

Effect of Social Media On Self Esteem Among Various Age Groups in India

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media has become one of the most defining features of the 21st century, altering how individuals communicate, express themselves, and perceive their identities. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X) dominate the digital landscape, offering instant access to networks of friends, peers, and global communities. India, with its diverse population and rapidly expanding internet penetration, represents one of the largest user bases of these platforms. While social media fosters connection, learning, and opportunities for self-presentation, its impact on psychological constructs such as self-esteem has been the subject of increasing concern and debate.

Self-esteem, broadly defined as an individual's evaluation of their self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965), is closely tied to psychological well-being, emotional resilience, and life satisfaction. The relationship between social media use and self-esteem, however, is far from straightforward. On one hand, positive online feedback and the ability to maintain social ties can enhance self-esteem. On the other, constant exposure to idealized lifestyles, upward social comparisons, and dependence on online validation may reduce it. Existing research suggests that these effects are often mediated by age, as individuals across different life stages engage with social media in distinct ways.

This dissertation explores the **effect of social media on self-esteem among various age groups in India**, with a focus on adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults. The research is grounded in established psychological frameworks, including **Social Comparison Theory** (Festinger, 1954), which explains how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others; **Sociometer Theory** (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), which links self-esteem to perceived social acceptance; and **Uses and Gratifications Theory** (Katz et al., 1974), which highlights the motivations behind media use. Together, these theories provide a strong foundation for understanding the nuanced relationship between digital engagement and self-worth across life stages.

The study adopts a **quantitative, cross-sectional design** involving a minimum of 100 participants from different age groups. Participants will complete a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic

details, a **Social Media Usage Questionnaire** (assessing frequency, duration, and type of use), and the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)**,

a widely validated tool for measuring self-esteem. Data will be analysed using **descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and ANOVA tests** to examine differences and associations between age groups and patterns of social media use (e.g., active vs. passive engagement).

The research is expected to reveal generational differences in how social media impacts self-esteem. Adolescents and young adults may be more vulnerable to downward effects due to peer pressure, identity formation, and reliance on online validation. Middle-aged adults may experience mixed effects, balancing personal identity with professional networking, while older adults may demonstrate protective factors, using social media primarily for connection and reducing loneliness.

This dissertation aims to contribute to the growing body of literature by providing **age-specific and culturally relevant insights** within the Indian context, where digitalization intersects with cultural values and generational divides. The findings are anticipated to inform **educators, psychologists, policymakers, and digital literacy programs**, helping to design interventions that mitigate risks while enhancing the positive potential of social media use.

Keywords: Social Media, Self-Esteem, Adolescents, Young Adults, Middle-Aged Adults, Older Adults, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The 21st century has witnessed a dramatic transformation in the way people interact, largely driven by the rise of social media. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter (X), and Snapchat have become indispensable tools for communication, networking, and self-expression. Unlike traditional forms of interaction, social media enables individuals to engage with vast audiences instantly, transcending geographical and cultural barriers. Globally, billions of people use social media daily, with Statista (2023) reporting over 4.9 billion active users. India, in particular, stands out as one of the world's largest social media markets, with more than 600 million users, a figure expected to grow significantly in the coming years (IAMAI, 2022).

While social media has undoubtedly revolutionized access to information and connectivity, its impact on psychological well-being has become an area of growing concern. Among the many psychological constructs influenced by online engagement, **self-esteem** holds particular importance. Defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of their worth (Rosenberg, 1965), self-esteem is closely linked to emotional health, resilience, social adjustment, and overall quality of life. Social media has the potential both to enhance and to diminish self-esteem: positive online interactions may foster belonging and confidence, while constant exposure to idealized portrayals of others' lives may trigger self-doubt and comparison.

The issue becomes even more complex when examined across different **age groups**. Adolescents, who are still developing their identities, may rely heavily on peer validation online, making them vulnerable to fluctuations in self-esteem. Young adults, navigating academic and career challenges, often turn to social

media for networking and self-expression, which may both empower and destabilize them. Middle-aged adults may use social media primarily for information and family connections, while older adults increasingly turn to platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to reduce isolation and maintain relationships. The **age-specific differences** in social media motivations suggest that its impact on self-esteem is unlikely to be uniform across the lifespan.

In India, where generational differences, urban-rural divides, and cultural values intersect with digital life, examining the relationship between social media and self-esteem across age groups is both timely and essential.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Although extensive global research has examined the effects of social media on psychological well-being, most studies are concentrated in Western contexts, focusing primarily on adolescents and young adults. Limited research has been conducted in India, and even fewer studies have systematically compared **multiple age groups** within the same cultural context. This is a significant gap, given India's diverse population and unique cultural emphasis on collectivism, family ties, and intergenerational relationships.

Furthermore, while much of the existing literature explores **time spent on social media**, fewer studies analyze the **qualitative aspects of use**—for instance, whether individuals engage actively (creating, posting, interacting) or passively (browsing, comparing). These patterns may exert different effects on self-esteem, making it necessary to study not just the amount of social media use but also the **nature of engagement**.

Finally, by focusing on the Indian context, this study will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how cultural, developmental, and technological factors intersect to shape psychological outcomes. The findings may have implications not only for psychology as a discipline but also for education, mental health interventions, and policy development.

1.3 Problem Statement

The widespread use of social media in India has transformed communication and social interaction across age groups. However, while adolescents and young adults are often studied in this context, less is known about the psychological implications for middle-aged and older adults. Moreover, the impact of social media on **self-esteem**, a critical determinant of mental health and social adjustment, remains underexplored in Indian populations. Without such knowledge, psychologists, educators, and policymakers risk overlooking age-specific vulnerabilities and opportunities related to social media engagement.

Thus, there is a need for systematic research that investigates:

1. How social media affects self-esteem across different age groups.
2. Whether the impact differs by **type of engagement** (active vs. passive).
3. How cultural and generational factors in India moderate this relationship.

Need for the Study

In the contemporary digital era, social media has become an integral part of daily life, influencing how individuals interact, communicate, and perceive themselves. India, with one of the fastest-growing digital populations in the world, has witnessed a massive surge in social media usage across all age groups. While platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and TikTok-like apps provide avenues for connection, information exchange, and entertainment, they also present risks associated with excessive use, online comparison, and dependence on external validation.

One of the most significant psychological domains impacted by social media is **self-esteem**, which refers to an individual's evaluation of their own worth. Research suggests that social media can simultaneously provide opportunities for self-expression and expose individuals to negative experiences such as cyberbullying, unrealistic beauty standards, and constant peer comparison. These factors may lead to distorted self-perceptions, reduced confidence, and in some cases, symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Despite extensive global research, there is limited comprehensive evidence on the **Indian context**, where cultural norms, family values, and generational differences strongly influence social media use and self-concept. Younger populations in India are often more exposed to global digital trends, while older generations are adopting social media at a different pace and for different purposes (e.g., networking, family connection, or professional growth). This creates diverse patterns of use and potentially varying effects on self-esteem across age groups.

The study is therefore essential for several reasons:

1. Understanding Age-Based Differences

- Adolescents and young adults may use social media primarily for identity formation, peer approval, and social comparison.
 - Middle-aged groups may use it for professional networking and family connections, where validation and success markers differ.
 - Older adults may use it as a tool for reducing loneliness, reconnecting with peers, and staying updated.
- Investigating these differences will provide insight into how self-esteem is shaped uniquely within each age group.

2. Addressing the Rise of Social Media Addiction

In India, increasing rates of internet and smartphone penetration have led to concerns about digital overuse. Prolonged engagement can reinforce dependency on likes, comments, and online approval, leading to fragile or fluctuating self-esteem. A systematic study is necessary to explore how addiction-like behaviors correlate with psychological well-being.

3. Filling the Research Gap in Indian Society

While Western literature extensively documents the effects of social media on self-esteem, there is a paucity of research focusing on Indian populations, especially in terms of **cross-generational analysis**. Cultural values such as collectivism, family-centered identity, and academic/professional expectations may uniquely influence the relationship between social media and self-esteem in India.

4. **Practical and Policy Implications**

The findings can inform educators, parents, psychologists, and policymakers in developing age-appropriate awareness campaigns and intervention programs. For instance, adolescents may benefit from digital literacy programs, while older adults may require training to use social media healthily without dependency.

5. **Relevance in the Post-Pandemic Era**

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital dependency, making social media one of the primary avenues for education, work, and social connection. This sudden shift highlights the urgent need to understand its long-term implications on psychological well-being in India.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study is designed to address the following objectives:

1. To examine the overall relationship between social media use and self-esteem in the Indian population.
2. To compare the effect of social media on self-esteem among different age groups (adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults).
3. To explore whether active engagement (e.g., posting, interacting) and passive engagement (e.g., browsing, observing) exert differential effects on self-esteem.
4. To identify cultural and contextual factors within India that shape social media use and its psychological outcomes.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among Indian users?
2. How does this relationship differ across various age groups?
3. Does the type of engagement (active vs. passive use) influence self-esteem differently?
4. What cultural or contextual factors play a role in moderating this relationship in the Indian context?

