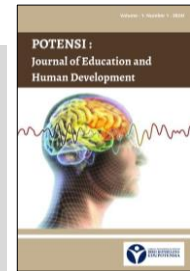


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Effect of Cognitive Distortion on Social Media Addiction Among College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to describe the general picture of cognitive distortion and social media addiction among university students, as well as to identify the influence of cognitive distortion and social media addiction on social media addiction. The study employed a quantitative approach with a causal-comparative design and involved 184 university students as samples through probability sampling. The results showed that the majority of students were in the low category of cognitive distortion, while social media addiction was mostly in the moderate category. There was a strong positive correlation between cognitive distortion and social media addiction with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.387$ and a contribution of 15% ($R^2 = 0.150$), as well as a significance value of 0.000, with 85% of other variables not explained in this study.



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Introduction

The development of technology has become an unavoidable condition in today's life. The development of technology has also brought about social media that utilizes the internet and aims to allow users to present themselves in various ways, such as interacting, collaborating, and building social relationships virtually (Nasrullah, 2015). The results of a survey in Indonesia on internet users in the 2019-2020 period by APJII (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia) reached 196.71 million people out of Indonesia's total population of 266.91 million people. The number of social media users increased by 23.5 million or 8.9% compared to the 2018 data. According to research by Hootsuite and We Are Social (2022), 4.62 billion people worldwide used social media in February 2022, which is 58.4% of the world's population. As of February 2022, there were 192.4 million social media users in Indonesia. This number increased by 21 million or 12.6% compared to the previous year (Syarifah, et al., 2022). In a previous study, it was found that 89.7% of internet users in Indonesia were students, and 97% of internet users had accessed social media content (APJII, 2018). The dominance of internet usage by social media indicates that more and more people are using social media in various aspects of their daily lives (Harahap & Adeni, 2020). The use of social media has numerous benefits, including communication, information gathering, relationship building, and self-presentation. They can also be used as a medium for business, career, education, and even politics (Hartinah, et al., 2019). In January 2022,

the number of social media users in Indonesia reached 191.4 million, or 68.9% of the total population, an increase of 12.6% from 2021, which had 170 million social media users (Hootsuite, 2022:17). According to Aziz (2020), students are one of the most active groups of social media users, as they are in a transition phase from late adolescence to early adulthood and are experiencing psychological dynamics, with 89.7% of users aged 18-25 years (Handikasari, et al., 2018). Engaging in social media can make students active in socializing, developing their identity, and self-disclosure, which can be demonstrated through social media (Artvianti, 2016).

According to Andreassen & Pallesen (2014), social media addiction is an excessive concern about social media, a strong urge and motivation to continue using social media, and spending a lot of time and effort on social media, which disrupts daily activities such as social activities, work, study, interpersonal relationships, and even psychological well-being. Social media addiction is also related to sleep problems and can decrease cognitive function in individuals. Aspects related to social media addiction include mood modification, conflict, salience, relapse, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms (Andreassen, 2015). Griffiths, et al., (2014) explained that individuals who experience social media addiction typically spend a lot of time on social media, lack the ability to control their social media use, feel uncomfortable and stressed or anxious when their social media use is limited, and constantly think about social media. According to Nurudin (2018), social media addiction is a psychological disorder that makes someone feel that the world on social media is more enjoyable and attractive than real life. Therefore, social media addiction is a psychological disorder where users spend a lot of time accessing social media due to high curiosity, lack of self-control, and lack of productive activities in their lives (Lestari & Winingsih, 2020).

Social media addiction can affect a person's thinking about something that often leads to emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, anger, and humiliation. This thinking can lead someone to engage in dysfunctional behaviors such as obsession, procrastination, and addiction (Prout & Fedewa, 2015). People who are addicted to social media use a particular facility or application to meet their needs to feel better, even though the intensity of their use may increase (Farmer & Chapman, 2016). Social media addiction has a negative impact on its users, can trigger mental disorders. In addition, individuals are also at risk of experiencing other negative effects such as stress, anxiety, and depression, which have a negative impact on the cognitive distortion of social media users (Mario, 2022). Automatically, cognitive distortion will be active every time there is a stimulus in the form of the internet, which makes them access social media continuously. This results in discomfort, for example, feeling uncomfortable or losing when not using social media. This makes individuals not carry out productive activities, such as exercise, learning, and direct communication (Wulandari & Netrawati, 2020).

