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## A study of the effects of social media addiction on psychological well-being among secondary school students in Al-Emara city

**Dr. Mahdi Abed Neamah Al-Musawi**

Assistant Professor of Pediatric Nursing Department of AL Kut University, Iraq. [dr.almusawi14@alkutcollege.edu.iq](mailto:dr.almusawi14@alkutcollege.edu.iq)

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### Abstract

**Objective:** To investigate the prevalence and impact of social media addiction on the psychological well-being and academic performance of secondary school students in Al-Emara City, Iraq.

**Method:** The study was conducted over seven months, from (November - 2022 to May – 2023). The study focused on secondary school students in Al-Emara city, Maysan governorate. A total of 385 secondary school students were selected to participate in the study. The sample included both male and female students from various secondary schools in Al-Emara city. Participants were distributed across different age groups (typically 13-18 years). **Results:** Female users (59.5%) outnumbered males (40.5%), Urban users (62.3%) significantly higher than rural (37.7 %), 50.3% spend three or more hours daily on social media, most popular platforms YouTube (53.2%) and Instagram (36.3%). The results observed that 67.8% use real names on social media, 88.2% claim to provide accurate profile information, and 94 % believe social media contributes to personal development. Academic and Psychological Impacts observed that 58 % believe frequent use negatively affects academic performance, 77.2% report sleep disturbances, 72.9% experience mental disorientation after use, and 62.5% report health or psychological issues related to social media use.

**Conclusion:** The study reveals a complex relationship between social media use and student well-being. While students recognize benefits in personal development, many experience negative impacts on sleep, mental clarity, and academic performance. Findings suggest a need for targeted interventions to promote healthy digital habits and leverage social media for educational purposes while mitigating its adverse effects.

**Keywords:** Social media addiction; Adolescents; Psychological well-being; Academic performance; Sleep disturbance; Mental health.

### Introduction

In recent years, the world has witnessed significant changes in the quantitative and qualitative expansion of the Internet and social networks, as well as the number of people using them. Social networks encompass websites and applications that enable users to share content, ideas, opinions, beliefs, feelings, and personal, social, and educational experiences. They facilitate communication among a wide range of users at a global level (1).

Popular social networks include Instagram, Telegram, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and WhatsApp (2). As of 2018, there were approximately 4.021 billion internet users worldwide, with 3.196 billion people regularly using social networks (3). Social networks have many advantages in learning as they provide wide access to information and information resources, reduce barriers to group interaction and telecommunications, support collaborative learning activities, encourage learners to learn more about

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self-learning, increase engagement and learner motivation, and support active and social learning (4).

The widespread adoption of smartphones and easy access to social networking sites have transformed how teenagers communicate, socialize, and consume information (5). While social media offers numerous benefits, including enhanced connectivity and access to diverse resources, excessive use can lead to addiction-like behaviors, potentially compromising mental health and academic performance (6). Recent studies have highlighted correlations between problematic social media use and various psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem among adolescents (7). However, research specific to the cultural context of Al-Emara city is limited, creating a need for localized investigations to inform targeted interventions and policies. Social networking addiction refers to mental preoccupation with social network use, allocating excessive time to these networks at the expense of other social activities, including occupational and professional activities, interpersonal relationships, and health (8).

It can negatively impact physical and psychological health, causing behavioral disorders, depression, anxiety, and mania (9). The overuse of social networks has significant academic, social, and health consequences for students. Research indicates that social media addiction affects approximately 12% of users across social networking sites. Prolonged use of social media has been positively associated with mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression, and negatively associated with long-term well-being (10). Signs and symptoms of addiction to social networking can include experiencing disturbances in day-to-day work and activities, spending more than one hour a day on social networks, being curious to see old friends' profiles, ignoring work and daily activities due to the use of social networks, and feeling anxious and stressed

due to the lack of access to social networks (11). The overuse of social networks has positive and negative academic, social, and health consequences for students, where reduced academic performance is one of the most important consequences of social networking overuse for students, and overuse of the internet and social networking and addiction has a negative effect on academic performance and mental health of students (12).

It has been reported that social media addiction affects approximately 12% of users across social networking sites, and many studies on social media usage and mental health have shown that the prolonged use of social media such as Facebook is positively associated with mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression and negatively associated with long-term well-being. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to show the effect of overuse of social media addiction on academic level performance and the health problems of university students. This study seeks to examine the prevalence and intensity of social media use among secondary school students in Al-Emara city and to explore its relationship with various aspects of psychological well-being. By investigating these associations within the specific cultural context of Al-Emara, aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform targeted interventions, educational policies, and support strategies for adolescents navigating the digital social landscape.

### **Materials and Methods**

This research study was conducted over seven months, from (November - 2022 to May – 2023). The study focused on secondary school students in Al-Emara city, Maysan governorate. A total of 385 secondary school students were selected to participate in the study. The sample included both male and female students from various secondary schools in Al-Emara city. Participants were distributed across different age groups (typically 13-

18 years old) and academic tracks (scientific, literary, and vocational).

To investigate the relationship between students' addiction to social networking sites, health or psychological problems, and their academic performance, the researcher developed some questionnaires. The survey was distributed among secondary school students in the form of a paper questionnaire among the schools participating in this study. This dual approach ensured wide dissemination and accommodated students with varying levels of internet access.

