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Social Media Addiction Impact on Mental Health Among Palestinian Youth: The Quality-of-Life as a Mediator

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Abstract: The study aimed to examine the prevalence and consequences of Social Network Addiction (SNA) among Palestinian youth. SNA is a distinct form of digital addiction that can significantly impact mental health among young people. The research sample consisted of 16-20 years old of both genders (n=722) and by employing four psychometric tools, SNA scale, Youngs' internet addiction scale, General well-being scale and the Quality-of-Life scale. The findings showed that 45.8% of the sample exhibited addictive behavior related to social networking sites. The General Well-being of the studied sample was negatively associated with social networks addiction ($r = -.315$; $p < .01$), while the hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated that the Quality of Life was the most impactful predictor to interpret the General Well-being within the studied sample. Although the research suggested a number of risk factors that may interpret the demographic variations regarding SNA prevalence among the sample, the research recommends further studies to explore and explain the phenomena within the Arabic culture.

Keywords: *Social Media Addiction; Mental Health; Quality of Life; Palestine*

Introduction

Social Networks Services (SNSs) addiction is a subcategory of internet addiction (Moretta, 2022), a relatively new kind of addiction affecting humans, especially the youth (Barnes, 2019). Many studies have pointed to the grave concerns of social networks addiction (SNA) on the youth, particularly on mental wellbeing (AlHeneidi, 2021; Andreassen, 2015; Clark, 2008; Hou, 2019; Saputri, 2021; Zhao, 2021), disturbing their personal and social life and reducing their social and academic performance (Barrot, 2021; Sampasa-Kanyinga, 2019). Digital addiction has been identified as a critical factor affecting the quality of sleep and performance (Garett, 2018; Gómez-Galán, 2020), significantly impacting the mental and physical health and the suitable progress of academic performance (Gómez-Galán, 2020). This research aims to carry out two main objectives; to investigate the prevalence level of SNSs addiction among Palestinian youth, and to measure its impact on their mental health and general wellbeing.

Social Networks Services Psychological Framework

The paradigm of the interactive nature of Web 2.0 platforms and technologies aligns with human cognitive processes. Recent Web 2.0 and Web 2.5 technologies permit users to both consume and generate content (Kowalik, 2021). These technologies demonstrate the extent to which human beings are communicative and collaborative (Anderson, 2018). Given that the fundamental characteristics of cognition are believed to be distributed (Dror, 2008; Hutchins, 1995), collaborative (Rogers, 1993), and interaction-oriented (Wilke, 2018), human cognition is also dependent on context (Miyake, 1986; Turnbull, 2019). Among various theories, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which encompasses the transactional interactions between individuals and their surroundings, emphasizes the importance of contextual factors in shaping human cognition and behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The influence of social environmental factors is prominently reflected in the literature on online behavior, particularly in the context of the Web 2.5 info-sphere (Arnkil, 2018; Cook, 2011; Dourish, 2004; Lin, 2017; Notley, 2009; Terras, 2012; Terras, 2015; Zhou, 2019).

The cyber environment has generated a plethora of contexts for interactions (Preuveneers, 2017), with SNSs occupying a prominent position among Web 2.0 platforms and technologies, where content creation is a key feature (Floridi, 2014; Poecze, 2020; Weber, 2016). Due to the active nature of engagement, whether online or offline, the settings of SNSs possess transactional qualities that surpass those of traditional human interactions, leading to the emergence of various manifestations of networked societies (Housley et al., 2014; Li, 2021; Van Dijk, 2020). Users are required to navigate multiple transitions from one setting to another, and this process becomes increasingly distinct as they simultaneously acquire

and impart new knowledge and experiences that enhance their own interactions and those of others. Users must be cognizant of the gradual shifts in context, which result in the incorporation of new mental frames after exposure to these varied contexts in order to stay current (Bibri, 2022; Terras, 2015).

