Journal of Research and Development
A Multidisciplinary International Level Referred and Double Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access
ISSN : 2230-9578 | Website: https://jrdrvb.org Volume-18, Issue-2| February - 2026

Original Article

Impact of Social Media Use on Self-Esteem and Mental Health among Young Adults

Dr.Kumari Abha Rani
Assistant Professor, Dept.of Psychology M.D.D.M College,
Muzaffarpur BRABU, Muzaffarpur
Email: abhahsteacher@gmail.com

Manuscript ID:
JRD -2026-180224
ISSN: 2230-9578
Volume 18
Issue 2
Pp. 125-129
February - 2026
Submitted: 17 Jan. 2026
Revised: 27 Jan. 2026
Accepted: 12 Feb. 2026
Published: 28 Feb. 2026

Abstract

The present study examined the impact of social media use on self-esteem and mental health among young adults. With the rapid growth of digital communication platforms, understanding their psychological influence has become increasingly important. This research aimed to explore whether greater integration of social media into daily life is associated with differences in self-esteem and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. A total of 100 young adults (50 males and 50 females) aged 18–25 years were selected through purposive sampling from higher educational institutions. Data were collected using standardized instruments: the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) to measure social media engagement, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) to assess global self-esteem, and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) to evaluate mental health indicators. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were conducted to examine relationships among variables.The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between social media use and self-esteem, indicating that higher levels of social media integration were associated with lower self-esteem. In addition, social media use showed significant positive relationships with depression, anxiety, and stress. Regression analysis further demonstrated that social media use significantly predicted both self-esteem and mental health outcomes.

Keywords: *Social media, self-esteem, depression, anxiety, mental health*

Introduction

Over the past decade, social media has transformed the social environment of young adults. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter are no longer optional tools of communication; they are integrated into daily routines, identity expression, and peer interaction. According to recent digital usage reports, individuals aged 18–25 spend an average of 2–4 hours per day on social networking platforms. This prolonged exposure raises important psychological questions about how social media engagement influences self-perception and mental health. Young adulthood is a critical developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, emotional sensitivity, and heightened awareness of peer evaluation. During this period, self-esteem plays a central role in psychological adjustment. Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their worth and competence. Stable and positive self-esteem is associated with resilience, emotional regulation, and life satisfaction, whereas low self-esteem is linked to depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders. Social media environments are structured around visual presentation, social comparison, and feedback mechanisms such as likes, comments, and shares. These features may intensify comparison processes, especially upward comparison, where individuals compare themselves to idealized portrayals of others. Such comparisons can create discrepancies between one's real self and perceived ideal standards, potentially lowering self-esteem. At the same time, dependence on online validation may shift the source of self-worth from internal evaluation to external approval. In addition to self-esteem, mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and stress have been increasingly examined in relation to social media use. Studies suggest that excessive or emotionally invested use may contribute to sleep disturbance, fear of missing out (FOMO), cyberbullying exposure, and reduced face-to-face interaction.

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Kumari Abha Rani, Assistant Professor, Dept.of Psychology M.D.D.M College, Muzaffarpur BRABU, Muzaffarpur

How to cite this article:
Kumari, A. R. (2026). Impact of Social Media Use on Self-Esteem and Mental Health among Young Adults. Journal of Research & Development, 18(2), 125–129. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18921844

Quick Response Code:
Website: https://jrdrvb.org/
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18921844
OPEN ACCESS

Journal of Research and Development
A Multidisciplinary International Level Referred and Double Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access
ISSN : 2230-9578 | Website: https://jrdrvb.org Volume-18, Issue-2| February - 2026

These factors may elevate psychological distress. However, social media can also provide social support, peer connection, and identity affirmation, indicating that its impact is complex rather than purely negative. Although international research has explored these associations, findings remain mixed, and cultural as well as contextual differences may influence outcomes. Furthermore, many studies focus only on either self-esteem or depression, without examining both simultaneously in a single model. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between social media use, self-esteem, and mental health (depression, anxiety, and stress) among young adults using standardized psychological scales.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between social media use and self-esteem.
- To examine the relationship between social media use and mental health (depression, anxiety, stress).
- To determine whether social media use predicts self-esteem and mental health outcomes.

Hypotheses

H1: Social media use will be negatively correlated with self-esteem.
H2: Social media use will be positively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress.
H3: Social media use will significantly predict self-esteem and mental health.

