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## The Influence of Social Media on Relationship Dynamics among Maldivian Youth

Aishath Rafiyya <sup>1\*</sup>, Tanpat Kraiwanit <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1-2</sup> Faculty of Economics, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani, Thailand

\* Corresponding Author: Aishath Rafiyya

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### Abstract

This study investigates the intricate relationships between demographic factors, social media usage patterns, and their impact on the social dynamics of Maldivian youth. Specifically, it examines how age, gender, marital status, education level, daily social media usage, platform preferences, primary motivations for use, and posting frequency influence young people's relationships and social interactions in the Maldives. Employing a quantitative design, data was collected from 408 Maldivian youth using online questionnaires. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized to analyze the data. Key findings include: a peak in social media impact for the 27-31 age group, suggesting a critical period of personal and professional engagement; gender differences potentially reflecting broader societal norms; higher impact on single individuals, indicating social media's role in relationship formation; and a "sweet spot" of moderate to high usage (1-4 hours daily) correlating with increased impact. The study also found that platform choice significantly influenced social media's impact, with TikTok users reporting the highest effects, likely due to the platform's growing popularity and unique features. Moreover, those using social media primarily for professional networking experienced greater impact, highlighting the platform's evolving role beyond personal communication. These findings underscore the complex interplay between personal characteristics, usage patterns, and social media's influence on Maldivian youth. By providing insights into this understudied population, this research contributes valuable data to the growing body of cross-cultural social media studies. The results have implications for policymakers and other stakeholders seeking to understand and navigate the evolving digital landscape in the Maldives and similar cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** maldivian youth, social media, demographic factors, usage patterns, social dynamics

### Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of modern communication, shaping how individuals and organizations interact, share information, and build relationships. With platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, billions of users worldwide engage in real-time exchanges of ideas, opinions, and content. Social media has not only transformed personal communication but also revolutionized industries like marketing, journalism, and entertainment by providing unprecedented access to global audiences (Ausat, 2023; Limna *et al.*, 2023; Ong & Toh, 2023) <sup>[4, 31, 20]</sup>. In the Maldives, where social media is deeply woven into everyday life, young people navigate relationships within a rapidly evolving digital environment. Maldivian youth, much like their peers globally, are digital natives, spending an average of eight hours daily on platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram. This high level of engagement highlights the pivotal role of social media in shaping communication, interpersonal relationships, and social identity (Hatamleh *et al.*, 2023; Kemp, 2023; The Island Feed, 2024) <sup>[12, 15, 29]</sup>. The benefits of social media include maintaining relationships, facilitating new connections, and fostering supportive networks, particularly in geographically dispersed communities like the Maldives.

However, concerns remain regarding its potential to spark conflict, exacerbate privacy concerns, and contribute to cyberbullying, as these platforms often blur the boundaries between private and public spheres (Byrne *et al.*, 2018; Scherini, 2020; Sun *et al.*, 2021; Al-Turif & Al-Sanad, 2023) [6, 24, 28, 2].

The influence of social media is shaped by cultural factors, with norms, values, and communication styles affecting how platforms are used and understood across different contexts (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Hsu *et al.*, 2021) [18, 13]. In the Maldivian context, social media usage reflects unique cultural dynamics, such as the importance of familial and community ties, while also exposing youth to global trends and values. This intersection of local traditions and global digital influences calls for a deeper exploration of how social media impacts interpersonal relationships, mental health, and social behavior among Maldivian youth (UNICEF, 2022; Udayanga, 2023) [35, 33]. Although prior research has focused on the growth of social media in the Maldives, there is limited insight into its effects on personal relationships. The growing concerns around mental health further emphasize the need for context-specific studies on social media's impact on interpersonal dynamics. This study aims to examine how demographic factors (age, gender, marital status, education level), social media usage patterns (daily usage, most-used platforms, primary motivations), and posting frequency influence the relationships and social dynamics of Maldivian youth. The study's findings contribute to understanding the cultural and social implications of social media in shaping young people's experiences and interactions in the Maldives.