The survey included questions on the following topics Demographic information (gender, age, school year), Social media usage patterns (Personal account ownership, Use of real name or pseudonym, Perception of data truthfulness on social media), impact of social media (Role in personal development, Influence on cultural awareness), Social media habits ( Purpose of use, Time spent on social media, Preferred social networking sites), Impact on daily life ( Time management, Sleep patterns). Academic performance (Perceived changes in academic level after creating a social media account, Influence of social media use on academic performance), Psychological effects (Mental disorientation after use, General psychological impact), Perceived disadvantages of social media, and Health or psychological problems experienced while using social media.

### **Statistical analysis.**

Statistical analyses of the results were made with a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using SPSS 17. The criterion for statistical significance was ( $P < 0.05$ ).

### **Results**

The higher percentage of female social media users (59.5%) compared to males (40.5%) among

secondary school students is noteworthy (Figure 1). This gender disparity in social media use could have implications for social development and academic performance. Further analysis revealed that female students were more likely to use Instagram as compared with the males), while male students showed a preference for YouTube as compared with the females. This difference in platform preference might influence the type of content consumed and its potential impact on students.

The significant difference in social media usage between urban (62.3%) and rural (37.7%) secondary school students (Figure 2) highlights potential disparities in internet access and digital literacy. This urban-rural divide could have implications for educational equity, as students with less access to social media might miss out on certain educational resources and networking opportunities.

The fact that 67.8% of students use their real names on social media (Figure 3) while 88.2% claim their data is correct and realistic (Figure 4) suggests a trend towards authentic online identities among secondary school students. However, this also raises concerns about online privacy and safety for young users. Cross-analysis showed that students using pseudonyms were more likely to report having incorrect or unrealistic data on their profiles (38% as compared to 12% for those using real names). This could indicate a link between anonymity and the tendency to present an altered online persona.

The high percentage of students who believe social media contributes to personal development (94.02%, Figure 5) and cultural awareness (88.1%, Figure 6) indicates that secondary school students view social media as a valuable tool for growth and learning. This positive perception could be leveraged in educational settings to enhance engagement and learning outcomes.

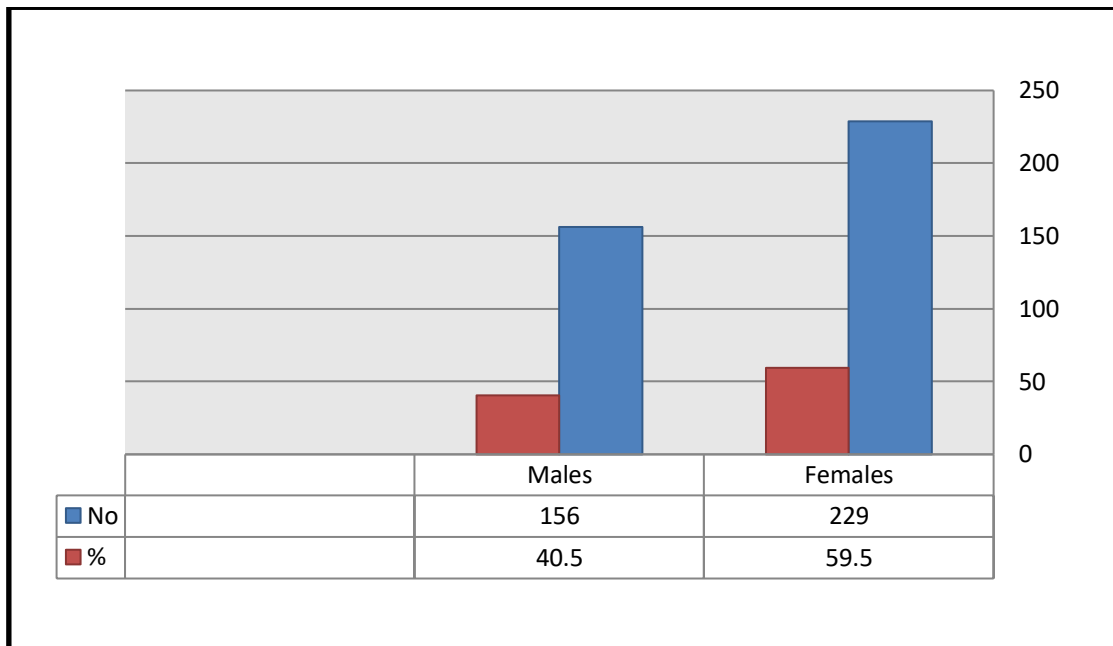


Figure (1): Show using of social media according to gender (No:385).

