

## Emotions Through Screens: Impact of Adult Attachment Style

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### ABSTRACT

Prior studies have examined the impact of high social media use on emotional regulation strategies, emphasizing the important role of individuals' two-dimensional attachment styles—specifically, anxious and avoidant attachment- in this connection. This study aimed to examine how social media usage influences emotional regulation strategies through four-dimensional adult attachment styles in individuals aged 18 to 35. Using a sample of 348 participants (156 males and 192 females), this study explores the serial multiple mediation effects of preoccupied and fearful attachment styles on the relationship between social media usage and emotional regulation. The findings indicate that social media usage has a significant direct impact on both fearful and preoccupied attachment styles. Fearful attachment style significantly predicts expressive suppression, suggesting that individuals manage their fear of rejection and maintain a facade of emotional control through social media. Conversely, preoccupied attachment style negatively predicts expressive suppression, which suggests that these individuals might seek emotional expression and reassurance through their social media interactions.

**Keywords:** *Social Media Usage, Emotional Regulation, Adult Attachment Style, Mediation Analysis*

**S**ocial media or Social networking sites (SNSs; Obar & Wildman, 2015) is the primary mobile internet facility used by students today (Basu et al., 2018), allowing them to create public or semi-public profiles and traverse their connections. Repetitive use of social media, reinforced by reward expectations, can lead to habitual usage, impulsive responses, and addiction-like symptoms, despite negative consequences (Wegmann et al., 2020). India's digital user base has grown significantly, with over 600 million active internet users and average daily social media usage of 2.5 hours (Statista, 2024). SNS use impacts mental health positively and negatively (Young et al., 2020). Studies show individuals use social media for emotion regulation, influencing mental health (Yang et al., 2020).

Emotion regulation refers to “the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them and how they experience and express them” (Gross, 1998).

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Emotional strategies, whether adaptive or maladaptive, can be classified by their entry point in the emotion-generating process (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Two key tactics are reappraisal and suppression. Reappraisal, an antecedent-focused strategy, involves altering emotional responses by changing the event's perceived significance (Gross, 2008), e.g., not feeling disappointed if a friend forgets their birthday due to workload or family issues. Suppression, a response-focused strategy, involves concealing emotions while internally experiencing them, e.g., hiding anxiety during a presentation (Gross, 2008; Seixas et al., 2021). Research shows attachment representations influence adaptive or maladaptive emotional regulation strategies.

Early interactions between an infant and one or more primary caregivers shape an adult's attachment type. According to Bowlby's attachment theory (1958), an infant's internal working model of self-identity and how to relate to others is developed early in life as they form emotional connections with their caregivers (Bretherton, 1987). This model serves as the foundation for intimate and romantic relationships because it is largely stable and persists throughout adulthood. Although it is quite possible that an individual's attachment pattern will change if his/her relational experiences are inconsistent with personal expectations. In the initial investigations on adult attachment, Hazan and Shaver (1987) looked at the relationship between individual differences in adult attachment and the way people remember and think back on their relationships with their parents. Adding on to subsequent researches, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed four attachment styles in adult attachment in close relationships at general: First being secure attachment style which refers to a sense of worthiness. The second is preoccupied attachment referring to unworthiness of the self and/or less positive view about themselves while they have a positive evaluation of others. The third is fearful attachment which can be described as the untrustworthy expectations about others. Lastly, dismissing attachment style which is described as maintaining a sense of independence instead of developing close relationships (Kozan et al., 2016).

### *Social media and Emotional regulation*

Effective emotion regulation is associated with better mental health outcomes and positively impacts interpersonal relationships. Suppression is considered a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy and is associated with mental distress and an increase in distressing thoughts or feelings (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000). This avoidance of dealing with emotions often shows up in other ways, like using social media (Rasmussen et al., 2020) or engaging in activities like alcohol consumption.