Boyd (2007) described social media networks (SNSs) as technical platforms that possess three main advantages: (1) They provide users with a virtual stage in which to construct and exhibit their selves across a range of diverse contexts (personal, commercial, political, religious, etc.). (2) They enable users to select their audience through organic or advertised means. (3) They offer users the ability to analyze and understand the composition and dynamics of their online community. Thus, SNSs differ from other digital platforms in that they allow users to leverage their social networks to identify new social, commercial, and other opportunities. Additionally, SNSs provide users with a sense of control, which allows them to a great extent to determine how they are perceived by others. These characteristics of SNSs make them highly appealing to a diverse range of users (Boyd, 2015; Papadimitriou, 2016).

An active presence on SNS implies the creation of content across a variety of settings. Because of the accelerating velocity of technological advancements and changes in context, this process exerts a tremendous pressure on users that demands huge effort from them. These difficulties also make it challenging for users to understand the potential effects of this new mode of communication on behavior, increasing the risk of negative psychological impacts on the user's well-being, such as social media fatigue (Zheng, 2021). The primary cause of these issues is that the features of spoken and written language are rapidly evolving due to technology (Papadimitriou, 2016). The significant impact of web 2.0 technologies on the lexical and iconic characteristics of linguistic communication, introducing new words such as blog, tweet, selfie, and Twiplomacy, has had a tremendous impact on our natural mode of communication and thus on our cognition and behavior (Terras, 2015; Terras, 2016).

Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) suggested that humans only adjust to challenges when compelled by a more powerful external influence or if the adaptation presents a substantial prospect, referred to as an affordance. A possibility is a resource made available to a human who can recognize and take advantage of it (Gibson, 1979). The interaction between a person and a prospect is directly influenced by context and culture (Mantovani, 1995; Norman, 1999). Furthermore, the level of interaction is impacted by the medium's context in terms of its physical properties (direct affordances) and conveyed meaning and benefits (mediated affordance). In this regard, humans utilize SNSs as an "inter-reality" realm, where they seek social support while expanding their sphere as a social expression of identity that elaborates on and enhances their social definition, as well as a tool for social analysis and understanding of others, leading to a constant need to be online and connected (Benkler, 2018; Riva, 2016).

The field of Social Network Addiction (SNA) is confronted with a multitude of methodological obstacles that impede the development of this area within cyber-psychology (Kuss, 2017). One of the main challenges is the lack of consistency in the conceptualization and measurement of different types of digital addiction. Various studies have used different definitions, frameworks and assessment tools to study SNA, resulting in difficulties in comparing and generalizing the results across studies (Lin, 2011; Wellman, 2018). Additionally, the use of different cut-off values for determining problematic use or addiction in SNA research, further complicates the comparability of the results across studies (Kuss et al., 2013).

Despite these challenges, there is a growing body of literature that has applied similar criteria to the study of behavioral addiction in various forms such as shopping addiction, work addiction, Facebook addiction, smartphone addiction, internet addiction, gambling addiction, and social media addiction (Kuss, 2017; Shek et al., 2016). Such consensus in the literature provides a solid foundation for the implementation of such criteria in SNA research (Kuss et al., 2013).

Furthermore, research in SNA also need to take into account the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the online social environment (Wellman, 2018), and how it impacts the way people interact and form social networks (Lin, 2011). This highlights the importance of using longitudinal studies and mixed-methods approach in SNA research to capture the complexity and nuances of online social interactions (Andreassen et al., 2016; Billieux et al., 2015; Clark & Callja., 2008; Kuss et al., 2013; Monacis, 2016; Shahnawaz, 2020; Wellman, 2018).

Impact of digital addiction on mental health

Historically, substance abuse has been considered the primary driver of addiction (Darcq & Kieffer, 2018; Karch, 2019; Nestler, 2022; Simon, 2020). However, recent classification systems, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-DSM-5 (APA, 2013), and the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases, eleventh revision (WHO, 2018), have recognized the emergence of non-substance related addictions, such as digital addiction. These classification systems acknowledge that pleasurable behaviors can also lead to addiction (Kwak, 2023). According to Tikhonov (2015), internet addiction is characterized by a non-chemical dependency on internet use. Individuals with this disorder may experience an excessive need to access the internet, despite the impact it may have on other aspects of their lives, such as employment, health, education, and familial responsibilities, and may result in partial or total impairment or distress (Griffiths, 2014; Restrepo, 2020; Shaw, 2008).