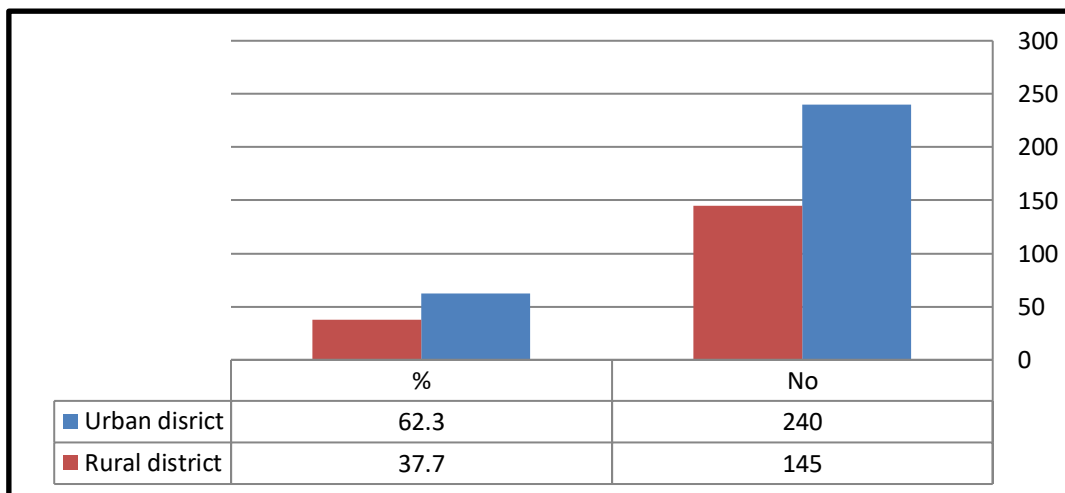


Figure (2): using of social media according to residence (No:385).

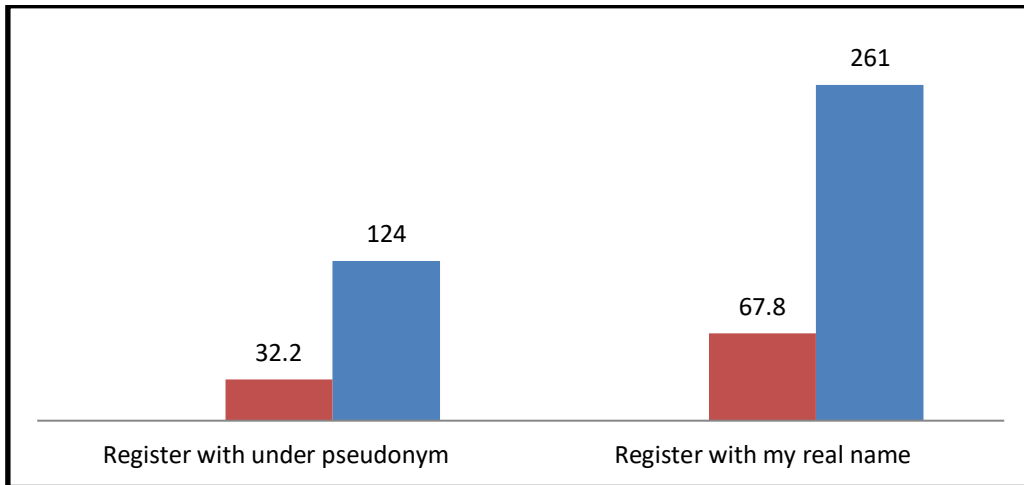


Figure (3): Show the people who register under their real names as compared with the people who register under pseudonyms (No:385).

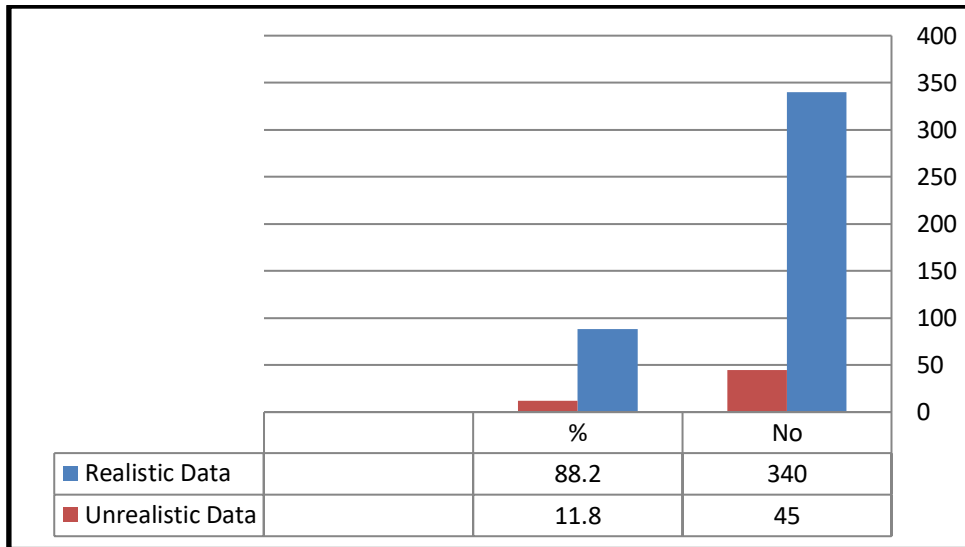


Figure (4): Show data on social media were correct and realistic data as compared with the people who have incorrect and unrealistic data (No:385).