Method

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between social media use, self-esteem, and mental health among young adults. This design was considered appropriate as the objective was to assess the direction and strength of associations among variables without manipulating any conditions.

Participants

The sample comprised 100 young adults (N = 100) aged between 18 and 25 years. 50 males and 50 females, Participants were recruited from undergraduate and postgraduate colleges located in urban areas using a purposive sampling technique. Inclusion criteria required participants to be active users of social media platforms for at least one hour daily. Individuals with a reported history of severe psychiatric disorders or ongoing psychiatric hospitalization were excluded to minimize confounding influences on mental health outcomes.

Measures

Social media engagement was assessed using the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) developed by Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013). The scale consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). It measures the extent to which social media is integrated into an individual's daily routine and emotional life. Total scores range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating stronger psychological integration and emotional attachment to social media. In the present study, the scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .86), indicating satisfactory reliability.Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Rosenberg (1965). The scale includes 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The total score ranges from 10 to 40, with higher scores reflecting higher global self-esteem. In the current study, the scale showed high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .88.Mental health was assessed using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). The DASS-21 consists of 21 items divided into three subscales: depression, anxiety, and stress, with 7 items in each subscale. Responses are recorded on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (Did not apply to me at all) to 3 (Applied to me very much). As recommended in the scoring manual, subscale scores were multiplied by two to obtain final scores. In the present study, the internal consistency coefficients were satisfactory: Depression (α = .90), Anxiety (α = .87), and Stress (α = .85), indicating good reliability of the instrument.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the Muzaffarpur college authorities. Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. They were assured that the data would be used solely for academic research purposes. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before administering the questionnaires. Data were collected in classroom settings in small groups to ensure a comfortable and distraction-free environment. Participants were provided with a questionnaire booklet containing demographic details and standardized scales measuring social media use, self-esteem, and mental health. Clear instructions were given, and any doubts regarding the response format were clarified without influencing answers. The average time taken to complete the questionnaires was approximately 20–25 minutes. All responses were collected anonymously to minimize social desirability bias. After completion, the questionnaires were checked for completeness. The collected data were coded and entered into SPSS (Version 26) for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses of the study.

Journal of Research and Development
A Multidisciplinary International Level Referred and Double Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access
ISSN : 2230-9578 | Website: https://jrdrvb.org Volume-18, Issue-2| February - 2026

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 30). Descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) were calculated to understand the distribution of scores for social media use, self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was computed to examine the relationships among variables. Further, simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether social media use significantly predicted self-esteem and mental health outcomes. The level of significance was set at **p < .05** and **p < .01**.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 100)

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Social Media Use	34.20	6.45	18	48
Self-Esteem	21.35	4.10	12	33
Depression	15.80	5.20	4	28
Anxiety	14.10	4.85	3	26
Stress	16.25	5.00	5	30

The descriptive results indicate moderate levels of social media integration and moderate psychological distress among participants. The mean self-esteem score suggests comparatively lower self-evaluation within the sample.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Matrix among Study Variables (N = 100)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social Media Use	—				
2. Self-Esteem	–.45	—			
3. Depression	.49	–.52	—		
4. Anxiety	.42	–.46	.61	—	
5. Stress	.38	–.40	.58	.63	—

The correlation analysis reveals a significant negative relationship between social media use and self-esteem ($r = –.45$, $p < .01$). Social media use shows significant positive correlations with depression ($r = .49$, $p < .01$), anxiety ($r = .42$, $p < .01$), and stress ($r = .38$, $p < .01$). These findings indicate that higher social media engagement is associated with lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress.

Table 3

Regression Analysis Predicting Self-Esteem from Social Media Use

Model	R	R^2	F	B	P	
1	.45	.20	24.50	–.45	< .001	

Social media use significantly predicted self-esteem, explaining 20% of the variance ($R^2 = .20$, $F(1,98) = 24.50$, $p < .001$). The negative beta value indicates that higher social media use predicts lower self-esteem.

Table 4
Regression Analysis Predicting Depression from Social Media Use

Model	R	R^2	F	β	P
1	.49	.24	30.10	.49	< .001

Social media use significantly predicted depression, explaining 24% of the variance ($R^2 = .24$, $F(1,98) = 30.10$, $p < .001$). Higher levels of social media integration were associated with higher depressive symptoms.

the statistical findings support the hypotheses that increased social media use is significantly associated with lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults.