Prior studies have highlighted the significant concerns associated with internet addiction, particularly in relation to social media (Clark, 2008; Gentina, 2018; Muñoz et al., 2010; Sondhi, 2024). These concerns include disruptions to personal and social life and reductions in academic

performance. Young (2011) conducted the first experimental research on internet addiction at the American Psychological Association's annual conference. She applied the principles for pathological gambling defined by the DSM-IV to diagnose internet addiction as a psychological disorder. Subsequently, Young developed a set of scales to distinguish between internet-dependent and internet-addicted behavior. The characteristics of addictive behavior identified in her research include loss of control over self-actions, withdrawal, and relapse. Additionally, Young found that addictive behavior is associated with decreased social, academic, occupational, and financial functioning among affected individuals, leading her to conclude that digital addiction is a mental disorder requiring diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Young compared internet addiction to substance addiction and introduced self-prevention techniques aimed at avoiding addictive behavior and providing emotional relief. She also identified four psychological triggers that lead to internet addiction: (1) the popularity of applications that draws users to use them more frequently, (2) emotional involvement that creates a sense of serenity that relieves pain and stressful feelings, (3) cognitive alteration that causes the user to feel relief from destructive thoughts and negative emotions, and (4) distressing life events that lead to dissatisfaction with one's life. The more of these factors that are present, the higher the likelihood of digital addiction (APA, 2013; Shek, 2016).

The concept of internet addiction has been a subject of ongoing debate among researchers, with different perspectives on its nature and classification. While some researchers, such as (Young, 2011), have posited that internet addiction should be considered as a mental disorder, others have proposed an alternative perspective. Kuss and Griffiths (2016) have argued that internet addiction should be conceptualized as a technological addiction, as it shares similarities with other behavioral addictions such as gambling, gaming, and shopping addiction.

This alternative perspective is supported by several studies that have identified common features among different forms of behavioral addictions, including excessive use, withdrawal symptoms, tolerance, loss of control, and negative impact on personal and social functioning (Kuss, 2017; Shaw, 2008; Siomos, 2012). Furthermore, research has shown that the use of technology, particularly the internet, has the potential to activate the same neural reward systems as other behavioral addictions (Kuss, 2017; von Deneen et al., 2022).

Kuss and Griffiths (2017) have also proposed a framework for the assessment of internet addiction that aligns with the diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling outlined in the DSM-IV. This framework includes six key dimensions: Salience, Mood modification, Tolerance, Withdrawal, Conflict, and Relapse. These dimensions have been found to be consistently present in different forms of behavioral addictions, including internet addiction (Pandey, 2018).

The characteristics of internet services, such as the ability to induce mood modification, time distortion, gratification, and increased use of online services such as shopping, pornography, and gambling sites, increases the likelihood of engaging in addictive behavior. These symptoms and effects lead to significant deficiencies in various aspects of the addicted users' lives, which lends support to the classification of internet addiction as a mental disorder as mentioned in previous studies (Shek, 2016; Young, 2012). In recognition of this, the American Psychiatric Association is considering including internet addiction in the revised DSM-V, as the lack of an official classification for internet addiction has impeded the development of effective treatment protocols specifically tailored to those suffering from internet addiction (APA, 2013; Shek, 2016).

The excessive use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) has been linked to a range of negative consequences, particularly among teenagers and youth. Studies have shown that excessive use of SNSs can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, including poor social skills (Siomos, 2012), anxiety (Shaw, 2008), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Scott, 2017), depression (Sechi, 2021), and overall reduced well-being (Tyagi, 2022).

Research has also highlighted the negative impact of SNSs on emotional intelligence (EI) traits. EI is the ability to perceive, understand and manage emotions and relationships with others, and it is considered a key factor in personal and professional success (Mayer et al., 2011). Studies have found that the use of SNSs can negatively affect EI traits such as self-motivation (Shaw, 2008), empathy (Siomos, 2012), cooperation (Scott, 2017), and impulse control (Sechi, 2021; Tyagi, 2022).

