



Article

Association of Social Media Addiction, Weight Perception, and Lifestyle in Mexican Nursing Students

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been a reported significant increase in social media addiction (SMA), associated with unhealthy lifestyle habits. To analyze the association between SMA, lifestyle, and weight perception among Mexican nursing students, a cross-sectional, correlational study was conducted among undergraduate and graduate students over 18 years old. The survey was administered via Google Forms and distributed through Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram from June to August 2023. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and a multiple linear regression model with SPSS. A total of 255 students participated, 80.0% of whom were women, and 86.2% were undergraduate students. The average social media addiction score was 25.6 (SD = 14.0). Of the participants, 49.8% reported a dangerous-to-fair lifestyle, while 50.2% reported a good-to-excellent lifestyle. Social media addiction was negatively correlated with lifestyle ($r_s = -0.496, p < 0.001$). In the multiple linear regression model, social media addiction, perception of body weight, and students who work explained 32.5% of the lifestyle variance. Students who reported higher levels of social media addiction tended to have less healthy lifestyles. It is important to consider the detection of social media addiction and its potential long-term health implications for nursing students.

Keywords: social media addiction; online social networking; lifestyle; healthy lifestyle; nursing students



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1. Introduction

The World Health Organization defines lifestyle as the way individuals live, shaped by behaviors that result from the interaction of personal, social, and socioeconomic factors (WHO 1999). A healthy lifestyle includes activities such as regular physical exercise, maintaining a balanced diet, good mental health, weight management, and avoiding the use of legal or illegal substances (Pastor et al. 1998). Adopting a healthy lifestyle can help to prevent chronic conditions like obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease (Byrne et al. 2016), while also reducing the risk of mortality (Loef and Walach 2012; Zhang et al. 2021).

In Latin America, reports indicate that 52.5% of university students are physically inactive, 22.6% consume tobacco, 26.2% engage in harmful alcohol consumption, and 81.3% have a low intake of fruits and vegetables (Rangel Caballero et al. 2017). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, several countries reported a rise in unhealthy lifestyles and an increase in weight gain during and after lockdown (Enriquez-Martinez et al. 2021; Meza-Miranda et al. 2022; Perez-Dominguez et al. 2021).

In Mexico, there has also been an observed increase in the consumption of unhealthy foods, sedentary behaviors, insomnia, poor sleep quality, and extended use of electronic devices with internet access (Nájera-Ortiz and Cartas-Fuentevilla 2023; Ramos and Arroyo-Jimenez 2021; Zamarripa et al. 2021). In recent years, this trend, coupled with the advancement of new technologies and electronic communication methods, has led to a rise in social media addiction (SMA). This new health concern among youth (Sun and Zhang 2021) could be linked to the adoption of unhealthy lifestyle habits.

Addiction is a repetitive behavior that is pleasurable but leads to a loss of control and disrupts daily life, impacting various areas such as family, social interactions, or academic performance (Room 2006). SMA is characterized by excessive use and constant engagement with social media platforms. Signs of SMA include neglect of other important activities, preoccupation with social media use, intolerance, and mood swings during periods of abstinence (Araujo Robles 2016).

SMA could negatively impact lifestyle due to the significant amount of time spent on activities such as viewing, sharing, uploading, or reacting to content. This behavior can lead to sedentary habits, poor sleep hygiene, an unhealthy diet, reduced physical and social interactions, and increased stress and anxiety. Additionally, it can contribute to higher tobacco and alcohol use and distort perceptions of body weight due to beauty standards promoted on social media, as reported by university students from Turkey, Indonesia, Germany, and China (Ayyıldız and Şahin 2022; Brailovskaia and Margraf 2020; Çakmak and Tanrıöver 2024; Hou et al. 2019; Romer and Moreno 2017; Rounsefell et al. 2020; Sujarwoto et al. 2023). This further favors unhealthy lifestyles because awareness or correct perception of nutritional status is a critical stage to initiating a behavior change; therefore, incorrectly assessing body weight prevents the initiation of healthy eating habits and encourages denial of the problem that causes excess body weight (Vidal et al. 2022) and thus the increased risk of developing chronic diseases.