Studies suggest social media platforms are key venues for self-expression, peer support, and maintaining connections, enhancing emotional regulation through emotional expression and validation (Sharma & Sharma, 2021). For example, Facebook and Instagram enable young adults to share experiences and seek feedback, aiding emotional processing and stress reduction (Borah & Vemuri, 2020). However, exposure to idealized lifestyles fosters negative comparisons, lowering self-esteem and increasing anxiety (Nair, 2022). This is supported by findings from a survey conducted by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) stating that a significant percentage of young adults reported social media usage-based feelings of depression and anxiety (IAMAI, 2021). There are likely explanatory mechanisms that impact the relationship between emotion deregulation and problematic use of such sites, once such of the factor could be adult attachment style.

### ***Emotional regulation and Adult Attachment***

The development of individual differences in emotional regulation strategies to manage negative affect, has been better understood in recent decades because of attachment theory. For example, it has been discovered that the neural substrates of adult emotional regulation are shaped by the quality of a child's interactions with their primary care (Ferraro & Taylor, 2021). The need to preserve a deactivated attachment system and prevent vulnerable emotions like fear and sadness is linked to the use of suppression techniques to avoid facing emotion-related thoughts (Shaver et al., 2009). The findings imply that attachment is crucial for comprehending emotional expression in adulthood and that it occurs before emotional regulation.

Individuals with a secure attachment style have less trouble in controlling their emotions and exhibit equitable social behavior because of enhanced emotional awareness (Odacı & Çıkrıkçı, 2014), while people with anxious attachment style have more daily disruption, a lack of control, emotional rejection (Guzmán et al. 2016), and difficulty accessing emotional regulation techniques (Henschel et al., 2019). Individuals with a fearful attachment style, may struggle with emotional regulation because of their conflicting desires for closeness and fear of rejection or abandonment (Domic-Siede et al., 2024).

### ***Social media and adult attachment***

To comprehend the motivations behind social media usage, attachment styles, for example, appear to leave an impact on the amount of time spent online. Attachment theory suggests that individuals rely on different external sources to regulate their affective states, and this need it called “self-object need”. Addiction could be seen as a form of attachment disorder, which typically emerges in young adulthood as a maladaptive and delayed transition (Flores et al., 2023). Social network site use can increase a sense of belongingness amongst adults (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). Earlier research has indicated that individuals with anxiety attachment styles use social media to avoid more intimate offline forms of communication, suggesting that they use social networking sites to keep relationships psychologically distant (Young et al., 2020), an appropriate lens for examining how people use socially-oriented technologies is attachment theory, which focuses on explaining how people perceive and approach interpersonal relationships (Chen, 2019).

Investigations have proven that today's children and youth have unstable control over their feelings and mostly display negative emotions in various circumstances due to excessive time spent on social media (Cheda, 2019). There has been a general link between social media usage and depression, however the data quality is usually low, and some results have shown inconsistent trends (e.g., time spent on social media and mental health problems). Studies are starting to show how that certain social media interactions can harm the mental health of youth (Khalaf et al., 2023). However, till now no conclusive data is presented on young adult population. Research studies exploring the connection between adult attachment style, emotional regulation and social media usage are dominated by two major styles of adult attachment i.e., anxiously attached individuals have problem in managing their emotions, which results in high social media consumption in comparison to those who are highly avoidant towards their relationships (Liu & Ma, 2019, Young et al., 2020). However, studies show less clear data on the four dimensions of adult attachment: secure, fearful, avoidant and dismissive (Blackwell et al., 2017). Findings also indicate that adult attachment style is the key predictor of social media usage and emotional regulation (D'Arienzo et al., 2019). Hence, this study seeks to explore the connection between social media usage and

emotional regulation in young adults, while also examining the influence of adult attachment style.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Sample*

The current study incorporated a convenient sampling method for data collection. A total of 348 individuals participated in the study with 192 females (55.2%) and 156 males (44.8%). The age range of individuals who participated was between 21 and 35 years. Among the participants, 05 were researchers, 102 were working professionals and 241 were students, indicating majority of the sample (69.3%) was students. Geographically, participants hailed from both urban and semi-urban areas. In terms of social media usage, 99 individuals (28.4%) reported using it for less than 02 hours daily, while 194 participants (55.7%) used it for 2-5 hours, 38 individuals (10.9%) for 5-7 hours, and 17 participants (4.9%) reported using it for more than 07 hours per day.