One of the reasons for these negative consequences is the nature of SNSs which are designed to be highly engaging and addictive, with features such as notifications, push messages and constant updates which can create a sense of urgency and FOMO (fear of missing out) among users. Additionally, the over-reliance on SNSs for social interactions can lead to a decline in face-to-face interactions and poor social skills (Siomos, 2012).

Recent studies utilizing Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) have demonstrated that the human brain continues to undergo changes during the teenage and mid-twenties life span due to internal and external stimuli, with digital media playing a significant role in this process due to its immersive nature. From a neuroscience perspective, while the brain's neural activity is enhanced by the increased processing capabilities provided by digital media, it may also undermine deeper emotional intelligence functions that are strengthened by contemplative and reflective information processing (Cohen, 2022; Pandey, 2018; Rosen, 2012). In other words, the brain requires periods of rest to effectively process and integrate information, make connections between mental frames, and develop a sense of self, which are critical for overall mental and physical well-being (Seal, 2010).

In addition to neural and cognitive consequences of digital addiction, research has pointed to its grave consequences on behavioral and

developmental mental health, such as increased stress and anxiety levels (Seabrook et al., 2016), lowered self-esteem (Mo et al., 2020; Yücens, 2018), and limited social interaction (Sun, 2021). The SNSs communicative setting where easily created and managed relationships while emotionally detached intensifies attitudes towards narcissism and anti-social behavioral trends (Moqbel, 2018; Moretta, 2022; Scott, 2017).

Methodology

Participants

The sample consisted of 727 Palestinian students aged 16-20 of both genders from high schools and universities who were active students of Palestinian schools, universities, and community colleges. The participants were randomly selected based on availability from online communities associated with Palestinian schools, universities, and community colleges. The sample's age and gender distributions are presented in Table 1. Data collection was conducted using a secure web platform to ensure the strict anonymity of the participants.

Table 1 Sample demographics

Age	Total Number	Percentage
16	139	19.1%
17	104	14.3%
18	136	18.7%
19	168	23.1%
20	180	24.8%
Male	219	30.1%
Female	508	69.9%

Measurements and tools

The study designed a data collection tool by combining four psychometric scales in order to fulfill the study's objectives.

WHO Quality of Life Scale: The 5-item World Health Organization Quality of Life Index (WHO-5) is a brief, standardized global assessment tool that evaluates individuals' subjective well-being. The WHO-5, which exclusively comprises positively worded items, reflects the WHO's perspective that positive well-being is synonymous with good mental health. Participants are required to indicate the frequency with which they experienced the statements over the previous two weeks. Responses are

scored on a scale from 0 (indicating no well-being) to 5 (indicating all-time well-being) for each of the five items, thereby allowing a total raw score range of 0 to 25 (indicating the highest possible level of well-being). (WHO, 2012). The QoL scale is applied within the research tool to measure the QoL score among the studied sample and then to help assess their psychological wellbeing with relevance to the SNA addiction explaining the mediating nature of correlations between social networks addiction, and the QoL scale score.

Scale of General Well-Being (SGWB): Longo et al. (2018) developed the Scale of General Well-being (SGWB), which assesses overall well-being as well as 14 distinct aspects of well-being, such as happiness, optimism, and self-awareness, among others. The SGWB uses a 5-point response format and generates responses that cover the full range of the response scale, with mean values approximating the median of the scale. The minimum score on the SGWB is 14, while the maximum is 70 (Stewart-Brown et al., 2008).

Social Networks Addiction Scale (SNAS): The scale can be used either to detect or to explain addictive behavior dimensions or to diagnose patients. Dimension exploration score is calculated by summing each dimension's questions score. A total score can be obtained by summing up all 21 items. The score can range from 21 to 147. Any score above a total score of 84 signifies addiction with three levels of usage diagnosis, controlled, moderate and severe (Griffiths, 2005; Shahnawaz, 2020). The scale was analyzed and validated in Arabic and Palestinian context (Atwan et al., 2022).