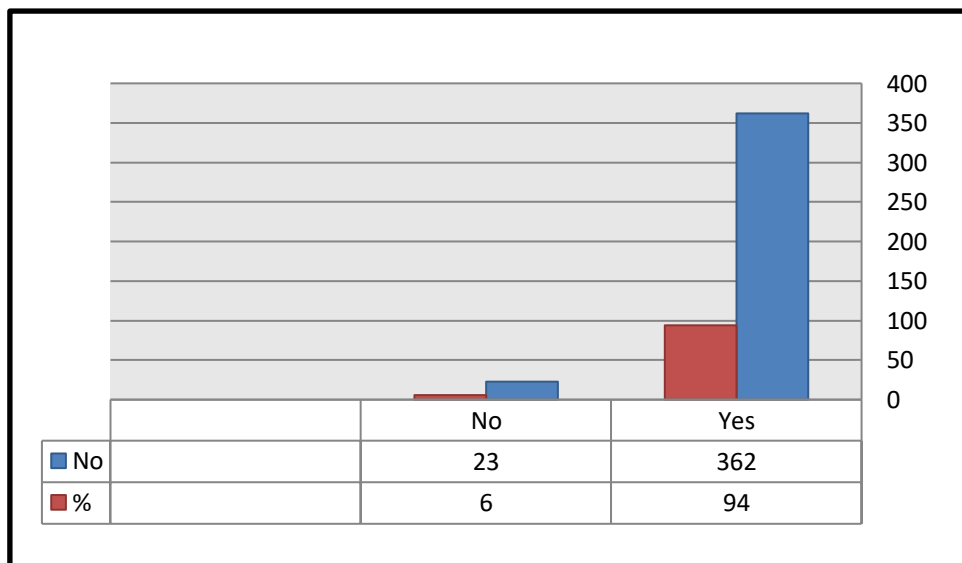


Figure (5): Show data effect of social media has a major role in developing the personality of the individual (No:385).

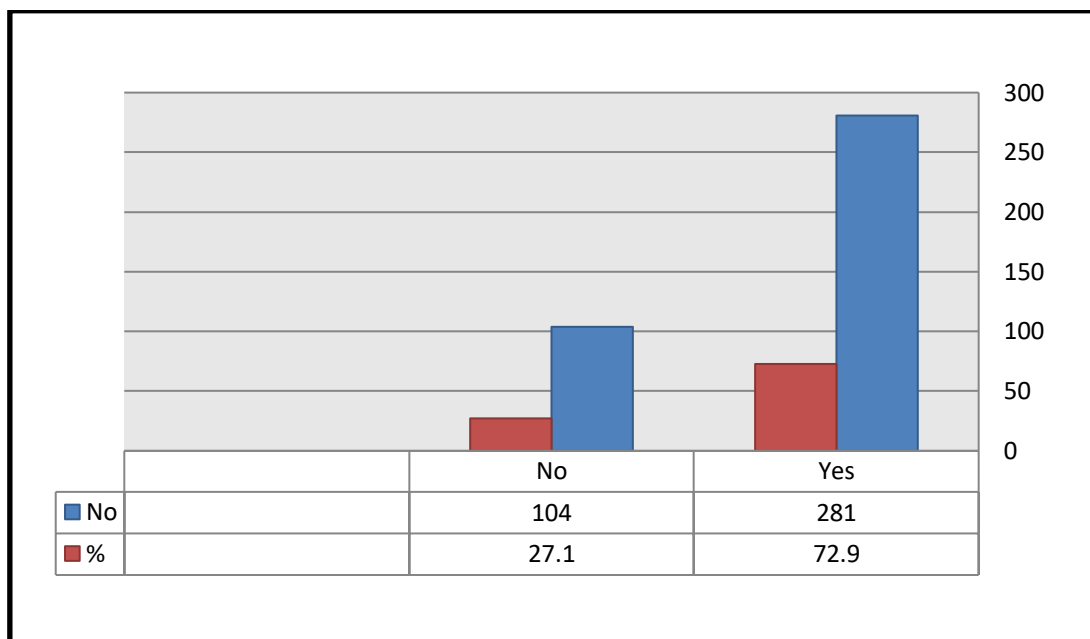


Figure (6): Show the Role of social media in the rise in the level of the culture (No:385).

While a significant portion of students (26.2%) use social media for academic purposes, the majority use it for entertainment and news (34.0%, Table 1). This combined with the fact that 50.3% of students spend three or more hours daily on social media (Figure 7), suggests a need for guidance on balancing social media use with academic responsibilities. Interestingly, students who reported using social media primarily for academic purposes spent less time overall on these platforms (an average of 2.1 hours/day) compared to those using it mainly for entertainment (an average of 3.4 hours/day).

The popularity of YouTube (53.2%) and Instagram (36.3%) among secondary school students (Figure 8) reflects a preference for visual and video-based content. Educators could potentially leverage these platforms for educational purposes to increase student engagement. A high percentage of students (60.7%) prefer to spend their free time on social media rather than with family (25.9%, Figure 9) raises concerns about the impact on real-world social skills and family relationships.

The high rates of sleep disturbances (77.1%, Figure 10) and mental disorientation (72.9 %, Figure 12) associated with social media use are particularly alarming for secondary school students, given the importance of adequate sleep and mental clarity for academic performance and overall well-being. Further analysis revealed a strong correlation between time spent on social media and reported sleep disturbances in ( $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that excessive use directly impacts sleep quality.

