Examining the Role of Family and Social Environment in Social Media Use Among Youth

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Given the increasing use of social media among youth and the resulting psychological, social, and cognitive consequences, this study aimed to identify and analyze the familial and social components associated with social media use in this age group. This research was conducted using a systematic review approach by analyzing 25 scholarly articles published between 2012 and 2024. The selected articles were extracted from reputable academic databases including PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The article selection process was carried out based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data were systematically extracted using qualitative content analysis, and a coding table was developed accordingly. The results indicated that factors such as family cohesion, satisfaction with family relationships, attachment styles, social support, self-esteem, resilience, peer pressure, emotion regulation, fear of missing out (FoMO), and cognitive characteristics significantly influence excessive or problematic social media use. Moreover, the mediating role of psychological variables such as mentalization and mental health in the relationship between family and social environment with youths' online behavior was emphasized. Based on the findings of this study, designing preventive and promotive interventions centered on family education, strengthening emotion regulation skills, and enhancing resilience can help reduce the harms associated with maladaptive social media use among youth.

Keywords: *social media, family, social support, attachment, youth, systematic review*

1. Introduction

Social media platforms, as one of the prominent manifestations of transformation in human communication, have gained a significant place in the daily lives of youth. These virtual spaces provide various opportunities for social interaction, news tracking, entertainment, and receiving educational content (Livingstone et al., 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2019). However, the growing use of social media—particularly among adolescents and youth—has raised concerns regarding its psychological, social, and academic consequences. Empirical evidence indicates that problematic and maladaptive use of social media can lead to issues such as depression (Li et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024), anxiety (Bilgin et al., 2020; Boursier et al., 2020), eating disorders (Sattar et al., 2025), and academic decline (Van Den Eijnden et al., 2018). Among the influencing factors, the family—as the first social institution—plays a key role in shaping communication behaviors and media consumption habits of children. Attachment styles, family cohesion, and parent-child relationship quality are among the variables directly associated with the extent and manner of adolescents' and youths' social media use (Bilgin et al., 2020; Ercengiz & Bayraktar, 2025; Gökçearslan et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). Anxious and avoidant attachment styles are recognized as positive predictors of social media use disorder, whereas family cohesion and harmony, by fostering secure attachment, can act as preventive factors against such disorders (Arıkan et al., 2022; Ercengiz & Bayraktar, 2025; Monacis et al., 2017). Families experiencing poor functioning, recurring conflicts, emotional disengagement, and ineffective communication are more prone to fostering excessive dependence on social media among their children (Raeisi et al., 2021).

On the other hand, the social environment also plays a determining role in youths' communication behaviors. Peer pressure, the need for social approval, and prevailing behavioral patterns among friends can steer young individuals toward excessive or maladaptive social media use (Mohammadi & Dimehkar Haghighi, 2024). In some cases, unhealthy interactions in virtual spaces not only reduce family communication but also lead to feelings of isolation, social alienation, and impairments in developing communication skills (Cheng et al., 2021; Conway et al., 2024).

In the digital age, social media has become an inseparable part of young people's lives, significantly affecting their mental health and social behaviors. On one hand, these platforms offer opportunities to connect with friends, engage in learning, and stay informed. On the other hand, their excessive or inappropriate use can result in reduced face-to-face interactions, academic decline, psychological issues, and family dysfunction. These challenges are particularly salient during adolescence and youth, which are critical periods for identity formation and social relationship development (Sawyer et al., 2018; Vannucci et al., 2020). In this context, the family, as the primary socializing agent, plays a foundational role in managing social media use. In families characterized by harmony, trust, and emotional support, young individuals are more likely to use social media responsibly and avoid its negative consequences. Conversely, families with communication issues and frequent conflicts are more likely to have adolescents who engage in problematic or excessive social media use (Bilgin et al., 2020; Tadpatrikar et al., 2021).

