

Original Article

THE PSYCHOSOMATIC COROLLARIES OF SHORT VIDEOS ON YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Social media often acts as a double-edged sword; on the one hand, it offers innumerable societal benefits but also poses overwhelming challenges. Multiple studies focus on organisational and governing responsibility but invariably ignore individual users' amenability. Today's internet-crazy era is inundated with reels and short-form video content on social media platforms, which has firmly taken hold of the youth of India and around the world. The angst that has made almost every household concerned is its usurious engagement, causing inveterate addiction, which entails neurological and cognitive repercussions primarily among the youth. Various studies have observed a correlation between short video addiction (SVA) and attentional disorder, heightened anxiety, depression, and memory loss. An exploratory study involving an extensive search across global databases and a full literature search across online research digital inventories enabled assessing the issue, pinpointing causative factors, and identifying therapeutic avenues to resolve this vexed sociological issue. The findings show significant engagement of youth who scroll SVA for at least 2 hours daily, which exemplifies a subliminal nexus between cognitive risks and SVA. This study urges involvement of governing bodies to establish a balanced digital ecosystem, incorporate mental health support services and policy interventions for responsible media consumption across the country.

Keywords: Short form Video, Reels, Internet Addiction, Social Media, Digital Detox

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, social media's short videos and Reels have captured the world's imagination like never before. What is more astounding is that the number of users has grown exponentially Zhang et al. (2019). China alone has witnessed a massive rise in its user base, now at almost 1 billion, accounting for 95% of the total internet population. Of these users, teenagers and older adults are among the primary user base Orben and Przybylski, (2019), Zhang et al. (2019). This sudden uptick in Reels' popularity and proliferation has simultaneously alarmed policymakers and researchers about increasing addiction to these platforms among vulnerable sections Meng et al. (2022). According to Mu et al. (2022), uncontrolled and compulsive use of Reels is called Short Video Addiction (SVA). It is a behavioural disorder that ushers in a host of psychological and physical repercussions, including visual impairments, sleep disorders, cervical spinal injuries, cognitive anomalies, emotional, learning, attention, and memory disorders; depression, stress and anxiety. Research to date on SVA has focused only on behavioural manifestations. However, important aspects such as the transcriptomic features and neural mechanisms need investigation. With the introduction of social media, the world has learned to communicate faster and share information in real time across the globe. Having transformed the way information is disseminated, social media allows a multitude to get connected, yet issues like mental health concerns, misinformation, and infringement of one's privacy have highlighted untold misery and distress caused by its insane consumption. The inherent ambiguity,

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where both merits and demerits are juxtaposed, makes it essential to examine and analyse its harmful impacts. In such a scenario, there is an urgent need for a therapeutic intervention that would mitigate its overt perils. And its responsible use must be underscored to deal with its accompanying complications. At times, social media's affordances are vague. It is like a double-edged sword, as nuclear energy can power, but at the same time can prove devastating. Social media enables the socio-economic apparatus's function at an extraordinary pace. It enables the rapid dissemination of myriad information and creates social influence worldwide. It also offers immeasurable benefits to society through instant interaction and connectivity (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault (2021), Vaast et al. (2017), yet it causes huge distress through misinformation, cyberbullying, and psychological anguish. Currently, on average, 4.6 billion active users spend 2.5 hours daily on SM platforms, including Reels, etc. Kemp (2022). Today, social media is defined by platforms that stream non-stop Reels and short videos via TikTok, YouTube and Instagram. These platforms stream Reels and short videos till eternity, tempting users to scroll and swipe. Such an unblinking scroll, where users are enticed, literally beguiled and compelled to consume content without an intentional break, raises poignant questions about its subliminal, subtle, and vicious impact on one's cognitive and psychological well-being. This paper intends to examine what provokes users to swipe and scroll. What cognitive and neurological impacts do such Reels inflict on users' psyches? And ultimately, what could be more appropriate scientific solutions for these sinisterly internecine tendencies that are wreaking havoc among its users, irrespective of age threshold?