## 2. Literature Review

The term "social media" emerged from the evolution of social networking through technology and internet-based tools. Today, social media serves as a powerful instrument for businesses of all kinds, thanks to its ability to engage consumers and inspire action. It offers an unparalleled opportunity to connect individuals around shared interests, enabling the exchange of knowledge, the development of ideas, and interaction with like-minded communities through online networks. Social media encompasses a wide array of platforms, including content-sharing communities, social networking sites, micro-blogging platforms, and professional networks. In recent years, social media has become a vital component of digital marketing strategies and is poised to maintain its prominence in the future. Through popular platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as e-commerce giants like eBay and Amazon, individuals now have the means to voice their opinions on products and services to a global audience. With people devoting significant portions of their time to these platforms, social media continues to shape how we communicate, collaborate, and consume content in the digital age (Akhtar *et al.*, 2023) [1]. Social media has a significant impact on global communication dynamics, providing unprecedented opportunities for intercultural dialogue and knowledge exchange. Understanding the impact of social media on cross-cultural communication is critical in today's interconnected world (Fazil *et al.*, 2024) [9].

Demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and education level significantly influence social media usage patterns. Age often determines platform preference, with younger users gravitating toward visually driven apps like

Instagram and TikTok, while older demographics may prefer Facebook (Perrin & Anderson, 2019) [15]. This age-based preference is further supported by Auxier and Anderson (2021) [5], who found that 71% of 18-29 year-olds use Instagram, compared to just 13% of those 65 and older. Gender differences are also evident in social media usage. Women typically engage more in social and community-building activities, whereas men may be more inclined toward news and entertainment consumption (Thelwall, 2008) [30]. This gender disparity is particularly noticeable on platforms like Pinterest, where women are significantly more likely to be users than men (Auxier & Anderson, 2021) [5]. Marital status can affect usage frequency, as single individuals often use social media for networking and relationship-building, while married users might focus on maintaining existing connections (Hargittai, 2007) [11]. This is consistent with findings from Toma and Hancock (2013) [32], who observed that single individuals tend to use social media more intensively for self-presentation and relationship seeking. Education level also plays a role in social media usage patterns. Higher-educated users tend to engage with platforms for professional networking and information-gathering (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009) [36]. LinkedIn, for instance, is used by 51% of adults with a bachelor's or advanced degree, compared to just 10% of those with a high school diploma or less (Auxier & Anderson, 2021) [5].

In terms of usage patterns, the amount of time spent on social media daily varies, with many users averaging between two to three hours per day (Global Web Index, 2020) [10]. Most-used platforms differ based on demographics, but globally, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok dominate (Kemp, 2021) [14]. Users' primary motivations for engaging with social media include staying connected with friends and family, consuming news, entertainment, seeking information, or promoting personal and professional brands (Whiting & Williams, 2013) [37]. These motivations can significantly influence how individuals interact with social media platforms and the impact of this usage on their lives (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016) [26]. Posting frequency depends on the individual's purpose for using social media. Casual users might post occasionally, primarily to share personal milestones or photos, while more engaged users—such as influencers or businesses—post multiple times a day to maintain visibility and interaction with their audiences (Ellison *et al.*, 2007) [8]. This variation in posting behavior can have significant implications for user engagement and the overall social media experience (Deters & Mehl, 2013) [7].

## 3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to investigate the impact of demographic factors and social media usage patterns on relationships and social dynamics among Maldivian youth. Online questionnaires created using Google Forms were disseminated via various social media platforms to collect data, ensuring wide reach and accessibility. Prior to implementation, the questionnaire was pre-tested on 30 respondents to ensure its effectiveness, following recommendations from Sitthipon *et al.* (2022) [27]. The sample size was meticulously calculated using a statistical formula, with a significance level ( $p$ ) of 0.5, precision of  $\pm 5\%$ , and a 95% confidence level. Following the recommendations of Kraivanit *et al.* (2023) [31] and Thetlek *et al.* (2023) [16], this calculation determined a minimum

required sample size of 384. However, to enhance the study's robustness and account for potential non-responses, the sample was expanded to 408 participants, selected through convenience sampling. Data collection spanned a three-month period, allowing for the capture of current and relevant information while also enabling the observation of evolving trends, thus enhancing the reliability and accuracy of the research findings. The survey instrument gathered comprehensive data on participants' age, gender, marital status, education level, daily social media usage, preferred platforms, primary motivations, and posting frequency. To analyze this rich dataset, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted, facilitating the identification of statistically significant differences in social media impact across various demographic and usage-related categories. This methodological approach enabled a nuanced examination of how multiple factors interact to influence social media's role in the lives of Maldivian youth, providing valuable insights into this understudied population. The extended data collection period and the comprehensive nature of the survey allowed for a thorough exploration of the complex relationships between demographic factors, social media usage patterns, and their impacts on youth social dynamics in the Maldives.

