



## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION IN THE CONTEXT OF AGE AND GENDER CHARACTERISTICS

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**Abstract:** This article is dedicated to analyzing research on social media addiction in the context of age and gender characteristics. The study covers the period from 1990 to 2024, examining dependence on social networks and its relationship with age and gender factors. The influence of age and gender factors on the formation of addiction is investigated through empirical research, theoretical approaches, and comparative analyses. Theoretical and practical aspects, as well as age and gender differences, are also explored.

**Keywords:** Internet technologies, social media addiction, age factors, gender differences, psychological characteristics, psychological impact, research methodology, empirical studies, social comparison, psychological adaptation, socio-psychological consequences.

**Introduction.** Social networks have become an integral part of modern life, playing a crucial role in daily activities, communication, and information exchange. However, excessive use can lead to emotional dependence, inability to manage time, and psychological problems. The development of social media addiction, particularly among youth and various gender groups, has become an urgent issue. This process can significantly impact individual and social life, disrupting a person's psychological stability and social relationships. Today, considering age and gender factors when studying this problem is of paramount importance. The dynamics of social media addiction development, its age-related stages, gender characteristics, and connection with social context are being examined through various theoretical approaches. Specifically, the cognitive-behavioral approach suggests that social media addiction is associated with habits and reward systems formed in human consciousness, where individual characteristics and social factors play a significant role [20].

Studies indicate that a thorough analysis of the age and gender characteristics of social media addiction is crucial for developing prevention strategies. Therefore, creating preventive measures tailored to different age and gender groups is a relevant scientific and practical issue.

**Materials and methods of research.**

This study analyzed scientific articles, statistical data, and the results of psychological research on the phenomenon of social media addiction from 1990 to 2024. Data were obtained from leading scientific databases such as APA PsycNET®, PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, Frontiersin.org, ScienceDirect.com, ResearchGate,

Academia.edu, Springer.com, and Semantic Scholar.org. The study employed methods of content analysis, meta-analysis, comparative analysis, and bibliographic analysis.

**Research Methods.** The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as meta-analysis and comparative analysis. These approaches enabled a comprehensive examination of aspects related to age and gender factors in social media addiction. Content analysis involved analyzing scientific articles, statistical data, and research results in terms of content, studying the influence of age and gender factors on addiction. Meta-analysis compared results from various studies to draw general conclusions. Studies from the first generation (1990-2010) and the modern generation (2011-2024) were compared. Comparative analysis identified modern trends in gender and age by comparing studies from different periods. Bibliographic analysis involved systematizing and analyzing scientific literature relevant to the research topic.

**Literature Review.** The theoretical foundations of the research and historical development trends were examined through a literature review. Scientific research on internet and social media addiction conducted in different periods was theoretically analyzed in the following stages:

1) 1990-1999: Early clinical and theoretical research on Internet addiction. The scientific community began studying the phenomenon of social media addiction in the 1990s. Initially, the concept of internet addiction was formed, and the psychological and social consequences of overuse were analyzed in studies conducted by K. Young [59, 60] and M. Griffiths [17, 18]. Later, with the expansion of Internet technologies and the emergence of social networks, this problem became more complex, and social media addiction emerged as an independent phenomenon. M. Griffiths and K. Young identified the early signs and diagnostic criteria of internet addiction. J. Morahan-Martin put forward initial considerations regarding the psychological impact and negative consequences of internet use [33, 34]. During this period, the concept of internet addiction was established. Although the age factor was not clearly defined, it was noted that excessive internet use among students had increased.

2) 2000-2010: the transition period from the Internet to social networks. With the emergence of platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter during this period, research focused on the psychological impact of social networks [6, 44]. Among young people and students, the influence of social networks on psychological well-being has begun to be studied. Although the concept of "dependence" is not widely used, excessive use of social networks is associated with negative behavior. M.D. Griffiths presented Internet addiction as a real form of addiction [19, 20]. S.E. Caplan introduced the concept of "problematic internet use," emphasizing that such behavior is associated with problems in social skills and self-esteem [8]. P.M. Walkenburger and J. Peter, studying the influence of social networks on the psychology of young people, noted their association with low self-esteem and depression [54]. Although gender differences have not yet been thoroughly studied, it was noted that there is a high propensity for addiction among adolescents and students based on the age factor.