Cognitive distortion is a negative view or incorrect thinking about oneself, others, or the environment. This understanding will produce negative thinking in every normal or positive situation, even without evidence or facts (Dozois & Beck, 2008). According to Beck, there are four types of cognitive distortion, namely selective abstraction, overgeneralization, magnification, and absolute thinking (Kaczurkin & Foa, 2015). Cognitive distortion can occur without being aware of it. Sometimes, we feel that we have thought well, but the results do not match what we expected. A person who experiences cognitive distortion often responds to things negatively and pessimistically, unlike someone who does not experience cognitive distortion, who will face things positively and optimistically (Lestari, et al., 2018). Goldfried and Davison stated that unpleasant emotional conditions can be a sign that a person's cognitive state is experiencing bias or distortion (Rizkiakawati & Asiah, 2016). The previous explanation from Goldfried & Davison (1976), as cited in the research of Rizkiawati and Asiah, reveals that the discomfort arising from an individual's emotional reaction indicates that what an individual thinks is likely irrational and only exists in their head (Rizkiakawati & Asiah, 2016). According to Burns (1988), the forms of cognitive distortion are: Overgeneralization, Personalization, Dichotomous Thinking, Mind Reading, Magnification, Minimization, Emotional Reasoning, Must Statements, and Labeling. Considering the impact of social media addiction and cognitive distortion, it is necessary to involve guidance and counseling in reducing social media addiction and cognitive distortion through counseling services. Counseling services are one of the helping relationships that enable individuals to solve problems they are facing and cope with crises in their lives (Yusuf & Nurihsan, 2014). Counseling services for cognitive distortion aim to help individuals change negative statements into positive ones in their minds. This cognitive approach is useful for changing automatic thoughts (self-talk) and cognitive schemas. Cognitive distortion originates from core beliefs that have been established, namely the most basic beliefs about oneself, which believe that they cannot achieve their academic goals (Situmorang, 2018). According to Corey (2012), in helping individuals restructure their negative thoughts through the Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) approach. Cognitive distortion and social media addiction are two concepts that are related in several studies. Cognitive distortion refers to the irrational change in thinking

patterns that can influence an individual's behavior. Social media addiction, on the other hand, is the excessive habit of using social media that can have a negative impact on one's life. Social media addiction can be influenced by several psychological factors, including cognitive distortion. Further research is needed to understand how cognitive distortion affects social media addiction and how counseling strategies can help address this disorder. Given this phenomenon, the researcher is interested in investigating the "Effect of Cognitive Distortion on Social Media Addiction".

Method

Participants

This study uses a causal-comparative correlational design with a quantitative approach. The research population consists of Guidance and Counseling students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya, batches 2022-2024. The sampling technique used is probability sampling with simple random sampling method.

Procedure

Two primary instruments were used in this study: the Social Media Addiction Scale to measure social media addiction, and the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire scale to measure cognitive distortion. These instruments were administered online, and participants were voluntarily recruited to complete both measures. The researcher provided an explanation of the study's purpose and ensured the confidentiality of the participants.

Measures

Social Media Addiction Scale (Andreassen & Griffiths, 2017)

The measurement of social media addiction in this study utilized a self-developed instrument based on the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), originally developed by Andreassen and Griffiths (2017) and adapted into the Indonesian context by Veriantari (2021). This instrument consists of 12 items designed to assess the degree of addictive engagement with social media, drawing upon the six core components of behavioral addiction proposed by Griffiths (2005), namely: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Each component is represented by two items in the scale, resulting in a total of 12 items. For example, the item "I often think about what I will do next on social media" reflects the salience component, while "I feel restless if I cannot access social media" illustrates withdrawal symptoms. The scale uses a four-point Likert response format to avoid neutral answers, with the following response options: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA), scored from 1 to 4 respectively. The total score is calculated by summing all item responses, ranging from 12 to 48. Higher scores indicate a greater tendency toward social media addiction. The adapted version by Veriantari (2021) has undergone content validation and reliability testing within the Indonesian university student context, showing high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.80. This suggests that the instrument is reliable and suitable for use in the present study.

Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire yang disusun oleh Hollan & Kendall (1980)

The present study utilized the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ), originally developed by Hollon and Kendall (1980), and subsequently translated into Indonesian, to assess the presence and frequency of cognitive distortions among students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya. The ATQ is a widely used self-report instrument designed to measure the occurrence of negative automatic thoughts, which are spontaneous, recurrent cognitions typically associated with depressive symptoms and maladaptive cognitive schemas. These thoughts often reflect dysfunctional beliefs and are central to cognitive models of psychological distress, particularly depression. The original version of the ATQ consists of 30 items that capture various dimensions of negative thinking, including low self-worth, helplessness, hopelessness, and self-criticism. Each item represents a typical thought that may arise in emotionally distressing situations, such as "I feel like I'm not good enough" or "There's no way I can solve my problems." Respondents are asked to indicate how often they have experienced each thought over the past week. In this study, the Indonesian-translated version of the ATQ was employed, using a five-point Likert scale to reflect the frequency of each thought. The available response options were: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always, which were scored from 1 to 5, respectively. The total score is calculated by summing the individual item scores, with higher total scores indicating a greater frequency of negative automatic thoughts and a higher tendency toward cognitive distortion. The ATQ has consistently demonstrated strong psychometric properties in both its original and adapted versions. Numerous studies have

reported high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically exceeding 0.90, indicating excellent reliability. The translated version used in this research has undergone linguistic and cultural adaptation and has shown adequate reliability in preliminary pilot testing, making it a valid and appropriate instrument for assessing cognitive distortions in the context of Indonesian higher education students.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis used in this study was parametric in nature. To examine the effect of one variable on another, a simple linear regression technique was employed. All data analyses were carried out using Microsoft Excel (Office 2019) and IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 22.

Results

The results of this study are presented in four sections. First, the demographic data of the students is presented. Second, the overall distribution of social media addiction and the distribution of subscale domains among students are discussed, along with the overall distribution of cognitive distortion, which is divided into two subscales among students. Third, the findings on the differences in social media addiction and cognitive distortion based on academic year are presented. Fourth, the correlation between total social media addiction and subscales related to cognitive distortion is shown. The total number of respondents was 184 students.

The participants in this study consisted of 184 undergraduate students from the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya. As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were male ($n = 143$; 77.7%), while the remaining 22.3% ($n = 41$) were female. All participants (100%) were enrolled in the same faculty and study program, ensuring homogeneity in academic background. In terms of academic cohort, the respondents were distributed across three different classes: the 2022 and 2024 cohorts each accounted for 35.3% ($n = 65$) of the sample, while the 2023 cohort represented 29.3% ($n = 54$). Data on social media usage revealed a high level of digital connectivity among participants. Most students reported having accounts on Instagram (97.2%), WhatsApp (96.7%), TikTok (88.0%), and YouTube (87.5%). A moderate proportion reported having Telegram accounts (53.2%), while fewer students had accounts on Facebook (41.3%) and Twitter (34.2%). When asked about the social media platforms they used most frequently, WhatsApp was the dominant choice, with 88.59% of respondents indicating it as their primary platform. TikTok and Instagram followed closely, cited by 78.26% and 77.72% of respondents, respectively. Other platforms such as YouTube (31.52%), Twitter (8.70%), Telegram (7.61%), and Facebook (5.43%) were less commonly used as primary platforms.