Social media primarily refers to an ensemble of online services prevalent on the second stage of the internet revolution, called the Web 2.0 platform, which enables people to communicate and interact, basically to share, exchange, and promote information of diverse nature and myriad activities worldwide through networks and in virtual networks Dawot and Ibrahim (2014). These SM platforms permit individuals and communities to share, discuss, create and recreate user-generated content, which exposes the penchants, predilections and aversions of people across the globe. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) call social media the "clutch" of internet-based applications that enable users to interact with like-minded individuals and share and exchange user-generated content.

Web 2.0 encompasses technological innovations that enable users to create content collaboratively. On the web, it supports communication, facilitates interaction and information sharing, and provides a simple platform for first-time users. Web 2.0 applications enable users to manipulate technologies as they build and maintain social networks and engage in more intense social interaction. Social networking embraces sites, wikis, RSS, tags, mashups, media sharing tools, folksonomy and bookmarking Murugsan (2007), Harrison and Barthel (2009), Gu and Wide' n-Wulff, (2010), Harris and Rea (2010), Babushkina (2010), Zhou et al. (2011), Jang (2013), Wu (2023), Jussila et al. (2014). Web 2.0 is an amalgamation of myriad applications, social trends, and business strategies, which is more dynamic and interactive than Web 1.0, as users can access and contribute assorted content to websites that couldn't be achieved previously in Web 1.0. As per Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), several social networking sites are massively popular worldwide. All these social networking sites ride piggyback on different technologies such as Wikipedia, Flickr, blogs, microblogs, including X, and renowned social media sites are as follows: Facebook, X, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, Instagram, VK, Myspace, Ask.fm, MeetUp, Meetme, and classmates.com.

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has its origins on May 24, 1844, when a series of electronic dots was tapped out on a telegraph machine by human hands. The first electronic message from Baltimore to Washington, DC, almost proved Samuel Morse had grasped the momentous ramifications of his scientific achievement: 'What hath God wrought?' he wrote. In the 1980s and 90s, the surge in internet use enabled the introduction of online communication services such as America Online, CompuServe, and Prodigy. Through email, bulletin board messaging, and real-time online chatting, users literally got acquainted with digital communication services. This paved the way for the earliest social media networks, which began with the short-lived Six Degrees profile-uploading service in 1997, followed by Friendster in 2001. These rudimentary platforms attracted millions, enabled email address registration, and facilitated basic online networking. With the launch of the LiveJournal publishing site, another form of digital social communication, such as weblogs or blogs, began to gain popularity. This coincided with the launch of the Blogger publishing platform by Pyra Labs, which Google acquired in 2003. LinkedIn, a networking site for career-centric individuals, was founded in 2002 and has over 700 million users worldwide. Myspace was launched in 2003, and the number of its users has grown exponentially. The social media site Facebook, which is used by the highest number of users in the world, was introduced in 2008. Today, the social media landscape is populated by a wide range of services that jockey for the attention of over 5 billion people across the globe. LinkedIn is a business and job-focused social media platform that is operated via websites and mobile apps. Reid Hoffman and Eric Ly launched it on May 5, 2003. Since 2016, it has been a wholly owned subsidiary of Microsoft Corporation. It has over 1 billion registered members from over 200 countries and territories. It allows both workers and employers to create profiles and interact with each other.

SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL MEDIA KEY DATA

As of 2025, over 5 billion people use social media globally, accounting for 64% of the world's population. Facebook remains the most popular platform with 3.15 billion active users. YouTube comes as the second most renowned social media platform with 2.5

billion users all over. Instagram has over 2 billion users, the fourth largest media platform, followed by TikTok with 1 billion active users, which shows massive promise in the world. On average, people spend 2 hours and 23 minutes on social media platforms. Mobile phones and desktops account for 98% and 2% of social media usage time, respectively. Among social media activities, 82% accounts for watching videos, 76% for reading news, and 72% for interacting with friends and family. Globally, there are 48.5% male and 51.6% female users. The majority of mobile users in the age group of 18 to 34 are 59%. Northern Europe has the highest social media penetration rates, 82%, followed by Western Europe, 80%, and Southern Europe, 75%. In the US, 72% of adults use at least one social media platform. Central and Southern Asia have the lowest social media penetration rates of 41% and 45%, respectively. Facebook, globally being the most extensive social media networking site, leads the pack with 3.04 billion users; YouTube, the premier platform for video sharing and consumption, follows with 2.5 billion; WhatsApp and Instagram are in the 3rd position with 2 billion users and TikTok, showing great promise, has 1.5 billion users in its fold.

SOCIAL MEDIA PENETRATION IN INDIA

India's total population stands at 1.42 billion, of which a whopping 692 million are internet users; 627 million use the internet via mobile. As of March 2025, India has 467 million social media users. The study has further revealed that people spend at least 6 hours and 23 minutes on the internet, and, on social media, on average, 2 hours and 50 minutes are spent daily. With around 531.46 million active users, WhatsApp is the most popular platform in India, which has 76.80% of the country's total internet users. Telegram is the second-most popular portal, with 384.06 million users and 55.50% penetration. Facebook Messenger has 343.92 million users with 49.70% penetration, followed by Snapchat, which has 45.50% penetration. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, in rural India, the use of mobile phones is projected to be around 97.6%, and 96.8% of people aged 15-29 used mobile phones at least once in three months. And 95.5% of people under the above-mentioned age segment own a mobile, including smartphones. While in urban areas, about 97.6% of persons own smartphones in the same age group. And approximately 85.5% of households own at least one smartphone, and 86.3% of them have internet access within their premises.

SOCIAL MEDIA SCENARIO IN TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu, with its high literacy rates and strong IT sector, has around 63.48 million social media users. Chennai, being the capital, is the digital hub. At the same time, second-rung cities, including rural regions, depend upon government initiatives and the state's cultural industries to boost user engagement and thus promote digital platforms. The social media penetration in Chennai, which was 4.64 million in 2011, increased to 5.34 million in 2025. Coimbatore increased from 3.45 million to 3.97 million, Madurai from 3.04 to 3.49 million, Tiruppur from 2.47 to 2.83 million, and Puducherry (UT) from 1.24 million to 1.42 million. Technology, being ubiquitous, is rapidly changing the lives of people across the region, nation, and worldwide. Yet the proliferation of the internet and mobile penetration in 2025 showed a sharp contrast with the urban-rural divide. Internet and mobile penetration in Chennai, Coimbatore, Salem, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Vellore, etc. is pegged at 95% and 98%, respectively. Urbanised UT regions, Puducherry, Mahe, Yanam, and Karaikal's mobile penetration is 97% and internet penetration 90%. Second-rung cities, Ariyalur, Dharmapuri, Sivaganga, Ramanathapuram, etc., have 92% mobile penetration and 70% internet presence. The potential takeaways are that urban centres are growing faster than rural regions. In a world where internet growth is universal and up for grabs, the harsh fact is that around 30% of the rural population in Tamil Nadu remains digitally excluded.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gao et al. (2025), in their study titled 'Neuroanatomical and functional substrates of the short video addiction (SVA) and its association with brain transcriptomic & cellular architecture in NeuroImage', claim that apart from neurobiological factors, personality traits are key drivers of digital addiction. A recent study on dispositional envy (DE) has identified it as a stable trait that correlates with Smartphone Addiction and Internet Addiction Meier and Johnson (2022), Wang et al. (2019). It suggests that DE makes individuals sensitive to social comparison and prone to experiencing damaging emotions when witnessing others' possessions or success Smith et al. (2014). Those with high DE experience more adverse emotions, like depression, anxiety, and negative affect Wang et al. (2019). According to Kardefelt-Winther (2014), users cling to the Internet to alleviate negativity, and those with a high level of DE are more susceptible to SVA.

