

Research Paper

Exploring the Effects of Social Media on Self-Esteem and Mental Health among Young Adults: A Pilot Study

Siddhi Pathak^{1*}, Dr. Madhu Pandey²

ABSTRACT

In today's digital age, when social networking sites are an integral part of everyday life, the subject of social media's consequences on mental health and self-esteem is extremely pertinent. It's widely recognised that we live in a very online, connected world. Research is increasingly pointing to a link between spending too much time on social media platforms and experiencing more anxiety and depression and loneliness, which has raised worries about the impact of social media on mental health. This study delves into the link between social media use and mental health and emphasises self-esteem while highlighting how digital communication shapes self-perception and connections with others. Social media has become an essential part of young adults' lives, influencing their self-esteem and mental health in profound ways. This study investigates its psychological effects, focusing on aspects like body image, social comparisons, and emotional well-being. It examines the impact of carefully curated posts, feedback-driven interactions, and the pressure to maintain an appealing digital persona on self-perception. Additionally, it explores the role of fear of missing out (FOMO) and negative online encounters in amplifying anxiety and diminishing self-worth. While addressing the challenges, the research also highlights the benefits, such as enhanced connectivity and self-expression opportunities. By analysing patterns of usage and their implications, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of social media's influence on young adults and offer guidance on fostering healthy online practices to promote mental resilience.

Keywords: *Social Media, Self-Esteem, Mental Health, Young Adults, Anxiety*

Social media creates a space where people constantly compare themselves to others. Social media has torn down geographical barriers. Social media makes it effortless to connect with loved ones across distances and meet new people with shared interests, offering instant communication, self-expression, and real-time updates on trends. (Mesfin Awoke Bekalu 2019). Social media encourages people to curate idealized versions of themselves, leading to a loss of authentic self-expression and shallow relationships (Turkle, 2011). While these platforms offer opportunities for engagement and social connection, they also introduce complex psychological challenges, particularly in relation to self-esteem and mental health—areas that researchers are still working to fully understand (Branden

¹Student

²Assistant Professor

*Corresponding Author

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1995). One of the most pressing concerns is the way social media has been influencing the self-perception among the people. (Daryl Bem, 1967). Now a days, it is observed that individual's sense of worth is shaped by digital interactions. (Meredith, Giles 2021) Consequently, exposure to flawless images, luxurious vacations, and personal milestones can lead individuals to feel inadequate, fuelling dissatisfaction with their own lives. Studies suggest that frequent social comparison on these platforms is linked to lower self-esteem, making users more vulnerable to negative self-evaluation. (Emma Warnock-Parkes, Jennifer Wild, and David M. CClark, 2022) The negative interactions, cyberbullying, and critical online feedback can contribute to stress and emotional turmoil. (Helen Cowie, 2011; Gonzales, A. L., & Hancock, J. T. (2011) Compulsive activities like browsing in the late hours of the night are common among adolescents, and they seriously interrupt their sleep patterns and have a detrimental effect on their mental and physical well-being (Taddi et al 2024). There have been many studies which suggests that excessive social media consumption, especially passive scrolling without direct engagement also correlates with increased anxiety levels and poorer mental well-being. (Taddi et. al, 2024) Social media use has also been associated with heightened anxiety. (Tripathi and Jain 2024). The pressure to stay active online and accumulating likes, responding to messages, as well as maintaining an engaging digital presence can be overwhelming. The dopamine-driven reward system where likes, comments, and shares provide short-term pleasure can lead to emotional instability when engagement is low (Lin et. al., 2016). Many individuals experience FOMO (fear of missing out) which intensifies feelings of exclusion when they see others participating in activities, they are not a part of trend and end up with anxiousness feeling within them (Chou & Edge 2012). Studies have consistently shown that using social media is associated with higher levels of anxiety, despair, and loneliness (Andreassen et al., 2017; Pratik et al 2023) (Seabrook, 2016) Social media's impact varies depending on individual factors like age, mental health, and personality. Establishing time restrictions and being selective about content can mitigate its adverse effects. The platform itself isn't harmful; its influence depends on how users engage with it.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

- To understand the relationship between time spent on social media and self-esteem.
- To understand the relationship between time spent on social media and mental health.
- To understand the relationship between time spent on social media and GAD.