1.6 Hypotheses of the Study

Based on prior literature and theoretical frameworks, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Social media use has a significant effect on self-esteem.
- **H2:** Adolescents and young adults will report lower self-esteem associated with social media use compared to middle-aged and older adults.
- **H3:** Passive social media use will be negatively associated with self-esteem, while active use will be positively associated.
- **H4:** Cultural and generational factors will moderate the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among Indian users.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

1. **Academic Contribution:** It addresses a gap in existing research by comparing multiple age groups within the Indian context, contributing to global literature on digital psychology.
2. **Practical Relevance:** Findings will inform educators, psychologists, and parents about the psychological risks and benefits of social media, especially for vulnerable groups such as adolescents.
3. **Policy Implications:** Insights may guide policymakers in developing digital literacy and mental health initiatives tailored to different generations.
4. **Cultural Relevance:** By situating the study within India's unique socio-cultural fabric, the research acknowledges diversity in digital experiences, providing culturally grounded insights.

1.8 Scope of the Study

The scope of this dissertation is limited to examining the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among four age groups in India.

- Adolescents (13–19 years)
- Young Adults (20–35 years)
- Middle-Aged Adults (36–50 years)
- Older Adults (51 years and above)

The study will focus on a sample size of at least 100 participants, recruited through stratified sampling to ensure representation across groups. Data will be collected using standardized scales (e.g., Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Social Media Usage Questionnaire). Statistical analysis (ANOVA, correlations) will be used to test hypotheses.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

- The study will rely on **self-report measures**, which may be subject to social desirability bias.

- The sample size, while adequate for preliminary analysis, may not capture the full diversity of India's population.
- As a cross-sectional study, it will not establish causality between social media use and self-esteem.
- Rural and non-urban populations may be underrepresented due to accessibility issues.

1.10 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1:** Introduction – Presents the background, rationale, objectives, hypotheses, and scope.
- **Chapter 2:** Literature Review – Reviews global and Indian studies, theoretical frameworks, and research gaps.
- **Chapter 3:** Methodology – Details the research design, sampling, tools, and ethical considerations.
- **Chapter 4:** Data analysis and Results – Presents statistical findings and hypothesis testing.
- **Chapter 5:** conclusion - Summarizes findings, highlights contributions
- **Chapter 6:** Limitations – explanation of limitations of the study and implications, and suggests future research directions.
- **Chapter 7:** References – references related to the study.
- **Chapter 8:** Annexure – questionnaire format and consent form.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The rise of social media has revolutionized the way individuals connect, communicate, and construct their identities. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), YouTube, and Snapchat have become integral to everyday life across age groups. India, with its rapidly expanding internet base, ranks among the top countries in terms of active social media users (Statista, 2023). While social media offers numerous benefits, including access to information, social connectedness, and opportunities for self-expression, concerns have emerged regarding its potential impact on psychological well-being, particularly self-esteem.

Self-esteem, defined as an individual's overall evaluation of their worth (Rosenberg, 1965), plays a critical role in psychological functioning. Research has linked self-esteem to resilience, life satisfaction, and mental health (Orth & Robins, 2014). Given its significance, understanding how social media shapes self-esteem across different life stages is crucial, particularly within the Indian context where cultural, social, and generational dynamics interact with digital behavior.

This chapter reviews theoretical frameworks and empirical studies on the relationship between social media and self-esteem, highlighting global and Indian research. It also identifies gaps that justify the current study.

2.2 Concept of Social Media

Social media is broadly defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Unlike traditional media, social media emphasizes interactivity, participation, and community building (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Globally, social media usage has become a defining characteristic of modern communication. The rise of smartphones has further intensified engagement, with users spending significant daily time online. In India, younger populations dominate the digital landscape, but adoption is rising across older age groups as well (IAMAI, 2022). The prevalence of social media raises questions about its influence on psychological constructs such as self-esteem.

2.3 Concept of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is considered a central dimension of the self, reflecting how positively or negatively individuals evaluate themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). High self-esteem is associated with adaptive functioning, confidence, and resilience, whereas low self-esteem correlates with depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal (Mann et al., 2004).

Research indicates that self-esteem develops across the lifespan. It tends to be unstable during adolescence, rises in young adulthood, stabilizes in middle age, and shows slight decline in older adulthood (Orth et al., 2018). Given this developmental trajectory, the interaction between self-esteem and social media is likely to vary across age groups.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing with others. Social media amplifies opportunities for comparison, as users are constantly exposed to curated portrayals of peers' achievements, appearances, and lifestyles. Upward comparisons (with those perceived as superior) may diminish self-esteem, while downward comparisons may enhance it (Vogel et al., 2014).

2.4.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) explains media use in terms of fulfilling personal needs, such as entertainment, social interaction, and identity exploration. On social media, adolescents may seek peer validation, young adults may explore identities, and older adults may maintain relationships. These differing motivations influence self-esteem outcomes (Joinson, 2008).

2.4.3 Self-Discrepancy Theory

According to Higgins (1987), self-esteem is influenced by discrepancies between one's actual self, ideal self, and ought self. Social media exposure to idealized content intensifies these gaps, particularly in appearance and lifestyle domains, leading to diminished self-esteem (Lee, 2014).

2.4.4 Sociometer Theory

Leary and Baumeister (2000) conceptualize self-esteem as a sociometer, reflecting perceived social inclusion or exclusion. Social media interactions, such as receiving likes or comments, act as real-time feedback mechanisms, shaping self-worth.

2.4.5 Cultivation Theory

Gerbner's (1998) Cultivation Theory suggests that prolonged media exposure shapes perceptions of reality. On social media, continuous exposure to idealized lifestyles may cultivate unrealistic standards of success and beauty, affecting self-esteem.

2.4.6 Identity Theory

Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) emphasizes that self-esteem is tied to the validation of identities. Social media provides platforms for identity performance and exploration, but also exposes individuals to judgment, which may positively or negatively impact self-esteem.

Together, these frameworks underscore the multifaceted relationship between social media and self-esteem, suggesting both risks and benefits depending on age, usage, and cultural context.

2.5 Global Research on Social Media and Self-Esteem

2.5.1 Adolescents

Adolescence is a critical period for identity development and peer validation. Research shows adolescents are particularly vulnerable to negative effects of social media. Nesi and Prinstein (2015) found that adolescents' engagement in online social comparison was linked to depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem. Perloff (2014) emphasized that Instagram's visual emphasis fosters body image concerns, especially among adolescent girls.

2.5.2 Young Adults

Findings among young adults are mixed. Tandoc et al. (2015) observed that "Facebook envy" predicted depressive symptoms in college students. In contrast, Ellison et al. (2007) reported that social media use enhanced social capital and self-esteem by facilitating connectedness. Valkenburg et al. (2017) noted that active engagement (posting, interacting) was associated with higher self-esteem, whereas passive consumption (scrolling) predicted lower self-worth.

2.5.3 Middle-Aged Adults

Research on middle-aged adults is relatively limited. Best et al. (2014) found that this group uses social media primarily for information exchange and maintaining family ties. While self-esteem effects were less pronounced, excessive use sometimes led to stress and feelings of inadequacy.

2.5.4 Older Adults

Older adults use social media for maintaining social networks and combating loneliness. Chen and Schulz (2016) found that social media use reduced isolation and improved subjective well-being among seniors. Quan-Haase et al. (2018) observed that older adults derived more positive than negative outcomes from online engagement, with minimal threats to self-esteem.

2.6 Research in the Indian Context

India's digital transformation provides a distinct context, shaped by collectivism, intergenerational households, and urban-rural divides.

Adolescents and Youth

Indian adolescents are highly active on platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp. Bano et al. (2019) reported that excessive social media use among adolescents correlated with body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. Singh and Nayak (2020) found that Instagram use negatively affected Indian youths' self-esteem, with gender differences: girls experienced appearance-based pressures, while boys felt performance-related pressures.

Young Adults

Chaudhary and Sharma (2019) documented that college students in India experienced both benefits and drawbacks. While social media enhanced connectedness and self-expression, it also fostered academic distraction and peer pressure, leading to fluctuating self-esteem.

Adults

Among Indian professionals, platforms such as LinkedIn and WhatsApp dominate. Mishra and Rout (2021) noted that WhatsApp use among adults sometimes contributed to stress and information overload, though direct links with self-esteem were weaker compared to adolescents.

Older Adults

Older Indians, though smaller in proportion, increasingly use WhatsApp and Facebook to maintain family connections. Mehta (2020) found that these interactions enhanced feelings of belonging and reduced loneliness, with minimal impact on self-esteem.

Urban-Rural Divide

Urban youth engage in appearance-driven social media practices, while rural youth often use platforms for education and connectivity (Gupta & Singh, 2021). The impact on self-esteem may thus vary significantly by geography.

2.7 Age-Related Differences in Self-Esteem

Longitudinal research (Orth et al., 2018) shows that self-esteem follows a predictable trajectory: low in adolescence, rising in young adulthood, stabilizing in midlife, and declining in older age. Social media may amplify these trends:

- **Adolescents:** More vulnerable due to peer comparison and identity development.