#### 4. Results

A comprehensive dataset was gathered from 408 participants who completed detailed online surveys. The responses were carefully coded and analyzed, ensuring that the findings were well-aligned with the research objectives and provided robust insights into the study's focus.

**Table 1:** Age Group Analysis

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
17 - 21	120	3.30	.460	34.301	.000
22 - 26	87	3.32	.739		
27 - 31	116	4.03	.678		
32 - 35	85	3.56	.544		
Total	408	3.57	.680		

Table 1 presents the ANOVA results for different age groups. It shows significant differences in mean scores across age groups ( $F = 34.301$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The age group of 27-31 exhibits the highest mean score (4.03), whereas the 17-21 and 22-26 age groups show lower means (3.30 and 3.32, respectively). This indicates that age significantly influences the impact of social media on relationships and social dynamics, with individuals in their late 20s to early 30s potentially experiencing the greatest effect.

**Table 2.** Gender Analysis

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Female	212	3.35	.479	34.402	.000
Male	196	3.74	.765		
Total	408	3.57	.680		

Table 2 presents the ANOVA results comparing females and males. It shows a significant gender difference in the impact of social media on relationships among Maldivian youth ( $F = 34.402$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Males report a higher mean score (3.74) compared to females (3.35), suggesting that males may experience a greater influence of social media on their

relationships and social dynamics. This indicates that gender plays a key role in shaping how social media affects interpersonal interactions in this context.

**Table 3:** Marital Status Analysis

Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Married	152	3.42	.496	45.689	.000
Single	120	3.95	.728		
Divorced	88	3.26	.637		
In a Relationship	48	3.03	.183		
Total	408	3.57	.680		

As presented in Table 3, marital status shows significant differences ( $F = 45.689$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Single individuals have the highest mean score (3.95), followed by married (3.42), divorced (3.26), and those in relationships (3.03). This suggests that relationship status significantly influences how social media affects social dynamics, with single individuals potentially experiencing the most impact.

**Table 4:** Education Level Analysis

Education	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Secondary	143	3.67	.777	22.418	.000
Undergraduate	180	3.47	.654		
Postgraduate	62	3.40	.651		
Total	408	3.57	.680		

Table 4 shows the ANOVA results for different education levels (Secondary, Undergraduate, Postgraduate). Education level shows significant differences ( $F = 22.418$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those with secondary education have the highest mean score (3.67), followed by undergraduates (3.47) and postgraduates (3.40). This indicates that education level plays a role in how social media influences relationships and social dynamics among Maldivian youth.

**Table 5:** Daily Usage Analysis

Daily Usage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Less than 1 hour	10	3.17	.378	20.421	.000
1 - 2 hours	45	4.00	.000		
3 - 4 hours	67	4.00	.000		
More than 4 hours	286	3.63	.753		
Total	408	3.57	.680		

As presented in Table 5, there are significant differences based on daily social media usage ( $F = 20.421$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those using social media for 1-2 hours or 3-4 hours daily have the highest mean scores (both 4.00), while those using it less than 1 hour have the lowest (3.17). This suggests that moderate to high daily usage has a more significant impact on relationships and social dynamics.

**Table 6:** Most Used Platforms Analysis

Most Used Platforms	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Instagram	162	3.14	.347	15.860	.000
Facebook	142	3.20	.404		
TikTok	102	3.77	.425		
Total	408	3.57	.680		

Table 6 displays the ANOVA results for the most used social media platforms. The choice of platform shows significant differences ( $F = 15.860$ ,  $p < .001$ ). TikTok users have the

highest mean score (3.77), followed by Facebook (3.20) and Instagram (3.14). This indicates that the choice of social media platform influences its impact on relationships and social dynamics among Maldivian youth.

**Table 7:** Primary Motivation Analysis

Primary Motivation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Entertainment	220	3.00	.000	11.492	.000
Communication with friends	120	3.06	.250		
Professional Networking	60	3.59	.638		
Total	408	3.57	.680		

From Table 7, primary motivation for using social media shows significant differences ( $F = 11.492, p < .001$ ). Those using social media for professional networking have the highest mean score (3.59), followed by entertainment (3.00) and communication with friends (3.06). This suggests that the motivation for using social media influences its impact on relationships and social dynamics.