#### *Instruments*

Three measures were used in this study,

- 1. Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAQ, Basu et al., 2021):** This scale assesses the presence and severity of social media addiction among participants, consisting of 20 items measuring various dimensions of addiction i.e., intense desire, impaired control, withdrawal, tolerance decreased alternate pleasure, and harmful use. Each item follows a self-rating procedure using 6- Point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher Scores indicated a greater risk of social media addiction. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the 20-item SMAQ scale was 0.879, the split-half reliability coefficient was found to be 0.76.
- 2. Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003):** The ERQ is a 10-item self-report test that gauges a person's propensity to control their emotions through expressive suppression and reappraisal. A seven-point Likert scale where 1 being strongly disagreed and 7 being strongly agreed is used for each item. The expressive suppression (4 items) and reappraisal (6 items) subscales make up the ERQ. Subscales are assessed using the average of their respective items. This questionnaire had test-retest reliability of .69 for both the reappraisal and suppression subscales, and internal consistency of each subscale was acceptable (reappraisal,  $\alpha = .79$ ; suppression,  $\alpha = .73$ ).
- 3. Relationships Scales Questionnaire. (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994):** The RSQ is a 30-item scale that evaluates four dimensions: secure, afraid, dismissing, and preoccupied. It offers a continuous assessment of an individual's normal subjective style in close interactions. Participants use a 5-point Likert scale to score the assertions (1= not at all like me and 5 very much like me). The scale items are a combination of various self-report questionnaires. The scale demonstrates good divergent and convergent validity while the internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha was .73 (Khodarahimi et al., 2016).

#### *Procedure*

The convenient sampling technique was used for data collection via Google forms circulation through social media roll outs and mailing lists within the time frame of 2 months (May-June 2024). All the participants, active social media users, with their average usage time spanning between 2 to 5 hours per day. Each participant had been provided informed consent before involving him/her in this study. The demographic details like age, email id, gender, marital status, and designation were collected from the participants. Prior

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instructions on how to attempt the questions were delivered, and at the end of the study the researcher's contact details were provided for any query or feedback.

### *Statistical Analysis*

SPSS software (version 21) and Microsoft excel were used for analyzing and editing data tables. Firstly, to analyze descriptive statistics to understand the nature, trend and spread of data. Secondly, Pearson product moment correlation was applied to understand the relationship between the variables. Thereafter, stepwise linear regression was used to establish the impact of social media usage and adult attachment styles on emotional regulation. Model 6 of Hayes's process model was implemented to carry out serial mediation where adult attachment styles impacted the relationship between social media usage and emotional regulation. The significant (p) value was set between 0.05 and 0.001.

## RESULTS

This study aimed to explore the relationship between adult attachment style, social media usage and emotional regulation. It investigated the interplay of Fearful attachment style and preoccupied attachment style with the relationship of social media usage and emotional regulation.

**Table 1 Inter-correlation between Social media usage, Emotional regulation and Adult attachment styles.**

Parameters	Mean (N=348)	SD	SMU	CR	ES	SA	FA	PA	DA
<b>SMU</b>	61.8046	18.3899	1						
<b>CR</b>	27.454	7.5279	0.1	1					
<b>ES</b>	16.569	5.74365	.162**	.510**	1				
<b>SA</b>	15.7931	2.94674	.136*	.206**	0.017	1			
<b>FA</b>	12.4224	3.56613	.270**	.161**	.386**	0.057	1		
<b>PA</b>	11.6552	3.10276	.338**	0.026	0.065	.178**	.299**	1	
<b>DA</b>	17.1523	3.24722	.109*	.218**	.198**	0.104	.506**	.338**	1

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$  (2-tailed); SMU- Social Media Usage; CR- Cognitive Reappraisal; ES- Expression Suppression; SA- Secure Attachment; FA- Fearful Attachment; PA- Preoccupied Attachment; DA- Dismissing Attachment

