

Attachment-Informed Strategies for Addressing Social Media Addiction in Kuwait

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of attachment styles—secure, anxious, avoidant, fearful-avoidant, and unclassified—on social media addiction in Kuwait, emphasizing the need for culturally relevant interventions. Using data from 4,419 participants, it identifies distinct patterns: anxious attached individuals use social media for emotional validation, while avoidant attached users limit interactions to preserve autonomy. The research integrates ethical considerations, such as data privacy and cultural alignment, to propose tailored strategies for educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. This study merges psychological theory and practical solutions to address social media addiction in non-Western contexts, promoting digital well-being.

KEYWORDS

Framework, Adolescent Attachment Styles (AAQ), Social Media Usage Patterns, Social Media Impact Perception, Attachment, Problematic Social Media Use, Cultural Context, Kuwait

INTRODUCTION

Social media profoundly impacts interpersonal connections, shaping social dynamics and mental health through cultural and emotional interplay.

Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding these dynamics, demonstrating how early emotional templates influence online interactions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Culturally sensitive frameworks are essential for contextualizing digital behaviors, particularly in societies like Kuwait and the Middle East, where collectivist values and family-centered norms shape personal expression (Agbaria & Bdier, 2021; Alsaleh et al., 2019).

This framework examines how attachment styles shape social media engagement. Secure attached individuals use online social media platforms to nurture relationships without over-relying on social media, while anxious attached users often seek validation through excessive use of these apps (Monacis et al., 2017). Avoidant attached users engage superficially, avoiding emotional closeness, even online (Costanzo et al., 2021). **Fearful-avoidant attachment** is characterized by high levels of both attachment anxiety and avoidance. Individuals with this attachment style desire close relationships but simultaneously fear intimacy, leading to conflicting behaviors. They may seek social interactions but withdraw when emotional closeness develops, resulting in inconsistent engagement patterns (Eichenberg et al., 2024).

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These behavioral patterns underscore the need for tailored interventions addressing diverse attachment orientations.

Social media overuse has been linked to emotional distress, particularly among adolescents experiencing fear of missing out (FOMO) (Przybylski et al., 2013). This effect is particularly pronounced in Middle Eastern collectivist cultures, where over-engagement can intensify relational conflicts and self-esteem challenges (Agbaria, 2023).

Culturally sensitive group cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) sessions can help adolescents regulate emotions while addressing socio-cultural dynamics, mitigating adverse effects.

Technological solutions, such as artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced feedback systems, offer personalized strategies to manage online engagement. Tools like emotion tracking provide real-time coping mechanisms, including guided breathing exercises or digital detox reminders (Plackett et al., 2023). Integrating these tools with methods like motivational interviewing (MI) ensures interventions are adaptive and culturally relevant.

Preventive strategies complement corrective approaches by equipping individuals with tools to maintain healthy digital habits. Programs such as mentorship initiatives, leadership roles, and inclusive spaces foster resilience and digital literacy, aligning personal well-being with collective responsibility. These interventions are particularly effective in culturally nuanced societies like Kuwait. At its core, the framework integrates attachment theory, cultural awareness, and AI-driven interventions to address social media addiction. The framework combines attachment theory with cultural and AI-driven approaches for tailored solutions.

Dynamic, real-time support ensures interventions evolve with user needs, fostering sustainable digital well-being. This multi-layered framework transcends behavior management by addressing the psychological drivers of addiction, emphasizing cultural sensitivity, data privacy, and ethical integrity. It aligns with Kuwait's social values while remaining adaptable to diverse user groups and emerging challenges. As digital behavior evolves, interventions must integrate psychological insights, advanced technologies, and cultural relevance to cultivate healthier online communities.

The paper is structured with "Literature Review," "Data Description," which outlines the dataset, "Hypothesis Design and Testing," "Conceptual Framework," and "Conclusion, Shortcomings, and Future Work," which summarizes contributions and limitations, emphasizing the importance of integrating attachment theory with culturally adaptive strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bowlby (1969/1982) introduced attachment theory, providing a foundational framework for understanding how individuals form emotional bonds that influence behaviors throughout life. Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended this theory to adulthood, identifying three primary attachment styles—secure, anxious, and avoidant—which profoundly shape both interpersonal dynamics and digital behaviors. For example, Monacis et al. (2017) demonstrated that individuals with anxious attachment styles tend to engage excessively with social media, often seeking validation. In contrast, those with an avoidant attachment style, which is characterized by their preference for emotional distance, minimize engagement with social platforms to protect themselves from intimacy (Stöven & Herzberg, 2023).

There is a significant intersection between attachment theory and mental health outcomes, particularly for individuals with anxious attachment styles. These individuals are at heightened risk for experiencing depression and reduced life satisfaction (Young et al., 2020). Often, they rely on social platforms to address unmet emotional needs, which inadvertently perpetuates psychological distress (Worsley et al., 2018). The bidirectional relationship between mental health and social media use, highlighted by Hou et al. (2019), is critical for understanding the compounding effects of excessive online engagement. Additionally, Jeri-Yabar et al. (2019) emphasize the association between excessive

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