- **Young adults:** Self-esteem fluctuations tied to academic, career, and social validation online.
- **Middle-aged adults:** Stable self-esteem, but potential pressures from professional comparisons.
- **Older adults:** Use social media for connection, with relatively stable or positive self-esteem outcomes.

2.8 Critical Evaluation of Literature

The reviewed literature reveals both consistencies and contradictions:

- Social media use is consistently linked with **social comparison**, a key predictor of low self-esteem.
- However, **active engagement** (posting, interacting) is often associated with **higher self-esteem** compared to passive use.
- **Cultural differences** matter: Western users emphasize individual expression, while Indian users often prioritize family and community engagement, potentially buffering against negative effects.
- Methodologically, most studies are **cross-sectional**, limiting causal interpretations. Few longitudinal or experimental studies exist, particularly in India.
- Age-specific effects remain underexplored in India, with research skewed towards urban adolescents and college students.

2.9 Research Gaps

1. **Limited Indian research** systematically comparing different age groups.
2. **Urban bias**, with rural populations underrepresented.
3. **Gendered experiences** require deeper exploration in the Indian context.
4. Lack of **longitudinal and mixed-method approaches** to establish causality.
5. Insufficient focus on **behavioral patterns of social media use** (active vs. passive, validation-seeking vs. informational use).

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopted a **quantitative cross-sectional survey design** to examine the relationship between social media use and self-esteem across different age groups in India. A structured self-report questionnaire was administered, consisting of standardized and adapted measures of social media use, social comparison tendencies, and self-esteem. This design was chosen as it allows efficient collection of data from a large sample, enables statistical analysis of group differences, and helps identify associations between variables at a single point in time.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of self-esteem among participants belonging to different age groups in India.
2. To explore the patterns of social media use and social comparison across these age groups.

3. To examine the relationship between social media use, social comparison, and self-esteem.
4. To determine whether age moderates the relationship between social media use and self-esteem.

3.3 Hypotheses

1. There will be significant differences in self-esteem levels among different age groups in India.
2. Higher social media usage will be associated with lower self-esteem.
3. Greater social comparison on social media will predict lower self-esteem.
4. The effect of social media use on self-esteem will vary across age groups.
5. Adolescents and young adults will report lower self-esteem associated with social media use compared to middle-aged and older adults.

3.4 Participants

The target population for this study included **Indian social media users aged above 13 years**. A minimum sample size of **100 participants** was set, with an effort to achieve balanced representation across four age categories:

- Adolescents (13–19 years)
- Young Adults (20–35 years)
- Middle-aged Adults (36–50 years)
- Older Adults (above 51 years)

A **stratified purposive sampling technique** was employed to ensure inclusion from each age group. Recruitment was carried out via online platforms (e.g., Google Forms shared through WhatsApp, email, and social media) and offline settings (colleges, community centers, and senior citizen clubs).

Inclusion criteria:

- Active social media user (using social media at least once per week).
- Resident of India.
- Ability to read and understand English (or translated questionnaire if applicable).

Exclusion criteria:

- Individuals not using social media.
- Participants with diagnosed psychiatric conditions affecting self-report (self-disclosed).

3.5 Sample Size Justification

A minimum of **100 participants** was targeted to meet basic statistical requirements for ANOVA and regression analysis. Based on power analysis guidelines (Cohen, 1992), with a medium effect size ($f = 0.25$), $\alpha = 0.05$, and power $(1-\beta) = 0.80$, a minimum of 80 participants was required. Thus, the proposed sample size of ≥ 100 was considered adequate.

3.6 Measures

3.6.1 Demographic Sheet

Participants provided information on age, gender, education, occupation, residence (urban/rural), socioeconomic background, and frequency of social media use.

3.6.2 Social Media Use Profile

Items included platforms used, average hours per day spent on social media, primary purpose of use.

3.6.3 Social Media usage scale

A **6-item scale** was developed for this study to assess active versus passive engagement on social media. Responses were measured on a **5-point Likert scale** (1 = very rarely, 5 = very often). Example item: “*You feel an urge to use social media more and more.*” Higher scores indicated more active social media engagement.

3.6.4 Social Comparison

This measured the tendency to compare oneself with others on social media. Responses were recorded. Example item: “*I often compare my life to others’ posts on social media.*”

3.6.5 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The **10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)** was used to assess global self-esteem. Items were rated on a **4-point scale** (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). Five items were reverse-scored. Higher scores indicated higher self-esteem. This scale has demonstrated good reliability in Indian and international contexts.

3.7 Procedure

1. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board.
2. A pilot test with 15 participants was conducted to check clarity, reliability, and administration time.
3. Data collection was carried out using both **online (Google Forms)** and **offline paper-based** methods.
4. The questionnaire began with an information sheet and consent form. Participants aged below 18 provided assent with parental consent.
5. Average completion time was **10–15 minutes**.
6. After completion, participants received a debrief note and contact details for further queries.

3.8 Data Analysis Plan

Data were coded and entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. The following analyses were planned:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Means, standard deviations, and frequencies for demographics and scale scores.
- **Reliability Testing:** Cronbach's alpha for SMB, SCSM, and RSES.
- **Group Comparisons:** One-way ANOVA to compare self-esteem across age groups, followed by Tukey's post-hoc tests.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson correlations between hours of use, SMB scores, SCSM scores, and self-esteem.
- **Regression Analysis:** Multiple regression to predict self-esteem from social media use variables and social comparison.
- **Moderation Analysis (optional):** Using PROCESS macro to test whether age moderates the relationship between social media use and self-esteem.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** All participants provided informed consent before participation.
- **Confidentiality:** Responses were anonymous, and no identifying information was collected.
- **Right to Withdraw:** Participants could withdraw at any point without penalty.
- **Minimization of Risk:** The study posed minimal risk; however, helpline information was provided in case of discomfort.
- **Data Security:** Data was stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.

History and the Concept of Social Media

Defining the Concept of Social Media

Social media is broadly defined as a group of online platforms and applications that allow individuals to create, share, and exchange content within virtual communities and networks. Unlike traditional media, which is largely unidirectional and controlled by institutions, social media emphasizes **user participation, collaboration, and interactivity** (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It combines the principles of social interaction with digital communication technologies, making individuals both producers and consumers ("prosumers") of content.

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social media platforms can be understood as networked spaces that provide users with three essential functions:

1. **Profile creation** – the ability to construct public or semi-public personal identities.
2. **Networking** – connecting with friends, acquaintances, and communities.

3. **Interaction** – enabling the exchange of messages, images, videos, and other user-generated content.

Social media today encompasses a wide variety of platforms:

- **Social networking sites** (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn),
- **Microblogging platforms** (Twitter/X, Threads),
- **Content communities** (YouTube, TikTok),
- **Messaging apps** (WhatsApp, Telegram),
- **Discussion forums** (Reddit, Quora).

Despite differences in structure, all platforms share a central purpose: **facilitating communication, identity construction, and social interaction**. These aspects are directly linked to psychological processes such as **self-presentation, social comparison, and self-esteem regulation**.

Historical Development of Social Media

The history of social media is closely tied to the evolution of the internet and digital technologies. Its development can be divided into distinct phases:

1. Early Digital Communication (1970s–1990s)

The earliest traces of social networking can be found in systems such as **Bulletin Board Systems (BBS)** and **Usenet**, which enabled users to post public messages and participate in group discussions. These systems were primitive by today's standards but represented the first step toward **online communities**.

The 1990s witnessed the rise of instant messaging platforms like **ICQ, AOL Instant Messenger, and Yahoo! Chat**, which introduced real-time, one-to-one and group communication. Around the same time, early virtual communities such as **GeoCities** allowed users to build personal web pages, laying the groundwork for online identity creation.

2. The First Wave of Social Networking Sites (2000–2004)

The early 2000s saw the birth of recognizable social media platforms.

- **Friendster (2002)** allowed users to create digital profiles and connect with friends, pioneering the concept of an online social network.
- **MySpace (2003)** added customizable personal pages and music sharing, becoming especially popular among youth and artists.
- **LinkedIn (2003)** introduced professional networking, showing how online social connections could extend beyond personal life into career development.

These platforms emphasized **profile-based networking and digital identity**, features that remain central to social media today.

3. Expansion and Mainstream Adoption (2004–2010)

The launch of **Facebook in 2004** marked a turning point. Unlike earlier platforms, Facebook required real names and authentic identities, creating a more structured and trust-based network. By 2008, it had overtaken MySpace, becoming the world's dominant platform.

Other innovations during this period included:

- **YouTube (2005)**, which transformed users from passive consumers to active creators of video content.
- **Twitter (2006)**, introducing microblogging and real-time updates in 140 characters, emphasizing immediacy.
- **Orkut (2004–2014)**, which gained particular popularity in India and Brazil before being overshadowed by Facebook.

By the late 2000s, the introduction of **smartphones and mobile internet access** revolutionized social media. Platforms were no longer confined to desktop use but integrated seamlessly into daily routines.

4. Diversification and Globalization (2010–Present)

The 2010s brought rapid diversification:

- **Instagram (2010)** prioritized visual content and aesthetics, becoming central to identity presentation and social comparison.
- **WhatsApp (2009, widespread in India from 2012)** became the most dominant messaging platform, replacing SMS and reshaping personal and professional communication.
- **Snapchat (2011)** popularized ephemeral content, changing perceptions of privacy and sharing.
- **TikTok (2016)** introduced algorithm-driven short videos, rapidly gaining global dominance and reshaping content consumption patterns.