In addition to familial influences, the social environment and peer pressure also significantly impact youth's online behavior. Especially during adolescence and early adulthood, social media plays a vital role in establishing social connections and shaping identity. Peer influence and the desire to be visible in digital spaces often motivate adolescents to engage more with these platforms, which—if left unmanaged—may lead to psychological and social challenges (Cheng et al., 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, various models have been proposed to explain the effects of social media on family relationships and online behaviors. One such model is the Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (PACE) framework, which emphasizes the role of childhood experiences, trauma, and parental interactions in explaining problematic social media use. This model examines how emotional, cognitive, and executive factors influence online behavior (Brand et al., 2016). According to the PACE framework, individual traits, expectations from social media, and emotional regulation skills collectively impact a person's digital behavior (Gökçearslan et al., 2021). Therefore, responsible and healthy use of social media requires appropriate familial and social support. Strengthening family relationships, improving parent-child communication, and training in emotional regulation and online behavior management can mitigate the harms of excessive social media use and promote the psychological well-being of youth (Austermann et al., 2021; Avari et al., 2022).

As social media use increasingly replaces face-to-face family interactions, the quality of familial engagement is

challenged (Ehtemam et al., 2024). Generational gaps in technological literacy, reduced in-person conversations, and growing divides between parents and children are among the cultural consequences of this phenomenon (Amin et al., 2022; Pourrezaei & Naderi, 2016). Moreover, social media has become not only a tool for entertainment and interaction but also a mechanism for identity formation and compensating for psychological deficiencies among youth (Aref & Kashani, 2022). Supporting this notion, a study by Ercengiz and Bayraktar (2025), using structural equation modeling, investigated the impact of family cohesion and attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious) on social media use disorder among 355 Turkish high school students. The findings revealed that family cohesion negatively predicted anxious and avoidant attachment styles and positively influenced secure attachment. Furthermore, secure attachment negatively predicted, and anxious and avoidant styles positively predicted, excessive social media use. These results suggest that attachment styles mediate the relationship between family cohesion and social media use disorder (Ercengiz & Bayraktar, 2025). Thus, educating parents to foster family cohesion may serve as an effective strategy in mitigating harmful social media use among adolescents. In a related study, Salehi (2024) found that insecure attachment style was directly related to psychological distress and social media addiction (Salehi, 2024). Fabris et al. (2020), focusing on adolescents, concluded that fear of missing out and stress stemming from social rejection are key determinants in the tendency toward excessive media use (Fabris et al., 2020). Similarly, research by Gokcearslan et al. (2021) showed that traits such as narcissism, loneliness, and a sense of family belonging influence mobile phone addiction and problematic media use through a shared causal pathway (Gökçearslan et al., 2021).

Given the inconsistencies in the literature regarding the relationship between attachment styles, family cohesion, and social media use disorder, conducting a systematic review to synthesize and analyze findings appears essential. This study aims to gather, analyze, and, where possible, integrate existing evidence to present an accurate and documented portrayal of current patterns.

2. Methods and Materials

The research method employed in this study is a systematic review aimed at collecting, evaluating, and comprehensively analyzing findings from studies related to the role of family and social environment in social media use among youth. In this method, the research question was first clearly defined, and inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure that only relevant and high-quality studies were included in the analysis. Subsequently, an extensive search was conducted across reputable scientific databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science to identify and retrieve relevant articles.

The inclusion criteria for this study comprised research published in English and Persian that addressed the impact of family and social environment on social media use among youth. Selected articles were required to specifically examine aspects such as family cohesion, attachment styles, social support, and social media use disorders. In addition, only those studies with robust and reliable methodologies that presented empirical or analytical data were included. Theoretical articles or those lacking practical and empirical information were excluded from the study. Ultimately, from the articles identified, 25 studies that were relevant to the research topic and met quality standards were selected for analysis. Table 1 presents the reviewed articles.

