms of behavioral addiction to deepen understanding of the phenomenon (Billieux et al., 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017)

8. Proposed Model: The Digital Addiction Cycle:

Based on a psycho-behavioral analysis of the phenomenon, this study proposes the Digital Addiction Cycle model to explain the mechanisms of social media addiction. The model illustrates how frequent use transforms into dependence and addiction through a repetitive cycle of triggers, responses, and psychological reinforcement.

A. Triggers:

Triggers include all digital cues that stimulate interaction, such as :

• Instant notifications

• Likes and comments

• Constantly updated new content

These triggers stimulate curiosity and the desire for continuous interaction, encouraging the user to respond compulsively (Andreassen, 2015).

B. Response:

Response refers to the user's compulsive behavior, where the individual engages in constant checking of the digital platform, even in the absence of an actual need to communicate. This behavior reflects a loss of control over technology use, which is one of the key indicators of behavioral addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

C. Reinforcement:

Reinforcement involves the neural response to reward, where digital interaction leads to the release of dopamine, which is responsible for feelings of pleasure and reward. This reinforcement reinforces compulsive behavior, increasing the likelihood of continued return to digital platforms (Volkow et al., 2011).

D. Repetition ⟶ Dependence ⟶ Addiction

This cyclical pattern of stimuli, responses, and reinforcement evolves into:

• Continuous repetition of use

• Psychological and behavioral dependence on the digital platform

• Digital behavioral addiction reflected in psychological, behavioral, and social dimensions

The digital addiction cycle model illustrates how ordinary digital interactions transform into fully-fledged addictive behavior, where external stimuli interact with internal responses and neural reinforcement mechanisms. This model can be used as a framework to understand:

• The reasons for the persistence of digital addiction.

• Points of therapeutic and psychological intervention.

• The development of preventive strategies to reduce excessive reliance on social media (Billieux et al., 2015; Andreassen, 2015).

9- Applications:

The results of this study point to a range of practical and theoretical applications regarding social media addiction, which can be categorized into three main dimensions:

A. The scientific dimension:

The study contributes to the development of the concept of digital behavioral addiction by:

• Clarifying the relationship between digital stimuli and psychological and behavioral responses.

• Providing a theoretical framework for understanding the mechanisms of psycho-behavioral addiction beyond the scope of traditional substance addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

• Supporting future studies aimed at establishing clear diagnostic criteria for digital addiction (Andreassen, 2015).

B. Clinical Dimension:

The findings help improve diagnostic tools and therapeutic interventions by:

• Developing measures to assess media dependence with a focus on psychological and behavioral dimensions (Billieux et al, 2015).

• Designing behavioral and psychological treatment strategies aimed at controlling compulsive use, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and digital self-regulation programs (Hawi & Samaha, 2016).

• Enhancing the ability to distinguish between normal use and excessive use that may develop into a disorder (Andreassen et al, 2016).

C. Educational and Social Dimensions:

The study opens up avenues for educational and community applications, including:

• Digital awareness campaigns regarding the risks of excessive use of social media platforms.

• Developing regulatory guidelines for use in schools, universities, and public spaces, with the aim of limiting continuous exposure to digital stimulation (Przybylski et al., 2013).

• Promoting a culture of conscious and responsible technology use that balances digital and real-life experiences.

These applications indicate that social media addiction is not merely an individual problem but rather a multidimensional phenomenon that can be addressed scientifically, clinically, and educationally. The study opens the door to rethinking digital addiction as a distinct behavioral disorder, thereby promoting the development of effective diagnostic and therapeutic strategies and deepening the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon in future research.

10. Limitations:

Although this study contributes to clarifying the mechanisms of social media addiction, there are several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results:

A. Lack of Longitudinal Evidence:

Most current studies rely on cross-sectional designs, which limits the ability to track the development of digital addiction over time. The absence of longitudinal studies makes it difficult to establish a causal relationship between excessive use and associated psychological disorders (Andreassen, 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

B. Variation in Definitions:

Definitions and terminology used to refer to social media addiction vary across studies, with some using terms such as “excessive use” or “digital excess,” leading to

challenges in comparing results and making it difficult to reach a scientific consensus on diagnostic criteria (Billieux et al, 2015).

C. Difficulty in measurement:

Studies face methodological difficulties in accurately measuring digital dependence, as they often rely on self-report questionnaires and user reports, which may be influenced by social bias or self-underestimation/overestimation (Hawi & Samaha, 2016).

These limitations point to the urgent need for cross-cultural longitudinal studies, along with the development of accurate standardized measurement tools, to precisely define the nature of digital addiction and distinguish it from normal use or other psychological phenomena.

Conclusion:

This study highlights that social media addiction is an increasingly significant issue, impacting psychological, behavioral, and social dimensions. Findings indicate that it shares key features with traditional forms of addiction, including loss of control, persistent engagement, and compulsive reactions to digital stimuli, alongside notable consequences for mental health and social interactions.

The research underscores that social media addiction extends beyond mere excessive usage, necessitating a structured clinical framework to establish clear diagnostic criteria and identify related behavioral patterns, while considering individual variability and the broader digital context.

Furthermore, the study calls for more longitudinal and cross-cultural investigations to uncover the underlying psychological and behavioral processes, refine assessment tools, and develop effective prevention and treatment approaches. Advancing this scientific understanding will help define digital addiction more precisely and support its recognition as a distinct behavioral disorder, ultimately benefiting both individual well-being and the wider digital society.

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