Malur (2025), in a study titled 'Reels and Short Videos-A Pan India Study on the Impact and Addiction of social media Among Professional Youths' published on SSRN, the authors aver that an exploratory study carried out among those pursuing professional and non-professional careers revealed some startling facts. Individuals pursuing professional studies were less likely to show psychic disorder or the impact of social media because their commitment keeps them engaged in their stipulated studies, thus not leading them towards addiction to Reels, short videos, songs, etc. On the contrary, adolescents pursuing non-professional courses tend to fritter away more time watching and creating Reels and short videos. It was noticed that the majority remain stuck on social media to engage with others, share their activities and garner likes. Basically, it was the attitudes that separate focused and non-focused individuals about the use of social media that determine usage and addiction.

Brand et al. (2024), in a study titled 'Scrolling through adolescence: Unveiling the relationship of the use of social networks and its addictive behaviour with psychosocial health in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health', states that inveterate use of social media brings higher symptoms of anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, and behavioural issues among adolescents. A survey among 6,596 US adolescents revealed that spending over 3 hours daily on social networks is directly proportional to mental disorder. A longitudinal study also confirms links between protracted social network use and symptoms of anxiety among adolescents aged 13 and 14. But prolonged use of social media is not always linked with mental health issues. Evidence suggests that the use of Facebook may have more positive than negative effects on one's psyche.

Ji et al. (2023), in a study 'The Causes, Effects, and Interventions of social media addiction' in the Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, found that higher levels of neuroticism are associated with severe use of social media among a particular section. Basically, neuroticism is the presence of emotional instability, and those affected by it often show more depression, anxiety, and negative feelings; such individuals can't regulate their own feelings and emotions as one ought to. Blackwell et al., in a survey among 207 individuals, revealed that neuroticism is the predictor of a higher level of social media use and addiction to it. Furthermore, Blackwell et al. find that insecure attachment styles play a mediating role in the ties between SMA and neuroticism; anxiety is also associated with SMA.

METHODOLOGY

To broadly understand, analyse, and unambiguously pinpoint the psychological factors that prompt scrolling and swiping on a smartphone to view short video reels or digital content, the research employed an exploratory study. Further, a comprehensive literature search across academic databases was conducted through esteemed global publications. For further investigation and close validation of associated factors accompanying apparent corollary, and what could be palpable solutions for these emerging psychosomatic disorders, we conducted a full literature search across the board and available online digital inventory to present this poignant issue in its entirety, dogging adolescents and intrinsically has become a matter of immediate concern to all families under the sun.

Primarily, this study aims to understand the proliferation of social media networks and their penetration rates among the target audience. In the face of heightened engagement among youth with social media, this study primarily intends to examine stimuli or enticing factors that captivate youth towards Reels and short video content. What drives them to swipe their smartphones, which catapults them into an unseen realm? Determining whether the use of smartphones or scrolling Reels or short video content drives them crazy, or psychosomatic factors that compel them to get hooked to it to forget or avoid internal mental trauma, cognitive disorder, or worries for the future, or the other way round.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACT OF SHORT VIDEOS

According to Prof Qiang Wang of Tianjin Normal University of China, in his study published in NeuroImage revealed that heavy short-video or Reels users show heightened activity in the brain's rewarding circuits that are stimulated during liquor and gaming's inveterate habits. Reels or short video addiction is a global public health hazard. In China alone, users spend 151 minutes daily, involving 95.5% of internet users. This addiction not only impairs attention, mental health, and sleep but also entails depression risks. The study has revealed that 95% of teenagers aged 12-17 use the internet, and 80% of them use social media. Around 22% of adolescents use their preferred social media sites 10 times daily. Visual effects of social media attract teenagers; it helps them to rewire their thinking skills, creativity, widen their friendship circle, and strengthen learning. On one hand, social media platforms are a boon, but they also victimise young people through cyberbullying and online harassment. And those young sections susceptible to online bullying often face depression, anxiety, social isolation, and even suicide.

