

Online Disinhibition Effect in Individuals with Social Media Addiction: Relationship with Personality Traits and Clinical Symptoms

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(Received: 16 January 2026

Revised: 25 February 2026

Accepted: 17 March 2026)

KEYWORDS

Social Media
Addiction; Online
Disinhibition Effect;
Personality Traits;
Depression; Anxiety;
Stress

ABSTRACT:

Background:

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has led to increased concerns regarding Social Media Addiction (SMA) as a behavioral addiction affecting psychological well-being. One key psychological mechanism underlying problematic online behavior is the Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE), which reflects reduced self-regulation in digital environments. Additionally, personality traits and clinical symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress may interact with SMA, intensifying maladaptive outcomes.

Aim:

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect and Social Media Addiction, and to explore its association with personality traits and clinical symptoms.

Methods:

A total of 95 participants (N = 95) were recruited and divided into two groups: individuals with Social Media Addiction (n = 48) and healthy controls (n = 47). Purposive sampling was employed. Standardized instruments including the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), Online Disinhibition Effect Scale (ODES), NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) were administered. Data were analyzed using independent sample t-tests and Spearman's rank correlation in Jamovi software.

Results:

Significant differences were observed between the two groups across all major variables. Individuals with SMA demonstrated higher levels of online disinhibition, neuroticism, depression, anxiety, and stress, along with lower levels of extraversion and conscientiousness. Correlation analysis revealed significant associations between ODE dimensions and SMA, as well as with personality traits and clinical symptoms. Strong positive relationships were particularly evident between disinhibition components and maladaptive psychological outcomes.

Conclusion:

The findings highlight that Online Disinhibition Effect plays a crucial role in the development and maintenance of Social Media Addiction. Personality traits and clinical symptoms further contribute to this relationship, indicating a multifactorial psychological framework. These insights are essential for designing targeted psychological interventions and preventive strategies addressing problematic social media use.



1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital technology has significantly transformed human interaction, with social media emerging as a dominant platform for communication, self-expression, and information exchange. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook have become integral to daily life, particularly among young adults. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, including enhanced connectivity and access to information, excessive and uncontrolled usage has led to the emergence of Social Media Addiction (SMA) as a growing psychological concern.

Social Media Addiction is conceptualized as a form of behavioral addiction characterized by compulsive use, loss of control, and continued engagement despite adverse consequences. Individuals with SMA often exhibit symptoms such as preoccupation with social media, mood modification, withdrawal, and impaired functioning in personal, academic, or occupational domains. Neurobiologically, the addictive nature of social media is reinforced by reward mechanisms, particularly dopamine release associated with likes, comments, and notifications, which promote repeated engagement and habit formation.

A critical psychological construct associated with online behavior is the Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE), which refers to the tendency of individuals to exhibit less restraint and more uninhibited behavior in online environments compared to face-to-face interactions. This phenomenon arises due to several factors, including anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, and the absence of non-verbal cues. These elements reduce accountability and self-awareness, enabling individuals to express thoughts, emotions, or behaviors that they might suppress in offline contexts.

ODE manifests in both benign and toxic forms. On the positive side, it may encourage self-disclosure and emotional expression; however, its negative manifestations include impulsivity, cyberbullying, oversharing, and risky online behavior. In the context of Social Media Addiction, ODE may act as both a contributing and reinforcing factor. Individuals with higher levels of disinhibition may engage more frequently and intensely with social media, thereby strengthening addictive patterns through immediate gratification and social validation.

Personality traits play a crucial role in shaping individuals' online behavior and susceptibility to addiction. The Five-Factor Model of personality, encompassing Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these individual differences. Research indicates that high neuroticism is associated with emotional instability and vulnerability to stress, which may drive individuals toward excessive social media use as a coping mechanism. Conversely, traits such as conscientiousness and agreeableness are often linked with better self-regulation and may act as protective factors against addictive behaviors. Extraversion presents a complex relationship, as extraverted individuals may use social media for social engagement, whereas introverted individuals may rely on it as a substitute for offline interaction.