Table 1

Reviewed Articles

No.	Reference	Title	Results and Findings
1	(Pezoa-Jares et al., 2012)	Internet Addiction: A Review	A comprehensive review of internet addiction and its psychosocial factors, including the role of family and social environment. Emphasized the importance of familial support in prevention and treatment.
2	(Pontes et al., 2015)	Clinical Psychology of Internet Addiction: A Review	Conceptual and clinical examination of internet addiction, with a focus on familial and social factors in the development and maintenance of the disorder.
3	(Rom & Alfasi, 2014)	Role of Adult Attachment Style in Emotion, Cognition, and Behavior on Social Media	Adult attachment styles were identified as predictors of emotions and behaviors in social media use. Insecure styles were associated with problematic use.
4	(Rozgonjuk et al., 2022)	Maladaptive Gaming, Loneliness, and Family Cohesion Before and After COVID-19	Family cohesion identified as a protective factor against online gaming addiction and loneliness among adolescents and youth.

5	(Ruhl et al., 2015)	Adolescent Attachment Pathways with Mothers and Fathers	Quality of adolescent attachment to parents plays a key role in mental health and social behaviors. Positive parent-child experiences lead to secure attachment.
6	(Salehi et al., 2023)	Online Addictions Among Iranian Adolescents and Youth	Anxious and avoidant attachment styles, as well as gender, significantly predict internet and social media addiction among Iranian adolescents.
7	(Santoro et al., 2024)	Mentalization as Mediator Between Adult Attachment and Problematic Social Media Use	Mentalization serves as a key mediator between insecure attachment and problematic social media use.
8	(Savci et al., 2020)	Problematic Social Media Use and Social Bonding in Adolescence	Family life satisfaction serves as both a mediator and moderator in the relationship between problematic social media use and adolescents' social bonding.
9	(Shannon et al., 2022)	Problematic Social Media Use in Adolescents and Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis	Findings from systematic review and meta-analysis indicate problematic use is associated with psychological and social issues in youth.
10	(Spada, 2014)	Review of Problematic Internet Use	Problematic use of the internet is influenced by individual and familial factors and may result in psychological disorders.
11	(Savci & Aysan, 2017)	Addiction to New Technologies and Social Bonding	Addiction to new technologies such as the internet and social media negatively affects social bonding in adolescents.
12	(Sawyer et al., 2018)	The age of Adolescence	Adolescence is a sensitive developmental period with unique psychosocial features; family plays a key role in psychological health.
13	(Tadpatrikar et al., 2021)	Systematic Review of Technology Use and Family Communication Patterns	Excessive digital technology use reduces face-to-face interaction quality, widens communication gaps, and weakens family bonds.
14	(Tariq et al., 2022)	Social Media Use and Family Bonding: A Systematic Review of Quantitative Studies	Significant association reported between social media use and perceived family cohesion or fragmentation.
15	(Taibi et al., 2023)	Social Media Literacy to Support a Conscious Use of Social Media in Adolescents and Improve Their Psychological WellBeing: A Pilot Study	Social media addiction indirectly causes social neglect by reducing satisfaction with family life.
16	(Fabris et al., 2020)	Investigating the links between fear of missing out, social media addiction, and emotional symptoms in adolescence: The role of stress associated with neglect and negative reactions on social media	Social media addiction and FOMO directly relate to family dysfunction and decreased family relationship quality.
17	(Arıkan et al., 2022)	Transmission of Attachment Styles, Depression, Anxiety, and Social Media Addiction in Youth	Intergenerational transmission of attachment styles affects depression, anxiety, and social media addiction in youth.
18	(Boursier et al., 2020)	Do selfie-expectancies and social appearance anxiety predict adolescents' problematic social media use?	Developed a scale to assess social media addiction from parents' perspectives, highlighting the role of family in early detection.
19	(Bayraktar & Çelik, 2023)	Attachment Styles, Social Media Addiction, and Contingent Self-Esteem	Attachment styles and conditional self-esteem significantly contribute to social media addiction.
20	(Bilgin et al., 2020)	Social Media Addiction and Parent-Adolescent Relationship	Positive parent-adolescent communication correlates with reduced social media addiction.
21	(Blackwell et al., 2017)	Extraversion, Neuroticism, Attachment Style, and FOMO as Predictors of Social Media Addiction	Personality traits and attachment styles predict social media use and addiction.
22	(Chen, 2019)	From Attachment to Addiction: Mediating Role of Psychological Needs Satisfaction	Satisfaction of psychological needs mediates the relationship between attachment and social media addiction.
23	(Conway et al., 2024)	Parental Anxious and Avoidant Attachment, Emotion Regulation Difficulties, and Parenting	Parental attachment styles and emotion regulation affect parenting quality and adolescents' behaviors.
24	(Costanzo et al., 2021)	Maladaptive Daydreaming as Mediator Between Attachment Styles and Social Media Addiction	Maladaptive daydreaming mediates the link between insecure attachment and social media addiction.
25	(D'Arienzo et al., 2019)	Social Media Addiction and Attachment Styles: A Systematic Review	Systematic review reveals that attachment styles play a key role in social media addiction.