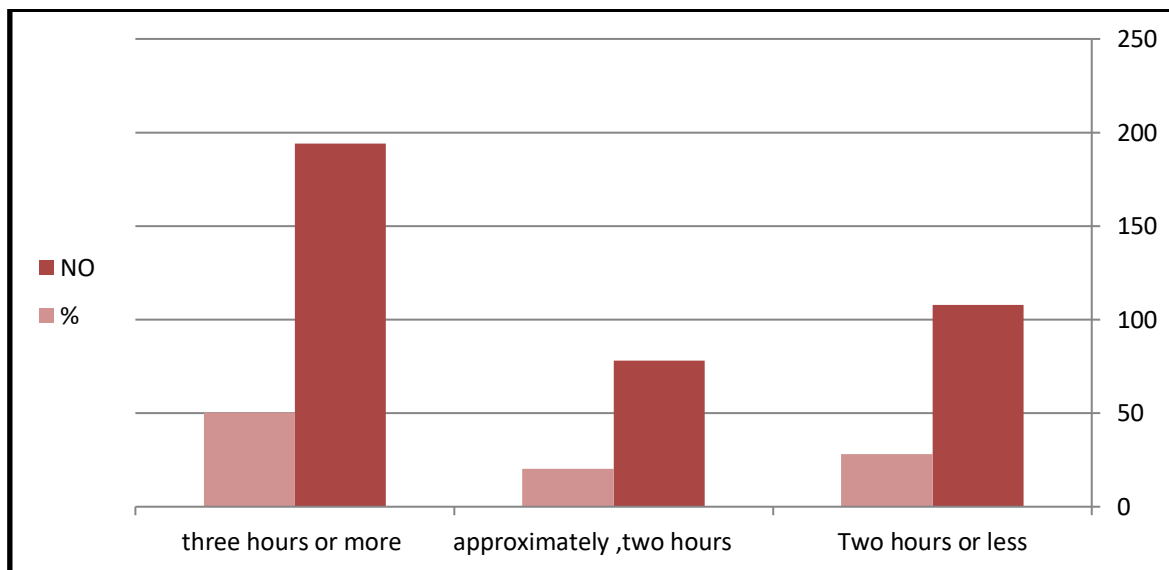
The results observed that 45% of students reported "good" academic performance after acquiring social media accounts (Figure 13), and 58 % believed that frequent social media use negatively affected their academic level (Figure 14). This discrepancy suggests that students may be aware of the potential negative impacts but struggle to modify their behavior. Students who reported using social media primarily for academic purposes had higher self-reported academic performance (mean score of 3.8/5) compared to those using it mainly for entertainment (mean score of 3.2/5).

The recognition of social media's impact on thought and behavior (51.4%, Figure 15) among secondary school students shows an awareness of its influential nature. The high percentage of students experiencing health and psychological issues (62.5%, Figure 16) highlights the need for education on healthy social

media use. Multiple regression analysis showed that time spent on social media was the strongest predictor of reported health issues in ( $p < 0.05$ ), followed by the purpose of use (entertainment as compared with academic in ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table (1) The purpose of using the social media**

	Number	%
Get information about my courses	101	26.2
Have fun with friends	18	4.7
Spending spare time	50	13.0
To research the latest various news	85	22.1
All of the mentioned	131	34.0



**Figure (7): Show the time spent using the social media (No:385).**

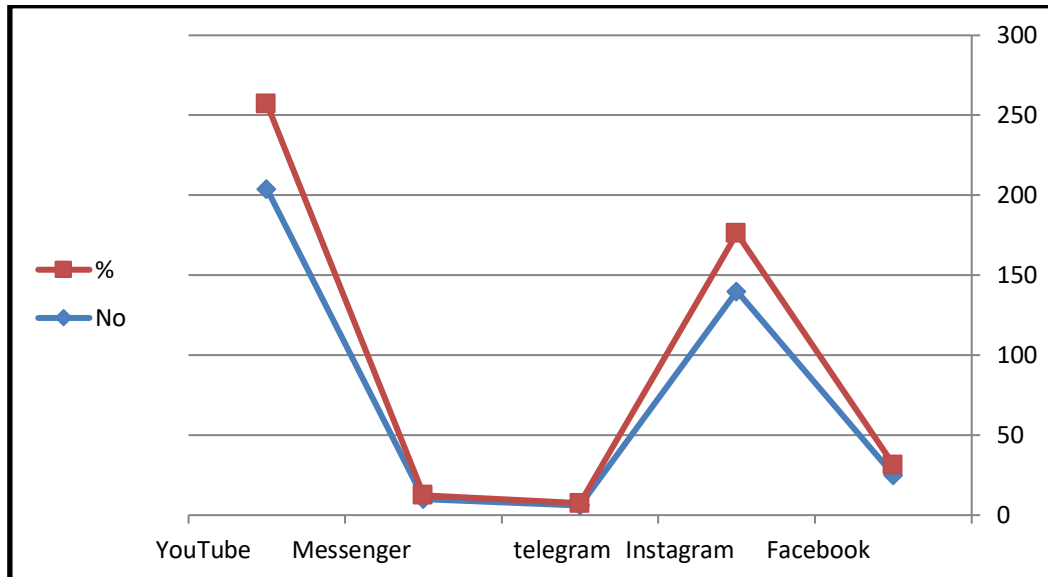


Figure (8): Show social media sites that are used by the people (No:385).