DOPAMINE CONNECTION

Dopamine is a crucial neurotransmitter, the chemical that makes one feel good when something is achieved, when you enjoy a meal, or spend quality time with loved ones. But the same pathways can become deleterious due to addictive tendencies. Whenever one gets into an addictive binge, such as swigging alcohol, gets engrossed in gaming, or indulges in scrolling reels, the level of dopamine rises, giving a sense of euphoria or hallucination. Dopamine is closely tied to reward or pleasure, but addiction virtually hijacks the reward system, creating an urge to watch Reels repeatedly. Neurologically, the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which develops until the age of 26 to 27, is involved in attention, decision-making and self-control. With constant content switching, one overuses it, and its day-to-day ability declines. The larger part of the brain, the hippocampus, is affected when youth indulge in nighttime scrolling, impacting sleep quality and memory consolidation. Therefore, those who binge on reels often complain of poor focus and memory lapses. Hence, endlessly scrolling reels inundates the reward system and dopamine, compelling the brain to crave novelty. On one hand, alcohol appropriates the reward system; Reels overstimulate it. Overstimulation of dopamine pathways undermines attention and self-control and compromises memory in ways similar to addictive substances, claims Marengo Asia Hospital's Neurology Head, Dr Kunal Bahrani.

ATTENTIONAL, NEURO, PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

It is one's capacity for attentional regulation that determines effective cognitive functioning, or the ability to concentrate and control distractions. Youth who are often hooked to social media reels have precarious attentional control and struggle with tasks that demand selective attention, [claim Roberts et al. \(2020\)](#). The reels' immediate reward provokes a yearning for ephemeral, engaging material, which makes it longer and more challenging for young people. Reels' psychological pull entices even middle-aged groups for momentary mirth. However, middle-aged people do not succumb to the reels' transient and sinister delight but remain more focused. As per [Beck and Logan \(2021\)](#), prolonged exposure to short reels impairs one's capacity for selective attention. Compared to young ones, middle-aged individuals at the outset might be swayed by reels' dopamine effects but have the capacity to regain attentional control.

NEUROLOGICAL IMPACTS

Recent studies show that when youth play reels, their brains release dopamine, which strongly impacts behaviour. The ventral striatum, which processes rewards, shows more such activity in young people, who constantly scroll reels whenever they get time [Park et al. \(2022\)](#). Such heightened activity prompts people to watch reels; however, it negatively impacts cognitive ability to focus long-term and reinforces the impulse for instant gratification. Although middle-aged people also exhibit more such activity in reward-related cerebral areas, the overall effect on habitual tendencies is minimal, say [Nakamura and Arai \(2021\)](#). It is the better-controlled brain impulses for executive functions and delayed fulfilment that separates middle-aged people from impulsive youth.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

[Vogel et al. \(2020\)](#) reiterate that young individuals are more susceptible to increased worry and decreased persistent pleasure when reels are limited, which insulates against possible psychological dependence. This demographic, who are multitasking, use reels to freak out while engrossed in other activities, which might distract them. As per Thompson and Stanley (2019), middle-aged people use reels for brief gratification because they are less likely to multitask and less likely for detrimental repercussions.

THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS - CBT

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is recommended to establish a semblance of balance between interfered normal social and occupational life. Primarily, CBT operates on two key principles: first, thinking impacts feelings and behaviour, which could be distorted, inviting depression, anxiety and maladaptive behaviour. Secondly, it believes in changing thinking patterns and modes of behaviour by pinpointing distorted thoughts and challenging them by introducing gradual and sustained change in the way one thinks and behaves. At the outset, CBT rewires the mental function that depicts tendencies towards addiction. This BA's semi-directive, client-centric approach uses intrinsic motivation to alter behavioural patterns and resolve internal customer ambivalence by creating a hiatus between the current and desired states. It basically helps consumers to identify the negative pattern and create an opportunity to change it. Their procedure is to employ communication skills, develop discrepancy, and explore ambivalence to provide stimuli for change. The existing CBT approach, along with motivational interview-based treatment to address substance dependence and pathological gambling, has achieved great results in addressing internet addiction. For adolescents grappling with addictive nature, group CBT can play a great role in mitigating the extent of internet usage and transforming self-regulation ability and emotional state.