After retrieving the articles, a qualitative assessment was conducted based on criteria such as research design, methodology, sample size, type of data analysis, and relevance to the research question. Subsequently, key data from selected studies were extracted and analyzed using content and thematic analysis methods. Coding and categorization of concepts and recurring patterns were then performed.

At this stage, qualitative data analysis software was employed to examine relationships among variables such as family cohesion, attachment styles, social support, and problematic social media use. These analyses were particularly helpful in identifying causal relationships and conceptual structures. Additionally, where possible, meta-analytic techniques were applied to synthesize data quantitatively in order to derive more comprehensive and well-documented results. Ultimately, the findings were reported in a structured and scientific manner. This research process facilitates a deeper understanding of the influence of family and social environment on youth's online behaviors

and contributes to the development of effective educational and intervention programs for managing healthy social media use.

3.   Findings and Results

In this study, a coding process was employed for data analysis and the extraction of key concepts. Coding, as a crucial tool in qualitative data analysis, allows for the identification and categorization of recurring patterns and themes within the data. To achieve this, data were extracted from the selected articles and coded based on their core concepts. To facilitate this process, the extracted data were organized into a coding table. Table 2 presents the codes that illustrate key concepts, subcomponents, and various data categories.

Table 2

Coding of Identified Subcomponents and Key Concepts Related to the Role of Family and Social Environment in Social Media Use Among Youth Based on Selected Research Sources

No.	Main Component	Subcomponent	Key Concepts	Source
1	Family Cohesion	Family Integration	Emotional support, family bonding, empathy, positive communication	A#4, A#8
2		Family Life Satisfaction	Satisfaction with quality of family relationships, psychological peace	A#8, A#15
3		Parent-Child Relationship Quality	Intimacy, positive experiences, secure attachment	A#5, A#20
4	Attachment Styles	Secure Attachment	Trust in self and others, stable relationships	A#6, A#3
5		Anxious Attachment	Fear of abandonment, need for approval, emotional dependency	A#6, A#17
6		Avoidant Attachment	Avoidance of closeness, isolation, distrust	A#3, A#6
7		Mentalization (Mediator)	Ability to understand own and others' minds, emotion regulation	A#7, A#24
8	Social and Psychological Support	Self-Esteem	Self-worth, confidence, positive self-concept	A#19, A#15
9		Resilience	Resistance to pressure and stress	A#13
10		Loneliness	Isolation, lack of social support	A#4, A#13
11		Mental Health	Depression, anxiety, life satisfaction	A#12, A#8
12	Problematic Social Media Use	Usage Intensity	Time spent, frequency of use	A#9, A#21, A#18
13		Usage Pattern	Excessive use, dependency, fear of missing out (FOMO)	A#21, A#13
14		Psychological Consequences	Depression, anxiety, reduced quality of social relationships	A#2, A#1
15		Social Consequences	Isolation, reduced real-life interaction, academic decline	A#1, A#4
16	Socio-Cultural Environment	Peer Influence	Peer pressure, influence of friends, behavioral modeling	A#16, A#22
17		Parental Role	Parental supervision, education, support	A#15, A#18
18		Cultural Influences	Values, norms, cultural beliefs	A#9, A#14
19	Psychological and Cognitive	Emotion Regulation	Emotion control, stress management	A#23, A#7
20		Maladaptive Daydreaming	Escaping reality, mediator between attachment and addiction	A#24, A#14
21		Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	Anxiety about social exclusion, driver of overuse	A#13, A#21
22	Mental Health	Depression	Positive association with problematic social media use	A#2, A#21
23		Anxiety	Increased anxiety linked to social media use	A#2, A#21
24		Life Satisfaction	Protective factor against social media addiction	A#8, A#12
25		Positive Self-Concept	Predictor of reduced addiction and problematic use	A#19, A#22