3) 2011-2020: Dependence on social networks and the formation of psychological models. During this period, with the popularization of such platforms as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, the influence of social networks on the psychology of young people began to be studied in depth. The research emphasized the connection between these platforms and depression, anxiety, and social comparison. D.J. Kuss and M.D. Griffiths classified social media addiction as one of the most common behavioral addictions among young people [25-27]. The

"Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale" (BSMAS) b "Social Media Disorder Scale" was developed by C.S. Andreassen, S. Pallesen, and M.D. Griffiths.[1] B. Keles, N. McCrae, and A. Grealish confirmed through a systematic review that excessive use of social networks can lead to depression and anxiety [23]. Age and gender factors of social media addiction were studied by H.T. Chou, N. Edge [10]. Diagnostic criteria and assessment tools for addiction have been developed, including the "Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale"[1]. During this period, the phenomenon of social media addiction was fully formed, and special attention was paid to Facebook depression - the connection between spending time on social networks and depressive symptoms, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) - the fear of missing important things, Social Comparison - low self-esteem syndromes through constant comparison with others.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, dependence on social networks increased, as people were forced to continue social connections through digital platforms. According to the research of A.S. Pellegrino and V. Bhatiasavi, during the pandemic, the use of social networks increased, and cases of addiction intensified [38]. During this period, the concept of dependence on social networks was fully formed. Differences in age and gender factors began to be studied more deeply.

4) 2021-2024: Modern Research and New Technological Factors. During this period, the study of the psychological impact of social networks based on transcultural research intensified. The influence of mobile technologies, virtual reality, and online platforms on the formation of addiction was analyzed [3, 15, 22, 30, 45, 47, 50, 53, 56, 58]. New scientific approaches to the study of age and gender differences have emerged. With the help of neurophysiological studies, changes caused by social media addiction in the brain began to be studied. It was revealed that TikTok and Instagram are the main sources of addiction among young people, and their negative impact on psychological health. According to gender differences: it was observed that women have a stronger sense of social comparison, while men have a higher development of addiction to games and information. Between 2010 and 2023, scientific research on social media addiction increased significantly. In 2023, 347 scientific articles on this topic were published, reaching a record level. Geographically, research on social network dependency was mainly conducted in countries such as the USA, Great Britain, and Turkey [38].

Comparative Analysis. Through comparative analysis, the age and gender characteristics of dependence on social networks were analyzed. Research conducted in different periods was compared, and modern trends were identified: a comparative analysis was carried out in terms of periodicity (changes in research on social media addiction during 1990-2024), gender (differences in the habits and forms of addiction of men and women using social networks), age groups (degrees of addiction and psychological consequences of adolescents, young adults, and older users). During the study, the dynamics of the development of the phenomenon of addiction to social networks, the influence of age and gender factors on this process were studied.

Results and their discussion.

The development of digital technologies and internet communication has fundamentally changed the role of social networks in society. Today, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, Twitter are becoming important not only for personal communication but also for education, business, healthcare, and social movements [39]. However, the popularization of these platforms is causing new psychological problems such as social media

addiction syndrome. Continuous updates, rapid information exchange, and visual content form a psychological reward system that increases dopamine in users, which can develop addiction traits in the long term. Long-term and uncontrolled use negatively affects a person's mental health, social relations, and cognitive activity. Excessive reliance on virtual communication can weaken social connections in real life, disrupt time management, reduce work efficiency, and lead to depressive states[2].

The problem of social media addiction in the context of age and gender characteristics. The phenomenon of addiction to social networks was studied in the period from 1990 to 2024 in terms of age and gender characteristics, and the main stages of research were identified. These stages made it possible to understand the process of transition from Internet addiction to addiction to social networks, as well as the dynamics of the development of this phenomenon. While initial research was aimed at studying internet addiction, with the development of social networks, the phenomenon of addiction associated with them has formed. Long-term observations have confirmed that age and gender factors play an important role in the formation of dependence on social networks. The growth of dependence on social networks is closely related to technological progress, and the scope of research has significantly expanded. Research focused on gender and age characteristics determines future scientific directions. At each stage, the development of the Internet and social networks has formed new scientific questions and changed the directions of research.

