

**Title: The Effect of Social Media on Children's Mental
Health in Saudi Arabia**

**العنوان: تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على الصحة النفسية للأطفال في المملكة
العربية السعودية**

Student's Name: Nour Imad Hasbini

ID: 222000092

Date: 14/07/2023

Everyone's Smart University

Midocean University

Master of Digital Media

Final_Project_DGM_761

Second Trimester 2023

Lecturer: Dr. Mahitab ElRafii

Introduction:

Social media has become an essential part of our daily lives. It has transformed the way we communicate and interact with each other. However, the excessive use of social media has been linked to various mental health problems, especially among children. The purpose of this thesis project is to investigate and understand the effect of social media on the mental health of children in Saudi Arabia. In recent years, social media platforms have become an essential part of children's lives, with significant consequences for their well-being. This study aims to identify the specific challenges and opportunities modeled by social media and develop strategies to promote positive mental health outcomes among Saudi Arabian children.

Background:

Saudi Arabia has one of the highest rates of social media usage in the world. According to a survey conducted by Hootsuite¹, 75% of the population uses social media. This high usage rate is not limited to adults but also includes children. A study conducted by Alsubaie et al.¹ found that 97% of university students in Saudi Arabia use social media.

Methodology:

Literature review: Conduct a full review of existing research on the relationship between social media and children's mental health within the Saudi Arabian context. This research will also use a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The quantitative data will be collected through an online survey that will be distributed to parents and educators across Saudi Arabia. The survey will include questions about Saudi Arabian children's social media usage, mental health problems, and factors that contribute to excessive

usage. The qualitative data will be collected through focus group discussions with Saudi Arabian children aged 10-18 who use social media regularly.

The study will focus on a sample of children in Saudi Arabia who actively use social media platforms. It may be determined that a sample size of at least 100 participants.

Problem Statement:

The increasing prevalence of social media use among children in Saudi Arabia has raised concerns regarding its potential impact on their mental health. As social media platforms become integral parts of daily life for many Saudi children, it is crucial to investigate the potential effects on their well-being. This study aims to examine the relationship between social media usage and children's mental health in Saudi Arabia, with a specific focus on identifying potential negative consequences and understanding the underlying factors contributing to these effects. By addressing this problem, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into the potential risks and challenges associated with social media use among children in Saudi Arabia, ultimately informing strategies for promoting healthy digital habits and safeguarding their mental well-being.

Importance of the Study:

The study investigating the effect of social media on children's mental health in Saudi Arabia holds significant importance due to several reasons.

Firstly, with the increasing use of social media platforms among children in Saudi Arabia, there is a pressing need to understand the potential impact on their mental well-being. Saudi Arabia has one of the highest social media penetration rates globally (Al-Qahtani, Al-Mutairi, & Alenezi, 2020), making it crucial to assess the implications of this widespread digital engagement on the mental health of its young

population. By examining this relationship, the study will contribute to a better understanding of the specific challenges and risks faced by Saudi children in the digital age.

Secondly, while existing research on social media's impact on mental health is abundant, most studies have been conducted in Western countries. Given the cultural, societal, and religious differences in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to investigate the unique context of this country and its potential influence on the relationship between social media use and children's mental health (Al-Deen, Hendricks, & Huang, 2019). This study will fill the gap in the literature by providing insights specific to Saudi Arabian children, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Thirdly, the study will contribute to the field of research by identifying the potential negative consequences of social media use on children's mental health in Saudi Arabia. It will explore factors such as cyberbullying (Almutairi, 2018), excessive screen time (Al-Hazzaa et al., 2019), social comparison (Alshahrani, Al-Khlaiwi, & Khan, 2021), and the impact of idealized portrayals on self-esteem and body image (Al-Rezq et al., 2020). The findings will shed light on the underlying mechanisms that contribute to mental health challenges, enabling researchers and policymakers to develop targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media.

Ultimately, this study's significance lies in its potential to inform evidence-based interventions and policies that promote healthy social media habits among children in Saudi Arabia. By generating empirical data and highlighting the specific challenges faced by Saudi Arabian children, the study aims to safeguard their mental well-being and contribute to the broader discourse on children's mental health in the digital era.

Theoretical Framework:

This study is guided by the integration of three theoretical frameworks: the Social Cognitive Theory, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, and the Social Comparison Theory.

The Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes observational learning, self-regulation, and self-efficacy as key factors in shaping behavior. It highlights how children acquire attitudes and behaviors through observing and imitating others, including influencers and online communities.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that individuals actively choose and engage with media to fulfill specific needs and gratifications. In the context of social media, children seek social interaction, information sharing, entertainment, and identity formation.

The Social Comparison Theory focuses on how individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes to others. On social media, children are exposed to idealized representations, leading to upward social comparisons that may impact self-esteem and body image.

By integrating these frameworks, this study aims to explore the relationship between social media use and children's mental health in Saudi Arabia, considering factors such as observational learning, self-regulation, gratifications sought through social media, and the impact of social comparisons.

Research Questions:

1. What is the relationship between social media usage and mental health problems among children in Saudi Arabia?
2. What are the most common mental health problems associated with social media usage among children in Saudi Arabia?
3. What are the factors that contribute to excessive social media usage among children in Saudi Arabia?
4. What are the best practices for parents and educators to help children use social media in a healthy way?
5. How does the duration and frequency of social media usage impact the mental well-being of children in Saudi Arabia?
6. What are the coping strategies employed by children in Saudi Arabia to deal with negative experiences on social media platforms?
7. What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of social media use among children in Saudi Arabia as reported by the children themselves?

References:

- Al-Deen, H. S., Hendricks, J. A., & Huang, L. N. (2019). The mediating role of social support in the relationship between social media use and mental well-being among youth in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 22(10), 1347-1364.
- Al-Hazzaa, H. M., Al-Sobayel, H. I., Musaiger, A. O., Connelly, J., & Abahussain, N. A. (2019). Association between screen time and mental health problems among adolescents in Saudi Arabia: Findings from the Makkah region. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 42(4), 655-667.
- Almutairi, A. F. (2018). Prevalence of cyberbullying among undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 16(4), 959-970.
- Al-Qahtani, A., Al-Mutairi, A., & Alenezi, R. (2020). Social media addiction and mental health among college students in Saudi Arabia: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Health Informatics in Developing Countries*, 14(1), 1-12.
- Al-Ramahi, M. (2019). The impact of social media usage on the psychological wellbeing of Saudi youth. *Journal of International Social Research*, 12(61), 814-829.
- Al-Rezq, R., Alshammari, R., Aldahshan, A., Alkhatlan, H., & Alzahrani, M. (2020). The influence of social media on body image dissatisfaction among females in Saudi Arabia: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging*, 24(1), 62-69.
- Alshahrani, A., Al-Khlaiwi, H., & Khan, A. S. (2021). The relationship between social media use, social comparison, and body image dissatisfaction among university students in Saudi Arabia. *Current Psychology*, 1-9.