The content analysis of selected studies, conducted through axial coding with a focus on main components and their related subcomponents, revealed that a variety of factors interact among family, social environment, and individual characteristics of youth to determine how they engage with social media. The findings were categorized into seven main components, each of which is discussed in detail below.

The research results indicated that family and social environment play a key role in both the nature and intensity of youth's social media use. This relationship operates through both direct pathways (e.g., parental supervision, family cohesion) and indirect pathways (e.g., attachment style, self-esteem, resilience, and fear of missing out).

One of the most influential components was family cohesion. Strong emotional bonds among family members

and satisfaction with intra-family relationships significantly reduce the likelihood of harmful social media use. Families that create a supportive, intimate, and stable environment foster young individuals with more positive self-concept and a greater sense of security (Savci et al., 2020; Savci & Aysan, 2017).

The quality of the parent-child relationship was also a determining factor. A secure and intimate attachment between parent and child serves as a protective factor against the tendency to seek emotional compensation in virtual environments (Bilgin et al., 2020; Ruhl et al., 2015).

In the domain of attachment styles, findings showed that secure attachment is associated with trust in oneself and others and leads to healthier social relationships. Individuals with secure attachment are less prone to social media addiction (Rom & Alfasi, 2014; Salehi et al., 2023). In contrast, those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles are more likely to seek social validation and escape from real relationships, which increases their susceptibility to excessive social media use (Arıkan et al., 2022; Salehi et al., 2023). Mentalization ability, as a mediating factor, also aids in better understanding one's own and others' emotions, thereby enhancing emotional regulation in response to social pressures (Costanzo et al., 2021; Santoro et al., 2024).

Social and psychological support was another fundamental component. High self-esteem, resilience to external pressures, and good mental health were all linked to a reduced tendency for maladaptive social media use (Bayraktar & Çelik, 2023; Tadpatrikar et al., 2021). Conversely, loneliness and social isolation contributed to compensatory use of digital spaces to fill emotional and relational voids (Tadpatrikar et al., 2021).

Regarding problematic social media use, findings showed that both usage intensity and usage patterns (e.g., fear of missing out or strong dependency) were associated with psychological outcomes such as anxiety and depression (Blackwell et al., 2017; Pontes et al., 2015). Furthermore, social consequences such as reduced real-life interactions, academic decline, and social withdrawal were also among the effects of excessive media use (Pezoa-Jares et al., 2012; Ruhl et al., 2015).