**Table 8:** Frequency of Posting Analysis

Frequency of Posting	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Daily	101	3.35	.601	17.893	.000
Weekly	183	3.03	.183		
Less frequently	124	3.79	.693		
Total	408	3.57	.680		

Table 8 presents the results for different frequencies of posting on social media. Posting frequency shows significant differences ( $F = 17.893, p < .001$ ). Those who post less frequently have the highest mean score (3.79), followed by daily posters (3.35) and weekly posters (3.03), indicating that posting frequency influences how social media affects relationships and social dynamics among Maldivian youth.

## 5. Discussions

The study identified statistically significant differences in how various factors—age, gender, marital status, education, daily usage, platform preference, motivation, and posting frequency—affect social media use and its influence on relationships and social dynamics. The finding that the 27-31 age group experiences the highest impact aligns with studies like Perrin (2015) [21], which found that young adults (18-29) are the most likely to use social media. However, the study's peak in the slightly older 27-31 group is interesting. It may reflect what Arnett (2000) [3] termed "emerging adulthood," a period of life between adolescence and full adulthood where individuals are establishing careers and long-term relationships, potentially increasing their reliance on social media for both personal and professional purposes. For gender differences, the observed gender differences echo findings from other studies, such as Thelwall (2008) [30], which found that males and females tend to use social media differently. However, the specific nature of these differences can vary greatly between cultures. The findings in the Maldivian context contribute to the growing body of cross-cultural social media research, such as Rosen *et al.* (2010) [23], which emphasizes the importance of considering cultural norms in social media usage patterns. Regarding relationship status, the higher impact on single individuals aligns with Toma and Hancock (2013) [32], who found that single people often use social media more intensively for self-presentation

and relationship seeking. This finding adds nuance to our understanding of how relationship status influences social media use in different cultural contexts. In terms of education, the variation across education levels is consistent with studies like Valenzuela *et al.* (2009) [36], which found that education level can influence how people use and are affected by social media. The findings in the Maldivian context provide valuable data for comparative studies across different educational systems and cultural backgrounds.

In terms of usage intensity, the "sweet spot" of moderate to high usage (1-4 hours) correlating with higher impact is an intriguing finding. It somewhat contradicts studies like Shakya and Christakis (2017) [25], which found that increased Facebook use was associated with decreased well-being. The study's results suggest a more nuanced relationship, possibly indicating that moderate use can be beneficial in certain cultural contexts or for certain outcomes. Moreover, the prominence of TikTok's impact aligns with recent global trends, as noted in research like Omar and Dequan (2020) [19], which highlight TikTok's rapid rise and unique appeal to younger users. This study adds to this body of knowledge by providing specific data from the Maldivian context. Regarding motivation for use, the finding that professional networking as a primary motivation correlates with higher impact is interesting in light of research like Utz (2016) [34], which found that using social media for job-related purposes can increase life satisfaction. This suggests that the impact of social media use may depend significantly on the user's goals and intentions. For posting frequency, the higher impact on less frequent posters is an intriguing finding that seems to contradict research like Deters and Mehl (2013) [7], which found that increased posting frequency on Facebook reduced loneliness. This discrepancy highlights the need for more research into the complex relationships between posting behaviors and social media's impact.

## 6. Conclusions

The study underscores that the impact of social media on relationships and social dynamics among Maldivian youth is influenced by a variety of demographic and usage factors. These results reveal the complex role of social media in Maldivian society and suggest that its effects vary across different groups.

This research provides valuable insights into the social media landscape of the Maldives, a context that is often underrepresented in existing literature. The findings offer guidance for targeted interventions and policies to promote healthy social media use among different demographic groups. The study emphasizes the importance of considering multiple factors in social media research, rather than treating users as a homogeneous group. Furthermore, the results could serve as a foundation for future longitudinal studies examining changes in social media's impact over time in the Maldives.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations and suggests avenues for future research. The use of convenience sampling may affect the generalizability of the results, and the cross-sectional design limits insights into long-term trends. Self-reported data could introduce biases, and the focus on popular platforms might not capture the effects of emerging social media trends. Additionally, the study did not explore potential interactions between demographic factors and social media usage, such as the influence of socio-



economic status or family background on social media impact. Future research should employ diverse sampling methods, longitudinal designs, and mixed-method approaches to capture a more comprehensive view. Expanding the scope to include a broader range of platforms, examining additional factors like socio-economic status, and conducting cross-cultural comparisons could provide a deeper understanding of social media's evolving role in various contexts.

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