Young's Internet Addiction Scale (IAT): The IAT, prepared by Young (2012), is a psychometric tool to assess internet digital addiction. The scale consists of twenty items that measure mild, moderate, and severe levels of addictive behavior. The main conceptual framework of the test is building up regarding addictive internet use as a sort of impulse-control disorder related to online activities and media. The scale was validated in the Palestinian context, achieving a high internal consistency score (0.87). The validity was established by assessing both contextual and construct validity (Mahamid & Berte, 2018).

Procedures

After obtaining the necessary official permissions from the Ministry of Education, the link to the study was shared with 33 Palestinian-targeted schools in thirteen districts, nine universities, and community colleges. The school teachers and administrators helped spread the link among the students and encouraged them to complete the questionnaire. The data were obtained through an online form and converted into an MS-Excel sheet. The lexical data were reduced into numerical data according to a specific coding system. Then the data were transferred into IBM SPSS 23.0 software for processing and analysis.

Statistical plan

The collected data were analyzed using the relational descriptive approach in psychological research, which involved three major sets of statistical analyses. First, general descriptive statistical tests were conducted to calculate the means, medians, and averages of the data demographics variables, including age, gender, educational level, and geographical location. Second, correlation tests were conducted to investigate the relationship between social media addiction trends and mental well-being using statistical Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression models. The researchers explored the predictors and moderators that explained the relationship between SNS addiction and mental well-being.

Ethical Considerations

The research sample consisted of individuals of different age groups, including minors according to the laws of the State of Palestine. To address the participation of minors aged 16-17 years, the researchers followed the necessary protocol and requested authorization from the Ministry of Education (MoE). The MoE reviewed the study's documentation and the data collection methods to ensure the safety of the participants. The researchers also designed the questionnaire to collect only non-personal information to protect the respondents' privacy and anonymity, as per the guidelines of the MoE. By taking these measures, the researchers aimed to conduct the study in an ethical and responsible manner, while ensuring the safety and confidentiality of the participants (MoE, 2017).

Results

According to the SNA scale criteria, 42.8% of the sample reflected normal SNA usability scoring less than 73 on the scale while 47.1% reflected an overuse trend scoring between 74-110, while 8.3% of the sample scored above 111 on the scale, indicating strictly addictive trends. The addiction increased with age ranging from 30% within the 16 years age group to more than 50% within the 20 years age group. The statistical tests came with a high degree of significance where: The Chi-Square of the results equaled .002, Goodman & Kruskal-tau equaled .002, where a value less than .005 is statistically significant.

The Chi-Square .551 and symmetric correlation .159 measurements regarding the geographic distribution with relevance to social media addiction were not significant therefore indicating a uniformity of addictive behavior for the districts of study. The Chi-Square .014 and correlations measurement .014 indicated no statistical significance between the educational levels of the study subjects. The Chi-Square .04 and correlations of Goodman and Kruskal-Tau .04 indicated a significant variation between both sexes, where females were more addicted to social media.

The descriptive statistical analysis of the data revealed normally distributed data, especially for the SNA scale where skewness and kurtosis values were very close to the mean (.133 and -.325) respectively. The normality check was confirmed by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test value (.08) being more than (.05) Because of the normal distribution of the data, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the association between study variables as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Correlations among study variables (N= 722)

Variable	IAT	SNAS	QoL	GWB
IA	1	.781**	-.073	-.258**
SNAS		1	-.162**	-.315**
QoL			1	.592**
GWB				1

** . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed), * . Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

As shown in table 2, approximately 44% of the participants had five to six active social media accounts with Facebook as the most dominant platform reaching 92%. The average number of the SNSs per subject had a weak positive correlation with the SNS addiction (.150). The age and educational level showed also a weak positive correlation to the SNS addiction level (.184), (.150) respectively. The gender of subjects related to the SNS addiction was in favor of the females.

