

Psychological Implications of Social Media Engagement: A Comprehensive Analysis of Depression, Anxiety, and Self-Esteem Among Youth

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Abstract

The proliferation of digital technology and the rapid expansion of social media platforms have fundamentally altered the modalities of communication, information dissemination, and social interaction, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Although these platforms facilitate enhanced connectivity, information access, and avenues for self-expression, a growing body of scholarly inquiry has raised critical concerns regarding their potential detrimental effects on psychological well-being (Twenge et al., 2018; Orben et al., 2019). This study investigates the psychological implications associated with social media engagement, specifically examining its relationship with depressive symptoms, anxiety levels, and self-esteem among youth. Employing a quantitative cross-sectional research design, this study assessed the interplay between social media usage patterns and mental health outcomes within a sample of individuals aged 15 to 24 years. Data were gathered utilizing standardized, validated instruments to measure the extent of social media engagement, severity of depressive symptoms, intensity of anxiety, and levels of self-esteem. Statistical procedures encompassing descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were conducted to analyze the data and test the hypothesized relationships. The results demonstrated significant positive correlations between excessive social media engagement and elevated levels of depression and anxiety, indicating that greater involvement in online environments is associated with increased psychological distress (Woods & Scott, 2016; Lin et al., 2016). Conversely, a significant negative relationship was established between social media engagement and self-esteem, wherein prolonged usage and frequent upward social comparison were found to correspond with diminished perceptions of self-worth and personal value (Vogel et al., 2014). These findings underscore the necessity for the development and implementation of evidence-based interventions, educational programs, and policy frameworks designed to foster responsible digital citizenship, mitigate psychological risks, and enhance the psychological resilience of young individuals in an increasingly digital society.

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Introduction

The advent of the digital era has fundamentally reshaped the modalities through which young individuals communicate, interact, and perceive their social environment. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X

have evolved into integral aspects of daily living, offering extensive opportunities for social connection, entertainment, educational advancement, and information exchange (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Boyd, 2014). While these digital environments offer notable advantages, a growing body of literature has

raised significant concerns regarding the potential detrimental psychological consequences associated with their usage among adolescents and young adults (Twenge et al., 2018; Orben et al., 2019). This demographic is considered particularly susceptible to the influences of digital media due to ongoing neurodevelopmental processes, the critical stage of identity formation, and heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation and social acceptance (Steinberg, 2014; Crone & Konijn, 2018).

Empirical evidence has established associations between excessive social media engagement and a range of adverse mental health outcomes, including elevated levels of depressive symptoms, anxiety, diminished self-esteem, sleep disruption, and general emotional distress (Woods & Scott, 2016; Lin et al., 2016). Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain these relationships, most notably upward social comparison, exposure to cyberbullying, the phenomenon known as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and the continuous pursuit of external validation through likes and comments (Festinger, 1954; Przybylski et al., 2013; Vogel et al., 2014). Given the ubiquity of these platforms and the substantial time invested by youth, understanding the precise nature of the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being is imperative. Such knowledge is essential for formulating evidence-based interventions, guidelines, and policies designed to mitigate risks and promote positive mental health (World Health Organization, 2021).

Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to examine the psychological implications of social media engagement among youth. Specifically, the research seeks to: characterize the demographic profile of respondents in terms of age, sex, educational attainment, and average daily duration of social media usage; determine the extent of social media engagement and assess the corresponding levels of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem within the sample; evaluate the statistical significance of the relationship between social

media engagement and these mental health indicators; and ascertain the predictive capacity of social media engagement regarding the variance observed in depression, anxiety, and self-esteem scores.