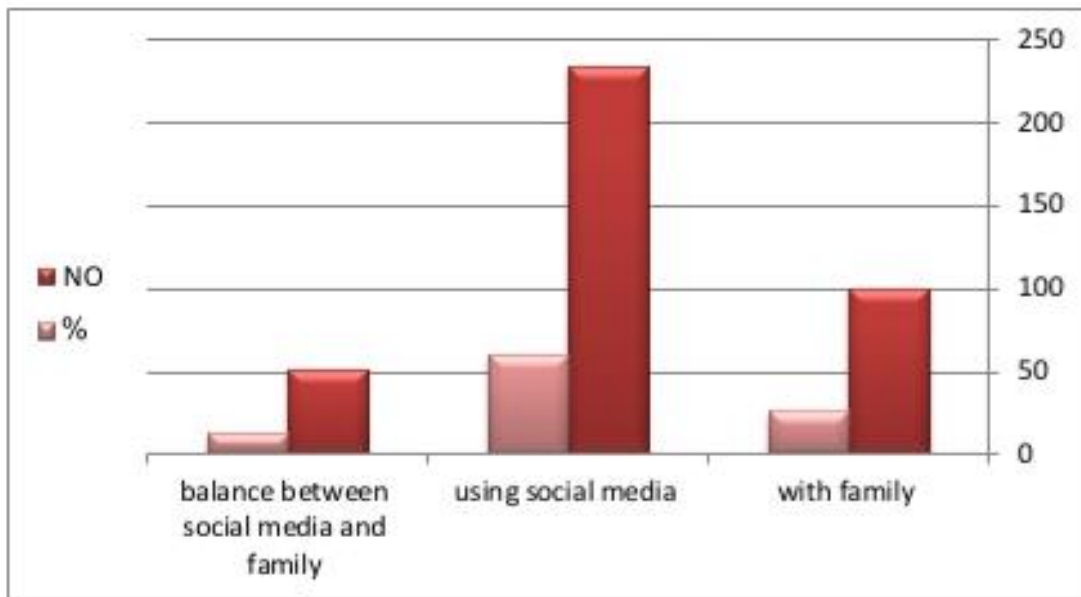


Figure (9): shows the time spent using social media, (No:385)



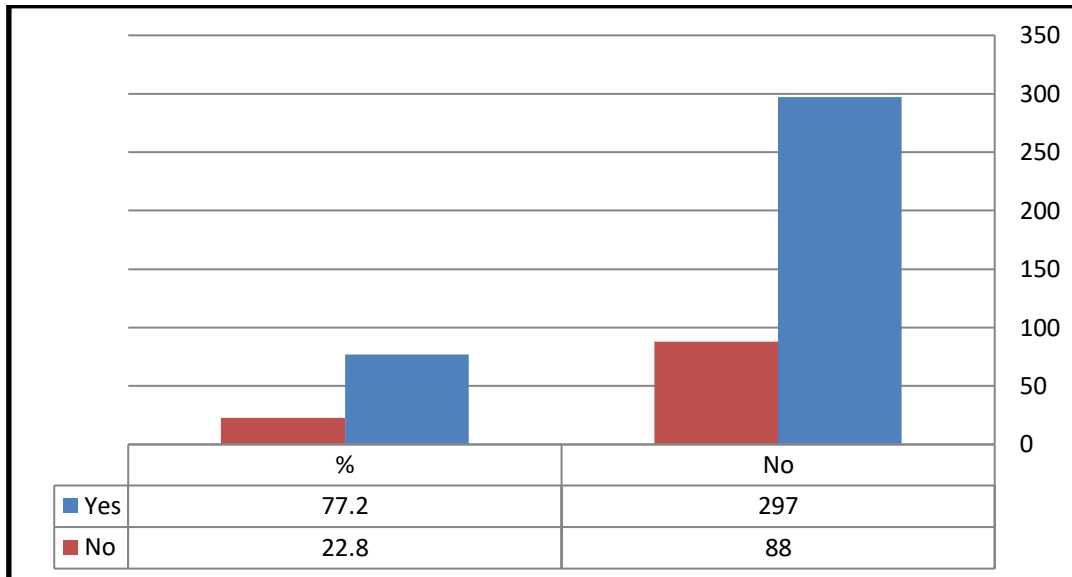


Figure (11): shows the impact of using social media on the individual's sleep pattern. (No:385)