The Pearson correlation matrix showed that SNS addiction was strongly correlated to internet addiction (.781), in a moderate negative correlation to the scale of general well-being (-.315) and in a weak negative correlation to the quality-of-life scale (-.162). On the other hand, the quality-of-life scale was moderately correlated to the general well-being scale (.592) and surprisingly less negatively correlated to Youngs' internet addiction scale (-.73) than the SNS addiction scale (-.162). Another remarkable finding was the elevated correlation between the SNS addiction scale with the general well-being (-.315) compared to the correlation between Youngs' internet addiction scale and the general well-being (-.258).

To further investigate the mediating role of the quality of life among the subjects, the research conducted a hierarchical regression analysis for the general well-being considering SNS addiction, QoL, gender and age as predictors. As shown in table 3, the adjusted R square results indicated that the QoL was the most significant predictor explaining 30% of the studied sample wellbeing while the remaining predictors explained less than 10% of the general well-being.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Model Summary (N=722)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F
1	.315a	.100	.098	1.00304	79.584
2	.632b	.400	.398	.81933	360.063
3	.634c	.402	.399	.81896	1.333

a. Predictors: (Constant), SNS addiction
b. Predictors: (Constant), SNS addiction, QoL
c. Predictors: (Constant), SNS addiction, QoL, Gender, Age
d. Predictors: (Constant), SNS addiction, QoL, Gender, Age
e. Dependent Variable: GWB

Discussion

Since the beginning of the past decade the SNSs proliferation has grown exponentially which has attracted the scientific community to the grave risks of addiction to such platforms. Although the research regarding this issue gained significant attention, yet it is in early stages within the Arab world where youth form one third of the general population. With regard to the study sample which consisted of 722 participants in the age group 16-20 years old, almost 50% of them have five to six active accounts on SNSs (Rabaa'i, 2018).

The research findings indicate that SNSs are widely used among the studied community, with very high usage rates for Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Specifically, 92.6% of the subjects have an active Facebook account, 92% have a WhatsApp account, and 89.1% have an active Instagram account. These findings are consistent with the Data-Portal report of Palestine in 2022, which showed that 3.2 million of the total population 60.1% have active accounts on SNSs, with 2.8 million 53.8% active unique Facebook users and 1.5 million 28.8% active Instagram users. The study found that almost half of the studied sample had between five to six active accounts on SNSs at any given time. The high SNS usage among the studied community highlights the need for further investigation especially among school children where the study faced certain limitations reaching them.

The SNA scale was the primary research tool and it was localized and validated in Arabic language and within Arabic Palestinian culture (Atwan et al., 2022). Comparing the SNA scale results with the other three tests, "IAT, QOL, GWB," statistically, the analysis showed a strong positive correlation between the SNA scale and the IAT, a .781 correlation score is positively high due to the very similar psychometric properties and factorial structure between Youngs' scale and the SNA scale, which supports the scale's ability to measure addictive behavior among subjects. The SNA was

negatively correlated with the QoL scale $-.162$ and the mental wellbeing scale $-.315$. The correlations between the SNA scale and the QoL and GWB scales indicate a seriously negative impact of SNSs addiction on the general well-being of the subjects.

The SNA scale has two diagnostic rules, the first one is divided into two categories; normal and addicted, the second is divided into three categories; normal, overuse and addicted (Shahnawaz, 2020). According to the first one, the research found that 45.8% of the total sample, which consists of 722 students, were considered addicted to social media based on their scores on the SNA scale. Specifically, 331 students scored 84 or above out of a total score of 147 on the scale. By applying the second type of categorization, only 42.8% of the study population reported as normal social platforms users, 47.1% were suffering from social platforms overuse and 8.3% of them reported as addicted to SNSs. Both classifications confirm a very high rate of addiction when compared to international rates, as in many countries, the rate of addiction to social media varies from 5-15% (Alimoradi, 2022; Cheng et al., 2021).

The research findings showed that 44.7% of the subjects who scored 84 and above in the SNA scale, scored less than 56 on the GWB scale, indicating a relatively lowered general well-being. Only 4.7% of the subjects who scored less than 84 in the SNA scale, scored less than 56 in the GWB scale. These findings greatly support the results of scale comparisons where the correlation coefficient between the SNA scale and the GWB scale was negatively correlated with a value equal to $.315$, indicating a high statistical significance. From another perspective, the correlation coefficient between the SNA and the QoL scale was a negative relationship that equaled $.16$ indicating high statistical significance. The data extracted from the statistical analysis of the studied sample support the research hypothesis that social media addiction has a strong negative effect on the student's lives quality and their mental health, and general wellbeing, and these findings meet the findings of previous studies (Longo, 2018; Mahamid & Berte, 2018).