This period also marked the **globalization of social media**, with platforms adapting to regional contexts. In India, the growth of affordable smartphones and 4G networks made social media accessible to rural and urban populations alike, resulting in an explosion of user engagement across age groups.

Social Media in the Indian Context

India is now home to one of the largest social media populations in the world, with over **500 million active users**. Platforms such as **WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram** dominate, while Twitter/X, YouTube, and TikTok (before its ban in 2020) also had significant influence.

The role of social media in India extends beyond personal networking:

- **Adolescents and young adults** use it for identity exploration, peer validation, and entertainment.
- **Middle-aged adults** balance personal connections with professional networking.

- **Older adults** increasingly adopt platforms to maintain social ties, combat loneliness, and access information.

Social media has also been instrumental in **political mobilization, digital activism, health awareness, and business promotion**, highlighting its broad societal impact. However, these benefits coexist with psychological concerns such as **cyberbullying, addiction, body image dissatisfaction, and fluctuating self-esteem levels**.

Psychological Perspectives on Social Media and Self-Esteem

The historical evolution of social media is not only technological but also psychological. Key theories help explain why its rise has such a strong connection to self-esteem:

- **Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954):** social media intensifies upward and downward comparisons, influencing how individuals evaluate themselves.
- **Self-Presentation Theory (Goffman, 1959):** Platforms allow users to curate idealized versions of themselves, shaping both their online identity and their internal sense of self.
- **Sociometer Theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000):** Self-esteem functions as a psychological gauge of social acceptance; likes, comments, and followers serve as modern indicators of belonging.

Thus, the development of social media cannot be studied in isolation from its psychological impact. As platforms evolved to prioritize interaction, visibility, and validation, their influence on **self-esteem** became increasingly profound, making this area of study highly relevant to psychology.

Concept of Self-Esteem and Various Definitions

Introduction to Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is one of the most extensively studied constructs in psychology because of its strong association with personality development, social adjustment, and overall mental health. At its core, self-esteem refers to how individuals evaluate their own worth, competence, and value as human beings. It is not merely about feeling “good” or “bad” about oneself; rather, it reflects a deep-seated and enduring self-assessment that influences emotions, motivation, and behavior.

Self-esteem functions as a **psychological lens** through which people interpret their experiences and relationships. Individuals with high self-esteem generally perceive themselves as competent, likable, and worthy, while those with low self-esteem may struggle with self-doubt, insecurity, and vulnerability to stress. Since self-esteem is closely tied to identity and social belonging, it becomes especially relevant in the context of social media use, where self-presentation and social validation are central.

Definitions of Self-Esteem

Over time, scholars have defined self-esteem in slightly different ways, highlighting its multidimensional nature. Some widely recognized definitions include:

1. **William James (1890):**

One of the earliest conceptualizations of self-esteem. James defined it as:

Self-esteem = Successes / Pretensions

According to him, self-esteem depends on the ratio of one's actual achievements to one's aspirations. Thus, if achievements exceed expectations, self-esteem rises; if not, it falls.

2. Morris Rosenberg (1965):

Rosenberg, who developed the widely used *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*, defined self-esteem as:

A positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality.

His definition emphasizes self-esteem as a global evaluation of the self, encompassing both cognitive (beliefs about oneself) and affective (feelings toward oneself) components.

3. Nathaniel Branden (1969):

Branden, often referred to as the “father of the self-esteem movement,” defined it as:

The experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness.

His view highlights both **self-efficacy** (belief in one's competence) and **self-respect** (sense of worth).

4. Mruk (1995):

Mruk conceptualized self-esteem as:

The balance between competence and worthiness.

He emphasized that self-esteem involves both personal achievements and internalized self-value.

5. Heatherton & Wyland (2003):

Defined self-esteem as:

The evaluative component of the self-concept, reflecting how individuals feel about themselves overall.

This definition frames self-esteem as one part of the broader self-system, focusing specifically on evaluative judgments.

6. Orth & Robins (2014):

Contemporary research defines self-esteem as:

An individual's subjective evaluation of his or her worth as a person, which is relatively stable across time but can fluctuate in response to life events.

This modern view acknowledges both stability (trait self-esteem) and variability (state self-esteem).

Core Characteristics of Self-Esteem

From these definitions, several core features emerge:

- **Global Evaluation:** Self-esteem is a general attitude toward the self rather than a specific ability or trait.

- **Affective-Cognitive Nature:** It includes both beliefs (“I am capable”) and feelings (“I feel good about myself”).
- **Relative Stability:** While self-esteem can fluctuate in response to experiences, it tends to be relatively stable over time.
- **Context-Sensitivity:** It is influenced by cultural norms, social interactions, and developmental stages.

Types of Self-Esteem

To better understand its dynamics, psychologists often differentiate between types of self-esteem:

1. High vs. Low Self-Esteem:

- High self-esteem individuals generally have positive self-perceptions, resilience, and healthy coping strategies.
- Low self-esteem individuals often experience insecurity, negative self-perceptions, and vulnerability to social comparison.

2. Stable vs. Unstable Self-Esteem:

- Stable self-esteem remains consistent across situations and over time.
- Unstable self-esteem fluctuates, often depending on external validation, such as social approval on platforms like Instagram or Facebook.

3. Explicit vs. Implicit Self-Esteem:

- Explicit self-esteem refers to conscious, reflective evaluations of the self.
- Implicit self-esteem refers to automatic, unconscious associations with oneself, measured through indirect tasks.

Historical Evolution and Concept of Self-Esteem

Early Philosophical Roots

The notion of self-worth has been discussed long before psychology became a scientific discipline. Philosophers in ancient Greece and beyond reflected on human dignity, self-respect, and moral value:

- **Socrates** emphasized self-knowledge as the foundation of wisdom and personal integrity.
- **Aristotle** introduced the idea of “megalopsychia” (greatness of soul), referring to individuals who recognized their worth in proportion to their virtues.
- In Eastern traditions, self-worth was tied to spiritual development. For example, Indian philosophy linked self-respect to *dharma* (righteous duty), while Buddhism emphasized self-compassion.

These philosophical reflections laid the foundation for later psychological explorations of the “self” and its evaluation.

Psychoanalytic Perspectives (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)

With the advent of modern psychology, self-esteem began to be understood within personality development theories:

- **Sigmund Freud (1923)** conceptualized self-esteem as part of the **ego**. He linked it to the satisfaction of instinctual drives, superego judgments, and the balance of psychic forces. Low self-esteem, in Freud's view, often resulted from unresolved conflicts and harsh self-criticism by the superego.
- **Alfred Adler (1927)** introduced the concept of **inferiority complex**, explaining how feelings of inadequacy could impair self-esteem and drive individuals to overcompensate.
- **Karen Horney (1937)** described self-esteem in terms of “basic anxiety” and the individual's struggle for a real versus idealized self.

Thus, psychoanalysis framed self-esteem as an internal psychological struggle shaped by early experiences and unconscious processes.

William James and the Early Psychological Definition

William James (1890) provided the first explicit psychological formulation of self-esteem, defining it mathematically as:

Self-esteem = Successes / Pretensions

This formula suggested that self-esteem depends on the balance between actual achievements (successes) and one's aspirations (pretensions). If successes outweigh pretensions, self-esteem rises; if not, it declines. James's definition remains influential because it highlights **achievement, expectation, and self-evaluation** as central to self-esteem.

Humanistic Psychology (Mid-20th Century)

Humanistic psychologists emphasized the positive and growth-oriented aspects of self-esteem:

- **Carl Rogers (1951)** introduced the concept of **positive regard** and **self-concept**. He argued that self-esteem develops when individuals experience unconditional positive regard from others, leading to **self-acceptance**. Conditional acceptance, on the other hand, fosters low self-esteem.
- **Abraham Maslow (1943)** placed self-esteem within his **Hierarchy of Needs**, identifying it as a higher-order psychological need that includes confidence, competence, and respect from others. According to Maslow, once basic and social needs are met, individuals seek self-esteem before reaching self-actualization.

Humanistic views shifted the understanding of self-esteem toward **self-growth, acceptance, and authenticity**.

The Self-Esteem Movement (1960s–1980s)

The 1960s and 1970s saw a surge of interest in self-esteem, particularly in education and child development.

- **Morris Rosenberg (1965)** introduced the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)**, which remains the most widely used measure of global self-esteem. He defined self-esteem as a positive or negative attitude toward the self as a whole.
- **Nathaniel Branden (1969)**, a psychotherapist, popularized self-esteem in public discourse. He defined it as “*the experience of being competent to cope with life’s challenges and being worthy of happiness.*” Branden’s work inspired the **self-esteem movement**, which influenced parenting and educational practices, sometimes controversially promoting self-esteem as a cure-all for social problems.