Regarding the estimated daily duration of social media use, responses varied across a range of time intervals. The largest proportion of respondents (27.72%) reported using social media for four hours per day, followed by six hours (22.28%), three hours (21.20%), five hours (15.22%), two hours (9.78%), and one hour (3.80%). These demographic data suggest that the student respondents are active users of social media, with high engagement across multiple platforms and considerable daily time investment, which is relevant for interpreting the patterns of social media behavior and its psychological correlates in subsequent analyses.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Student Respondents at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya

Variable	Category	n	Percentage (%)
Gender	Man	143	77.7%
	Woman	41	22.3%
Faculty	Faculty of Teacher Training and Education	184	100%
Study Program	Guidance and Counseling	184	100%
Batch/Class	2022	65	35.3%
	2023	54	29.3%
	2024	65	35.3%
Social Media Accounts Owned	Instagram	179	97.2%

	TikTok	162	88.0%
	WhatsApp	178	96.7%
	Telegram	98	53.2%
	Facebook	76	41.3%
	YouTube	161	87.5%
	Twitter	63	34.2%
Most Frequently Used Social Media	Instagram	143	77.72%
	TikTok	144	78.26%
	WhatsApp	163	88.59%
	Telegram	14	7.61%
	Facebook	10	5.43%
	YouTube	58	31.52%
	Twitter	16	8.70%
Estimated Time Spent on Social Media (Hours/day)	1	7	3.80%
	2	18	9.78%
	3	39	21.20%
	4	51	27.72%
	5	28	15.22%
	6	41	22.28%

The correlation analysis using simple linear regression revealed a moderate and positive relationship. As shown in Table 2, the correlation coefficient (R) was 0.387, indicating that higher levels of cognitive distortion were associated with higher levels of social media addiction. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.150$) implies that 15.0% of the variance in social media addiction can be explained by cognitive distortion. The adjusted R^2 was 0.145, and the standard error of the estimate was 4.176, suggesting moderate predictive accuracy.

Table 2. Model Summary of the Relationship Between Cognitive Distortion and Social Media Addiction

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.387	0.150	0.145	4.176

A further simple linear regression was performed to examine the predictive power of cognitive distortion. As presented in Table 3, the unstandardized coefficient (B) for cognitive distortion was 0.101, with a standard error of 0.018. The standardized coefficient (Beta) was 0.387, and the regression equation yielded a significant t-value of 5.661 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that cognitive distortion significantly predicted social media addiction.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression Results for Cognitive Distortion Predicting Social Media Addiction

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	25.245	1.035	—	24.397	.000
Cognitive Distortion	0.101	0.018	0.387	5.661	.000

Discussions

Social media addiction can be categorized into five levels: normal, mild, moderate, severe, and extremely severe. In the normal category, students use social media in a controlled manner and only for necessary purposes,

such as communication or information gathering. There is no disruption in daily activities, and students do not feel anxious when they cannot access social media. In the mild category, students who fall into this category still use social media within reasonable limits, although they access social media for a relatively long time (Pratiwi, 2017). In this category, students have not yet experienced significant problems because they can still control their social media use. The impact that occurs is usually a decrease in concentration while studying, and if not addressed promptly, this can lead to greater dependence on social media, causing the intensity of use to increase over time. Most of the respondents experienced moderate-level addiction. Students in this category showed a moderate level of social media use, with the possibility of switching to the mild or severe category. They exhibited addictive behavior towards social media, marked by feelings of pleasure when accessing it and feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and even loneliness when unable to access social media (Young, 2004). The resulting impact can cause students to face various problems due to excessive social media use, such as frequently being late in completing college assignments and lacking focus while studying due to social media distractions. Students in the severe category have a very high frequency of accessing social media and exhibit addictive tendencies and behavior marked by numerous addiction symptoms, thereby disrupting their daily activities (Pratiwi, 2017).

