

# Social Media Dependency and Facebook Usage among the Older Adults of Kerala

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## Abstract

Social media has become an integral part of modern society, with people of all ages using various platforms to connect, share information, and stay up-to-date on current events. However, there has been a recent trend of increased Facebook usage among older adults, which has raised concerns about social media dependency. The current study explores the trends in social media dependency and Facebook intensity among older adults of Kerala. The present study employed a quantitative research design and the sample consisted of 416 older adults, aged above 60 years. Two scales were used to collect data: the Social Media Dependency Scale (SMDS) and the Facebook Intensity Measure (FBI). Frequency and percentage analysis, Spearman's Rho, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Mann-Whitney U test were carried out using SPSS (Version 23) for deriving results. Those individuals who are more dependent on social media are also more likely to engage in high levels of Facebook activity. A good majority of the participants were found to be using social media and Facebook for more than 3 hours in a day and having more than 400 friends. Social media dependency and Facebook intensity were reported to be high in urban localities, South Kerala having significantly higher rates of social media dependency when compared to North and Central regions. Social media dependency was found to be high among males, whereas no difference was in Facebook intensity among male and females.

**Implications:** Given the importance of social connections for the well-being of older adults, it is critical to understand the impact of social media use on their lives and develop strategies to promote healthy social media behaviour.

**Keywords:** social media dependency, Facebook intensity, older adults, well-being

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized the way we communicate, interact and share information. Among these platforms, Facebook has gained immense popularity, with over 2.8 billion monthly active users as of 2021 (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2023). However, research suggests that excessive use of social media, including Facebook, can lead to social media dependency, which has negative consequences on individuals' well-being. Social media dependency refers to the reliance on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others for social interaction, information, entertainment, and validation (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). People may feel the need to check their social media accounts frequently and spend significant amounts of time scrolling through their newsfeeds, commenting on posts, and checking notifications. This can lead to a compulsive behavior pattern, where individuals need to constantly engage with social media, even if it interferes with their daily routines, work, or personal relationships (Alutaybi et al., 2020).

Many factors contribute to social media dependency, including the fear of missing out (FOMO), social comparison, the need for social validation, and the addictive nature of social media platforms (Jabeen et al., 2023). For some people, social media may provide an escape from the stress and pressures of everyday life, making it difficult to disconnect from these platforms. While social media can be a valuable tool for communication, networking, and self-expression, excessive use

can negatively affect mental health, including anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem. It can also lead to social isolation and a disconnection from real-life social interactions (Karim et al., 2020).

A study by Pew Research Center (2018) found that 62% of adults aged 65 and older in the United States use Facebook, and the use is primarily associated with increased social support and decreased loneliness (Zhang et al., 2021). A study by Quinn (2018) found that older adults who used Facebook had better cognitive function than those who did not, while Facebook users can have benefits for older adults, it can also pose challenges; older adults may have difficulty navigating the platform or may be more vulnerable to online scams and fraud (James et al., 2014). Older adults may feel overwhelmed by the amount of information available on Facebook and may struggle to filter out irrelevant or unreliable content (Ellison et al., 2011).

Several studies have identified strategies for promoting safe and effective Facebook use by older adults; Shapira et al (2007) suggest that older adults can benefit from training on how to use Facebook safely and effectively. Kuerbis (2021) recommend that older adults should be encouraged to join online groups and engage in social activities on Facebook to promote social connectedness. Moreover, Facebook can serve as a platform for social activism and political engagement, providing individuals with a platform to voice their opinions and participate in social movements (Warren et al., 2014).

Excessive Facebook usage has been associated with negative consequences such as decreased life satisfaction (Stieger, 2019), decreased self-esteem, and increased depressive symptoms (Srivastava et al., 2019), and social comparison on Facebook can lead to adverse outcomes, including envy, jealousy, and decreased self-esteem (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018).

Social media has become an integral part of modern society, with people of all ages using various platforms to connect, share information, and stay up-to-date on current events. However, there has been a recent trend of increased Facebook usage among older adults, which has raised concerns about social media dependency. Social media dependency is a phenomenon where individuals become overly reliant on social media platforms for communication and information. This dependency can have negative consequences on mental health, social relationships, and overall well-being. Facebook offers a way for older adults to stay connected with family and friends, especially those who live far away (Heimlich, 2011). With features like video calling and messaging, Facebook provides a convenient and accessible way for older adults to communicate with loved ones (Chopik, 2016). Facebook provides a way for older adults to stay informed about current events and social issues. Many news outlets and organizations have a Facebook presence, making it easy for older adults to access information and engage in discussions about important topics (Madden, 2010).