Contemporary Psychological Perspectives (1990s–Present)

Modern psychology has refined the concept of self-esteem, emphasizing its complexity:

- **Mruk (1995)** proposed a **two-dimensional model**, defining self-esteem as a balance between competence and worthiness.
- **Heatherton & Wyland (2003)** described it as the evaluative component of the self-concept, highlighting that it includes both cognitive beliefs and emotional feelings.
- **Orth & Robins (2014)** differentiated between **trait self-esteem** (a stable, long-term sense of worth) and **state self-esteem** (temporary fluctuations based on context, such as receiving likes on social media).

Recent research also explores **implicit self-esteem** (automatic, unconscious evaluations of self-worth) alongside **explicit self-esteem** (conscious self-reflections). This distinction helps explain why people may consciously report high self-esteem but unconsciously display insecurity.

Core Characteristics of Self-Esteem Across Theories

Despite evolving definitions, key themes recur:

1. **Evaluative:** Self-esteem involves positive or negative judgments about the self.
2. **Multidimensional:** It includes competence, self-respect, and social belonging.
3. **Dynamic:** It can fluctuate across situations (state) but shows stability over time (trait).
4. **Relational:** It is shaped by interactions with others and cultural context.

Self-Esteem and Other Psychological Variables

Self-esteem, broadly defined as an individual’s overall evaluation of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965), does not exist in isolation. It interacts dynamically with a range of psychological, social, and behavioral variables. Understanding these relationships is crucial for contextualizing the impact of social media on self-esteem, as these variables often mediate or moderate the outcomes.

1. Self-Esteem and Anxiety

Low self-esteem is strongly correlated with higher levels of anxiety. Individuals with diminished self-worth often doubt their competence and fear negative evaluation from others, which may lead to social anxiety or generalized anxiety (Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Conversely, healthy self-esteem acts as a protective factor against stress and anxiety by fostering resilience and positive coping strategies.

2. Self-Esteem and Depression

A consistent body of research links low self-esteem to depressive symptoms. Beck's cognitive model highlights negative self-schemas as a core component of depression. Longitudinal studies show that low self-esteem is both a **predictor** and a **consequence** of depression (Orth et al., 2008). High self-esteem, on the other hand, contributes to optimism and positive affect.

3. Self-Esteem and Body Image

Body image plays a central role in shaping self-esteem, especially among adolescents and young adults. Unrealistic beauty standards portrayed on social media often exacerbate body dissatisfaction, which in turn lowers self-esteem (Fardouly et al., 2015). Conversely, individuals with positive body image are more likely to report higher self-esteem and healthier psychological functioning.

4. Self-Esteem and Academic/Occupational Performance

Self-esteem is positively associated with motivation, persistence, and academic achievement (Baumeister et al., 2003). In workplaces, employees with higher self-esteem demonstrate greater job satisfaction, productivity, and leadership potential. Low self-esteem, by contrast, can result in fear of failure, avoidance of challenges, and burnout.

5. Self-Esteem and Social Relationships

Healthy interpersonal relationships play a vital role in the development and maintenance of self-esteem. According to **Sociometer Theory** (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), self-esteem acts as a psychological gauge of social acceptance. Social rejection or lack of belongingness can lower self-esteem, while positive peer and family interactions enhance it.

6. Self-Esteem and Aggression

While low self-esteem is typically associated with internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety, depression), inflated or unstable self-esteem has been linked to aggression and hostility. Individuals who possess fragile self-esteem may react aggressively when their self-worth is threatened (Baumeister et al., 1996).

7. Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction

Numerous studies confirm that self-esteem is a strong predictor of overall life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995). Individuals with high self-esteem perceive themselves as competent and valuable, which contributes to subjective well-being, positive affect, and a stronger sense of purpose.

8. Self-Esteem and Resilience

Self-esteem contributes significantly to resilience, the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity. Individuals with higher self-esteem are more likely to employ adaptive coping mechanisms, perceive challenges as opportunities, and recover more effectively from setbacks (Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2003).

9. Self-Esteem and Personality Traits

Research within the framework of the Big Five Personality Model has shown that self-esteem is most strongly correlated with **neuroticism (negative)** and **extraversion (positive)** (Robins et al., 2001). Agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness also contribute indirectly to healthy self-esteem through improved relationships and competence.

10. Self-Esteem and Social Media Usage

Self-esteem is intricately linked to digital behaviors. Social media platforms provide opportunities for self-presentation, but also expose users to upward social comparison and cyberbullying, which may lower self-esteem. Conversely, constructive online interactions and validation can temporarily boost self-worth. This dual role makes self-esteem a pivotal variable in digital psychology research (Vogel et al., 2014).

Overcoming Social Media Addiction

Introduction

The rise of social media has transformed the way individuals communicate, socialize, and access information. However, excessive use has led to what psychologists increasingly describe as *social media addiction*. This condition is characterized by compulsive checking of online platforms, preoccupation with virtual validation, and difficulty disengaging even when usage disrupts daily life. Addiction to social media can impair concentration, sleep patterns, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships. Overcoming such dependency requires a multidimensional approach involving psychological, behavioral, technological, and social interventions (Andreassen, 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

1. Psychological Approaches

1.1 Self-Awareness and Self-Monitoring

The first step in breaking the cycle of addiction involves self-awareness. Individuals must recognize the extent to which social media influences their lives. This can be achieved by tracking daily screen time, reflecting on emotional states, and identifying triggers such as boredom or loneliness (Sun & Zhang, 2021).

1.2 Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT has been widely used to treat behavioral addictions, including problematic internet use. It challenges maladaptive beliefs such as “*I need to check my notifications to feel accepted*” and replaces them with healthier alternatives. Evidence suggests CBT reduces compulsive digital behaviors and improves self-regulation (Young, 2017; Marino et al., 2018).

1.3 Mindfulness-Based Practices

Mindfulness enhances present-moment awareness, reducing automatic behaviors like compulsive scrolling. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have been shown to decrease problematic social media use and improve emotional well-being (Lan et al., 2018; Elhai et al., 2020).

2. Behavioral Interventions

2.1 Setting Boundaries

Conscious regulation of digital habits—such as disabling notifications and limiting usage to specific times—reduces compulsive engagement (Bányai et al., 2017).

2.2 Digital Detox Programs

Short-term abstinence or “digital detoxes” can reset unhealthy patterns. Research shows that even brief breaks from social media improve mood, focus, and sleep quality (Vanman et al., 2018; Hunt et al., 2018).

2.3 Alternative Activities

Replacing social media use with physical exercise, reading, or volunteering satisfies psychological needs while reducing dependence (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017).

3. Technological Solutions

3.1 App Limiters and Screen Time Monitors

Tools like *Digital Wellbeing* (Android) and *Screen Time* (iOS) help individuals track and restrict use. Evidence shows these tools support healthier digital habits when combined with personal commitment (Stiglic & Viner, 2019).

3.2 Content Filtering and Blocking Tools

Blocking applications such as Freedom or StayFocusd minimize distractions and promote productivity (Parker et al., 2020).

3.3 Gamification of Self-Control

Apps that gamify digital wellness, rewarding users for avoiding unnecessary scrolling, encourage self-control through positive reinforcement (Wu et al., 2020).

4. Social and Environmental Support

4.1 Strengthening Offline Relationships

Offline connections provide emotional support and reduce reliance on virtual validation. Strong interpersonal ties are inversely related to problematic online use (Best et al., 2021).

4.2 Role of Families and Educational Institutions

Parents and educators can model balanced digital use, encourage awareness programs, and introduce curricula promoting digital well-being (Odgers & Jensen, 2020).

4.3 Community and Group Support

Support groups foster accountability, normalize struggles, and promote collective recovery (Hawi & Samaha, 2017).

5. Professional Interventions

Severe cases may require professional help. Therapists and counselors can offer CBT, group therapy, or mindfulness-based strategies. Co-occurring issues such as anxiety, depression, or insomnia may also need medical management (Andreassen et al., 2020; Hussain & Griffiths, 2019)

How to Develop Self-Esteem

Introduction

Self-esteem, defined as the individual's evaluation of their own worth, plays a crucial role in psychological well-being, motivation, and interpersonal functioning (Rosenberg, 1965). Low self-esteem has been linked to anxiety, depression, and susceptibility to external validation, while high self-esteem is associated with resilience, life satisfaction, and healthier relationships. Developing self-esteem is not an instantaneous process but a gradual and intentional practice involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral growth.

1. Building Self-Awareness

The foundation of self-esteem lies in self-awareness. Individuals must first understand their strengths, weaknesses, values, and goals. Self-reflection practices, such as journaling or mindfulness, allow individuals to recognize patterns of negative self-talk and replace them with more balanced self-perceptions (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Awareness of one's uniqueness fosters acceptance rather than constant comparison with others, particularly relevant in the era of social media.

2. Cultivating Positive Self-Talk

Internal dialogue strongly influences self-esteem. Negative self-statements (e.g., *"I am not good enough"*) reinforce low self-worth, whereas positive affirmations (e.g., *"I am capable and deserving of success"*) help strengthen confidence. Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques encourage individuals to challenge irrational beliefs and reframe them into healthier, more constructive thoughts (Beck, 2011).

