

Spirituality-Based Psychotherapies in Relation to Social Media Addiction: A Review

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Abstract

Social media addiction has become a pressing concern, characterized by compulsive usage that significantly impacts mental health. In the digital age, where the boundaries between the virtual and the real have blurred, social networking sites (SNS) have emerged as pivotal platforms that shape the lives of young people. Most people's life now revolve around social networking sites, particularly those of teens. Excessive engagement with social media can have adverse effects on individuals' minds, bodies, and spirits, potentially leading to dependence and addiction. Thus, an effective intervention would require addressing these domains which are mind, body and soul. While all the intervention available such as CBT or digital detox are effective in providing short term relief, they often overlook the existential and deeper aspects leading to addiction. Primary articles were searched using two databases namely PubMed and Google Scholar. Then other relevant articles were reviewed using the reference list of the primary studies. The present study explains how spirituality can provide a deeper sense of meaning, enhance emotional regulation, and promote resilience. Moving forward, the mechanism underlying the impact of spirituality-based interventions have been highlighted in this study and explains how just by shifting the focus from external validation to inner fulfilment, spirituality-based psychotherapy encourages individuals to find peace within the chaos of digital life. Lastly, the potential challenges that could be faced while planning and implementing the spirituality-based psychotherapies are discussed to complement the overall concept of the paper. Hence, integrating spiritual principles and practices is a key to transform the addictive patterns associated with social media.

Keywords: Addiction, meditation, spirituality, social media, social networking sites

INTRODUCTION

Last several decades have seen a meteoric growth in the social media usage especially among young children. The advancement of Web based technology, availability of mobile phones and easy internet access have facilitated the consistency of social media especially networking sites in our daily life. Easy availability of internet is giving access to information, but also immoderate time spend on internet and social networking sites is associated with problems of Insomnia, anxiety, depression, and low self-

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esteem [1]. But before talking about the treatment, the paramount question to address is, if social media addiction is a psychological condition, and the question of whether it should be recognized and addressed as such Griffiths et al. (2014) stated that, “any behaviour (e.g., social networking) which fulfils the mentioned six criteria can be clearly defined and operationalized as indicating an addiction” [2]. Six criteria being, Salience (dominance of social networking sites in one’s thoughts, feeling, and behaviours), Mood modification, Tolerance, Withdrawal symptoms (feeling uneasy or unpleasant when one is not able to use social media. Conflict in real life affairs and

other activities related to academics, work or relationships. Additionally, the abrupt cessation of online social networking (such as loss of Internet connectivity) may lead to signs and symptoms in chronic users which substantially resemble symptoms observed during withdrawal from drugs, alcohol, or nicotine [3]. Problematic and excessive social media usage is associated with various psychological and emotional problems that affects the adjustment of adolescents.

While many available interventions such as CBT, digital detox strategies etc focuses on psychological and behavioural modifications, which primarily focus on modifying thought patterns, increasing self-awareness and reducing screen time. While these approaches are effective in providing short term relief, often overlook the deeper and existential aspects of addiction. This study aims to understand the role of spirituality and associated factor such as mindfulness, meditation, prayer etc in social media addiction and recovery. The primary objective of this research is to examine how spirituality-based practices can help in mitigating the impact of social media addiction. By analysing the mechanisms of influence, the study seeks to reveal how spirituality can be beneficial in treating the social media addiction just like the other behavioural addiction.

Spiritual health, which encompasses aspects of meaning, purpose and connection beyond oneself, can potentially offer a holistic approach mitigating social media addiction. Spiritual health model may foster long term resilience and purpose in one's life which can contribute to overall health and well-being beyond the material satisfaction. Dictionary defined spirituality with the phrases such as "affecting the soul" or "pertaining to God" etc. The integration of spirituality in psychotherapy offers a unique and profound approach to addressing social media addiction. By fostering a sense of connection to a higher purpose and promoting practices that enhance self-awareness and self-regulation, spirituality-based psychotherapy can effectively decrease the compulsive behaviors linked to addiction to social media also, counterbalance the external validation often sought through social media which can lead to healthier relationships with technology and a more balanced, fulfilling life.