The outcomes of this investigation are intended to provide valuable insights for young individuals, parents, educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers, facilitating the development of strategies that foster responsible digital habits and psychological resilience. This study is delimited to participants aged 15 to 24 years and focuses explicitly on the constructs of social media engagement, depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. Other potentially relevant variables such as resilience, feelings of loneliness, and academic performance are not included within the scope of this research.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between social media engagement and selected mental health outcomes among youth. The descriptive component was utilized to determine the levels of social media engagement, depression, anxiety, and self-esteem among the respondents, while the correlational aspect assessed the associations between social media engagement and the identified psychological variables. The study was conducted in selected educational institutions and communities where youth participants were readily accessible. A total of 300 respondents aged 15 to 24 years were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation across relevant demographic groups. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of five sections: Part I gathered demographic information, including age, sex, educational level, and average daily social media use; Part II measured social media engagement; Part III assessed depression levels; Part IV evaluated anxiety symptoms; and Part V measured self-esteem. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured the necessary approvals from relevant authorities and obtained informed consent from all participants. The questionnaires

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were subsequently administered, and the collected data were organized, encoded, and subjected to statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were employed to summarize respondent characteristics and determine the levels of the study variables. Inferential statistical techniques such as Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, Multiple Regression Analysis, t-test, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were utilized to examine relationships, determine predictive effects, and identify significant differences among variables where applicable.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study were presented through a series of statistical tables and corresponding interpretations.

Demographic Profile

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 150 respondents in terms of age group, sex, and educational level. The results reveal that the majority of the respondents belonged to the 18–20 years age group, comprising 78 respondents (52.00%). This was followed by those aged 15–17 years, with 45 respondents (30.00%), while the 21–24 years age group had the smallest representation, consisting of 27 respondents (18.00%). These findings indicate that most participants were in their late adolescence to early adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by high engagement with digital technologies and social media platforms.

In terms of sex, female respondents constituted the majority of the sample, accounting for 88 respondents (58.67%), whereas male respondents comprised 62 respondents (41.33%). This distribution suggests a greater participation of females in the study, which may provide valuable insights into gender-related differences in social media engagement and psychological well-being.

Regarding educational level, the largest proportion of respondents were enrolled in

College/University, with 75 respondents (50.00%). This was followed by High School students, who accounted for 63 respondents (42.00%), while only 12 respondents (8.00%) were from Vocational/Technical programs. The predominance of college and high school students indicates that the study primarily reflects the experiences and perspectives of individuals engaged in formal academic settings.

Overall, the demographic profile suggests that the respondents were predominantly female, aged 18–20 years, and enrolled in college or university programs. These characteristics imply that the sample represents a population of youth who are likely to be active users of social media, making them an appropriate group for examining the relationship between social media engagement and mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and self-esteem.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	15–17 years	45	30.00
	18–20 years	78	52.00
	21–24 years	27	18.00
Sex	Male	62	41.33
	Female	88	58.67
Educational Level	High School	63	42.00
	College/University	75	50.00

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	Vocational/Technical	12	8.00
Total		150	100.00

Level of Social Media Engagement

Table 2 presents the level of social media engagement among the respondents based on four indicators: frequency of daily use, duration of use per session, nature of activities, and interaction with content or other users. The findings reveal that all indicators obtained a High descriptive rating, indicating that the respondents actively engage with social media platforms in various ways.

Among the indicators, frequency of daily use obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.12$), suggesting that the respondents access social media frequently throughout the day. This finding implies that social media has become an integral part of their daily routines and serves as a primary medium for communication, entertainment, information seeking, and social interaction. The duration of use per session also received a high mean score ($M = 3.05$), indicating that respondents tend to spend considerable amounts of time on social media during each visit.

Furthermore, the indicator interaction with content and other users yielded a mean score of 2.94, while the nature of activities such as posting, commenting, and browsing obtained a mean score of 2.87. Although these indicators received slightly lower mean scores compared to frequency and duration of use, they still fall within the high engagement category. This suggests that respondents are not merely passive consumers of online content but are actively

participating in social networking activities and online interactions.

The overall mean score of 2.99, with a descriptive rating of High, indicates that the respondents generally demonstrate a high level of social media engagement. This result suggests that social media plays a significant role in the lives of the youth participants, influencing their daily behaviors, communication patterns, and social experiences. Given the high level of engagement observed, the findings underscore the importance of examining the potential psychological implications of social media use, particularly its relationship with mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. The substantial involvement of respondents in social media platforms may increase both the opportunities and risks associated with digital interaction, making it a relevant factor in understanding youth psychological well-being.