In the extremely severe addiction category, students face more serious consequences compared to those in the severe category, such as not completing college assignments, decreased grades, sleeping during lectures, and difficulty understanding the taught material (Huang et al., 2003). Research conducted by Leung & Lee (2012) supports this, showing that students with extremely severe social media addiction often experience decreased academic achievement compared to those without social media addiction. Students in this category require immediate attention, as if left unchecked, can lead to more severe negative consequences, such as symptoms of depression, obsession, compulsive behavior, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, psychosis, and even social isolation (Osatuyi & Turel, 2018). Cognitive distortion can be categorized into three levels: low, moderate, and high. In the low category, cognitive distortion typically occurs occasionally in specific situations, such as when students face academic pressure or mild personal problems. At this level, students still have the ability to recognize unrealistic thoughts and can correct them relatively quickly. This distortion does not significantly disrupt their academic performance or social relationships. Students with low-level cognitive distortion tend to be able to manage stress or anxiety effectively and continue their daily activities without too much disturbance. In the moderate category, cognitive distortion occurs more frequently and affects how students think in several situations. Students may start to feel trapped in negative thought patterns often related to their inability to cope with academic, social, or personal pressure. This distortion can affect their academic performance, such as difficulty focusing or feeling unable to complete tasks on time. Students with moderate-level cognitive distortion may also feel anxious or pessimistic when facing exams or other challenges, although they can still function normally in daily life. In the high category, cognitive distortion becomes very dominant and often disrupts students' academic and social life.

Helmond et al. (2014) revealed that cognitive distortion is an important factor in explaining behavioral problems or problematic habits. Covin et al. (2011) also explained that a person's automatic thoughts can influence their emotions. If the automatic thoughts are positive, the emerging emotions tend to be good, which in turn encourages positive behavior. Conversely, if the thoughts that arise are negative, the emotions triggered are also bad, and the resulting behavior becomes negative. According to Rizkiakawati & Asiah (2016), a person's feelings or emotions are greatly influenced by their thoughts or cognition, and those feelings subsequently influence their behavior. Cognition, which refers to how a person thinks about themselves and their environment, can experience errors or biases, as stated by Rizkiakawati & Asiah (2016), who refer to it as cognitive distortion, namely the thinking process that is not in line with reality. Cognitive distortion often appears in the form of negative automatic thoughts. Covin et al. (2011) divided cognition into two main aspects, namely core beliefs and automatic thoughts.

Social media has now become an integral part of modern society. Rapid technological advancements have made it easier for people to engage in various activities, and one of the significant impacts of this technology is social media. Its usage has become commonplace, and most people use it in almost every aspect of their lives. However, excessive social media use can have adverse effects if not done wisely. Overuse can lead to pathological conditions, with symptoms such as obsessive thinking about social media, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, difficulty controlling usage, and difficulty reducing the intensity of social media use (Mario, 2022). The importance of understanding cognitive distortion in the context of social media addiction is to identify unrealistic thought patterns that reinforce addictive behavior. The influence of cognitive distortion can

exacerbate addiction, with students becoming increasingly dependent on social media to gain comfort or distraction from other life problems. Cognitive distortion has a significant impact on social media addiction, as how individuals think about themselves, their experiences, and social interactions in the virtual world can influence the intensity and pattern of social media use. Cognitive distortion plays a crucial role in shaping thought patterns that encourage individuals to spend more time on social media. Distortions such as negative social comparison, the need for external validation, and negative automatic thoughts exacerbate social media addiction. Social media users trapped in cognitive distortion often feel unable to control their behavior, as they feel driven by the need to meet standard they have created based on unrealistic views of themselves or others. Addressing these cognitive distortions is essential to reducing social media addiction and improving individuals' mental well-being.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the statistical analysis, it can be concluded that cognitive distortion has a significant and positive effect on social media addiction among students. The simple linear regression analysis revealed a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.387, with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.150. This indicates that 15.0% of the variance in social media addiction can be explained by students' levels of cognitive distortion. Furthermore, the regression coefficient for cognitive distortion was statistically significant ($B = 0.101$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that an increase in negative automatic thoughts is associated with a higher tendency toward addictive behavior in social media use. These findings highlight the important role of cognitive processes in influencing problematic engagement with social media platforms, and they support the need for cognitive-based interventions to address digital addiction among university students.

Declaration

Ethics Approval

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya and conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research with human participants.

Informed Consent

Before the study began, all participants were given a full explanation of the purpose, procedures, and their rights during the study. Written informed consent from students and parents was obtained.

Conflict of Interests

The researcher declares no conflict of interest in this study.

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