Table 1 describes Pearson's product-moment correlation concerning the association between social media usage, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, secure attachment style, fearful attachment style, preoccupied attachment style, and dismissing attachment style. Positive significant correlation of social media usage with expressive suppression ( $r=.162$ ,  $p=.002$ ), secure attachment style ( $r=.136$ ,  $p=.001$ ), fearful attachment ( $r=.270$ ,  $p=.00$ ), preoccupied attachment ( $r=.338$ ,  $p=.00$ ), and dismissing attachment style ( $r=.109$ ,  $p=.042$ ), Whereas an insignificant positive relationship was found between social media usage and cognitive reappraisal. A significantly positive relationship of cognitive reappraisal was found with expressive suppression ( $r=.510$ ,  $p=.000$ ), secure attachment ( $r=.206$ ,  $p=.000$ ), fearful attachment ( $r=.161$ ,  $p=.003$ ), and dismissing attachment ( $r=.218$ ,  $p=.000$ ). However, a negative but insignificant relationship was found between cognitive reappraisal and preoccupied attachment style. Expressive suppression was found to significant positive

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correlation with cognitive reappraisal ( $r=.510, p=.000$ ), fearful attachment ( $r=.386, p=.000$ ), and dismissing attachment ( $r=.198, p=.000$ ). An insignificant relationship of expressive suppression with secure attachment style and preoccupied attachment style was found. Secure attachment style had a significantly positive correlation with preoccupied attachment style ( $r=.178, p=.000$ ). An insignificant correlation of secure attachment style with fearful attachment style ( $r=-.057, p>.05$ ) and dismissing attachment style ( $r=.104, p>.05$ ) was found. Fearful attachment style had a significant positive correlation with preoccupied ( $r=.299, p=.000$ ) and dismissing attachment style ( $r=.506, p=.000$ ). Preoccupied attachment style has a significantly positive correlation with dismissing attachment style ( $r=.338, p=.000$ ).

**Table 2 Model Summary of stepwise regression for social media usage and attachment styles on emotional regulation**

Model	Variables Interred	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change	Change Statistics	
						F Change	Sig. F Change
1	<b>Fearful attachment</b>	.386 <sup>a</sup>	0.149	0.146	0.149	60.469	.000
2	<b>Fearful attachment &amp; Preoccupied attachment</b>	.429 <sup>b</sup>	0.184	0.18	0.036	15.037	.000
3	<b>Fearful attachment, Preoccupied attachment &amp; Social Media Usage</b>	.445 <sup>c</sup>	0.198	0.191	0.014	5.908	0.016

*\*Dependent variable: Expressive Suppression*

Hierarchical/ stepwise linear regression was carried out to explore how social media usage affects the emotional regulation and attachment styles of young adults. Table 2 depicts the outcome of linear regression, where the independent variables were dimensions of adult attachment style: secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing attachment style. The second variable was social media usage, whereas the dependent variable was expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal.

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**Table 3** *Coefficients of the stepwise regression analysis for social media usage and attachment styles on emotional regulation*

		<i>95.0% Confidence Interval for B</i>						
<b>Model</b>		<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Lower Bound</b>	<b>Upper Bound</b>
1	(Constant)	8.852	1.032		8.575	0	6.821	10.882
	Fearful attachment	0.621	0.08	0.386	7.776	0	0.464	0.778
2	(Constant)	11.933	1.287		9.274	0	9.402	14.464
	Fearful attachment	0.716	0.082	0.445	8.729	0	0.555	0.878
	Preoccupied attachment	-0.366	0.094	-0.198	-3.878	0	-0.551	-0.18
3	(Constant)	10.728	1.37		7.828	0	8.032	13.424
	Fearful attachment	0.678	0.083	0.421	8.175	0	0.515	0.842
	Preoccupied attachment	-0.432	0.098	-0.233	-4.429	0	-0.624	-0.24
	Social Media Usage	0.04	0.016	0.127	2.431	0.016	0.008	0.072