In addition to personality factors, clinical symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress are increasingly recognized as both predictors and consequences of Social Media Addiction. Individuals experiencing psychological distress may turn to social media as a means of escape or emotional regulation. However, prolonged exposure to curated online content, social comparison, and validation-seeking behaviors may exacerbate these symptoms, creating a cyclical relationship. Depression is often linked to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, anxiety to fear of missing out (FOMO) and constant vigilance, and stress to cognitive overload and disrupted routines.

Despite growing research on Social Media Addiction, the integrated relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect, personality traits, and clinical symptoms remains underexplored, particularly in the Indian context. Most studies have examined these variables in isolation, limiting a comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying SMA. Furthermore, empirical studies simultaneously comparing individuals with SMA and healthy controls across these dimensions are scarce.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the interplay between Online Disinhibition Effect, personality traits, and clinical symptoms in individuals with Social Media Addiction. By adopting a comparative and correlational approach, this study aims to provide a



multidimensional understanding of the factors contributing to SMA and their interrelationships.

Understanding these associations is crucial for both theoretical and practical reasons. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the existing literature by integrating multiple psychological constructs into a unified framework. From a clinical perspective, it provides insights for developing targeted interventions aimed at reducing problematic social media use and improving mental health outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Behavioral Addictions and Social Media Addiction

Behavioral addictions have gained increasing recognition in psychological research, extending beyond substance-related disorders to include activities such as gaming, internet use, and social networking. Early conceptualizations by Griffiths (2005) proposed the “components model of addiction,” which identifies core elements such as salience, tolerance, mood modification, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse as common across addictive behaviors. This framework has been widely applied to understand Social Media Addiction (SMA) as a non-substance behavioral addiction.

SMA is characterized by excessive concern about social media, an uncontrollable urge to use these platforms, and impairment in daily functioning. Andreassen (2015) defined SMA as a strong motivation toward excessive social media use that negatively affects psychological well-being. Similarly, Kuss and Griffiths (2011) highlighted that although SMA is not formally recognized in diagnostic manuals, it exhibits characteristics comparable to recognized behavioral addictions, including negative impacts on academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and mental health.

Research has also emphasized the role of reinforcement mechanisms in sustaining SMA. Bettmann et al. (2020) suggested that continuous social connectivity and instant feedback systems, such as likes and comments, reinforce usage patterns. Additionally, Aksoy (2018) identified factors such as fear of missing out (FOMO), social needs, and lack of interpersonal relationships as key drivers of addictive social media use. These findings collectively

suggest that SMA is a multifaceted construct influenced by psychological, social, and technological factors.

2.2 Online Disinhibition Effect and Social Media Addiction

The Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE) is a critical construct in understanding online behavior. First introduced by Suler (2004), ODE refers to the tendency of individuals to behave more freely and expressively in online environments due to reduced social constraints. Factors such as anonymity, invisibility, and lack of immediate feedback contribute to this phenomenon.

Empirical research suggests a strong association between ODE and problematic internet use. Casale, Fioravanti, and Caplan (2015) found that individuals who perceive online communication as more controllable and less socially demanding are more likely to experience disinhibition, which in turn predicts problematic internet use. Similarly, Cookingham and Ryan (2014) reported that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to ODE, often engaging in excessive self-disclosure due to perceived anonymity.

In the context of Social Media Addiction, ODE appears to both facilitate and reinforce addictive behaviors. Sharma, Anand, and Kohli (2021) identified online disinhibition, along with sensation-seeking and impulsivity, as significant predictors of excessive internet use among adolescents. Paul (2019) further observed that individuals with SMA often exhibit behaviors such as oversharing and impulsive communication, which are characteristic of disinhibition.

Kuss and Griffiths (2017) emphasized that the structural features of social networking sites, combined with psychological factors like disinhibition, contribute to compulsive usage patterns. The interplay between ODE and SMA suggests a cyclical relationship, where disinhibited behavior increases engagement, which in turn reinforces addiction through reward mechanisms.

2.3 Personality Traits and Social Media Addiction

Personality traits, particularly those outlined in the Five-Factor Model, play a significant role in influencing social media usage patterns and susceptibility to addiction. The Big Five traits—Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness—provide a comprehensive framework for examining individual differences.