The high SNA addiction rate observed in the Palestinian sample is likely due to several risk factors; the study included only individuals under the age of 30, who are considered digital natives and may have higher exposure to and dependence on social media. Additionally, the participants live in a politically unstable region under occupation, which may increase stress and encourage the use of social media as a coping mechanism. The sample's demographics, including being predominantly unemployed singles with minimal personal responsibility. The combination of these environmental and individual factors might explain the high SNA levels than average.

The linear hierarchal regression analysis results clarified the mediating role of the QoL index over general well-being. The analysis tested four predictors (the SNSs addiction, the quality of life, age and gender) in the hierarchal regression model. As shown in table 3, the adjusted

R square results revealed that the QoL scale results were the most significant predictor explaining the tested subjects' general well-being among the other analyzed predictors. On the other hand, age and gender were negligible in the hierarchical regression model explaining the general well-being. These results are consistent with the basic definition of the quality of life as a cognitive component of subjective general well-being (Diener, 1999; Medvedev, 2018). Therefore, the QoL was the major mediating variable explaining the general well-being in the sample.

The research strongly suggests that excessive social media use has certain and confirmed effects on the youth's mental health and general well-being. This result, compared to the most popular SNSs among the Palestinian youth, presents Facebook and Instagram as the most popular social media platforms and eventually as the most addictive SNSs among the Palestinians. This conclusion requires further investigation to clarify differences among the SNSs related to the pattern and platform of choice related to SNSs addiction.

The research findings were consistent with the social learning theories (Bandura, 1977; Rotter, 2017), as they discussed the impact of the socio-behavioral model. They argued that young people are vulnerable to certain environmental factors related mainly to social interaction dependent attitude that pushes them towards deeper and time-consuming digital socialization, which in turn drives them into addictive behavior (Lang, 2021). Results were consistent with the findings of previous studies in different geographical locations (Andreassen, 2016; Cerniglia, 2017; Cheng, 2021; Kuss, 2017; Shek, 2016; Su, 2020; Young, 2011), reflecting some kind of resemblance in the Palestinian youth's digital behavior with the global community. In fact, more than 90% of the students who showed signs of SNS overuse were found to have lower scores on measures of general well-being, as well as relatively low scores on measures of life quality, which also affected their well-being (Lang, 2021).

Conclusions

Digitally-addicted people typically show diminished self-control and an urge to go online and generally suffer from withdrawal effects such as depression, lowered labor, learning functionality, anxiety, physical activity, lowered sleep quality, and lowered self-esteem. They were almost showing similar symptoms to alcohol or drug abuse (Echeburúa, 2010; Seabrook et al., 2016; Wegmann et al., 2015). These risk factors that result from addictive behavior require further academic and clinical attention, particularly in the Arabic region, due to the scarcity of research in this field.

The research has concluded that digital media addiction, mainly social media platforms addiction among students of universities and high schools, is a prevalent and established problem in Palestine. Also, the research has proven that digitally addictive behavior among the Palestinian youth indeed leads to negative mental, emotional, and maybe physical impairment due to substance-like addictive trends. The quality-of-life index

had a perceptible mediating role over the youth general well-being due to multiple sets of environmental risk factors. Advancing research focusing on investigating the phenomenon in the Arabic region to develop preventive counter-addiction measures and procedures in sustainable and larger-scale approach with a more controlled research environment, is a top priority to protect future generations.

Statement of Competing Interests

The authors do not declare any interest.

Ethics Approval

All procedures in this study involving human participants were under the ethical standards of Al-Quds University and An-Najah University's Research Ethics Boards, the Ministry of Education in Palestine, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2010), and the 2013 Helsinki Declaration. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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