*\*Dependent Variable: Expressive Suppression*

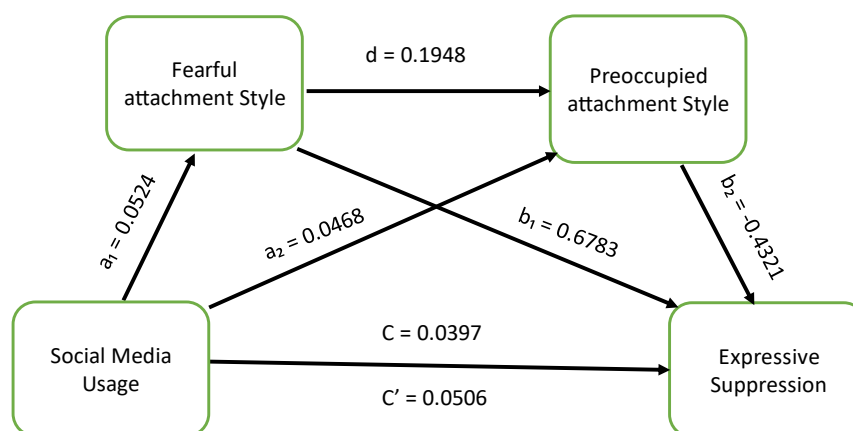
In Table 2 and Table 3, it was found that fearful attachment style explained 14.9% of the variance in expressive suppression with  $R=.386$ ,  $R^2=.149$ ,  $\beta=.386$ , and  $F=60.469$ ,  $p<0.00$ . A 3.5% significant increase was witnessed in  $R^2$  when preoccupied attachment style as the variable was added to the fearful attachment style resulting in an 18.4% variable with  $R=.429$ ,  $R^2=.184$ ,  $\beta=-.1965$ ,  $F=38.979$ , and  $p=0.00$ . Preoccupied attachment style negatively predicted expressive suppression. A significant increase of 1.4% in  $R^2$  value was witnessed when social media usage as a variable was added to the former two variables, the variance came to 19.8% in expressive suppression with  $R=.445$ ,  $R^2=.198$ ,  $\beta=.127$ ,  $F=28.325$ , and  $p=0.00$ . Therefore, we can say that 19.8% of the variance present in expressive suppression of emotion regulation in the sample is due to social media usage along with fearful and preoccupied attachment style.

Moreover, secure attachment style ( $\beta=0.69$ ,  $p=.164$ ) and dismissing attachment style ( $\beta=.72$ ,  $p=.216$ ) did not predict emotional regulation. Hence, these styles were not further considered for serial mediation analysis.

**Table 4 Model Summary indicating the individual effect of antecedent variables on outcome variables**

Model 1 (FEAR)			
Antecedent	Coefficient	SE	p
Social Media Usage	0.0524	0.01	<0.001
Model 2 (POC)			
Social media Usage	0.0468	0.0086	<0.001
Fearful Attachment style	0.1948	0.0446	<0.001
Model 3 (EXSUP)			
Social media Usage	0.0397	0.0163	<0.05
Fearful Attachment style	0.6783	0.083	<0.001
Preoccupied Attachment style	-0.4321	0.0976	<0.001

**Figure 1 Serial mediation effect of fearful attachment style and preoccupied attachment style on the relationship between social media usage and expressive suppression.**



A serial multiple mediation by model 6 of PROCESS V4. Hayes’s process in the SPSS 21 version was utilized to establish the influence of preoccupied adult attachment style and fearful adult attachment style on the relationship between social media usage and expressive suppression.