THEORIES AND CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE TOPIC

Viktor Frankl in his book "*Man's Search for Meaning*" emphasised on the idea of discovering significance and direction in sufferings is vital for psychological well-being and developing resilience. In his "Logotherapy", Frankel centers on assisting individuals in discovering significance and direction in their lives. By exploring philosophical questions and fostering a sense of purpose, individuals can shift their focus from superficial social media interactions to more meaningful, fulfilling experiences.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs: Abraham Maslow's framework emphasised on the importance of peak experiences as moments of intense joy and fulfilment, often accompanied by unity and transcendence. Maslow believed that all these experiences are essential for personal growth, self-actualization resulting into a greater well-being and spiritual insights.

John Bowlby in his "*Attachment theory*", examines how early relationships affect a person's emotional development. Within the spiritual realm, it is thought that cultivating a stable bond with a higher power or spiritual being can offer a steady sense of love and safety, diminishing need on social media for emotional support and social acceptance. Also, the transference of Attachment needs from unreliable social media connections to more reliable and nurturing spiritual relationships.

Spiritual Crisis Model: This model views addiction as a sign of a deeper spiritual crisis, where individuals seek to fill a void or escape existential pain through substance use. Effective treatment and long-term rehabilitation are said to depend on addressing the underlying spiritual crises.

"Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Model": This model forms the theoretical foundation of holistic interventions in substance abuse. It is thought that biological, social, psychological, and spiritual variables all have an impact on addiction. The model supports for a comprehensive treatment approach that addresses all these dimensions to achieve sustained recovery.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Özturan et al. (2022) investigated the potential correlation between university students' addiction to social media and mindfulness [4]. The findings of the study showed that high score on mindfulness were associated with low level of social media addiction. Role of Emotional regulation and self-awareness were studied as the mediating factors in this study which could be enhanced using mindfulness practices could mediate the association between mindfulness and social media addiction. The researcher highlighted the potential mindfulness-based intervention as a guarding factor against the advancement of social media addiction among university students.

Yeung, J. W. (2021) conducted an empirical study to understand the impact of religious participation by recovering addicts on their later abstinence [5]. The researcher emphasized in their findings that faith-based treatments grounded in Christian principles of addiction were more effective than secular treatments in enhancing religious engagement, religious growth, and sustained abstinence among recovering addicts post-treatment.

Chwaszcz, J. et al. (2018) analysed the function of spirituality in addiction and recovery [6]. The study underscored the importance of a multidimensional approach to understand spirituality and highlighted the significant impact that spiritual beliefs and practices had on the recovery process.

Adedoyin, C., Burns, N., Jackson, H. M., & Franklin, S. (2014) highlighted the importance of comprehensive approach in substance abuse treatment considering the physical, emotional, social as well as spiritual factors of an individual's life to promote well-being and recovery [7]. The authors also emphasized on the integration of holistic approaches with traditional substance abuse treatments such as CBT, 12-step programs and medication assisted therapy etc. the study discussed about various holistic interventions such as: Mindfulness and meditation (to create self-awareness, reduces stress and promote emotional regulation), nutritional therapy (promoting healthy eating habits and manage cravings to reduce the impact of withdrawal symptoms), arts and music therapy and spiritual practices such as participating in 12-step programs, praying, counseling, and other practices that promote community and aid in recovery. Thus, providing a framework for understanding how these interventions can be utilized in substance abuse treatment.

Priester P.E et al. (2009) studied how behaviour change models could be applied to better understand the spiritual mechanisms that facilitate change in people undergoing substance abuse treatment [8]. The authors believed that spiritual mechanisms are not distinct from behavioural processes but are deeply intertwined with cognitive as well as motivational aspects of change. Hence, providing a conceptual framework for developing treatment programs that can incorporate spiritual assessments as well as interventions such as spiritual counselling, personal spiritual practices, and forming spiritual communities to support holistic recovery.