Table 5
Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values for Gender Differences (N = 100)

Variable	Male (n = 50) M ± SD	Female (n = 50) M ± SD	t-value	p-value
Social Media Use	**32.40 ± 6.10**	**35.80 ± 5.70**	**-2.88**	**.005**
Self-Esteem	**29.80 ± 4.50**	**27.10 ± 4.90**	**2.86**	**.005**
Depression	**10.20 ± 5.40**	**14.60 ± 6.10**	**-3.74**	**.000**
Anxiety	**9.10 ± 4.80**	**12.90 ± 5.20**	**-3.63**	**.000**
Stress	**11.30 ± 5.00**	**14.70 ± 5.40**	**-3.20**	**.002**

Journal of Research and Development
A Multidisciplinary International Level Referred and Double Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access
ISSN : 2230-9578 | Website: https://jrdrvb.org Volume-18, Issue-2| February - 2026

These findings suggest that female participants may be more emotionally invested in social media and experience greater psychological distress compared to male participants.

Result and Discussion:

The present study examined the relationship between social media use, self-esteem, and mental health among young adults. The findings revealed a significant negative association between social media use and self-esteem, and significant positive associations between social media use and depression, anxiety, and stress. These results suggest that greater psychological integration of social media into daily life is linked to lower self-evaluation and higher emotional distress. The negative correlation between social media use and self-esteem supports the first hypothesis. Young adults who reported stronger emotional attachment to social media platforms tended to report lower global self-worth. One possible explanation lies in social comparison processes. Social media platforms often present curated and idealized representations of peers' lives. Repeated exposure to such content may lead individuals to compare their own achievements, appearance, and lifestyle with unrealistic standards. Persistent upward comparison may create dissatisfaction and feelings of inadequacy, gradually reducing self-esteem.The positive relationship between social media use and depression, anxiety, and stress also supports the second hypothesis. Participants who were more psychologically engaged with social media reported higher levels of emotional distress. Several mechanisms may explain this pattern. First, constant connectivity can lead to information overload and reduced opportunities for psychological rest. Second, the pressure to maintain an appealing online presence may increase performance anxiety. Third, fear of missing out (FOMO) may intensify feelings of exclusion or loneliness, particularly when individuals perceive others as more socially active or successful.Regression analysis further demonstrated that social media use significantly predicted both self-esteem and depressive symptoms. Although the variance explained (20–24%) was moderate, it indicates that social media engagement is a meaningful contributor to psychological outcomes. However, a large proportion of variance remains unexplained, suggesting that additional factors such as personality traits, family environment, coping strategies, and offline social support also influence mental health.The findings align with theoretical perspectives such as Social Comparison Theory, which suggests that individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others, and Self-Discrepancy Theory, which proposes that discrepancies between actual and ideal self-images can produce emotional distress. Social media environments may intensify these processes by providing constant, easily accessible comparison targets.At the same time, it is important to recognize that social media is not inherently harmful. Its effects depend on the nature of use. Active and meaningful engagement, such as supportive communication and creative expression, may promote connection and well-being. In contrast, passive scrolling and validation-seeking behavior appear more strongly associated with negative outcomes. Therefore, the quality of engagement may be more critical than the quantity of time spent online.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the relationship between social media use, self-esteem, and mental health among young adults. The findings indicate that higher levels of social media integration are significantly associated with lower self-esteem and increased levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Social media use was found to be a significant predictor of both self-esteem and depressive symptoms, explaining a meaningful proportion of variance in psychological outcomes. These results suggest that while social media is an important tool for communication and social interaction, excessive or emotionally dependent use may negatively influence self-perception and emotional well-being. Continuous exposure to idealized content, comparison tendencies, and reliance on external validation may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and psychological distress.However, social media itself is not inherently harmful. Its impact depends on how individuals use it. Balanced, purposeful, and mindful engagement may reduce potential risks and enhance positive experiences. Therefore, promoting awareness about healthy digital habits, strengthening internal sources of self-worth, and encouraging offline social connections are essential steps in protecting young adults' mental health. In an increasingly digital society, understanding the psychological implications of social media use is crucial. Future research should continue exploring this area through longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify causal relationships and identify protective factors that can buffer against negative outcomes.