In Table 4 and Figure 1, for the first model summary, the outcome variable is fearful attachment style (M1). Social media usage (X) has a significant impact on fearful attachment style ( $\beta = .0524$ ,  $SE = .0100$ ,  $t = 5.2219$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating path  $a_1$ . The second model’s outcome variable was preoccupied attachment style (M2). A significant effect of social media usage ( $\beta = .0468$ ,  $SE = .0086$ ,  $t = 9.3978$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and fearful attachment style ( $\beta = .1948$ ,  $SE = .0446$ ,  $t = 4.3713$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) on preoccupied attachment style. Indicating path,  $a_2$  and  $d$  respectively. In model 3 the outcome variable was expressive suppression (Y). A significant impact of social media usage ( $\beta = .0397$ ,  $SE = .0163$ ,  $t = 2.4307$ ,  $p = 0.0156$ ), fearful attachment style ( $\beta = .6783$ ,  $SE = .0830$ ,  $t = 8.1750$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and preoccupied attachment style ( $\beta = -.4321$ ,  $SE = .0976$ ,  $t = -4.4294$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) on suppressive expressive was seen. This path was indicated by  $c'$ ,  $b_1$  and  $b_2$  respectively.

**Table 5 Indirect effect of social media usage on expressive suppression through fearful and preoccupied attachment style**

Effect Key	Points of Coefficient		Bootstrap 95% Confidence Interval	
	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
SCOM-> Fear-> EXSUP	0.0356	0.0093	0.0186	0.0545
SCOM-> POC-> EXSUP	-0.0202	0.0062	-0.034	-0.0098
SCOM-> Fear-> POC-> EXSUP	-0.0044	0.0017	-0.008	-0.0016

*Note: SCOM- Social Media Usage, Fear- Fearful attachment style, POC- Preoccupied attachment style, EXSUP- Expressive suppression*

In Table 5, the total impact of social media usage ( $\beta = .0506$ ,  $SE = .0166$ ,  $t = 3.0522$ ,  $p = .0024$ ) (through fearful attachment style and preoccupied attachment style) on expressive suppression was found to be significant. A significant and direct relationship was found between social media usage and expressive suppression ( $\beta = 0.0397$ ,  $SE = .0163$ ,  $t = 2.43$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ). A significant indirect effect was observed between social media usage and expressive suppression through fearful attachment style ( $\beta = .0356$ ,  $SE = .0093$ , 95%, CI [.0183, .0549]). A significant but indirect effect was observed between social media usage and expressive suppression through preoccupied attachment style ( $\beta = -.0202$ , 95%,  $SE = .0062$ , 95%, CI [-.0342, -.0096]). Similarly, a significant indirect effect was found between social media usage and expressive suppression through fearful attachment style and preoccupied attachment style ( $\beta = -.0044$ ,  $SE = .0017$ , 95%, CI [-.0083, -.0017]). However, the total indirect effect ( $\beta = .0350$ , CI [-.0283, .0988]) the total effect of social media usage on expressive suppression was found to be insignificant (Beta=.0506, SE=.0166, t=3.0522, p=0.0024). Therefore, there is partial serial mediation of fearful attachment style and preoccupied attachment style on the relationship between social media usage and expressive suppression.

**DISCUSSION**

The study sought to determine how young adults' use of social media affected their ability to control their emotions and how adult attachment style acted as a mediating factor. The findings confirmed that social media usage have an impact on emotional regulation of an individual and attachment patterns with various significant ones play a big part in influencing one's control on emotions while using social networking sites.

The study partially supported hypothesis which stated that social media usage, emotional regulation and adult attachment styles would be significantly correlated. It was depicted that social media has significant positive correlation with expressive suppression dimension of emotional regulation. Individuals who do not express their thoughts and feelings freely to others are prone to high social media usage (Rasmussen et al., 2020). In this study, social media use was found to have a significant positive correlation with the following attachment styles: dismissive, preoccupied, scared, and secure. Having secure attachment has been related to an individual's increased number of social ties and willingness to initiate and maintain online relationships (Yaakobi & Goldenberg, 2014). Those with a fearful attachment style, despite their anxiety about relationships, tend to be attracted to social