Cook, C. C. (2004) studied the connection between spirituality and addiction, highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating spiritual components into addiction treatment [9]. By exploring the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, the article underscores the importance of a holistic approach that addresses the spiritual elements of recovery. This outlook not only enhances our insight of addiction but also offers valuable insights for developing more effective and inclusive treatment strategies. For those interested in the function of spirituality in addiction recovery, this article offers a foundational framework and encourages further exploration into how spiritual practices and beliefs can support individuals in overcoming addiction and achieving long-term sobriety

Neff, J. A., & MacMaster, S. A. (2005) examined the widespread use of 12-step programs and the incorporation of prayer, meditation, and holistic methods, particularly in the context of recovering from substance abuse [10].

Sample from 139 substance abuse treatment centre. Of the total sample was collected for a survey. It was found out that out of total, about 91% of the program endorsed a twelve-step approach, 26% of the

programs actively used prayers and nearly 58% of the program used meditation as a component of treatment. The authors proposed that behavioural change models can be integrated with spiritual mechanisms in substance use treatment. They highlight how spirituality contributes to recovery by addressing psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions.

DISCUSSION

Previously, it has been demonstrated that the ongoing use and misuse of substances can frequently have detrimental effects on the mental, physical, and spiritual well-being of individuals. This persistent use can potentially escalate into dependence and addiction. Hence an effective intervention, would address these same domains during treatment [11]. Various clinicians have supported the role of daily prayers and meditations in managing day to day chaos. Many coping theorists believed that, the first step to manage daily life is to learn to differentiate between those problems that are under the individual's control and those outside his/her. It is often seen that; people take the help of prayer and meditation when problems are outside of their control. Social media addiction is an emerging area of behavioural addiction study akin to other forms of non-substance-related addictions such as gambling. Social media addiction shares many similarities with other behaviour addiction such as: obsessive checking of phones, preoccupation of thoughts related to social media, inability to limit use, neglect other activities (work, studies, social interactions) due to social media, increase use of social media to achieve same level of enjoyment i.e. tolerance and lastly emotional distress in form of anxiety, irritability and negative mood when not able to use any of social media sites that could be accounted as withdrawal symptoms. Several underlying factors which can be attributed as low self-esteem, constant need for social validation, using social media to escape from real-life problems, social comparisons, seeking empathy, validation and support from online communities and receiving instant gratification to boost mood can play a crucial role in leading to social media addiction. Low conscientiousness can directly contribute to the development of the addiction. Spirituality as a coping method may play a protective role in improving physical and mental health. Integrating spirituality into addiction treatment can enhance recovery outcomes by addressing the holistic need of the individual. Religious or spiritual participation is increasingly recognized as a protective factor against the development of substance abuse problems [12, 13]. Miller (1997) discussed the function of forgiveness, salvation, social support, positive role models, and empathy within the therapeutic relationship as the elements of spiritual change during treatment. "Faith-based treatment programs" and 12-step programs, such as "Alcoholics Anonymous", stresses upon the association with a Higher Power and continue to dominate addiction treatment approaches. Spirituality often neglected in traditional addiction therapies, is crucial in the recovery process. Various studies showed a positive association between spirituality or religious involvement and successful rehabilitation from substance abuse [14]. Previously the researchers had advocate for integrating spiritual discussions into therapy by addressing clients' existential questions, and encouraging spiritual practices like meditation, prayer, mindfulness, and participation in religious communities which can help clients find meaning and purpose in life. Not only this, but spirituality can also aid in recovery process, by helping individuals move beyond self-centeredness towards connecting with others along with emphasizing the significance of community and acceptance by others, which is a fundamental step in the whole recovery process. Practices such as prayer, mindfulness, guided meditation, silent contemplation, and spiritual counselling, participation in religious services, and engagement with religious texts provide coping mechanisms for managing stress, cravings, and emotional challenges aids in the broader recovery process, rebuilding life and healing all aspects affected by addiction. Hence the main point this review wants to highlight is the need for interventions that can potentially enhance spirituality, meaning, forgiveness, and connectedness which in turn can increase motivation to change, treatment readiness to aid in the addiction recovery process in terms of social media as well.

Mechanism of Influence

Overall, the common themes highlighting the mechanism of influence of spirituality in addiction treatment are summarised below in Figure 1.

