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Social media use and social anxiety levels among early adolescents

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Abstract

Background: The use of social media among early adolescents (aged 10–13 years) continues to increase, and this may affect their mental health, particularly social anxiety. Adolescents at this stage are undergoing a critical developmental phase, both physically and emotionally, making them highly vulnerable to the psychological impacts of excessive social media use.

Purpose: To determine the relationship between the intensity of social media use and the level of social anxiety among early adolescents in elementary school.

Method: A quantitative approach with a correlational and cross-sectional design. The sample consisted of 69 fifth- and sixth-grade students selected using Simple Random Sampling. Data were collected using the Social Media Usage Scale (SMPS) and the Social Anxiety Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the Kendall's Tau test to examine the relationship between the two variables.

Results: The results showed that the majority of adolescents (55.1%) actively used social media, and most (60.9%) experienced moderate levels of social anxiety. The Kendall's Tau correlation test indicated a significant relationship between social media use and social anxiety ($p = 0.001$; $\tau = 0.384$), suggesting that the more frequently adolescents use social media, the higher their level of social anxiety.

Conclusion: Social media use is significantly associated with social anxiety among early adolescents. Supervision from schools and parents is necessary to manage social media use wisely.

Keywords: Early Adolescents; Mental Health; Social Anxiety; Social Media Use.

INTRODUCTION

Early adolescence (10–13 years) is a critical developmental stage, as individuals undergo rapid physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes, making them more vulnerable to mental health problems such as social anxiety (World Health Organization, 2019). Social anxiety is characterized by an excessive fear of negative evaluation from others, which can lead adolescents to avoid social interactions and negatively affect their academic achievement (Antony & Swinson, 2018). Social anxiety often arises from excessive *chinta* about others' judgments, causing adolescents to withdraw from social situations and experience difficulties in building relationships (Samsara, 2020). This condition

can disrupt their social development and potentially affect their long-term psychological well-being.

The advancement of digital technology has made social media an inseparable part of adolescents' lives. Social media enables adolescents to communicate, share information, and express themselves through various forms of content such as text, images, and videos (Aulia, Nurdiana, & Hadi, 2022). Various studies indicate that the majority of adolescents in Indonesia use platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube daily for communication, information seeking, and entertainment (Prasetya, 2025). The use of social media has both positive and negative impacts on adolescent development. On the one hand, it can

expand social networks, enhance digital communication skills, and foster creativity among adolescents (Dzikri, Aisyah, & Mahfuzah, 2024). On the other hand, excessive use may reduce interest in learning, trigger social comparison, and increase anxiety and stress due to the pressure to present an idealized self-image in the online environment (Mulyono, 2021).

Previous research has shown a relationship between the intensity of social media use and social anxiety among adolescents, where more frequent interaction on social media is associated with a higher tendency for social anxiety (Akbar & Hakim, 2024). However, most of these studies focus on middle adolescence, late adolescence, or university students, leaving limited evidence that specifically examines early adolescents at the elementary school level (Agyapong-Opoku, Agyapong-Opoku, & Greenshaw, 2025). Preliminary studies conducted on early adolescents indicate that some students have experienced social anxiety in various situations and feel more comfortable interacting through social media than face-to-face. This highlights the need for research that specifically analyzes the relationship between social media use and levels of social anxiety in early adolescents, so that it can serve as a basis for developing more targeted mental health nursing interventions and digital literacy education.

RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design and a correlational method to examine the relationship between the intensity of social media use and the level of social anxiety among early adolescents in elementary school. The independent variable in this study was the intensity of social media use, defined as the frequency and duration of social media usage. This variable was measured using the Social Media Usage Scale (SMPS), consisting of 10 items assessing frequency and duration of use. The

scale applied a four-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 4 = Always). The dependent variable was the level of social anxiety, defined as the anxiety experienced by adolescents in certain social situations, such as speaking in public or interacting with new people. Social anxiety was measured using the Social Anxiety Questionnaire (SAQ), which consists of 17 items rated on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 4 = Always).