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media as a low-risk way to connect with others while managing their fears of intimacy and rejection (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). Individuals who dominantly have preoccupied attachment styles tend to increasingly use social media to identify what they perceive as missing in their relationships (like social support) (D'Arienzo et al., 2019). Preoccupied individuals, frequently use social media to seek validation and remain closely connected to their social circles, thereby fulfilling their attachment needs (Lin, 2015). Lastly, individuals with a dismissing attachment style use social media to assert their independence and control the nature of their social interactions, preferring the less demanding nature of online communication over face-to-face encounters (Utz, 2015). These findings highlight the versatile role of social media in catering to the diverse attachment needs of individuals, regardless of their attachment style. This research indicates a positive significant relationship between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, as well as with secure, fearful, and dismissing attachment styles. Individuals with a secure attachment style, who generally have a well-developed emotional regulation repertoire, also tend to use cognitive reappraisal effectively, leveraging it alongside other strategies to maintain emotional balance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Individuals with fearful attachment, despite their anxiety about relationships, often use cognitive reappraisal as a coping mechanism to manage their heightened emotional responses (Wei et al., 2005). Similarly, those with a dismissing attachment style, who prioritize independence and self-reliance, frequently employ cognitive reappraisal to down regulate emotions and maintain their preferred emotional distance (Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005). These findings underscore the complex interplay between cognitive reappraisal and various emotional regulation strategies and attachment styles. This study indicated a positive significant relationship between expressive suppression and other factors including cognitive reappraisal, social media usage, fearful attachment style, and dismissing attachment style. Individuals who frequently use expressive suppression, a strategy involving the inhibition of emotional expression, often also engage in cognitive reappraisal, a strategy where they reframe situations to alter their emotional impact, suggesting that these emotion regulation strategies can coexist (Gross & John, 2003). Additionally, social media usage is positively related to expressive suppression, as individuals might choose to present a curated version of themselves online, managing their emotional expressions to fit social norms (Quaglieri et al., 2021). Those with a fearful attachment style, often use expressive suppression to deal with their emotional experiences and maintain a semblance of control in social interactions (Pietromonaco et al., 2013). Similarly, individuals with a dismissing attachment style, who value independence and self-sufficiency, tend to use expressive suppression to avoid vulnerability and maintain emotional distance in relationships (Wei et al., 2005). These findings highlight a complex interplay between emotion regulation strategies, social media behaviors, and attachment styles.

In mediation analysis social media usage was the predictor variable and expressive suppression has been seen as the outcome variable. Consequently, the first mediator emerged as fearful attachment style and the second mediator as the preoccupied fearful attachment style. The study's findings highlight the significant contributions of various attachment styles and social media usage to expressive suppression, a key emotion regulation strategy. Fearful attachment style, characterized by a high level of anxiety and fear of rejection, predisposes individuals to suppress their emotions to avoid potential negative social consequences (Pietromonaco et al., 2013). This suppression helps them manage their fears of intimacy and rejection by maintaining a facade of emotional control. In contrast, individuals with a preoccupied attachment style, who are typically anxious and overly dependent on others for validation, might use less expressive suppression because

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they actively seek emotional closeness and reassurance, leading them to express rather than suppress their emotions (Wei et al., 2005). The negative  $\beta$  value for preoccupied attachment style indicates that while these individuals influence expressive suppression, they are more likely to use additional techniques for controlling their emotions, such as expressing their feelings and asking for help, for example cognitive reappraisal. Therefore, the findings of the serial multiple mediation analysis show that the association between expressive repression and social media use is highly mediated by both scared and preoccupied attachment styles. Specifically, social media usage significantly influences fearful attachment style, which further affects preoccupied attachment style, and both attachment styles impact expressive suppression.

Social media usage further contributes to expressive suppression by providing a platform where individuals can curate their self-presentation and control the manifestation of their emotions. This curated presentation often involves suppressing negative emotions to conform to social norms and portray an idealized version of oneself (Wang et al., 2018). The slight increase in explained variance when social media usage is included suggests that while social media is acceptable for emotional expression in some contexts, it also encourages suppression to fit in with perceived societal expectations. However, expressive suppression was not significantly predicted by secure or dismissing attachment styles, which is consistent with the findings of research study showing that securely attached people are typically more outspoken and dismissing people tend to minimise the significance of emotional expression entirely in favour of self-sufficiency (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Moreover, dissenting literature suggests that secure attachment can facilitate open emotional expression and thus might not always lead to expressive suppression (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Likewise, some studies indicate that dismissing attachment can involve emotional suppression to maintain independence and avoid emotional vulnerability (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