SMA and unhealthy lifestyles among young people have both increased in recent years, with various health implications, indicating a possible link between the two issues. For healthcare professionals, identifying risk factors is essential to promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing chronic diseases. In the future, nursing students will be responsible for promoting health and identifying risk factors to prevent chronic diseases, especially by recognizing barriers to adopting healthy lifestyles. However, those nursing students who experience SMA may not recognize it as an issue, potentially neglecting to address it in populations that also face SMA and unhealthy lifestyle habits. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the association between social media addiction, weight perception, and lifestyle among Mexican nursing students.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

This study was cross-sectional and correlational, with the target population consisting of undergraduate and graduate nursing students over 18 years old from Mexicali, Baja California. The sample size for this study was 255 participants, calculated using the G*Power 3.1.9.7 program with the following criteria: 95% confidence level, 90% power, and an effect size (R^2) of 0.08 for a multiple linear regression model (Vannucci et al. 2020). Exclusion criteria included pregnant women, those with a previous diagnosis of type 1 or type 2 diabetes, and students participating in an exchange program.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey via a flyer that included information about the target audience (inclusion and exclusion criteria) and the objective of the study. The flyer was shared by the research team on major social media platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. They were asked to share the survey on their social media with others who met the study's criteria. Participants accessed the survey by scanning a QR code or via the direct link provided in the flyer description. Upon entering

the Google Forms survey, participants were first presented with an informed consent form, which they had to accept before proceeding to the questionnaires. The consent form highlighted that participation was anonymous and voluntary and that no email addresses would be collected. Data collection occurred between June and August 2023.

2.3. Questionnaires

The Social Media Addiction Questionnaire (Escurrea Mayaute and Blas 2014) was used, consisting of 24 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 to 4 (0 = Never, 1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Almost always, 4 = Always). The questionnaire assesses three key areas: obsession with social media, lack of personal control over social media use, and excessive use of social media. Scores range from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 96, with higher scores indicating a greater level of social media addiction. In this study, the questionnaire reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 and McDonald's omega of 0.935.

The FANTASTIC Questionnaire was utilized to evaluate lifestyle (López-Carmona et al. 2000). This questionnaire includes 25 items with Likert-type response options (0, 1, and 2) and assesses ten dimensions: family and friends, physical activity, nutrition, smoking, alcohol consumption, positive sleep/stress, negative personality, mood, and work/school, as well as other drug use. The total score was calculated by summing all responses and multiplying by two, resulting in a score ranging from 0 to 100. The scores are classified as follows: below 39 points indicates "at risk", 40 to 59 is "poor", 60 to 69 is "fair", 70 to 84 is "good", and 85 to 100 is "excellent". In this study, the questionnaire demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

The Body Weight Perception Scale (Osuna-Ramírez et al. 2006) was used. It consists of 9 images of different body types for both men and women, allowing participants to select the image that best reflects their body perception. Images numbered 1 to 3 represent normal weight, 4 to 6 indicate overweight, and 7 to 9 denote obesity. The scale has demonstrated a sensitivity of 94.8% and a specificity of 83% in the Mexican population.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

Data were exported from Google Forms in Excel format and then imported into SPSS version 27 for analysis. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical variables, while measures of central tendency and dispersion were used for continuous variables. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors correction was applied to assess normality, and the results indicated deviations from normal distribution. Consequently, Spearman's correlation was utilized. A multiple linear regression model with the enter method was then employed to explain the variance in lifestyle. This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committees of the School of Nursing at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, under registration number CI-FEMXL-UABC/08.

3. Results

3.1. Participant Characteristics

A total of 255 students participated in the study. The average age was 21.1 years (SD = 3.5). The majority of participants were women, single, and undergraduate students. Additionally, 60.79% of participants reported perceiving themselves as overweight or obese (Table 1).

The average SMA score was 25.6 ± 14.0 , with the highest scoring dimension being excessive use, followed by obsession and lack of control. The average lifestyle score was 69.30 ± 10.70 . In terms of lifestyle dimensions, students scored highest in nutrition, communication with family/friends, and driving to school (Table 2). Based on lifestyle categorization, 0.40% of students were classified as "at risk", 16.5% as "poor", 32.9% as "fair", 43.5% as "good", and 6.7% as "excellent". The questionnaire reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 and McDonald's omega of 0.82.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants.