As can be seen from the table, the initial studies were aimed at a general study of internet addiction, and later a deeper analysis of the phenomenon of addiction to social networks began. Research conducted in 1990-2024 helped to determine the influence of age and gender factors on the formation of dependence. Since 2010, gender and age factors have become the central focus of research.

Age and gender aspects of the problem of social media addiction. In modern society, the role of the internet and social networks has fundamentally changed. Initially, they were a means of searching for information and exchanging information, but today they have become a platform for virtual communication, social identification, and self-expression. However, excessive use of social networks negatively affects a person's communication in real life, psychological health, and emotional stability [27]. Social media addiction is especially widespread among young people and has a significant impact on their social relationships and mental state. Excessive dependence on the virtual environment can lead to a decline in real-life communication skills and increase the risk of psychological isolation.

Analysis by age characteristics. Studies confirm the significant influence of age and gender factors on the level of social network dependency [2, 25]. Young people are the most active user group, and they have a high risk of addiction. It has been established that women have an emotional dependence on social networks, while men have a predominant need for functional use, obtaining information, and self-expression [25, 26]. Dependence on the virtual environment poses a serious threat to young people. This process can disrupt psychological well-being and exacerbate problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation [5].

Adolescents and teenagers are the most active users of social networks, and they have a high risk of addiction. These platforms serve not only as a means of communication, but also as a source of self-expression and confirmation of social status. Excessive attachment to virtual communication can lead to a weakening of real social relationships, psychological

isolation, and increased depression and anxiety. Adolescents become attached to platforms as a means of confirming their social status, increasing the risk of developing addiction [49]. Adults mainly use social networks for information exchange, professional communication, and news updates. However, long-term use can also cause mental fatigue and social isolation in them.

According to Pew Research Center, 84% of users aged 18-29 actively use social networks, which is higher than in other age groups. For users over 50 years old, this figure is significantly lower, and their use intensity is limited [39]. Addiction rates are highest among those aged 18-24, who are prone to problems such as FOMO (fear of missing something important), depression, and low self-esteem [16, 38]. Middle-aged people use social networks mainly for professional and informational purposes, where the level of addiction is lower compared to young people [38].

Children and adolescents. Dependence on social networks is usually formed during childhood and adolescence, as young people use networks as a means of strengthening their social status and self-expression [25]. Addiction is associated with the desire for social approval, and the reward system, stimulated by likes and comments, increases dopamine activity in young people and exacerbates addiction [32].

Students. Excessive dependence on social networks in students negatively affects academic and professional activity, academic performance decreases, and personal problems may increase[2]. They use networks to exchange information, increase competition and social status, and the desire to be recognized in the virtual world increases dependence.

Elders. Elderly users use social networks as a means of maintaining social activity and strengthening family ties. According to research, although the level of addiction is low, networks allow them to reduce social isolation, communicate with loved ones, and receive information [44]. However, prolonged use can sometimes lead to mental fatigue and social isolation.

Most studies were conducted among students and adolescents, and it was found that this group had a high level of social media addiction [38]. Between the ages of 14 and 24, addiction is associated with the activation of the dopamine system and the reward system, which is enhanced through social affirmation and FOMO[51]. However, the peculiarities of using social networks by middle-aged and elderly users and the psychological and social consequences of addiction have not been sufficiently studied [36, 38]. Long-term use in these groups can increase the risk of mental fatigue and social isolation.