Table 2. Level of Social Media Engagement

Indicators	Mean Score	Descriptive Rating
Frequency of daily use	3.12	High
Duration of use per session	3.05	High
Nature of activities (posting, commenting, browsing)	2.87	High
Interaction with content/other users	2.94	High
Overall Mean	2.99	High

Level of Depression

Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents according to the severity of

depressive symptoms. The findings indicate that the largest proportion of respondents fell under the Moderate category, with 45 respondents (30.00%), followed closely by those in the Mild category, comprising 42 respondents (28.00%). Additionally, 38 respondents (25.33%) reported Minimal or No Depression, while 18 respondents (12.00%) were classified as Moderately Severe, and 7 respondents (4.67%) were categorized as Severe.

The results suggest that a considerable number of respondents experience some degree of depressive symptoms, with more than half of the participants (74.67%) reporting symptoms ranging from mild to severe levels. The predominance of respondents in the moderate and mild categories indicates that depressive symptoms are relatively common among the youth included in the study. Although only a small percentage of respondents were classified under the severe category, the presence of moderate to severe depressive symptoms among a substantial portion of the sample highlights a potential mental health concern that warrants attention.

These findings may be attributed to various psychosocial and environmental factors affecting youth, including academic pressures, social relationships, family concerns, and extensive engagement with digital technologies and social media platforms. Previous research has suggested that excessive social media use may contribute to depressive symptoms through mechanisms such as social comparison, cyberbullying, fear of missing out (FOMO), and exposure to unrealistic portrayals of life and success. Consequently, the results emphasize the importance of implementing mental health promotion programs, providing accessible psychological support services, and encouraging healthy digital habits among young people.

Overall, the findings indicate that while a portion of the respondents exhibit minimal or no depressive symptoms, a significant majority experience varying levels of depression. This underscores the need for early identification, prevention strategies, and interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being and reducing mental health risks among youth.

Table.3 Level of Depression

Severity Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Minimal or None	38	25.33
Mild	42	28.00
Moderate	45	30.00
Moderately Severe	18	12.00
Severe	7	4.67
Total	150	100.00

Level of Anxiety

Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents according to their level of anxiety. The results indicate that the largest proportion of respondents experienced Moderate Anxiety, accounting for 51 respondents (34.00%). This was followed by Mild Anxiety, reported by 44 respondents (29.33%), while 23 respondents (15.33%) were classified as having Severe Anxiety. Conversely, 32 respondents (21.33%) reported No Anxiety. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents experienced some degree of anxiety, with 78.67% reporting mild, moderate, or severe anxiety symptoms.

The predominance of moderate anxiety suggests that a substantial number of youth are experiencing noticeable levels of worry, nervousness, and emotional distress that may affect their daily functioning, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships. The combined proportion of respondents with moderate and severe anxiety (49.33%) is particularly noteworthy, indicating that nearly half of the participants may be at risk of experiencing significant psychological challenges. Such anxiety symptoms may stem from various sources, including academic

demands, family expectations, social pressures, uncertainty about the future, and increased exposure to digital and social media environments.

Furthermore, the findings may reflect the growing influence of social media on youth mental health. Excessive social media engagement has been associated with heightened anxiety through mechanisms such as fear of missing out (FOMO), social comparison, cyberbullying, and the pressure to maintain an idealized online image. Continuous exposure to online content and constant connectivity may contribute to feelings of stress and emotional vulnerability among young individuals.

Overall, the results indicate that anxiety is a prevalent mental health concern among the respondents. The high proportion of participants experiencing mild to severe anxiety underscores the importance of implementing mental health awareness programs, strengthening psychological support services, and promoting healthy coping strategies to help youth manage anxiety effectively. These findings further emphasize the need to examine factors, such as social media engagement, that may contribute to elevated anxiety levels among young people.