Research consistently identifies neuroticism as a major risk factor for Social Media Addiction. Huang (2022), through a meta-analysis, found that individuals high in neuroticism are more prone to addictive social media use due to emotional instability and vulnerability to stress. Similarly, Tekin and Turhan (2021) reported a positive relationship between neuroticism and SMA, suggesting that individuals with higher emotional reactivity may use social media as a coping mechanism.

In contrast, conscientiousness and agreeableness are generally considered protective factors. Piko, Krajczár, and Kiss (2024) found that conscientiousness negatively predicts social media addiction, indicating that individuals with higher self-discipline and goal orientation are less likely to engage in excessive use. Hawi and Samaha (2019) also identified conscientiousness and agreeableness as significant predictors of lower addiction levels.

Extraversion presents mixed findings in the literature. While some studies suggest that extraverts are more active on social media due to their sociable nature, others indicate that introverted individuals may rely more heavily on online interactions as a substitute for offline communication (Dalvi-Esfahani et al., 2021). Openness to experience has shown less consistent associations, though it is sometimes linked to exploratory online behavior.

Overall, personality traits influence not only the extent of social media use but also the manner in which individuals engage with online platforms, thereby shaping the risk of addiction.

2.4 Clinical Symptoms and Social Media Addiction

A growing body of research highlights the strong association between Social Media Addiction and clinical symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress. These psychological factors can function both as antecedents and consequences of excessive social media use.

Peng and Liao (2023) found that problematic social media use is positively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress at the symptom level. Similarly, Şentürk, Geniş, and Coşar (2021) reported that individuals with anxiety disorders and depression exhibit higher levels of social media addiction compared to healthy controls.

Systematic reviews also support these findings. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) identified excessive time spent on social media and repetitive checking behaviors as significant risk factors for psychological distress among adolescents. Hughes (2018) further demonstrated that the number of social media platforms used is positively associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

The relationship between SMA and clinical symptoms is often bidirectional. Haand and Shuwang (2020) found that depression not only correlates with but also predicts social media addiction, suggesting a cyclical pattern. Similarly, Malaeb et al. (2021) highlighted that stress may mediate the relationship between social media use and other psychological outcomes.

These findings indicate that social media addiction is closely intertwined with mental health, emphasizing the need for integrated psychological assessment and intervention.

2.5 Research Gap

Despite the expanding literature on Social Media Addiction, several gaps remain evident. First, most studies have examined Online Disinhibition Effect, personality traits, and clinical symptoms independently, limiting a comprehensive understanding of their combined influence on SMA. Second, there is a scarcity of empirical studies that simultaneously compare individuals with Social Media Addiction and healthy controls across these variables.

Furthermore, research focusing on the Indian population is limited, despite the rapid growth of social media usage in the country. Cultural, social, and technological factors unique to this context may influence the manifestation of SMA and related psychological constructs.

Finally, while the Online Disinhibition Effect has been explored in relation to internet use and cyber behavior, its integrated relationship with personality traits and clinical symptoms in the context of Social Media Addiction remains underexplored.

3.

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aim And Objectives

Aim



To investigate the relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect and Social Media Addiction, and its association with personality traits and clinical symptoms.

Objectives

1. To compare Online Disinhibition Effect between individuals with Social Media Addiction and healthy controls
2. To compare personality traits between individuals with Social Media Addiction and healthy controls
3. To compare levels of depression, anxiety, and stress between the two groups
4. To examine the relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect and personality traits in individuals with Social Media Addiction
5. To examine the relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect and clinical symptoms in individuals with Social Media Addiction

3.3 Hypotheses

1. H_{01} : There will be no significant difference in Online Disinhibition Effect between individuals with Social Media Addiction and healthy controls
2. H_{02} : There will be no significant difference in personality traits between the two groups
3. H_{03} : There will be no significant difference in depression, anxiety, and stress levels between the two groups
4. H_{04} : There will be no significant relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect and personality traits
5. H_{05} : There will be no significant relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect and clinical symptoms

3.4 Research Design

The present study employed a **descriptive and correlational research design** to examine the differences and relationships between Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE), personality traits, and clinical symptoms in individuals with Social Media Addiction (SMA) and healthy controls. This design was appropriate as it allows for the assessment of naturally occurring variables without manipulation and facilitates

the identification of associations among psychological constructs.