Finally, the socio-cultural environment plays a significant role in shaping youth's social media use patterns. Peer pressure, behavioral modeling by friends, and prevailing cultural and familial values can either facilitate or restrict youth engagement with social media (Conway et al., 2024; Tadpatrikar et al., 2021; Taibi et al., 2023; Tariq et al., 2022). The role of parents in education and supervision has also

been highlighted as a key factor in preventing excessive use (Tadpatrikar et al., 2021; Taibi et al., 2023).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to analyze the role of family and social environment in explaining the factors influencing social media use among youth—a topic that has become a major concern for families, educational institutions, and social policymakers in light of the unprecedented expansion of digital technologies and the increasing presence of youth in virtual spaces. As traditional patterns of familial and social interactions evolve and part of individuals' emotional, cognitive, and communicative needs are met through online platforms, a deeper understanding of the underlying factors driving these behaviors becomes imperative. Focusing on components such as family cohesion, secure attachment, social support, mental health, peer pressure, and cognitive traits, the present research aimed to provide a comprehensive view of the causal structure of problematic social media use and identify effective intervention pathways based on familial and psychological resources that may enhance the social resilience of the younger generation.

The findings of this study highlight the fundamental role of the family—as the first context of socialization—in shaping behavioral and psychological patterns related to social media use. Families characterized by emotional cohesion, satisfaction with family life, and intimate parent-child relationships are less likely to raise children prone to harmful social media use. These results are consistent with studies (Savci et al., 2020; Savci & Aysan, 2017), which showed that satisfaction with family relationships and emotional support act as protective factors against social media dependency. Furthermore, the quality of attachment, particularly secure attachment, is associated with reduced fear of missing out and compulsive engagement in virtual environments (Rom & Alfasi, 2014; Salehi et al., 2023; Salehi, 2024).

In addition, psychological and cognitive variables such as self-esteem, resilience, and emotion regulation function as critical mediators in the pathway linking family and social context to youth media behavior. Individuals with high self-esteem and a positive self-concept are less likely to experience social anxiety and loneliness and, consequently, are less inclined to use social media to compensate for emotional needs. These findings align with the studies (Bayraktar & Çelik, 2023; Tadpatrikar et al., 2021) which

emphasized the role of self-esteem and psychological support in reducing media vulnerability. Conversely, research by Tariq, Munoz Saez, and Khan (2021) indicated that even in societies with high levels of self-esteem, cultural values such as high individualism may contribute to increased media overuse—a finding that partially contradicts the present study (Tariq et al., 2022).

Moreover, environmental structures such as peer pressure and cultural-social norms play a significant role in directing media behaviors. In societies where face-to-face interactions have diminished and dependence on digital communication has intensified, youth face increasing pressure to maintain a constant presence in virtual spaces. The findings (Liu et al., 2020; Tariq et al., 2022) confirm this trend.

Overall, the findings of the present study indicate that youth engagement with social media is not merely a technological behavior but is deeply rooted in their emotional, psychological, familial, and social interactions. Families characterized by emotional cohesion, secure attachment, satisfaction with family life, and informed parental supervision serve as protective environments against the harms of excessive social media use. Simultaneously, self-esteem, resilience, emotion regulation, and mental health function as psychological shields in preventing dependency on virtual spaces. Based on these insights, it is recommended that policymakers and educational planners shift their focus from merely managing technological tools to strengthening family foundations, promoting informed parenting practices, and incorporating media and emotional literacy education into school and university curricula. In addition, counseling interventions designed to enhance self-esteem, reduce social anxiety, and teach mentalization strategies can play a critical role in mitigating virtual addiction. Another suggestion is to foster positive peer groups and culturally supportive role models for real-life interactions within educational environments. This could help reduce the normative pressure of constant media presence and guide youth toward balancing virtual interactions with authentic relationships. Furthermore, mass media and cultural institutions can contribute by offering constructive content and positive modeling to help manage the psychological and social consequences of excessive media use. Finally, future studies are encouraged to explore gender, cultural, and economic differences in the psychosocial antecedents and consequences of social media use. Incorporating qualitative approaches alongside quantitative methods may also lead to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of youth facing this phenomenon.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

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