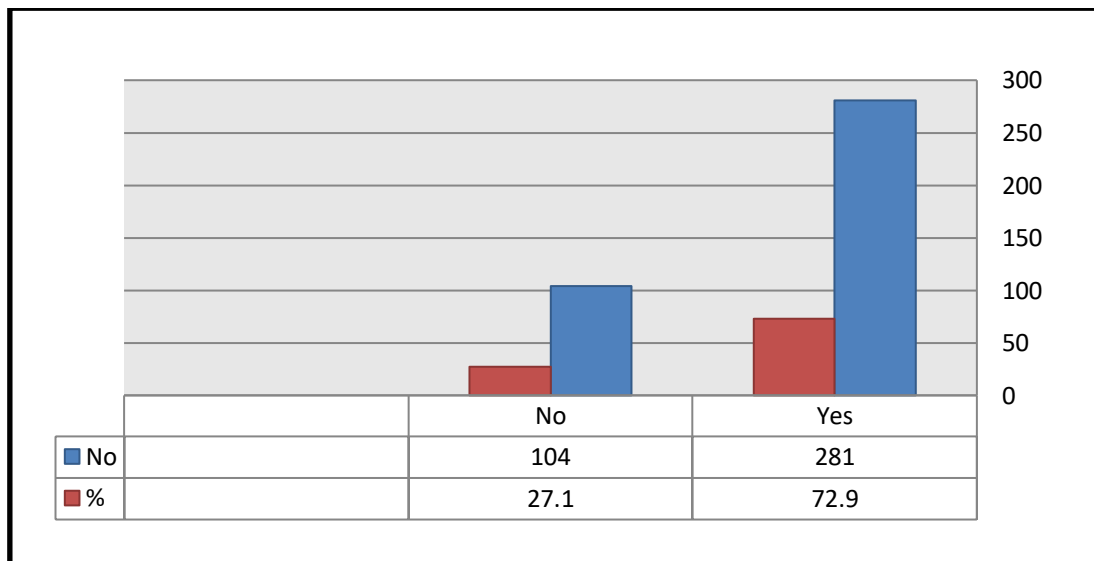


Figure (12): shows the feeling of mental disoriented after using social media, (No:385)



Figure (13): Show academic level after using the personal account on social media, (No:385)

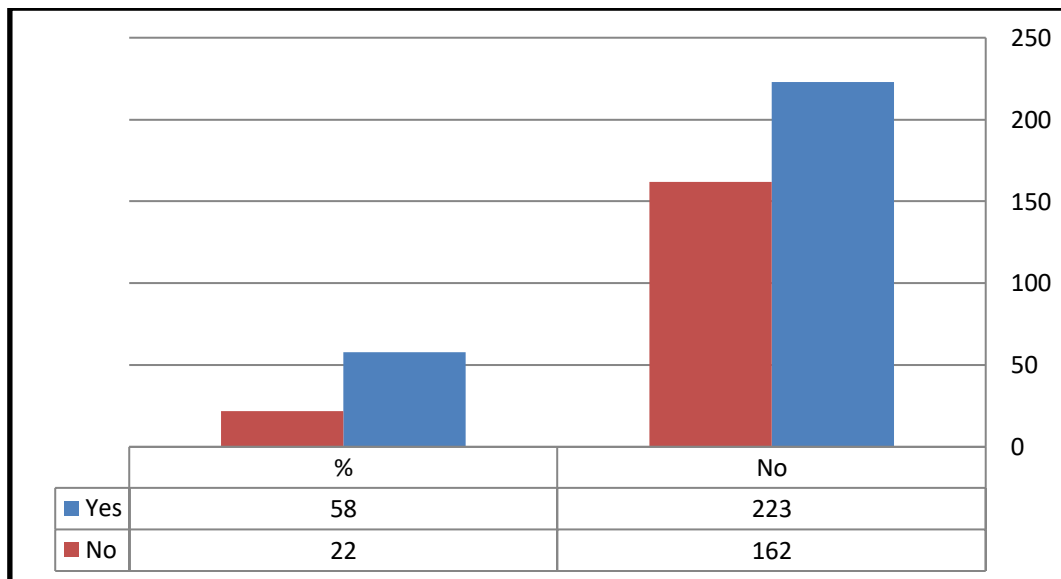


Figure (14): shows the frequent use of social media affects the academic level.

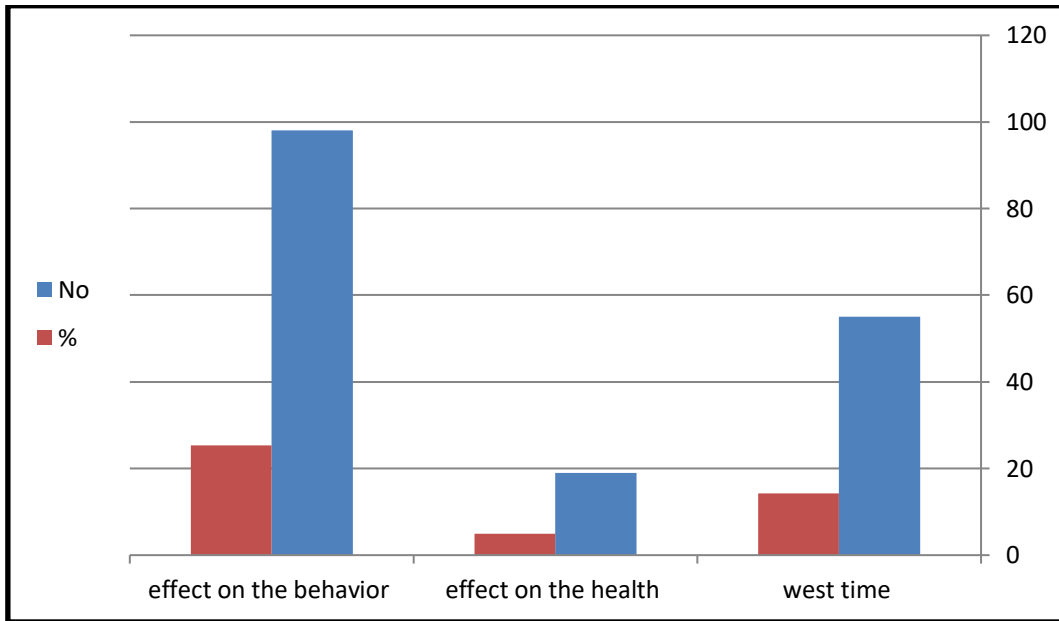


Figure (15): shows the disadvantages of social media, (No:385)