3.5 Participants

A total sample of **95 participants (N = 95)** was included in the study. The participants were divided into two groups:

Individuals with Social Media Addiction (n = 48)

Healthy Controls (n = 47)

Participants were within the age range of **20–35 years** and were required to be active internet and social media users residing in India.

3.6 Sampling Technique

The study utilized a **non-probability purposive sampling technique**, wherein participants were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives. This method ensured that individuals meeting the criteria for Social Media Addiction and healthy controls were adequately represented.

3.7 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- Individuals aged between 20 and 35 years
- Active users of the internet and social media
- Minimum educational qualification of 10th grade
- Ability to read and understand English
- Residents of India

Participants scoring:

- 41–106 (Healthy Controls) on SMAS
- 107–205 (SMA Group) on SMAS

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals outside the specified age range
- Participants with a prior diagnosis of psychological disorders (e.g., mood disorders, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders)
- Non-users of internet/social media
- Individuals unable to comprehend English
- Participants not meeting SMAS score criteria

3.8 Instruments

The study employed standardized and validated psychometric tools:



- **Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS)** (Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2015): Used as a screening tool to classify participants into SMA and control groups. It consists of a 5-point Likert scale with scores ranging from 41 to 205, demonstrating high reliability ($\alpha = 0.967$).
- **Online Disinhibition Effect Scale (ODES)** (Cheung et al., 2020): A 23-item scale measuring six dimensions of online disinhibition: Dissociative Anonymity, Invisibility, Asynchronicity, Solipsistic Introjection, Dissociative Imagination, and Minimization of Authority.
- **NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI)** (Costa & McCrae, 2005): A 60-item inventory assessing five personality traits: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.
- **Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21)** (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995): A 21-item scale used to assess levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Scores are categorized into severity levels after computation.

3.9 Procedure

The study was conducted in two phases:

- **Phase 1 (Screening):** Participants were informed about the study, and informed consent was obtained. The Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) was administered to classify participants into SMA and healthy control groups based on their scores.
- **Phase 2 (Assessment):** Participants in both groups were administered the ODES, NEO-FFI, and DASS-21 scales. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the process.

3.10 Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using **Jamovi software (version 2.5.3)**.

An independent samples t-test was used to examine differences between SMA and control groups across variables

Spearman's Rank Correlation was employed to assess relationships between Online Disinhibition Effect, personality traits, and clinical symptoms

A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Overview of Sample

The total sample consisted of **95 participants**, divided into individuals with Social Media Addiction ($n = 48$) and healthy controls ($n = 47$). The majority of participants were aged between 20–30 years, with a higher proportion of females in both groups. Most participants were students and reported frequent use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook.

4.2 Group Differences in Social Media Addiction

Table 1. Comparison of SMAS Scores Between Groups

Variable	Healthy Controls (Mean \pm SD)	SMA Group (Mean \pm SD)	t	p
SMAS	75.51 \pm 19.03	159.23 \pm 25.49	-18.11	< .001

Interpretation:

A highly significant difference was observed between the two groups, confirming the effective classification of participants into Social Media Addiction and control groups.

4.3 Group Differences in Online Disinhibition Effect

Table 2. Comparison of ODES Subscales

ODES Dimension	Healthy Controls (Mean \pm SD)	SMA Group (Mean \pm SD)	t	p
Dissociative Anonymity	9.06 \pm 1.67	22.89 \pm 4.48	-19.84	< .001



ODES Dimension	Healthy Controls (Mean ± SD)	SMA Group (Mean ± SD)	t	p
Invisibility	10.85 ± 3.28	27.96 ± 5.17	-19.21	<.001
Asynchronicity	10.66 ± 2.24	17.65 ± 2.22	-15.28	<.001
Solipsistic Introjection	11.79 ± 2.86	16.52 ± 2.70	-8.28	<.001
Dissociative Imagination	13.79 ± 2.14	20.25 ± 3.35	-11.17	<.001
Minimization of Authority	15.74 ± 4.32	19.10 ± 3.96	-3.96	<.001

Interpretation:

Individuals with Social Media Addiction scored significantly higher on all dimensions of Online Disinhibition Effect, indicating greater psychological disengagement and uninhibited behavior in online environments.