References

1. Andreassen, C. S., Torsheim, T., Brunborg, G. S., & Pallesen, S. (2012). Development of a Facebook addiction scale. *Psychological Reports, 110*(2), 501–517. https://doi.org/10.2466/02.09.18.PR0.110.2.501-517
2. Apaolaza, V., Hartmann, P., D'Souza, C., & Gilsanz, A. (2019). Mindfulness, compulsive mobile social media use, and derived stress. *Journal of Business Research, 98*, 49–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.01.031
3. Appel, H., Gerlach, A. L., & Crusius, J. (2016). The interplay between Facebook use, social comparison, envy, and depression. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 9*, 44–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.10.006
4. Azem, L., Al Alwani, R., Lucas, A., et al. (2023). Social media use and depression in adolescents: A scoping review. *Behavioral Sciences, 13*(6), 475. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13060475
5. Badola, A., Arora, N., Saran, B., & Priyanka. (2025). The effect of social media on body image, self-esteem, and social appearance anxiety among young adults. *International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences, 13*(10), 4159–4162. https://doi.org/10.18203/2320-6012.ijrms20253158

6. Best, P., Manktelow, R., & Taylor, B. (2014). Online communication, social media and adolescent wellbeing. *Children and Youth Services Review, 41*, 27–36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.03.001
7. Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*(1), 210–230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x
8. Burke, M., & Kraut, R. (2016). The relationship between Facebook use and well-being. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 21*(4), 265–281. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12162
9. Chou, H. T. G., & Edge, N. (2012). "They are happier and having better lives than I am": The impact of Facebook on perceptions of others' lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 15*(2), 117–121. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2011.0324
10. Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 9*, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.09.005
11. Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*(2), 117–140. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202
12. 12.Hunt, M. G., Marx, R., Lipson, C., & Young, J. (2018). No more FOMO: Limiting social media decreases loneliness and depression. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 37*(10), 751–768. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2018.37.10.751
13. Jenkins-Guarnieri, M. A., Wright, S. L., & Johnson, B. (2013). Development and validation of the Social Media Use Integration Scale. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 2*(1), 38–50. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030277
14. Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). The influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 25*(1), 79–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1590851
15. Kross, E., Verduyn, P., Demiralp, E., et al. (2013). Facebook use predicts declines in subjective well-being in young adults. *PLoS One, 8*(8), e69841. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0069841
16. Lee, S. Y. (2014). How do people compare themselves with others on social network sites? *Computers in Human Behavior, 32*, 253–260. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.12.009
17. Lin, L. Y., Sidani, J. E., Shensa, A., et al. (2016). Association between social media use and depression among U.S. young adults. *Depression and Anxiety, 33*(4), 323–331. https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22466
18. Lovibond, P. F., & Lovibond, S. H. (1995). The structure of negative emotional states: Comparison of the DASS with the Beck inventories. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 33*(3), 335–343. https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(94)00075-U
19. Meier, A., & Schäfer, S. (2018). The positive side of social comparison on social network sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 21*(3), 193–200. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2017.0667
20. Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015). Using social media for social comparison and feedback-seeking. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 43*(8), 1427–1438. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-015-0020-0
21. Odgers, C. L., & Jensen, M. R. (2020). Digital media and adolescent mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 61*(3), 336–348. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13190
22. Orben, A., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. *Nature Human Behaviour, 3*(2), 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1
23. Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. E., et al. (2017). Social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 53*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2017.01.010
24. Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(4), 1841–1848. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014
25. Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton University Press.
26. Samaha, M., & Hawi, N. S. (2016). Smartphone addiction, stress, academic performance, and satisfaction. *Computers in Human Behavior, 57*, 321–325. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.045
27. Shakya, H. B., & Christakis, N. A. (2017). Association of Facebook use with compromised well-being. *American Journal of Epidemiology, 185*(3), 203–211. https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kww189
28. Shensa, A., Escobar-Viera, C. G., Sidani, J. E., et al. (2017). Problematic social media use and depressive symptoms. *Addictive Behaviors, 69*, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2017.01.010
29. Steers, M. L. N., Wickham, R. E., & Acitelli, L. K. (2014). Facebook use and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 33*(8), 701–731. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2014.33.8.701
30. Tandoc, E. C., Ferrucci, P., & Duffy, M. (2015). Facebook use, envy, and depression. *Computers in Human Behavior, 43*, 139–146. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.10.053
31. Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms among adolescents. *Clinical Psychological Science, 6*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702617723376
32. Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2018). Screen time and lower psychological well-being among adolescents. *Preventive Medicine Reports, 12*, 271–283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2018.10.003
33. Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., & Schouten, A. P. (2006). Friend networking sites and adolescents' self-esteem. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 9*(5), 584–590. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2006.9.584