This study was conducted in an elementary school, with the population comprising all fifth- and sixth-grade students aged 10–13 years, totaling 172 students. The sample consisted of 69 respondents selected using a simple random sampling technique. The inclusion criteria included students who actively used social media for at least one hour per day, were willing to participate as respondents, and were aged 10–13 years. The exclusion criteria included students who were absent during data collection or those with neurological disorders. Data collection was carried out in a single session using two main instruments: the Social Media Usage Scale (SMPS) and the Social Anxiety Questionnaire (SAQ). The SMPS consisted of 10 items measuring the intensity of social media use, while the SAQ consisted of 17 items measuring the level of social anxiety; both instruments used a four-point Likert scale. Validity and reliability tests of the instruments were conducted prior to the study, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.88 for the SMPS and 0.90 for the SAQ, indicating very good reliability.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. The analysis was conducted in two stages: univariate analysis to describe respondent characteristics as well as the distribution of social media use and levels of social anxiety, and bivariate analysis using Kendall's Tau correlation test to examine the relationship between the intensity of social media use and social anxiety. This study also obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Universitas 'Aisyiyah Yogyakarta with Ethical Approval Number: 5173/KEP-UNISA/II/2026.

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RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents (N=69)

Variable	Results	P-Value	Correlations Coefficient (τ)
Age (n/%) (Mean$\pm$SD) (Range) (Year)	(11.4 $\pm$ 0.8) (10-13)		
10	6/8.7		
11	31/44.9		
12	27/39.1		
13	5/7.2		
Gender (n/%)			
Male	23/33.3		
Female	46/66.7		
Platform Media Sosial (n/%)			
TikTok	55/36.4		
Instagram	13/8.6		
YouTube	22/14.6		
WhatsApp	61/40.4		
Social Media Usage (n/%)			
Low	9/13.0	0.001	0.384
Moderate	38/55.1		
High	22/31.9		
Level of Social Anxiety (n/%)			
Low	12/17.4		
Moderate	42/60.9		
High	15/21.7		

Table presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the distribution of study variables. The mean age of the participants was 11.4 $\pm$ 0.8 years, ranging from 10 to 13 years. The majority of respondents were 11 years old (44.9%), followed by 12 years old (39.1%), 10 years old (8.7%), and 13 years old (7.2%). Based on gender, most respondents were female (66.7%), while males accounted for 33.3%. In terms of social media platforms, WhatsApp was the most frequently used (40.4%), followed by TikTok (36.4%), YouTube (14.6%), and Instagram (8.6%). Regarding the intensity of social media use, the majority of respondents were in the moderate category (55.1%), followed by high (31.9%) and low (13.0%). For the level of social anxiety, most respondents were categorized as moderate (60.9%),

followed by high (21.7%) and low (17.4%). The results of the correlation analysis showed a significant relationship between social media usage and social anxiety, with a p-value of 0.001 and a correlation coefficient (τ) of 0.384, indicating a moderate positive correlation.

DISCUSSION

Erikson's theory of the Identity versus Role Confusion stage explains that during adolescence, individuals are in the process of seeking their identity and defining their social roles in society. Social media becomes a primary medium for adolescents to express and construct their identity; however, exposure to unrealistic social standards can exacerbate their identity crisis, especially in the

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absence of adequate parental guidance (Erikson, 2018).

Excessive use of social media can lead to social comparison, in which adolescents frequently compare themselves to others online. This process can generate psychological pressure, as they may feel inadequate or unable to meet social expectations. Research has shown a positive relationship between social comparison and social anxiety among adolescent Instagram users (Lestari & Solekhah, 2022). Upward social comparison is also a significant risk factor that can worsen adolescents' mental health, including decreased self-esteem and increased anxiety (Shen, 2025).