3. Setting Realistic Goals and Achieving Them

According to William James's formula for self-esteem—successes divided by pretensions—self-worth improves when individuals set attainable goals and work toward achieving them. Breaking larger tasks into smaller, manageable steps creates a sense of competence and accomplishment, reinforcing positive self-perceptions (Bandura, 1997).

4. Developing Competence and Skills

Skill mastery is a key contributor to self-esteem. Engaging in activities such as learning a new language, developing hobbies, or improving academic and professional skills instills confidence. Bandura's concept of **self-efficacy** highlights that belief in one's ability to succeed in specific tasks directly enhances overall self-esteem (Bandura, 1997).

5. Practicing Self-Compassion

Self-esteem development requires treating oneself with kindness rather than harsh self-criticism. Kristin Neff's framework of **self-compassion** emphasizes three dimensions: self-kindness, recognition of shared humanity, and mindfulness. Self-compassion helps individuals cope with failures, learn from mistakes, and maintain self-worth even in challenging circumstances (Neff, 2011).

6. Building Healthy Relationships

Positive, supportive relationships foster a sense of belonging and acceptance, which in turn strengthen self-esteem. Being surrounded by individuals who provide encouragement, constructive feedback, and unconditional regard helps counteract internalized negativity (Rogers, 1961). Conversely, toxic or critical relationships should be minimized, as they often perpetuate low self-worth.

7. Reducing Social Comparison

Social comparison, especially prevalent in social media environments, is a major threat to self-esteem. Individuals can protect and develop their self-worth by focusing on personal growth rather than external validation. Shifting attention from "upward comparisons" (comparing with those perceived as more successful) to self-improvement fosters healthier self-perceptions (Festinger, 1954).

8. Practicing Gratitude and Mindfulness

Gratitude journaling and mindfulness exercises strengthen positive emotions and reduce tendencies toward self-criticism. Research shows that gratitude interventions not only improve mood but also enhance overall self-esteem by shifting focus from deficiencies to accomplishments and sources of support (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

9. Engaging in Physical and Mental Well-Being Activities

Physical activity, balanced nutrition, and adequate rest contribute to both mental and physical health, indirectly promoting positive self-regard. Exercise, in particular, is strongly correlated with higher self-esteem, as it enhances both body image and psychological resilience (Fox, 2000).

Conclusion

Developing self-esteem is a lifelong process requiring conscious self-awareness, cognitive restructuring, emotional acceptance, and healthy behavioral practices. By cultivating positive self-talk, setting realistic goals, building competence, and fostering meaningful relationships, individuals strengthen their sense of worth and resilience. In the digital age, where external validation through social media often undermines self-esteem, internal strategies such as self-compassion, mindfulness, and gratitude are especially crucial. Ultimately, building self-esteem empowers individuals to lead more confident, fulfilling, and psychologically balanced lives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DATA ANALYSIS

The Results and Discussion sections are key to presenting the findings of the study, analysing the statistical data, and interpreting the implications in the context of existing literature. Below is a detailed structure of how these sections will be organised.

1. Results

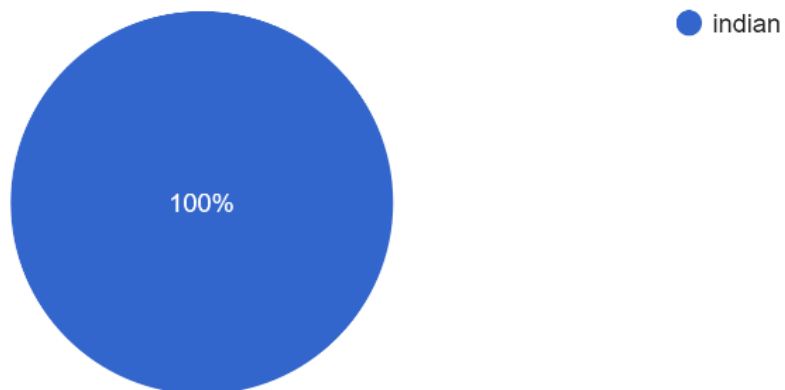
This section presents the key findings from both quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

a. Quantitative Results

Figure 1

Demographics of Participants

Nationality
100 responses



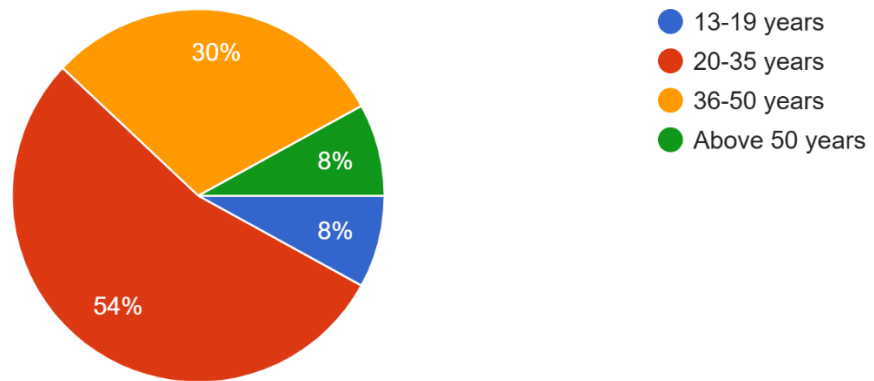
Note: Nationality of the total participants

Figure 2

Age of the participants

Age

100 responses



Note: The age of the participants.

Out of 100 participants who are Indians

Aged between 13-19 years is 8 %

Aged between 20-35 years is 54%

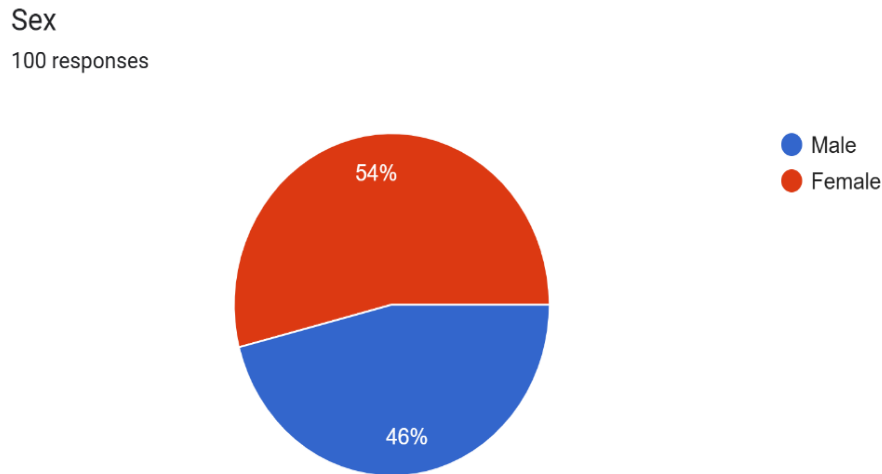
Aged between 36-50 years is 30%

Above 50 years is 8%

All the participants were selected on simple random samplings.

Sex

Among these 54 numbers are females and 46 are males.

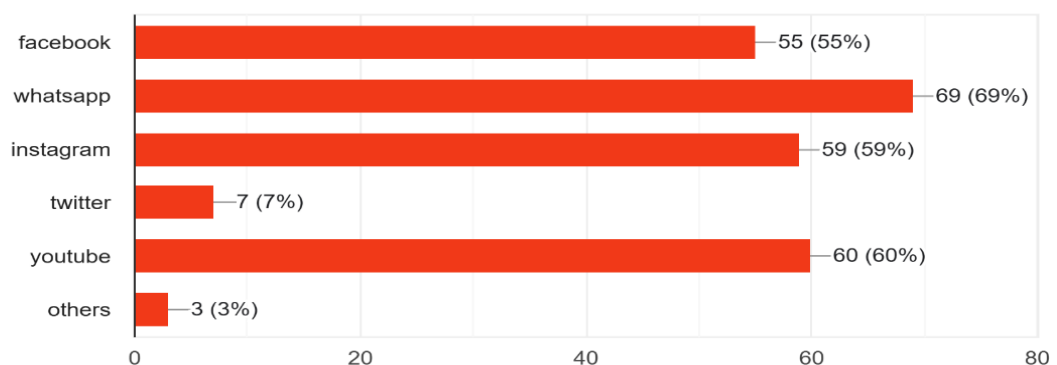
Figure 3*Sex of the participants**Note: sex of the participants.***Widely used social media**

Among the widely used social media applications WhatsApp (69%) leads followed by YouTube (60%).