Hypothesis

- There will be no relationship between time spent on social media and self-esteem.
- There will be significant relationship between time spent on social media and mental health.
- There will be a significant relationship between time spent on social media and anxiety.

Inclusion Criteria

In the present study 90 young adults were included through purposive and snowball sampling technique. The samples were selected between the age range of 18-30 years. The data was collected amongst the Urban population, in Lucknow.

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Exclusion Criteria

Participants who were not enrolled in private colleges or employed in private offices were excluded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 01: Shows Correlation Matrix among Social Media, Self Esteem, Mental Health and GAD.

Correlation Matrix

		SOCIAL MEDIA	SELF ESTEEM	MENTAL HEALTH	GAD-7
SOCIAL MEDIA	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
SELF ESTEEM	Pearson's r	0.057	—		
	df	88	—		
	p-value	0.593	—		
MENTAL HEALTH	Pearson's r	-0.214*	0.050	—	
	df	88	88	—	
	p-value	0.043	0.641	—	
GAD-7	Pearson's r	0.384***	0.001	-0.509***	—
	df	87	87	87	—
	p-value	<.001	0.995	<.001	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

This table 01 shows the correlation matrix which provides insights into the relationships among social media usage, self-esteem, mental health, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) scores. The obtained results elicit that social media has low positive correlation with self-esteem ($r = 0.057$), but this is not statistically significant ($p = 0.593$), indicating that there is no strong evidence of a significant relationship between these two variables. Social media and mental health ($r = -0.214$, $p = 0.043$) have a negative correlation at 0.05 level which means that increased use may have a slight impact on mental health. Thereafter, a moderate positive relationship is observed between social media and GAD scores ($r = 0.384$, $p < 0.001$) at .001. The obtained results explain a clear positive relationship between social media and generalized anxiety among individuals. However, self-esteem has no correlation with mental health ($r = 0.050$, $p = 0.641$) or GAD scores ($r = 0.001$, $p = 0.995$). Lastly, mental health and anxiety have a strong negative relationship ($r = -0.509$, $p < 0.001$).

The findings reveal a diverse relationship between social media use, self-esteem, mental health, and generalized anxiety disorders. While social media has a moderate relationship with increased anxiety among individuals, it manifests a very low negative correlation with

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mental health, its influence on self-esteem remains minimal and statistically insignificant. The findings indicate that the more a person spends time on social media, the generalized anxiety will seemingly increase as well as mental health will deteriorate. Since, the self-esteem indicates no correlation with anxiety so, it can be said that there is no relationship between social media use and anxiety. However, mental health and anxiety are strongly interconnected, with poorer mental health consistently linked to higher anxiety levels. These results underscore the importance of managing social media usage and promoting mental health strategies to mitigate its potential adverse effects on psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

The widespread use of social media has transformed the way people connect, share experiences, and perceive themselves. While it offers opportunities for creativity, entertainment, and communication, it also brings challenges such as dependency, online harassment, and the fear of missing out (FOMO), all of which can negatively impact mental health. (Chou & Edge 2012) The findings obtained elicits a major concern for the respected authorities involved in policy making for the increased consumption of social media. Since, the intensified use of social media platforms among young adults is leading them to have more anxiety prevalence within them and consequently a disturbed mental health. The excessive use of digital platforms may lead to reduced face-to-face interactions and feelings of loneliness. Therefore, it becomes very necessary to have such policies which can restrict the social media consumption as well as encourage them to engage in offline and lively activities. This research can help them to think on such parameters which can help young adults to connect with themselves for their wellbeing.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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