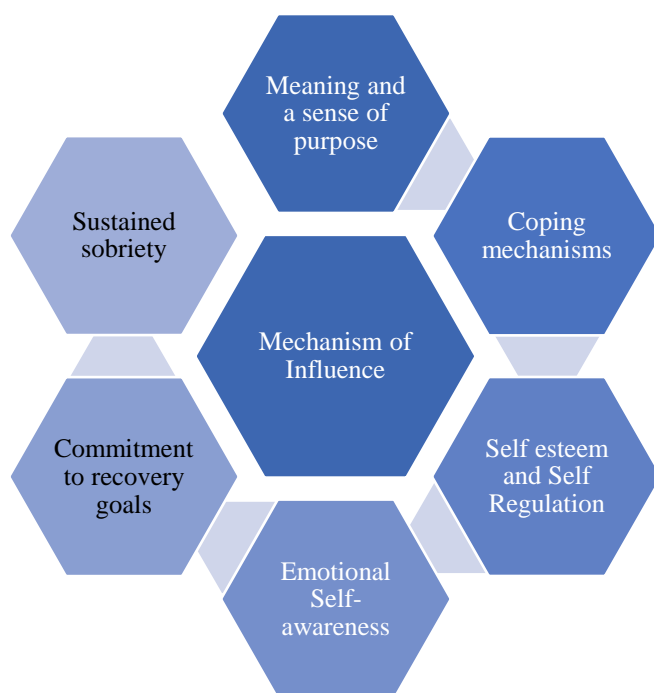


Figure 1. Components Influencing Recovery and Personal Growth.

Meaning and a sense of purpose: It is believed that clients often find meaning and purpose in life through spiritual practices. Gedge, E., & Querney, D (2014) argued that spirituality is a crucial yet silent dimension in the recovery process, which can be seen often neglected in traditional addiction therapies [15]. The author asked the therapist to integrate spiritual discussions into their therapy sessions by addressing client's existential questions, facilitating spiritual practices and encouraging engagements with spiritual communities. Also suggested various spiritual interventions including meditation, prayer, mindfulness and participation in religious and spiritual activities.

Coping mechanisms: Coping strategies are used to reduce or eliminate the negative effects of events or situations that cause stress. The two primary types of coping are emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. The cognitive and behavioral methods of problem-focused coping strategies involve attempting to escape unpleasant situations. Conversely, emotion-focused methods involve efforts to control the emotional reactions often triggered by the circumstances. Walton-Moss, B., Ray, E. M., & Woodruff, K. (2013) highlighted many studies that has reported a positive relationship between spirituality or religious involvement and successful recovery from substance abuse [16]. These practices such as prayer, meditation, participation in religious services, and engagement with religious texts. offer coping mechanism that help individuals in managing stress, cravings and emotional challenges during recovery.

Self-esteem and self-regulation: Social media users often come across a best chosen and curated online "self-presentations" of others, which can subsequently damage the viewers' perception of themselves. Previous research has demonstrated that metacognitive ideas about one's own thinking and self-regulation may have an impact on problematic Internet use and social media addiction [17]. Negative associations were found between social media addiction and college students' mental health and academic performance. Self-esteem had always played an underlying role between social media addiction and decreasing mental health. The authors demonstrated how cognitive restructuring and supportive techniques like diary entry and journaling can be used to treat social media addiction [18].

Emotional Self-awareness: Emotional self awareness entails paying attention to feelings, thinking back on emotional events, and assessing emotions. Relevant literatures had examined the connection

between emotional self-awareness and internet addiction as well as substance addiction [19]. Spiritual communities and practice assist the development of a rooted sense of connectedness which can provide emotional support and a safe space to express and process. A sense of hope and purpose, a reason to live, and chances for development and constructive change are also fostered by religion and spirituality.

Maintaining long-term sobriety and feeling connected to a higher power regularly can sustain rejuvenation and prevent the appreciation for the miracle of sobriety from diminishing. Expressing gratitude and reflecting on the gift of sobriety are essential for this ongoing renewal. Participants with higher levels of spiritual beliefs, hope, faith and practices reported higher level of alcohol abstinence self-efficacy and lower rates of relapse.