Outcome	M	SD
Age	21.1	3.5
Semester	4.0	2.5
	<i>n</i>	%
Sex		
Male	51	20
Female	204	80
Marital Status		
Single	235	92.1
Married	9	3.5
Cohabiting	11	4.3
Current Employment		
Yes	73	28.6
No	182	71.4
Education Level		
Undergraduate	220	86.2
Graduate	35	13.7
Weight Perception		
Normal	100	39.2
Overweight	112	43.9
Obese	43	16.9

Note: *n* = frequency, % = percentage, M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 2. Description of social media addiction and lifestyle.

	M (SD)
Social Media Addiction	25.6 (14.0)
Obsession	7.8 (4.3)
Lack of control	7.4 (2.9)
Excessive use	10.4 (6.1)
Lifestyle	69.3 (10.7)
Family and friends	3.0 (1.0)
Exercise	2.5 (1.2)
Nutrition	3.2 (1.1)
Smoking	0.3 (0.8)
Alcohol	0.8 (1.1)
Sleep and stress	2.0 (0.8)
Personality	1.9 (1.1)
Mood	2.5 (1.0)
Work/School	2.7 (0.9)
Drugs	1.3 (0.8)

Note: M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Correlation Analysis

Students who reported lower overall lifestyle scores also indicated higher levels of total SMA scores, as well as with the subdimensions of obsession, lack of control, and excessive social media use. Additionally, higher SMA scores were associated with decreased communication with family and friends, reduced physical activity, less healthy eating habits, poorer sleep quality, ineffective stress coping, and a less supportive work or school environment. In contrast, SMA was linked to higher alcohol consumption, smoking, negative personality traits, illegal drug use, and mood disorders. A higher perception of body weight was correlated with a less healthy lifestyle, but showed no significant correlation with SMA ($r_s = 0.058$, $p = 0.356$) (Table 3), and students working while studying reported a lower healthy lifestyle ($r_s = -0.198$, $p = 0.001$).

Table 3. Correlation analysis between social media addiction and lifestyle.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
SMA	−0.496 **	−0.189 **	−0.189 **	−0.274 **	0.174 **	0.218 **	−0.271 **	0.374 **	0.384 **	−0.242 **	0.239 **
Ob	−0.495 **	−0.183 **	−0.194 **	−0.286 **	0.216 **	0.261 **	−0.217 **	0.384 **	0.374 **	−0.270 **	0.213 **
LC	−0.422 **	−0.153 *	−0.209 **	−0.269 **	0.141 *	0.196 **	−0.261 **	0.259 **	0.269 **	−0.203 **	0.181 **
EU	−0.413 **	−0.142 *	−0.147 *	0.200 **	0.107	0.157 *	−0.249 **	0.323 **	0.362 **	−0.176 **	0.228 **
BWP	−0.260 **	0.002	−0.200 **	−0.702 **	0.086	0.135 *	−0.042	0.073	0.087	−0.010	0.032

Note: $n = 255$, SMA = Social Media Addiction, Ob = Obsession, LC = Lack of Control, EU = Excessive Use, BWP = Body Weight Perception, 1 = Lifestyle, 2 = Family and Friends, 3 = Exercise, 4 = Nutrition, 5 = Smoking, 6 = Alcohol Consumption, 7 = Positive Sleep and Stress, 8 = Negative Personality, 9 = Mood, 10 = Work/school, 11 = Other drugs. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

To assess the variance in the lifestyles of nursing students, a multiple linear regression model was utilized, incorporating predictors such as employment status (yes), body weight perception, and SMA. These variables were the only ones that showed a significant correlation with lifestyle. The analysis revealed that higher SMA, perceived higher body weight, and the combination of studying and working had a negative impact on lifestyle, collectively explaining 32.5% of the variance, $F = 41.779$, $p < 0.001$ (see Table 4). In the model, the VIF values ranged from 1.01 to 1.03, the Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.1, the normality test for the model residuals showed $p = 0.058$, and the Breusch–Pagan test indicated $p = 0.048$.

Table 4. Predictor model for lifestyle in Mexican nursing students.