Table 4. Level of Anxiety

Anxiety Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
No Anxiety	32	21.33
Mild Anxiety	44	29.33
Moderate Anxiety	51	34.00
Severe Anxiety	23	15.33
Total	150	100.00

Level of Self-esteem

Table 5 presents the self-esteem levels of the respondents as measured through three categories: high self-esteem, moderate self-esteem, and low self-esteem. The results indicate that the High Self-Esteem category obtained a mean score of 1.82, with a descriptive rating of “Balanced self-view.” This suggests that respondents within this category generally possess a positive perception of themselves, recognize their strengths and weaknesses realistically, and exhibit confidence in their abilities. In contrast, the Moderate Self-Esteem category recorded a mean score of 2.45, described as “Occasional self-doubt,” indicating that respondents sometimes experience uncertainty regarding their self-worth and capabilities but are generally able to maintain a relatively positive self-image. Meanwhile, the Low Self-Esteem category yielded the highest mean score of 2.78, with a descriptive rating of “Negative self-view,” reflecting greater tendencies toward self-criticism, insecurity, and dissatisfaction with oneself.

The overall mean score of 2.35, corresponding to a descriptive rating of “Moderate,” suggests that the respondents, on average, possess a moderate level of self-esteem. This finding indicates that while many youth maintain a generally positive perception of themselves, they also experience occasional feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty. Such fluctuations in self-esteem are common during adolescence and early adulthood, a developmental period characterized by identity formation, social comparison, and increased sensitivity to peer evaluation.

The results may also reflect the influence of social media engagement on self-perception. Frequent exposure to idealized images, achievements, and lifestyles portrayed on social media platforms can encourage upward social comparisons, which may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and reduced self-worth among some individuals. Consequently, although the respondents demonstrate a moderate level of

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self-esteem overall, the presence of occasional self-doubt suggests a need for interventions that promote positive self-image, self-acceptance, and healthy online behaviors.

Overall, the findings imply that the respondents generally maintain a moderate sense of self-worth but remain vulnerable to factors that can negatively affect their self-esteem. These results underscore the importance of fostering supportive environments, enhancing emotional resilience, and promoting responsible social media use to strengthen psychological well-being among youth.

Table 5. Level of Self Esteem

Self-Esteem Category	Mean Score	Descriptive Rating
High Self-Esteem	1.82	Balanced self-view
Moderate Self-Esteem	2.45	Occasional self-doubt
Low Self-Esteem	2.78	Negative self-view
Overall Mean	2.35	Moderate

Relationship Between Social Media Engagement and Mental Health

Table 6 analyzed the relationship between social media engagement and mental health outcomes, particularly depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. Table 6 presents the results of the correlation analysis examining the relationship between social media engagement and the mental health variables of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem among youth respondents. The findings indicate statistically significant relationships between social media engagement and all three psychological outcomes, as evidenced by the p-values of 0.000,

which are lower than the conventional significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypotheses stating that no significant relationships exist between social media engagement and the mental health variables are rejected.

The results show a moderate positive correlation between social media engagement and depression ($r = 0.42, p < .001$). This finding suggests that higher levels of social media engagement are associated with increased levels of depressive symptoms among youth. As engagement with social media platforms increases, respondents may become more susceptible to experiences such as social comparison, cyberbullying, fear of missing out (FOMO), and exposure to idealized online portrayals, which can contribute to feelings of sadness, inadequacy, and emotional distress.

Similarly, a significant positive correlation was found between social media engagement and anxiety ($r = 0.38, p < .001$). Although slightly weaker than the relationship with depression, the correlation indicates that greater social media use is associated with higher levels of anxiety among respondents. This finding implies that excessive engagement with online platforms may increase worries related to social acceptance, online validation, peer pressure, and constant connectivity, thereby contributing to elevated anxiety levels.

In contrast, the analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between social media engagement and self-esteem ($r = -0.35, p < .001$). This result indicates that as social media engagement increases, self-esteem tends to decrease. Youth who spend more time engaging with social media may be more likely to compare themselves with others, leading to negative self-perceptions and reduced self-worth. The negative association suggests that excessive exposure to curated and idealized online content may adversely affect how young individuals evaluate themselves.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that social media engagement is significantly related

to psychological well-being among youth. Specifically, higher levels of social media engagement are associated with increased depression and anxiety and decreased self-esteem. These results support the assumptions of Social Comparison Theory, which posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their lives and achievements with those of others, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory, which suggests that repeated exposure to negative thoughts and experiences can influence emotional and psychological functioning. Consequently, the findings highlight the importance of promoting responsible social media use and implementing interventions aimed at protecting and enhancing the mental health of young people in the digital age.