As the population ages, there is an increasing need to understand the impact of social media usage on the well-being of older adults. The proposed study aims to investigate the patterns of social media usage among older adults in Kerala and to determine the level of social media dependency and Facebook intensity among them. This will provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to social media dependency and Facebook usage in this age group and help develop strategies to promote healthy social media habits among this population.

## 2. Methodology

The present study employed a quantitative research design to investigate social media dependency and Facebook intensity among older adults. The sample consisted of 416 older adults, aged above 60 years (males = 142, Females = 274). Majority of them resides within Central Kerala (52.4%), in rural localities (46.2%), and more than three-fourth of them are living with their spouses (77.2%). Two scales were used to collect data: the Social Media Dependency Scale (SMDS) and the Facebook Intensity Measure (FBI). The SMDS is a 12-item self-report questionnaire, developed by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007), that measures the level of social media dependency among individuals. The FBI (Men & Tsai, 2013) is a 9-item self-report questionnaire that measures the intensity of Facebook use among individuals. The participants were asked to complete both scales online during the months January 2023 – March 2023. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided their informed consent before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study, and participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The data obtained was found to be not normally distributed and hence non-parametric tests were employed for further analysis. Frequency and percentage analysis, Spearman's Rho, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Mann-Whitney U test were carried out using SPSS (Version 23).

## 3. Results and Discussion

Facebook is the most popular and used platforms among older adults (aged 65 years and above), followed by WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest. Facebook has become increasingly popular among older adults in recent years, as it remains as a strong medium to stay connected with family and friends, share news and updates, and engage in online communities. Facebook also provides older adults with a way to combat feelings of social isolation and loneliness. Additionally, it offers a variety of features, such as video calls and groups, that allow older adults to connect with groups with purpose and meaning.

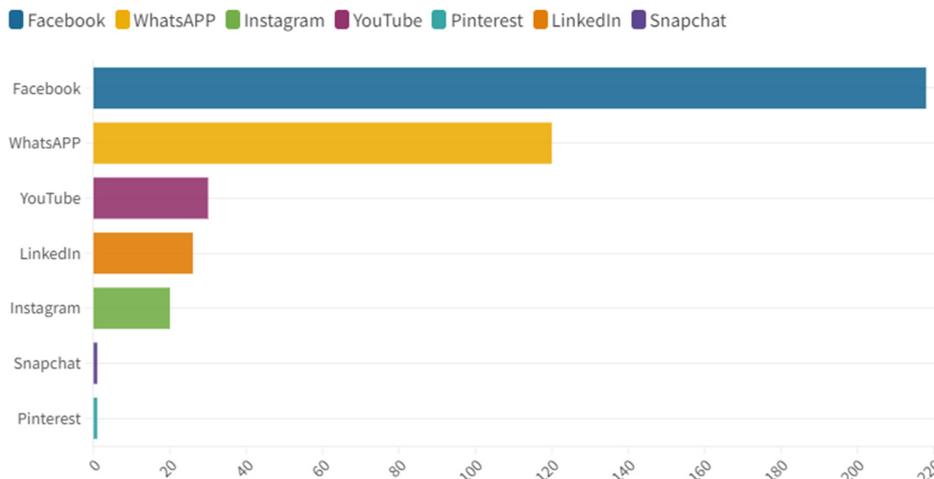


Figure 1. Popular social media among the older adults of Kerala

**What are the evident patterns of social media and Facebook use among older adults?**

A good majority of the participants were found to be using social media for more than 3 hours in a day (88.2%). Around half of the participants were reported to be spending more than 3 hours in facebook (52.4%) and having more than 400 friends (47.8%). The following tables (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, Table 4) demonstrate region and locality wise distribution of social media dependence and facebook intensity.