Figure 4*Usage of different apps*

Which social media platforms do you use most often (Select all that apply)

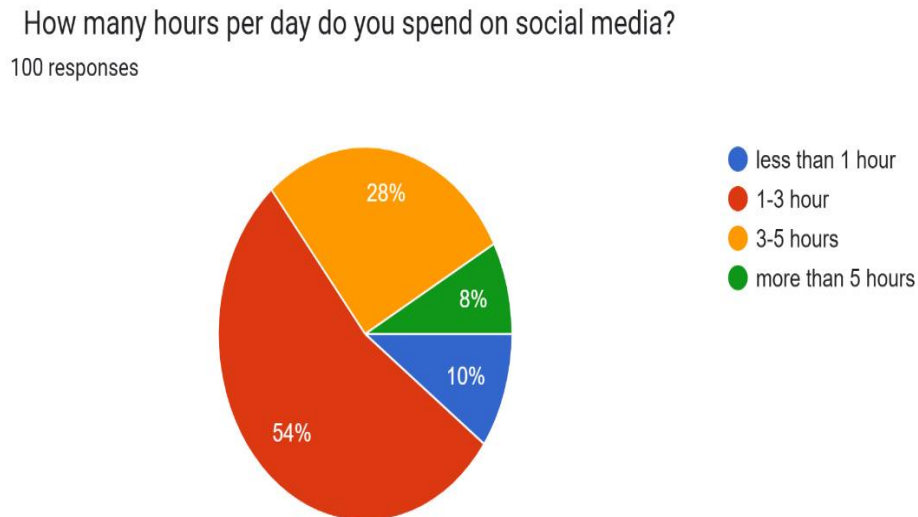
100 responses



Average usage time

Figure 5

Average usage time of the participants.



Over 10 of them reported they use social media less than 1 hour

54 of them reported they use social media 1-3 hours,

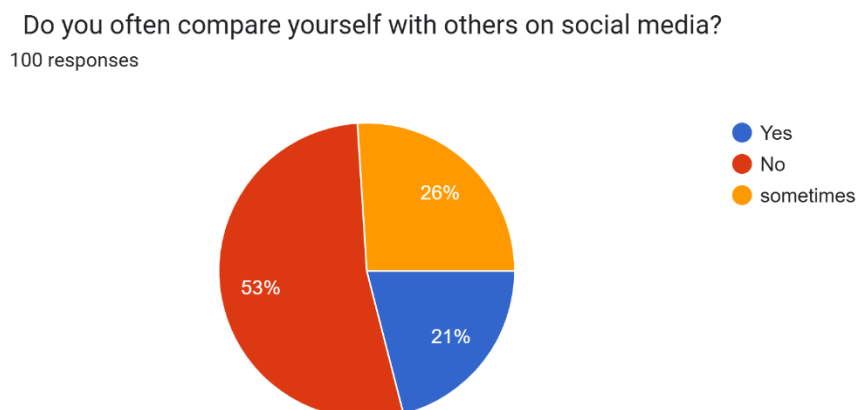
28 of them reported that they use social media 3-5 hours,

8 of them reported that they use social media more than 5 hours.

Social media comparison.

Figure 6

Social media comparison.



Note: social media comparison reported by participants.

Over 21 of the participants reported that they compare them with others on social media, 26 of them sometimes compared and 53 of the participants reported that they never compare with others on social media.

Self-esteem scale

The scale yields a single total score ranging from 0 to 30, with higher scores indicating more positive self-esteem.

- 0 to 15 points: Low self-esteem
- 16 to 25 points: Normal self-esteem
- 26 to 30 points: High self-esteem

Upon study among 100 participants the mean score is **18** which is normal (see table 2).

Social media scale

This scale scores maximum of 30, the higher scores indicate the more addictive usage.

Upon study among 100 participants the mean score is **16** which is normal (see table 2).

The regression analysis

The regression analysis shows the r value is **0.54**. and the r square is 0.291, which means that there is a negative correlation between the two variables.

This means the higher the social media usage results in lower self-esteem and lower social media usage will improve self-esteem significantly (see table 3).

Corelation analysis

Based on obtained data the Pearson Correlation is **-0.54** which is in negative.

The negative P value indicates that there is a negative correlation between the two variables.

This means the higher the social media usage results in lower self-esteem and lower social media usage will improve self-esteem significantly (see table 3).

P value

The p value is <0.05 , that is 0.000000006 (see table 3).

Age wise categorisation

Upon analysis of the social media usage and self-esteem on different age groups, indicates **the age between 13-19 years shows more corelation**, which will reveal the easy affection of the self-esteem during the development of the personality and this may be due to lack of life experience leads to direct corelation (see table 4).

Table 1

Scores obtained by the 100 participants.

Sl no	social media score	self-esteem score
1.	14	25
2.	16	17
3.	20	16
4.	10	19
5.	20	14
6.	13	26
7.	16	16
8.	8	22
9.	20	20
10.	11	12
11.	10	21
12.	6	27
13.	20	22
14.	14	21
15.	11	24
16.	15	20
17.	13	20
18.	16	28
19.	27	2
20.	23	22
21.	7	29
22.	24	13
23.	16	18
24.	11	16
25.	12	20
26.	16	19
27.	14	15
28.	11	20
29.	17	19
30.	18	17
31.	8	14
32.	13	19



33.	18	14
34.	18	18
35.	15	14
36.	15	15
37.	23	13
38.	24	14
39.	12	16
40.	13	24
41.	9	17
42.	12	25
43.	21	16
44.	16	17
45.	17	14
46.	18	19
47.	18	23
48.	9	29
49.	9	26
50.	20	15
51.	21	16
52.	6	26
53.	7	18
54.	16	18
55.	19	17
56.	17	19
57.	23	10
58.	22	12
59.	20	20
60.	8	24
61.	17	30
62.	14	16
63.	14	19
64.	14	23
65.	20	19
66.	10	28
67.	6	20
68.	18	19
69.	22	18
70.	15	13
71.	6	17
72.	16	18
73.	22	18
74.	17	24



75.	19	20
76.	21	18
77.	23	9
78.	23	14
79.	19	14
80.	16	11
81.	20	17
82.	14	17
83.	17	14
84.	19	19
85.	17	17
86.	14	17
87.	21	13
88.	21	13
89.	17	16
90.	16	18
91.	15	15
92.	17	17
93.	18	16
94.	25	9
95.	17	14
96.	21	18
97.	21	10
98.	17	11
99.	18	20
100.	19	19

Table 2

calculations

Total	1612	1800
Median	17	18
Mean	16.12	18

Table 3*Regression statistics*

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.540175789
R Square	0.291789883
Pearson correlation	-0.540175789
P value	0.000000006

Table 4*Category scores*

	mean	median
cat 1		
Sm score	19.375	20.5
Se score	14.25	14
cat 2		
Sm score	16.31481	17
Se score	17.7037	17.5
cat 3		
Sm score	14.96667	15
Se score	19.03333	18
cat 4		
Sm score	15.875	18.5
Se score	19.875	17

Note: cat 1 = age of 13-19 years, cat 2= age of 20-35 years, cat 3= age of 36-50 years, cat 4= age above 50 years, Sm score= social media score, Se score =self esteem score.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the **Effect of social media on Self-esteem among various age Groups in India**. This study conducted on 100 participants of a simple random sampling gives the result that, there will be negative correlation between the social media usage and the self-esteem. This means when the increase in social media usage will decrease the self-esteem eventually decrease in social media usage will increase the self-esteem of the individuals.

The social media and self-esteem negative correlation are stronger in age between 13 and 19 years. This may be due to early exposure of the excessive social exposure and lack of life experiences.

With limited social media usage, the self-esteem will be at higher levels and the comparison of self with others will affect the self-esteem drastically. Everyone should use social media with limited time without any comparison.

The study acknowledges several limitations, including reliance on self-reported data, the cross-sectional nature of the design, and sample biases. These limitations suggest the need for future research, particularly longitudinal studies to better understand the long-term effects.

LIMITATIONS

1. Self-Reported Data:

Issue: The study relied on self-reported data from participants to gather information. Self-reports are susceptible to biases such as recall bias, social desirability bias.

Implication:

This can lead to an underestimation or overestimation of the study. Participants may also be hesitant to disclose sensitive experiences, further influencing the accuracy of the data.

2. Cross-Sectional Design:

Issue: The study utilized a cross-sectional design, which means data were collected at one point in time rather than over a period of years.

Implication: This limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationship between social media usage and the self-esteem. Longitudinal studies would be better suited to examine how the social media usage will decrease the self of the individual. This will be helpful for developing coping strategies.

3. Sample Bias

Issue: The sample was primarily drawn from individuals on simple random sampling which will affect the overall sampling quality with disproportions in age groups sample.

Implication: The findings may not be generalizable to all individuals because of its limitation a larger study with more samples by advanced sampling techniques must be administered.

5. Limited Demographic Representation

Issue: The study sample may not be fully representative of the diverse populations that uses social media. For instance, participants may have been limited to certain age groups, ethnicities, or geographic locations.

Implication: This lack of diversity may restrict the applicability of the results to other groups, such as various age groups and economic class levels.

Limitations of the Study

Every research study, regardless of its scope or methodological rigor, is subject to certain limitations that must be acknowledged to provide a balanced and transparent interpretation of the findings. The present study on the *effect of social media on self-esteem among various age groups in India* has the following limitations:

1. Sampling Constraints

- The study employed a sample size of 100 participants. Although sufficient for exploratory research, this number may not be large enough to generalize the findings to the entire Indian population, which is highly diverse in terms of culture, socio-economic status, and digital exposure.
- Participants were drawn through convenience sampling, which may introduce **sampling bias** and limit the representativeness of the results.

2. Self-Report Bias

- Data collection relied on **self-report questionnaires** to assess social media usage and self-esteem levels. Such methods are vulnerable to **social desirability bias**, where participants may underreport or overreport their habits to present themselves in a favourable light.
- Memory recall errors may also have affected the accuracy of responses regarding time spent on social media.