4.4 Group Differences in Personality Traits

Table 3. Comparison of NEO-FFI Scores

Trait	Healthy Controls (Mean ± SD)	SMA Group (Mean ± SD)	t	p
Neuroticism	16.51 ± 4.56	25.23 ± 5.47	-8.43	<.001
Extraversion	29.62 ± 4.32	19.67 ± 5.19	10.14	<.001
Openness	27.57 ± 8.90	24.77 ± 4.44	3.60	<.001
Conscientiousness	35.38 ± 2.31	26.83 ± 4.39	11.84	<.001
Agreeableness	19.29 ± 2.85	31.44 ± 6.73	-2.71	.008

Interpretation:

Significant differences were found across all personality traits. Individuals with SMA showed **higher**

neuroticism and agreeableness, but lower extraversion and conscientiousness, suggesting emotional instability and reduced self-regulation.

4.5 Group Differences in Clinical Symptoms

Table 4. Comparison of DASS-21 Scores

Variable	Healthy Controls (Mean ± SD)	SMA Group (Mean ± SD)	t	p
Depression	9.89 ± 3.21	18.90 ± 5.80	-9.34	<.001
Anxiety	7.66 ± 4.41	12.27 ± 4.09	-5.29	<.001
Stress	16.11 ± 3.73	24.58 ± 6.92	-7.41	<.001

Interpretation:

Individuals with Social Media Addiction reported significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, indicating greater psychological distress.

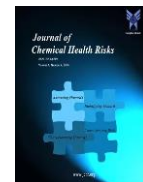
4.6 Correlation Analysis (SMA Group)

Table 5. Summary of Key Spearman Correlations

Variables	Relationship
SMA & Dissociative Imagination	Strong positive (r = 0.70)
SMA & Invisibility	Moderate positive (r = 0.53)
SMA & Asynchronicity	Moderate positive (r = 0.55)
SMA & Extraversion	Moderate negative (r = -0.54)
SMA & Conscientiousness	Strong negative (r = -0.63)

Interpretation:

Social Media Addiction was positively associated with Online Disinhibition dimensions and negatively associated with adaptive personality traits such as extraversion and conscientiousness. Stronger disinhibition was linked to higher addictive tendencies.



4.7 Summary of Findings

- Individuals with SMA showed **significantly higher online disinhibition**
- SMA group exhibited **greater psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress)**
- Personality traits differed significantly, with **higher neuroticism and lower self-regulation traits**
- Strong correlations indicate that **ODE is a key predictor of SMA**, influenced by personality and mental health factors

5. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE) and Social Media Addiction (SMA), along with the role of personality traits and clinical symptoms. The findings provide strong empirical support for a multidimensional understanding of social media addiction, highlighting the interplay between behavioral, psychological, and emotional factors.

A key finding of the study is the significantly higher level of Online Disinhibition Effect observed in individuals with Social Media Addiction compared to healthy controls. This result aligns with previous research suggesting that online environments reduce self-regulatory mechanisms, thereby promoting uninhibited behavior (Suler, 2004). The elevated scores across all dimensions of ODE—such as dissociative anonymity, invisibility, and asynchronicity—indicate that individuals with SMA experience a heightened sense of detachment from real-world consequences. This psychological detachment may encourage excessive engagement with social media, reinforcing addictive patterns.

The findings are consistent with Casale et al. (2015), who reported that perceptions of online interaction as controllable and less socially demanding contribute to increased disinhibition and problematic internet use. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2021) identified online disinhibition as a significant predictor of excessive internet engagement among adolescents. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that ODE is not only associated with problematic use but is significantly elevated in individuals clinically categorized as socially addicted.