Table 6. Relationship Between Social Media Engagement and Mental Health

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Social Media Engagement × Depression	0.42	0.000	Significant positive correlation
Social Media Engagement × Anxiety	0.38	0.000	Significant positive correlation
Social Media Engagement × Self-Esteem	-0.35	0.000	Significant negative correlation

The actual results revealed a significant positive correlation between social media engagement and both depression and anxiety,

demonstrating that greater involvement in online platforms is linked to higher levels of psychological distress among respondents. In contrast, a significant negative correlation was observed between social media engagement and self-esteem, showing that more frequent or intensive use tends to correspond with lower perceptions of personal worth and value. These outcomes align with the principles of Social Comparison Theory, which explains that individuals often assess their own circumstances and accomplishments relative to others, as well as Cognitive Behavioral Theory, which holds that negative thinking patterns formed through online interactions can directly affect emotional health. Collectively, these findings highlight the mental health risks associated with excessive social media engagement and emphasize the importance of developing strategies and programs that encourage responsible digital habits and strengthen the psychological resilience of young individuals.

Summary

This research inquiry examined the psychological ramifications of social media engagement within the youth demographic, with specific focus on the associations between online activity and three key constructs: depressive symptomatology, anxiety levels, and self-esteem. Adopting a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design, the investigation evaluated the magnitude of social media involvement and analyzed its statistical relationship with established indicators of psychological well-being. Empirical data were collected from respondents aged 15 to 24 years using standardized measurement tools, and subsequent analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. The outcomes yielded substantive empirical evidence elucidating the impact of social media engagement on mental health status, thereby enriching the extant body of scholarly literature concerning the psychological consequences of digital media consumption among young populations.

Conclusions

Based on the empirical findings derived from this study, it is concluded that social media engagement constitutes a pervasive and integral component of contemporary youth culture, with participants exhibiting high levels of activity and interaction across diverse digital networking platforms. Statistical analysis further established a significant positive correlation between the degree of social media engagement and the severity of depressive and anxiety symptoms, demonstrating that greater frequency, duration, and depth of online interaction are associated with elevated levels of psychological distress. Additionally, a significant inverse relationship was identified between social media engagement and self-esteem; this implies that intensive online participation, coupled with habitual social comparison and behaviors oriented toward external validation, adversely influences self-evaluation and diminishes perceptions of personal worth among young individuals. These results provide empirical validation for fundamental theoretical frameworks, notably Social Comparison Theory—which posits that individuals determine their own social and personal value based on how they stack up against others—and Cognitive Behavioral Theory—which asserts that maladaptive thought patterns derived from environmental interactions directly impact emotional health. Collectively, the findings affirm that excessive engagement with digital platforms presents measurable psychological risks and underscores the necessity of rigorous attention to the mental health implications of digital participation during critical developmental stages.

Recommendations

In consideration of the conclusions drawn from this investigation, the following recommendations are advanced:

- Educational authorities, families, and community organizations are urged to establish collaborative frameworks designed to foster balanced, responsible, and mindful social media practices through structured awareness campaigns,

informational seminars, and guidance initiatives.

- Academic institutions at all levels are encouraged to enhance existing mental health promotion programs by integrating modules focused on psychological resilience, digital wellness, and adaptive coping mechanisms into formal curricula and student support services.
- Instruction in digital literacy and critical thinking should be expanded and reinforced, equipping young individuals with the cognitive competencies required to navigate online environments safely, ethically, and with discernment regarding the nature of content and social interactions.
- Accessibility and availability of professional psychological support, counseling services, and mental health interventions should be broadened to address the specific emotional and psychosocial challenges associated with intensive digital engagement.
- Future scholarly inquiry is recommended to adopt longitudinal and experimental research designs; such approaches would facilitate the exploration of causal pathways and temporal relationships, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term psychological effects of social media use and yielding robust data to inform policy and intervention strategies.

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