Table 1. Region-wise average social media usage

		Average Social Media Usage			
		10–30 mins	1–2 hours	> 3 hours	Total
<b>Kerala Region</b>	South Kerala	0	12	100	112
	Central Kerala	1	25	192	218
	North Kerala	0	11	75	86
	Total	1	48	367	416

Table 2. Locality-wise average social media usage

		Average Social Media Usage			
		10–30 mins	1–2 hours	> 3 hours	Total
<b>Locality</b>	Urban	1	8	81	90
	Semi Urban	0	17	117	134
	Rural	0	23	169	192
	Total	1	48	367	416

Table 3. Region-wise average Facebook usage

		Average Facebook Usage				
		10–30 mins	1–2 hours	2–3 hours	> 3 hours	Total
<b>Kerala Region</b>	South Kerala	0	47	13	52	112
	Central Kerala	1	62	25	130	218
	North Kerala	0	37	11	38	86
	Total	1	146	49	220	416

Table 4. Locality-wise average Facebook usage

		Average Facebook Usage				
		10–30 mins	1–2 hours	2–3 hours	> 3 hours	Total
Locality	Urban	1	27	8	54	90
	Semi Urban	0	48	17	69	134
	Rural	0	71	24	97	192
	Total	1	146	49	220	416

Table 5. Spearman’s correlation matrix

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Total Facebook Friends (1)	1	-.055	-.047
Social Media Dependency (2)	-.055	1	.254**
Facebook Intensity (3)			1

\*\*p<.01

Table 5 illustrates mean, standard deviation and Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients corresponding to the total number of facebook friends, social media dependency, and facebook intensity. It is indicated that the total number of facebook friends does not have any significant association with social media dependency and facebook intensity, however, a significant positive correlation was shown between social media dependency and Facebook intensity. The individuals who are more dependent on social media are also more likely to engage in high levels of Facebook activity. This relationship may be explained by the fact that individuals who are highly dependent on social media may use Facebook as a way to satisfy their social needs, seek validation, and maintain social connections. However, it's important to note that excessive Facebook use can have negative consequences, such as reduced productivity, increased feelings of loneliness, and decreased well-being.

***Is there any difference in social media dependency and facebook intensity based on region, locality, gender, and relationship status?***

Table 6. Region-wise comparison of social media dependency and facebook intensity

Variable	Region	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis Chi- Square	Sig.
Social Media Dependency	South Kerala	112	232.92	6.48	.039
	Central Kerala	218	200.84		
	North Kerala	86	196.10		
Facebook Intensity	South Kerala	112	222.73	3.55	.169
	Central Kerala	218	198.20		
	North Kerala	86	216.07		

\*p<.05

Table 6 indicates that there is a significant difference in social media dependency among south, central, and north Kerala regions, and no significant difference in facebook intensity. Social media dependency is reported to be high in south Kerala. There are several reasons why social media dependency may be high in South Kerala. One reason is that South Kerala has a high literacy rate, with many individuals having access to smartphones and the internet. This, combined with the increasing availability of affordable data plans, has led to a significant increase in social media usage in the region. Additionally, the social and cultural norms in South Kerala place a high value on social connections and relationships, which may drive individuals to engage in excessive social media use. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns have increased reliance on social media for communication, entertainment, and news updates, which may have further contributed to social media dependency in the region.

Table 7. Locality-wise comparison of social media dependency and facebook intensity

Variable	Locality	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis Chi- Square	Sig.
Social Media Dependency	Urban	90	229.86	6.05	.048
	Semi Urban	134	190.33		
	Rural	192	211.17		
Facebook Intensity	Urban	90	229.39	6.12	.047
	Semi Urban	134	215.53		
	Rural	192	193.80		

\*p<.05

As shown in Table 7, there is a significant difference in social media dependency and facebook intensity among individuals from urban, semi-urban, and rural localities. Both social media dependency and facebook intensity are found to be high in urban locality.

Table 8. Gender -wise comparison of social media dependency and Facebook intensity

Variable	Gender	N	Mean Rank	U	Z	Sig.
Social Media Dependency	Male	142	237.45	15342.50	-3.553	.000
	Female	274	193.49			
Facebook Intensity	Male	142	217.35	18198.00	-1.087	.277
	Female	274	203.92			

Table 8 shows gender-wise comparison of social media dependency and Facebook intensity. Social media dependency is found to be high among males, whereas no difference was in Facebook intensity among male and females. While social media dependency is a growing concern among both genders, recent research suggests that it may be particularly high among males. Studies have suggested that there are several reasons why social media dependency may be higher among males. One reason is that social media can provide a platform for networking and career development, which may be particularly important for males who are seeking to establish themselves professionally. Social media use has been linked to certain aspects of masculinity, such as the need for validation and competition, which may drive males to engage in excessive social media use. Moreover, the digital world offers a safe space to express oneself, and this may be appealing to males who operate according to the cultural myth ‘men should be strong’ and find it challenging to express themselves in real life.