Another important result is the significant difference in personality traits between individuals with SMA and healthy controls. Specifically, higher levels of neuroticism were observed among individuals with SMA. This supports the findings of Huang (2022), who identified neuroticism as a major risk factor for social media addiction. Individuals high in neuroticism tend to experience emotional instability, anxiety, and negative affect, which may drive them toward social media as a coping mechanism. The online environment, characterized by immediate feedback and validation, may temporarily alleviate negative emotions, thereby reinforcing usage behavior.

Conversely, lower levels of extraversion and conscientiousness were found in individuals with SMA. Lower extraversion suggests reduced engagement in offline social interactions, which may lead individuals to seek social fulfillment through digital platforms. This is in line with Dalvi-Esfahani et al. (2021), who suggested that introverted individuals may rely more on online communication as a substitute for face-to-face interactions. Similarly, low conscientiousness reflects poor self-discipline and impulse control, which are critical factors in the development of addictive behaviors. Piko et al. (2024) also reported that conscientiousness negatively predicts social media addiction, indicating its protective role.

Interestingly, the study found higher levels of agreeableness among individuals with SMA, which contrasts with some previous findings. This may be explained by the tendency of agreeable individuals to seek social harmony and validation, making them more susceptible to excessive engagement in social networking platforms. However, this relationship requires further exploration, as existing literature presents mixed findings regarding agreeableness and SMA.

The study also revealed significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among individuals with Social Media Addiction. These findings are consistent with a substantial body of literature linking problematic social media use with psychological distress. Peng and Liao (2023) reported that problematic social media use is positively associated with depression, anxiety, and stress at the symptom level. Similarly, Keles et al. (2020) identified excessive social media use as a major risk



factor for psychological distress among adolescents and young adults.

The relationship between SMA and clinical symptoms appears to be bidirectional. Individuals experiencing depression or anxiety may turn to social media as a coping strategy, seeking distraction or social support. However, prolonged exposure to social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and validation-seeking behaviors may exacerbate these symptoms, creating a reinforcing cycle. This cyclical relationship is supported by Haand and Shuwang (2020), who found that depression not only correlates with but also predicts social media addiction.

The correlation analysis further strengthens the argument for an integrated psychological model of SMA. Strong positive correlations between Social Media Addiction and dimensions of Online Disinhibition Effect—particularly dissociative imagination and invisibility—suggest that individuals who perceive the online world as detached from reality are more likely to engage in addictive behaviors. These findings align with the theoretical perspective that reduced accountability and increased psychological distance in online environments facilitate excessive engagement.

Additionally, the negative correlations between SMA and traits such as extraversion and conscientiousness highlight the role of personality in moderating addictive tendencies. Individuals with lower self-regulation and social engagement in offline settings may be more vulnerable to developing maladaptive online behaviors. This interaction between personality traits and online behavior underscores the importance of considering individual differences in understanding social media addiction.

The findings also suggest that Online Disinhibition Effect may act as a mediating mechanism linking personality traits and clinical symptoms to Social Media Addiction. For instance, individuals high in neuroticism may experience greater emotional distress, which, combined with online disinhibition, leads to excessive and uncontrolled social media use. Similarly, individuals with low conscientiousness may lack the regulatory control needed to limit their online engagement, further exacerbated by the disinhibiting nature of digital environments.

From a theoretical perspective, the study supports the application of the components model of addiction (Griffiths, 2005) to social media use, as well as cognitive-behavioral frameworks that emphasize the role of maladaptive cognitions and emotional regulation in addictive behaviors. The integration of ODE into this framework provides a more nuanced understanding of how technological features interact with psychological factors to influence behavior.

Overall, the findings highlight that Social Media Addiction is not merely a function of excessive use but is deeply rooted in psychological processes involving disinhibition, personality predispositions, and emotional distress. The interplay between these factors creates a complex system that sustains and reinforces addictive behavior.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the present study have significant theoretical, clinical, and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the existing literature by integrating the Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE), personality traits, and clinical symptoms into a unified framework for understanding Social Media Addiction (SMA). This multidimensional approach moves beyond isolated variable analysis and provides a more comprehensive psychological model of addictive social media behavior.