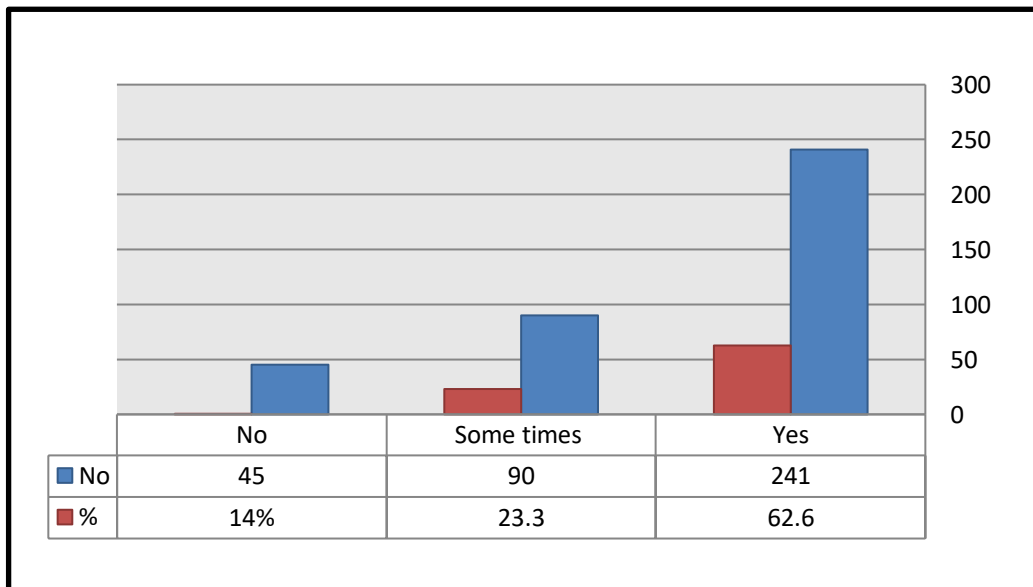


Figure (16): shows the suffering from health or psychological problems while using social media, (No:385)

## Discussion

The results of this study provided valuable insights into the patterns of social media use among secondary school students in Al-Emara city and its impact on various aspects of their lives, where the higher prevalence of social media use among female students (59.6%) compared to males (40.3%) aligns with previous research indicating gender differences in social media engagement (13).

The platform preferences observed (Instagram for girls, and YouTube for boys) reflect broader trends in adolescent social media use (14). These gender differences suggest the need for tailored approaches when addressing social media use in educational settings. The disparity in social media use between urban and rural students highlights potential issues of digital inequality. This gap may exacerbate existing educational disparities, as noted by Hardwick (15), who found that rural students often have less access to online educational resources. Addressing this divide is crucial for ensuring equal opportunities for all students in an increasingly digital educational landscape. The high percentage of students using their real names and reporting accurate profile information suggests a trend toward authentic online identities. While this can promote responsible online behavior, it also raises concerns about privacy and online safety for minors (16).

The positive perception of social media's role in personal development and cultural awareness among students is noteworthy. This aligns with research by Ahn (17), who found that social media can provide opportunities for identity exploration and social learning. However, the relatively low percentage of students using social media primarily for academic purposes (26.2%) suggests an opportunity for educators to better integrate these platforms into learning activities, as proposed by Manca and Ranieri (18).

The high proportion of students spending three or more hours daily on social media is concerning,

especially given the reported impacts on sleep (experiencing disturbances). These findings are consistent with those of Woods and Scott (19), who found associations between social media use, sleep quality, and psychological well-being in adolescents. The strong correlation between time spent on social media and sleep disturbances underscores the need for interventions promoting healthy social media habits. The high rates of mental disorientation and perceived negative impact on academic performance associated with social media use are alarming.

These results support the findings of Twenge and Campbell (20), who reported links between extensive social media use and decreased psychological well-being among adolescents. The discrepancy between students' awareness of negative impacts and their continued high usage suggests a need for strategies to help students better self-regulate their social media use. The prevalence of health and psychological issues related to social media use (reporting symptoms) is a significant concern. This aligns with research by Keles et al. (21), who found associations between social media use and mental health problems in adolescents. The strong predictive relationship between time spent on social media and reported health issues suggests that interventions focused on reducing excessive use could yield substantial health benefits. In conclusion, these results paint a complex picture of social media use among secondary school students. While students recognize both benefits and drawbacks, many struggle with excessive use and its consequences.

The findings suggest a need for targeted interventions to promote healthy social media habits, digital literacy education, and strategies to leverage social media for academic purposes while mitigating its negative impacts on health and academic performance.

### Conflict of interest:

the author declares no conflict of interest

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