The significant impact of social media usage on fearful attachment style suggests that frequent social media users may experience increased anxiety and avoidance in their relationships, leading to greater emotional suppression (Pietromonaco et al., 2013). This is supported by research showing that individuals with higher social media usage often develop anxious attachment behaviors, using these platforms to seek validation and avoid rejection (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). Fearful attachment style's positive prediction of expressive suppression highlights how these individuals manage their emotional responses to minimize perceived social threats.

Moreover, the significant effect of preoccupied attachment style on expressive suppression, although negative, indicates a complex interaction where these individuals, despite their dependency and anxiety about relationships, might use social media as an outlet for emotional expression rather than suppression (Wei et al., 2005). This finding is corroborated by studies showing that preoccupied individuals are more likely to seek emotional support and reassurance through online interactions, thus displaying less emotional suppression (Gentzler et al., 2011). The direct and indirect effects of social media usage on expressive suppression underscore its dual role, supporting the notion that social media can facilitate both emotional expression and suppression, depending on the user's attachment styles and needs.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

It is imperative to consider the limitations of the study that may have influenced the statistical outcome. Firstly, self-reported measures are subject to social desirability bias and recall inaccuracies, participants might under report or over report their social media usage or emotional regulation strategies due to social desirability or memory limitations. Using a combination of self-reports and objective measures, such as tracking actual social media usage from the Screen Time app on participants' phones, that could provide more accurate data. Another limitation is the sample composition. Future studies should aim for a more diverse sample to enhance generalizability like middle adulthood, etc. (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).

Future studies may take into consideration the various popular social media platforms and their distinct effects on emotional regulation and attachment styles (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Furthermore, a clear division between high and low social media usage could have been used to witness the effects of excessive consumption of networking sites on emotional regulation and the role of attachment styles. Including other psychological variables in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

### *Implications*

The findings of this study have significant real-world applications in understanding and addressing emotional regulation behaviors influenced by social media usage. For instance, individuals with a fearful attachment style, who often suppress their emotions to avoid perceived social rejection, may experience an exacerbation of these tendencies due to the curated and idealized nature of social media platforms (Pietromonaco et al., 2013). Mental health professionals could leverage these insights to design targeted interventions aimed at fostering trust in offline relationships and reducing reliance on expressive suppression as a maladaptive strategy. Similarly, individuals with a preoccupied attachment style, who frequently seek validation through extensive online interactions, may benefit from therapeutic approaches that promote self-validation and reduce dependency on external approval for emotional stability (Lin, 2015). Moreover, these findings can inform the development of digital literacy programs tailored to young adults, focusing on the psychological implications of prolonged social media use and the risks associated with emotional suppression. Social media platforms may also integrate mental health-focused features, such as encouraging mindful usage and providing access to resources that promote healthier emotional regulation. By addressing attachment-driven emotional behaviors, these strategies could significantly enhance individual well-being and foster balanced online and offline emotional experiences.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study investigated the impact of social media usage on emotional regulation strategies, specifically expressive suppression and cognitive appraisal. The findings explain that social media usage significantly affect fearful and preoccupied attachment styles, which in turn influence expressive suppression. Specifically, fearful attachment style positively predicts expressive suppression further suggesting that adults who are continuously involved in various social media platforms may develop anxious and avoidant attachment behaviors, leading to greater emotional suppression. Conversely, preoccupied attachment style negatively predicts expressive suppression, suggesting that these individuals might use social media to seek emotional expression and reassurance. These findings have significant consequences for educators and mental health practitioners, indicating the need for more

focused interventions that address the difficulties with emotional regulation brought on by social media use. Additionally, promoting secure attachment behaviors and healthier social media practices can potentially mitigate the adverse effects of emotional suppression, thereby enhancing emotional well-being among young adults. Further research is recommended to explore the dynamics relationship between social media usage and attachment style across different demographic groups and social media platforms.

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