Commitment to recovery goals: Higher degrees of spirituality are linked to increased optimism and stress-resilience in those in recovery from substance misuse [20]. Spirituality can induce a virtuous behaviour and often emphasize on delaying the gratification, which can support a sustained commitment to recovery.

Integration of Spiritual Health with Addiction Treatment

Karasu, T. B. (1999) stated that believing in the sacred, believing in unity, and believing in transformation is the path to spirituality [21].

“Accepting and surrender to higher power” Search for meaning is crucial to the process of recovery [22]. This involves recognizing the sacredness in all that surrounds us, where everyday objects and experiences are perceived as profoundly extraordinary.

It means being detached from worldly possessions while still appreciating the wonder of life. According to Storr, a person who can only reconnect with themselves through solitude, only he can connect with his deepest emotions. In reverse process, the more one is in connection with their inner realm, the better he can develop connections with the outer world’s sanctity. And only by becoming a part of this outer world sacredness one may uncover their spirituality. A study on the role of spirituality in the recovery of members of Narcotics Anonymous (NA), a well-known 12-step program for drug addiction, was carried out by Marc Galanter, Helen Dermatis, Stephen Post, and Cristal Sampson in 2013 [23]. Few interventions and practices highlighted in this present study are *12-step programs* (such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous) which is the key concept of spiritual awakening or experiencing a spiritual transformation. Steps 11 and 12 specifically focus on seeking spiritual growth and sharing the message of recovery. These programs encourage regular prayer, meditation, and self-reflection as part of their recovery process. Members are also encouraged to work through the steps with a sponsor, fostering a sense of accountability and spiritual growth. This practice can be transformative for people struggling with social media addiction by reducing anxiety and letting go of the need to control. Relying on higher power can provide emotional, psychological support as well which is much needed during the time of stress and can reduce the urge to engage in addictive behaviour.

“Developing faith/ believing in unity” In Buddhist word- it is “feeling of oneness”. The unity brings meaning, peace and serenity to the self, as life becomes heavy and feels like burden if one is not able to find purpose and meaning in life. Jasper argues that unity cannot be attained through any rational or scientific universal concept, nor does it reside within a universal religion. Instead, unity can only be achieved through unrestricted communication. Believing in unity signifies the alignment of mind, body, and spirit. One method to attain this elusive unity involves nurturing love, which blurs distinctions between us, others, objects, and ultimately the universe. This process extends our personal limits and boundaries. It is thought that when we connect with the transpersonal, we experience a similar ecstasy to that which accompanies falling in love. Instead of temporarily merging with a single beloved object, we permanently unite ourselves with the universe—a fundamental and eternal unity. Developing faith and believing in unity, cultivates the sense of belongingness and connectedness. Faith based communities

or spiritual groups can provide a safe space to engage in communal spiritual practices can potentially replace the unhealthy social media interactions with meaning and life changing conversations. It can also reduce the need to rely on online friends and communities for emotional validation.

“*Spiritual awakening*” spiritual awakening is characterized as a profound realization or experience that brings a significant shift in an individual's perception of themselves and the world. This transformation often includes a deeper link to a higher power or a sense of transcendent significance. Booth, J., & Martin, J. E. (1998) [24] argued that spiritual awakening can be a crucial moment in the recovery process, providing individuals with renewed purpose, motivation, and strength to overcome addiction. While our physical form may be finite, but our true nature is eternal. The spiritual self is realized by negating the ordinary self which means letting go of the subjective sense of being. This state of subjective selflessness involves non-differentiation from comprehensive existence and a deep reflection on impermanence, essentially merging self-awareness with the universe and living all over and in everything. When it comes to social media addiction, an effective intervention is one which can help the client transform himself or herself and not just eliminate the problem. Spiritual awakening often demands a re-evaluation of life's priorities. It can also encourage individual to seek purpose and fulfilment beyond social media.

Interventions

We will now concisely discuss a few proven interventions demonstrating how practices such as mindfulness, gratitude, and compassion, social support are incorporated into addiction treatment can be beneficial in reducing cravings and improve self-regulation.