Unsupervised social media use can further intensify social comparison and increase the risk of social anxiety (Akbar & Hakim, 2024). In addition, nighttime social media use is also a concern, with 43.5% of students reporting "sometimes" and 34.8% "often." Nighttime use can disrupt sleep quality, which in turn affects physical and emotional health, including increased social anxiety (Advisory, 2023). Many students report engaging in social comparison on social media. They experience anxiety related to their appearance and others' perceptions. Social comparison on social media is associated with lower self-esteem and increased appearance-related anxiety. Adolescents who compare themselves to unrealistic social standards often feel inadequate or unable to meet expectations, thereby worsening their identity crisis (Tian, Li, & Zhang, 2024).

The phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) further exacerbates social anxiety. Many students feel anxious when they see their peers participating in social activities that they are not part of. FoMO can intensify social anxiety in early adolescents, as they feel excluded or fear missing important social experiences (Maharani, 2026). Approximately 26.1% of students reported feeling angry when reprimanded by their parents regarding social media use. This reflects tension in the parent-child relationship, particularly in terms of supervision. Parental mediation strategies that are purely restrictive without active communication make adolescents reluctant to open up to their parents about their social media use, indicating that such approaches may lead to emotional tension between adolescents and parents (Yuliani et al., 2023). This is important to consider in

the context of managing adolescents' social anxiety related to social media use.

In addition, 59.4% of students reported seeking information about violence through social media. Exposure to violent content can increase fear and anxiety, as well as influence their perception of the world and social interactions. Exposure to violence on social media can exacerbate social anxiety and increase feelings of threat in adolescents' social interactions (Yuliani, Amenike, & Murni, 2023). The majority of students experienced social anxiety at a moderate level, indicating an impact that may affect their participation in school activities and social interactions. The most prominent issues include feelings of embarrassment or anxiety when speaking in front of the class or meeting new peers. At the age of 11–12 years, social anxiety is typically driven by fear of negative evaluation from peers, reinforced by frequent social comparison on social media and the FoMO phenomenon, which makes students feel that their lives are not as good as those portrayed online. Responses related to interacting with unfamiliar people showed the highest percentage for "always" (26.1%), while concerns about meeting new friends were highest for "sometimes" (43.5%). This indicates that students feel less comfortable in new or unfamiliar social situations. Adolescents with high levels of social anxiety often fear negative evaluation and have low confidence in social interactions (Elfariani & Anastasya, 2022).

The analysis of the relationship between social media use and social anxiety showed a significant positive correlation, with a p-value of 0.001 and a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.384$. High social media use increases the risk of social anxiety among adolescents, as exposure to unrealistic social norms can make students feel anxious during direct interactions (Dewi & Nugrahani, 2025). Excessive social media use can reduce self-esteem, increase the risk of depression, and negatively affect social relationships (Silvi, 2022).

Overall, this study indicates that high and poorly supervised social media use is closely associated with social anxiety among early adolescents. Interventions through social-emotional education, group guidance, teacher support, and parental involvement are essential to help students manage social anxiety adaptively, enhance self-confidence, and support healthy social and emotional development. Programs

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that focus on developing assertive communication skills and adaptive coping strategies have been shown to effectively reduce social anxiety and improve adolescents' social interactions (Hayya, Surini, & Savitri, 2023). Therefore, these findings emphasize that social anxiety in early adolescents is not a sporadic phenomenon, but a condition that requires sustained attention. Monitoring social media use, providing guidance from parents and teachers, and implementing educational programs on social anxiety management are important steps to support students' psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

There is a significant relationship between social media use and the level of social anxiety among early adolescents. The more frequently adolescents use social media, the higher the level of social anxiety they tend to experience; therefore, the wise management of social media use is essential to support mental health. Most early adolescents fall into the moderate category of social media use, with primary activities including communication, self-expression, and information seeking through platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, all of which play an important role in their social lives. In addition, the level of social anxiety among early adolescents is generally in the moderate category, with commonly reported symptoms including anxiety when meeting new people, speaking in public, or interacting in classroom settings. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between social media use and social anxiety in early adolescents and provide a foundation for appropriate mental health nursing interventions to support their social and emotional development.

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