SELF-HELP INTERVENTIONS

This individual-centric intervention enables users to monitor and control their own addictive nature. In this internet-induced age, people indiscriminately use apps for various purposes, and can take recourse to apps like ColdTurkey, SelfControl, and Freedom, which help them shut down the sites they are addicted to. The app Forest, which uses the Pomodoro technique, allows users to install a 25-minute alarm for users to focus on their work. It will keep them glued to their immediate tasks instead of scrolling or browsing through their phones. Another option could be the self-restriction plan, which may also help those seriously wanting to come out of their addiction by deciding to keep their phones in other rooms while performing academic tasks. It would keep them from using their smartphones while engrossed in serious work and help them stay away from procrastination or wasting time.

DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL

Prolonged use of social media makes people anxious, stressed, fagged out, and irritable, which disrupts sleep and concentration. If they want to come out of their addictive behaviour, then they need to make drastic and significant changes to regain their lost self-control. It will be like regaining lost paradise; their self-control enables them to do things they never thought they could. They must pluck up the courage to start with their to-do list, set personal goals and priorities, and list the resources and time required to fulfil

them in real time. Such an organised daily pattern can easily disrupt the cycle of addictive patterns, and subconscious scrolling of the phone would come to an end. Allowing your phone to light up 100 times disrupts attention; the lighting up of the phone needs to be curtailed to 50 times. Inculcating a habit of reading good books, exercising, and spending time with families can make you forget scrolling. It is high time that parents instil disciplined computer browsing among youth so that they shouldn't get trapped in the honeyed social media craze.

CONCLUSION

It has been critically observed that past studies have linked dispositional envy with mobile phone addiction, social networking, and social media use. However, a recent study has found that envy is associated with greater engagement with SVA as a means of dodging insecurities, deficiencies, or vexed emotions following comparisons. Another study links envy with inappropriate smartphone use, followed by fear of missing out and distorted interpersonal relationships with peers and others. Therefore, envy possibly could be the rationale from which the genesis of addiction should be probed using the fluctuating emotional pathways caused by social comparisons. Moreover, the study revealed that a high level of social media addiction tends to manifest a higher level of neuroticism, which takes the form of anxiety, depression, and aberrant behaviour. The existing data clearly show that Reels adversely affect both adolescents and the middle-aged population. However, several dominant factors, such as age, environment, and the setting where this digital content is consumed, determine the magnitude and its dimensional corollary. The main limitation of this study is the urgent need to conduct an in-depth investigation to lay bare the cerebral risks of these SVAs. Most importantly, it is well known that social media is a melange of a globally linked sociotechnical system, which is scrutinised by governing entities, individual volitions, preferences, and wills. Its crucial ethical parameters are marred by complexities that demand instant and liberating respites or solutions. Today, the spotlight is always on regulatory interventions and corporate responsibility, but individual volition or conscience is conveniently sidestepped. Humans are fully endowed with immense intelligence and freedom to apply anything for their welfare, and they have the acumen at their disposal to draw the line when things go against their welfare. Likewise, social media needs hands to operate it, and cerebral commands drive those hands. So, most of the responsibility rests with the users. When anyone gets addicted for psychosomatic reasons, the blame is attributed to social media or the alluring impact of reels or short videos. How long? But it is high time to set things right by owning up to the responsibility and applying mental faculty to wriggle out of the quagmire of addiction instead of blaming social media itself. This study also envisions the involvement of governing bodies to establish a balanced digital ecosystem, incorporate mental health support services and policy interventions for responsible media consumption across the country.

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