From a clinical standpoint, the results highlight the importance of assessing online behavioral patterns alongside personality traits and emotional functioning. Mental health professionals can incorporate screening for ODE and SMA in routine psychological assessments, particularly among young adults. The strong association between SMA and clinical symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress suggests the need for integrated intervention strategies. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can be adapted to address maladaptive online behaviors, improve self-regulation, and modify distorted cognitions related to online interactions.

Furthermore, personality-informed interventions can be developed. For example, individuals high in neuroticism may benefit from emotional regulation techniques, while those low in conscientiousness may require structured behavioral interventions to enhance self-control and time management. Psychoeducation programs can also be designed to increase awareness about the risks of



excessive social media use and the psychological mechanisms underlying online disinhibition.

At a broader level, the findings have implications for educational institutions and policymakers. Awareness campaigns and digital well-being programs can be implemented to promote responsible social media use. Incorporating digital literacy and mental health education into academic curricula may help individuals develop healthier online habits and coping strategies.

7. LIMITATIONS

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small ($N = 95$), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. A larger and more diverse sample would provide greater external validity.

Second, the study relied on self-report measures, which are subject to biases such as social desirability and response distortion. Participants may have underreported or overreported their social media usage and psychological symptoms.

Third, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. While significant associations were identified, it is not possible to determine the directionality of these relationships.

Additionally, the study focused on a specific age group (20–35 years), which restricts the applicability of findings to other age populations such as adolescents or older adults. Cultural and regional factors specific to the Indian context may also influence the results, limiting cross-cultural generalization.

8. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research can build upon the present study in several ways. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine the causal relationships between Online Disinhibition Effect, personality traits, clinical symptoms, and Social Media Addiction over time. Such designs would provide deeper insights into the developmental trajectory of addictive behaviors.

Experimental research designs may also be employed to explore the impact of specific online features (e.g., anonymity, feedback mechanisms) on disinhibition and addictive tendencies. This would help in identifying causal mechanisms and designing targeted interventions.

Further studies should include larger and more diverse samples across different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic contexts to enhance generalizability. Cross-cultural comparisons would be particularly valuable in understanding how cultural norms influence online behavior and addiction.

In addition, future research may explore mediating and moderating variables, such as coping strategies, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence, to better understand the complex dynamics underlying Social Media Addiction. The development and evaluation of intervention programs targeting digital well-being and psychological resilience also represent an important area for future investigation.

9. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE) and Social Media Addiction (SMA), along with the influence of personality traits and clinical symptoms. The findings provide strong evidence that SMA is a multifaceted psychological phenomenon influenced by behavioral tendencies, individual personality characteristics, and emotional well-being.

A key conclusion of the study is that individuals with Social Media Addiction exhibit significantly higher levels of online disinhibition. This suggests that reduced self-regulation and increased psychological detachment in online environments play a crucial role in the development and maintenance of addictive social media behaviors. The disinhibiting nature of digital platforms appears to facilitate excessive engagement by minimizing perceived consequences and enhancing immediate gratification.

The study also highlights the importance of personality traits in shaping susceptibility to Social Media Addiction. Higher neuroticism and lower conscientiousness emerged as significant characteristics among individuals with SMA, indicating emotional instability and poor self-regulation as key risk factors. These findings reinforce the role of personality as a foundational element influencing both online behavior and addiction vulnerability.

In addition, the significantly elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among individuals with SMA underscore the close relationship between social



media use and mental health. The results suggest a bidirectional relationship, where psychological distress contributes to increased social media use, which in turn exacerbates emotional difficulties. This cyclical pattern emphasizes the need for integrated approaches to assessment and intervention.

The correlation analysis further supports an interconnected framework, demonstrating that Online Disinhibition Effect, personality traits, and clinical symptoms collectively contribute to Social Media Addiction. These findings extend existing literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of how multiple psychological factors interact within the digital context.

Overall, the study makes a meaningful contribution by integrating key psychological constructs into a unified model of Social Media Addiction. The insights gained are valuable for researchers, clinicians, and policymakers in addressing the growing concern of problematic social media use. Future efforts should focus on developing targeted interventions and promoting digital well-being to mitigate the adverse psychological effects associated with excessive social media engagement.

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