Analysis by gender characteristics. The gender factor plays an important role in the formation of dependence on social networks. Women mainly use social media to communicate, get emotional connection and social approval,[26] their activities are associated with exchanging photos, expressing opinions and getting "likes" [25]. Men, on the other hand, tend to use it for games, information consumption, and functional purposes [10, 18]. These differences cause different manifestations of gender-specific forms of dependence. Among women, social comparison, evaluation of appearance, and the desire to strengthen status may be associated with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Men, on the other hand, are prone to addiction associated with virtual games and competition [2, 14]. Analysis of gender and age factors is important for understanding the psychological and social consequences of social media addiction. Therefore, the development of preventive measures



and the establishment of optimal limits of use is one of the most pressing issues for the digital well-being of society.

Currently, there is insufficient research on the differences in the use of social networks by men and women and their dependence to varying degrees. In the future, one of the pressing issues is the development of preventive strategies and the formation of individual approaches, taking into account gender factors. Social media addiction differs significantly by age and gender: men and women exhibit different behaviors in terms of use styles, motivations, and forms of addiction. Therefore, it is necessary to study this problem more deeply. This is important in the prevention of addiction and the development of preventive measures.

Individual and social consequences of addiction to social networks. Social media addiction has a serious impact not only on individual psychological well-being, but also on social life. This dependence can lead to a decrease in the quality of relationships in real life and the ability of people to communicate with each other. In addition, excessive virtual communication reduces work productivity and the effectiveness of the educational process, negatively affecting people's professional and personal lives [2].

Consequences of social media addiction for young people. Dependence on social networks has especially serious consequences for young people, since during this period the process of psychological development and social adaptation is still in the formation stage. Excessive dependence in adolescence hinders the development of communication skills in real life, can disrupt the process of self-awareness, and exacerbate emotional instability [49]. This will negatively affect the process of social adaptation and psychological stability in the future.

The impact of social networks on physical health. Spending too much time on social media negatively affects sleep quality and physical health. Studies show that using social networks at night leads to insomnia, sleep rhythm disorders, and constant fatigue [29], which reduces the overall quality of a person's life. Dependence on social networks is one of the most pressing psychological and social problems of modern society, which puts at risk the psychological, social, and physical health of various age and gender groups.

Social media addiction and preventive measures. In-depth scientific analysis of social media addiction and the development of preventive measures against it is one of the urgent directions of modern psychology. In particular, based on research conducted taking into account age and gender factors, it is possible to determine optimal norms for the use of social networks, minimize harmful consequences, and develop specific strategies for the formation of a digital healthy lifestyle.

Interdisciplinary approach and international research. Research on social media addiction is often conducted on the basis of international cooperation. Articles, books, conference materials, and reviews demonstrate that this issue requires an interdisciplinary approach. Most research has been published in the fields of psychology, sociology, and information technology, confirming the need for a comprehensive study of the topic [16]. The growth of international cooperation makes it possible to analyze this problem on a global scale. Through scientific collaboration, the specific aspects of social media addiction in social and cultural contexts are being identified. According to sources, the share of international multi-authored research is 23.56% [16, 38].



**Conclusion (Conclusion).** The results of this study show that age and gender factors have a significant influence on the formation and level of dependence on social networks. If there is a high level of dependency among adolescents and young people due to social status and the desire for approval, then in students this problem manifests itself in a decrease in academic performance. In adults, the balance between professional and personal life can be disrupted, and the elderly use social networks to reduce social isolation. The gender factor also plays an important role in the manifestation of dependence. Women mainly use social networks for communication, emotional connection, and social affirmation, while men tend to use them for games, information consumption, and functional purposes. These differences cause different manifestations of gender-specific forms of dependence. These results provide an important scientific basis for the development of programs for the prevention and prophylaxis of addiction to social networks, and the implementation of the following measures, taking into account different age and gender groups, is of great importance:

Raising media literacy - informing young people and adults about the negative consequences of using social networks.

Strengthening spiritual and educational activities - involving young people in healthy social and cultural activities.

Development of healthy alternative activities - encouragement of sports, art, and other social activities.

Special programs for the elderly - development of special programs that support their healthy use of social networks.

Social media addiction manifests itself differently depending on age and gender differences. Future research should be aimed at filling the gaps in this area. Working together with psychologists, educators, and parents, it can serve to eliminate the problem of addiction to social networks and, as a result, improve the psychological and social health of society.

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