#### 4. Summary and Conclusion

The major findings of the present study indicates that individuals who rely heavily on social media are more prone to being highly active on Facebook. Most of the participants in the study were discovered to be spending over three hours a day on social media and Facebook, while also having more than 400 friends. Urban areas showed higher levels of social media dependency and Facebook activity, with South Kerala displaying significantly higher dependency rates than the North and Central regions. The study also found that social media dependency was higher among males, while there was no gender difference in Facebook intensity. According to the results, older adults in Kerala are using Facebook mainly for socializing and entertainment purposes, in line with previous research on social media usage.

However, the study also uncovered a noteworthy percentage of older adults who admit to feeling addicted to social media, raising worries about the possible adverse outcomes of excessive social media consumption. As social connections are crucial for the welfare of older adults, it is essential to comprehend the effects of social media use on their lives and create plans to encourage healthy social media habits. Overall, the study is critical in addressing the potential risks and benefits of social media usage among older adults and promoting healthy social connections among this demographic group.

As of the 2011 census, the population of Kerala was approximately 33 million, making it one of the most densely populated states in India. Kerala has a literacy rate of 96.2%, the highest in the country, and a life expectancy of 74 years. The state's population is predominantly rural, with approximately two-thirds of the population living in rural areas. The majority of the population in Kerala are Hindus, followed by Muslims and Christians. Malayalam is the official language of the state, and English is widely spoken. Kerala has a high level of gender parity, with a slightly higher female population compared to males. The state also has a high proportion of elderly people, with around 12% of the population

over the age of 60. The popularity of mobile phones in Kerala can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, Kerala has a high literacy rate of 96.2%, and many residents are well-educated and tech-savvy. Second, the state has a high penetration of mobile networks and affordable data plans, making it easy for people to access the internet and stay connected with family and friends. Mobile phones have also become an essential tool for businesses in Kerala, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Many hotels and restaurants use mobile apps to facilitate bookings and reservations, while tour operators use mobile phones to provide real-time updates to travellers. The rise of Facebook usage among older adults has also led to concerns about social media dependency. Older adults who become overly reliant on Facebook for communication and information may find themselves feeling isolated and disconnected from the real world. Spending too much time on social media can lead to negative feelings, such as jealousy and loneliness.

While social media can offer numerous benefits, excessive use can lead to a range of negative consequences. For example, studies have found that excessive social media use is linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and poor sleep quality. Social media addiction can also impact performance levels and social relationships, as it can consume valuable time and attention that could be devoted to other activities. Furthermore, social media dependency can lead to a distorted sense of reality, as people may feel compelled to present a curated version of themselves that is not necessarily authentic.

Given the potential negative consequences of social media dependency, it is essential to take steps to reduce excessive use. One strategy is to set clear boundaries around social media use, such as limiting the amount of time spent on social media each day or designating specific times of day for social media use. Another strategy is to seek support from friends and family members, as social support can help individuals resist the urge to engage in excessive social media use. It can also be helpful to engage in other activities that promote well-being, such as exercise, reading, or spending time outdoors. Here are some ways to help older adults set a limit for Facebook and social media dependency:

- Create a schedule: Encourage older adults to establish a daily schedule that includes specific times for checking social media. This can help them reduce the time spent on social media while still staying connected.
- Identify triggers: Help older adults identify the triggers that lead to excessive social media use, such as boredom or loneliness. Encourage them to find alternative activities to engage in during those times.
- Use tracking tools: There are apps available that can track social media usage and provide notifications when a certain limit has been reached. Older adults can use these tools to keep track of their social media usage and limit their time spent on the platform.
- Set goals: Encourage older adults to set goals for their social media usage, such as checking Facebook only once a day or limiting their time on the platform to 30 minutes per session.
- Seek support: Encourage older adults to seek support from family and friends to help them reduce their social media usage. They can also join support groups or seek professional help if necessary.

Remember that setting limits for social media use can be challenging, so it is important to be patient and supportive while helping older adults establish healthy habits.

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