Religious and Spiritual Counselling integrates clients' spiritual and religious beliefs that can help them find meaning and strength in their recovery journey. This can involve exploring religious texts, engaging in spiritual practices, and receiving guidance from spiritual leaders. Religious communities often provide strong support systems that offer emotional and spiritual support, helping individuals stay committed to their recovery goals. spiritual and religious elements into substance abuse treatment can enhance recovery outcomes.

Regular meditation and prayer are examples of spiritual practices that can promote calm, lower stress levels, and improve self-awareness. These exercises assist people in finding inner strength and a spiritual connection. Mindfulness practices, such as mindful breathing and mindful movement, are discussed as tools to help individuals stay present, manage cravings, and reduce impulsive behaviours related to substance use.

The Behavior Change Model identified three key variables essential for behaviour change: a strong purpose to change, the required skills necessary for the behavior, and the absence of environmental barriers [25]. These variables are particularly significant to recover from substance abuse. The model proposed that in order to develop skills and improving self-efficacy “*Social learning*”, “*Peer Influence*”, and “*Social Reinforcement*” are very crucial. In the initial stages of recovery process, encouraging problem recognition, readiness for treatment, and active engagement can be achieved through peer modelling, sharing information about peer norms and abstinence, and encouraging changes in self-perception and moral values wherein in the later stages of the process, peer influence can play a critical role in bolstering behavioural changes which ultimately helps in enhancing self-efficacy and self-esteem, by offering social support throughout the recovery process.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES:

The review identifies gaps in the current research, including a need for more rigorous, large-scale studies to better understand the long-term impact of spiritual meditation on addiction recovery. Integrating spiritual practices into addiction treatment can enhance their effectiveness but requires training for practitioners and consideration of individual preferences. The diversity of spiritual

meditation practices and emphasizes the need for flexibility in their application. Different individuals may benefit from different types of meditation, and treatment programs should accommodate this diversity. The study highlights the importance of culturally tailored interventions in addiction treatment. The diversity of spiritual and religious beliefs among individuals and emphasizes the need for sensitivity and respect in addressing these factors in treatment.

FUTURE DIRECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Spiritual meditation has a significant positive impact on drug addiction recovery and overall well-being, contributing to reduced cravings, lower relapse rates, and improved psychological health. Treatment programs should consider individuals' spiritual and religious backgrounds and preferences to tailor interventions that resonate with their beliefs and values. Spiritual assessments can be conducted to understand clients' spiritual needs and how best to integrate spiritual practices into their treatment plans. A holistic approach that includes spiritual care addresses the multifaceted needs of individuals in recovery, promoting long-term sobriety and well-being. The integration of spiritual practices into standard addiction treatment programs. This can enhance treatment engagement, retention, and overall outcomes. Programs such as 12-step facilitation, mindfulness-based interventions, and spiritual counseling can be incorporated into existing treatment frameworks. Education and Training Healthcare providers and addiction counselors should receive training in spiritual care to effectively support clients' spiritual needs. Practitioners should be equipped to guide clients through spiritual practices and address any spiritual or emotional challenges that arise. Healthcare providers and counselors should receive training to competently address spiritual and religious aspects in treatment, ensuring they can support clients' spiritual needs without imposing their own beliefs.

CONCLUSION

This review paper illuminates the profound and multifaceted role that spirituality-based psychotherapy can play in addressing the pervasive issue of social media addiction. The increasing prevalence of social media usage has offered numerous benefits but has also given rise to significant mental health challenges, including addiction. Our exploration of existing literature and theoretical frameworks highlights the importance of integrating spirituality into psychotherapeutic practices for social media addiction. Spirituality-based psychotherapy can enhance the recovery process by introducing deeper meaning and purpose in life which often lacks in the life of those struggling with addiction, enhancing coping mechanisms, increasing self-esteem and self-regulation and can potentially help in sustaining long term sobriety by fostering resilience and perseverance in and individual by emphasizing the role of interconnectedness and community in recovery outcomes. The future interventions can be planned around three major areas of spirituality being: accepting and surrendering to the higher power, developing faith /believing in unity and spiritual awakening as highlighted in this review. These dimensions can help find the inner peace and can facilitate a comprehensive healing method when explored in a treatment method. Thus, the future of addiction treatment lies in embracing the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit, and spirituality-based psychotherapy is a crucial step in this direction.

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