Predictor	β	β_a	IC 95%		p
Current Employment (yes)	−1.270	−0.107	−2.496	−0.044	0.042
Body Weight Perception	−0.620	−0.220	−0.911	−0.329	0.000
SMA	−0.187	−0.492	−0.226	−0.149	0.000

Note: β = Unstandardized beta, β_a = Standardized beta, p = Significance value, SMA = Social Media Addiction.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the association between SMA and lifestyle among Mexican nursing students. Our findings revealed that SMA was linked to an unhealthy lifestyle, aligning with previous research that suggests individuals with higher levels of SMA tend to lead poorer lifestyles (Osuna-Ramírez et al. 2006). Young adults, particularly women, who experience stress, depression, and low self-esteem are more susceptible to developing SMA. This may be because these platforms offer an outlet for self-expression, stress relief, and a sense of gratification. However, they can also exacerbate mental health issues, increase dissatisfaction with body image, and intensify social pressure to engage in risky behaviors (Gökçay et al. 2024). Moreover, psychology students view social media use as a lifestyle, where they find relaxation and peace, but when disconnected, they often report withdrawal symptoms and a sense of urgency to get back online (Dailey et al. 2020).

According to lifestyle dimensions, SMA was associated with poorer healthy eating habits. Studies have shown that exposure to food on social media can lead to increased impulsive eating (Kurniasih 2017) and higher consumption of junk food with little nutritional value or fast food (Çakmak and Tanrıöver 2024; Filippone et al. 2022; Tang and Koh 2017), a trend also observed by university students in Singapore, France, and Indonesia. University students in Turkey and Saudi Arabia have found that SMA is linked to greater emotional eating, where individuals use food to manage their emotions in response to mood swings, which in turn can lead to a higher body mass index (BMI) (Alwafi et al. 2022; Tazeoğlu and Bozdoğan 2022). The rise in BMI may also be related to decreased physical activity, as prolonged social media use reduces the time available for exercise (Durmaz et al. 2023), as evidenced by the findings of this study.

Another problem associated with SMA is the exposure to content (images or videos) that promotes alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use. Our results indicated that individuals with higher SMA reported increased consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs,

which is consistent with previous studies of India and USA (Buja et al. 2018; Clendennen et al. 2020; Donaldson et al. 2022; Pokhrel et al. 2018; Roberson et al. 2018; Sahu et al. 2020). This phenomenon may be attributed to the fact that peer pressure exists not only in real-world settings but also in virtual environments like social media. In online social media, individuals post content showcasing alcohol, tobacco, or drug use to gain social approval through “likes” and positive feedback (Masthi et al. 2018).

SMA also has a detrimental effect on sleep, stress management, negative personality, and impulsivity, as highlighted by our findings. These results are consistent with previous studies conducted in Hawaii and Amsterdam, suggesting a positive correlation between excessive social media usage, lack of control, and increased sleep disturbances and insomnia (Pokhrel et al. 2018; Hendriks et al. 2018). For university students, SMA can lead to decreased academic performance (Figueroa-Quiñones et al. 2024), visual fatigue (Masthi et al. 2018), learning difficulties, reduced attention in classes, and a sense of academic overload, and could even contribute to burnout (Bou-Hamad 2020). University students are inclined to spend more time on social media because of the sense of well-being and peace it offers, unlike their academic responsibilities, which often cause stress and anxiety.

There are several implications of SMA on the lifestyle of university students. To address these challenges, it is crucial to promote the use of apps that support healthy living and to provide education and guidance tailored to individual goals (Liu 2024; Zhou et al. 2024). Additionally, health policies should be established to ensure virtual environments are free from content that encourages the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and unhealthy foods. Finally, programs should be implemented to reduce SMA and support the adoption of healthier lifestyles among university students. Moreover, topics concerning addictive behaviors related to social media, mobile devices, and video games, along with other technology-related issues, should be included. This should encompass tools for evaluation, detection, and prevention, with nursing professionals playing a critical role in addressing and mitigating these challenges.

This study has some limitations. First, this study was cross-sectional, which means it cannot establish causality between the variables examined. Additionally, the survey was conducted online and distributed via social media platforms, potentially excluding individuals who do not use or rarely use these platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), and the data were self-reported, which could lead to perception bias. The majority of the sample comprised female nursing students, which limits the generalizability of the findings, particularly because a probabilistic sampling method was not utilized. However, this study offers a novel relationship between SMA and lifestyle among Mexican nursing students. It reveals that, even though these students are in the health sciences field, SMA still exerts a negative influence on their lifestyle.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, more than half of the sample reported a lifestyle ranging from good to excellent, while SMA was relatively low. However, SMA was associated with unhealthy lifestyles among Mexican nursing students. It is important to develop programs for nursing students that reduce SMA and promote healthier lifestyles, aiming to prevent chronic diseases in the future. Additionally, it is important to incorporate topics addressing SMA in mental health, along with various approaches for its prevention and reduction.

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