3. Cross-Sectional Design

- The study utilized a **cross-sectional research design**, which captures information at a single point in time. This limits the ability to establish **causal relationships** between social media usage and self-esteem.
- Longitudinal studies would be required to track changes over time and provide stronger evidence of causality.

4. Cultural and Contextual Variations

- India is a culturally heterogeneous country, and patterns of social media usage may vary significantly across regions, languages, and socio-economic groups. The study sample may not adequately capture these variations.
- Urban participants may have different experiences compared to rural populations, which could affect how social media impacts self-esteem.

5. Platform-Specific Differences Not Considered

- The study examined social media usage in general without differentiating between specific platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, LinkedIn). Each platform has unique features (visual content, professional networking, short messages) that may affect self-esteem differently.

6. Age Group Categorization

- Although the study compared different age groups, categorization may oversimplify developmental and psychological differences within each group. For example, adolescents aged 13–17 may have distinct experiences compared to young adults aged 18–24, even if they fall under the same broad group.

7. Lack of Qualitative Insights

- While quantitative data provides measurable outcomes, the study did not incorporate qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups) that could have offered richer insights into participants' subjective experiences with social media and self-esteem.

8. External Influences Not Controlled

- Other psychological, social, and environmental factors that influence self-esteem—such as family support, peer pressure, mental health history, or academic/work stress—were not controlled for. These may have confounded the relationship between social media use and self-esteem.

9. Technological and Temporal Limitations

- The rapidly evolving nature of social media platforms means that findings may become outdated as new features, trends, and platforms emerge.
- The study reflects usage patterns at the time of data collection, which may shift significantly in the future.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present study has shed light on the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among different age groups in India. However, given the limitations acknowledged earlier, further research is necessary to broaden understanding and strengthen the generalizability of findings. The following suggestions are proposed for future investigations:

1. Larger and More Representative Samples

Future research should include larger, more diverse, and representative samples covering urban, semi-urban, and rural populations across different regions of India. This would ensure greater generalizability of findings across socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.

2. Longitudinal Research Designs

Since self-esteem and social media usage are dynamic phenomena, longitudinal studies should be conducted to observe changes over time. This would help establish **causal relationships** and identify

whether long-term social media use enhances or diminishes self-esteem across different developmental stages.

3. Platform-Specific Analyses

Future studies could differentiate between various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter (X), as each platform fosters distinct patterns of interaction and validation-seeking behaviors. Examining platform-specific effects would provide more nuanced insights.

4. Incorporating Qualitative Approaches

Including qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or case studies would allow researchers to capture deeper, subjective experiences of participants. Such methods could uncover the motivations, emotions, and personal narratives behind social media use that cannot be fully explained through quantitative surveys.

5. Experimental and Intervention-Based Studies

Experimental studies can be designed to manipulate exposure to certain types of content (e.g., idealized images, motivational posts, or neutral information) and measure their direct impact on self-esteem. Additionally, intervention-based studies (e.g., digital literacy programs, self-esteem enhancement workshops) can help test strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of social media.

6. Exploring Psychological Mediators and Moderators

Future research should examine additional psychological variables such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, body image concerns, and social comparison tendencies. These may act as **mediators or moderators** in the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, providing a more comprehensive model.

7. Cross-Cultural and Comparative Studies

Given the global nature of social media, comparative studies between India and other countries would be valuable. Such research could highlight cultural similarities and differences in how social media affects self-esteem, particularly between collectivist (e.g., India, China) and individualist (e.g., USA, UK) societies.

8. Age-Specific Deep Dives

Future studies could focus more narrowly on specific age brackets (e.g., adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults, or older adults) to explore unique developmental and psychosocial factors influencing the relationship between social media and self-esteem within each group.

9. Technological Advances and Emerging Platforms

As social media platforms evolve rapidly, researchers should examine emerging trends such as the impact of **short-form video apps** (e.g., TikTok, Instagram Reels), **virtual reality platforms**, and **AI-driven content feeds** on self-esteem. These newer technologies may have stronger and different psychological effects compared to earlier platforms.

10. Policy and Practical Applications

Finally, future studies should aim to generate evidence-based recommendations for educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. Research could focus on preventive strategies and interventions that promote healthy, balanced use of social media while safeguarding psychological well-being.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this research on the effect of social media on self-esteem among various age groups in India hold significant implications for individuals, families, educators, mental health professionals, policymakers, and society at large. Since social media is deeply embedded in daily life, understanding its psychological consequences can inform preventive, educational, and therapeutic strategies.

1. Theoretical Implications

- This study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital psychology by highlighting how **self-esteem interacts with social media usage** across different developmental stages.
- It provides support for theories such as **Sociometer Theory** (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), which emphasizes the role of social acceptance in regulating self-esteem, and expands their application to the Indian context.
- By comparing different age groups, the study offers a **developmental perspective**, demonstrating that the impact of social media varies with life stage, priorities, and cultural expectations.

2. Practical Implications

a. For Adolescents and Young Adults

- Schools, colleges, and universities can design **digital literacy and self-esteem enhancement programs** to help students critically evaluate online content, resist harmful comparisons, and engage in balanced usage.
- Awareness programs may reduce vulnerability to cyberbullying and promote healthier online interactions.

b. For Middle-Aged Adults

- Since this age group often uses social media for professional networking and maintaining family ties, organizations can promote **healthy digital habits** through workplace wellness programs.
- Guidance on **managing screen time and online validation** can help reduce stress, anxiety, and burnout.

c. For Older Adults

- Social media can serve as a valuable tool for reducing loneliness and maintaining connections. Training programs for older individuals can encourage **constructive engagement** while minimizing dependency.

- Community organizations and NGOs can create safe digital spaces for elderly users, fostering belongingness without overexposure.

3. Clinical and Counseling Implications

- Mental health professionals can integrate **social media usage assessments** into their diagnostic and therapeutic processes, especially when dealing with issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, or depression.
- **Cognitive-behavioral interventions** (CBT) can be tailored to address the distortions caused by excessive online comparisons and validation-seeking behaviors.
- Counseling sessions can include **psychoeducation for families** to support healthier digital practices at home.

4. Policy Implications

- Policymakers in India can use these insights to frame **guidelines for safe social media use**, especially for adolescents, who are more vulnerable to the negative effects of comparison and cyberbullying.
- Collaboration with tech companies can encourage the introduction of features that promote **digital well-being**, such as screen time reminders, content filters, or prompts encouraging offline activities.
- National mental health campaigns can integrate modules on **responsible digital engagement** alongside general health promotion.

5. Educational Implications

- Educational institutions can integrate **digital wellness modules** into curricula, teaching students how to critically consume media, evaluate self-worth independently of online validation, and practice mindfulness in digital spaces.
- Teachers and parents can be trained to recognize early warning signs of social media addiction and low self-esteem in students.

6. Social and Cultural Implications

- The study highlights the cultural uniqueness of India, where collectivism and family-oriented values coexist with globalized digital influences.
- By understanding how **different age groups experience social media**, families and communities can encourage **age-appropriate online practices**, ensuring social media use enhances rather than undermines psychological well-being.

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ANNEXURE

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

INFORMED CONSENT:

I have read and understood the above provided information. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. I give my consent to participate in the study and know that my participation is voluntary. allow the researcher to be handled and recorded my information, and use the results to carry out the research. I give my consent to participate in the intervention program if it is required for the study.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION:

1. All participants were provided with a clear and detailed informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study.
2. Anonymity and confidentiality to protect participant's identities, no personally identifiable information was collected.
3. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary.
4. Participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without providing a reason.
5. the study design and data collection tools were developed with cultural awareness in mind to ensure respectful engagement across different backgrounds and belief systems.

STRUCTURE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic details

Nationality

- Indian
- Others

State

.....

Age

- Adolescents (13–19 years)



- Young Adults (20–35 years)
- Middle-aged Adults (36–50 years)
- Older Adults (51 years and above).

Sex

- Male
- Female
- Other

Occupation

.....

Social media usage

Which social media platforms do you use most often? (Select all that apply)

☐ Facebook ☐ Instagram ☐ WhatsApp ☐ Twitter/X ☐ YouTube ☐ Snapchat ☐ Others:

How many hours per day do you spend on social media?

☐ Less than 1 hour ☐ 1–3 hours ☐ 3–5 hours ☐ More than 5 hours

How do you mostly use social media?

- ☐ To post/share content
- ☐ To browse/view others' content
- ☐ To chat/communicate
- ☐ For entertainment/news
- ☐ For professional/educational purposes

Do you often compare yourself with others on social media?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

1.You spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning how to use it.

- (1) very rarely,
- (2) rarely,
- (3) sometimes,
- (4) often,
- (5) very often.

2.You feel an urge to use social media more and more.

- (1) very rarely,
- (2) rarely,
- (3) sometimes,
- (4) often,
- (5) very often.

3.You use social media in order to forget about personal problems.

- (1) very rarely,
- (2) rarely,
- (3) sometimes,
- (4) often,
- (5) very often.

4.You have tried to cut down on the use of social media without success.

- (1) very rarely,
- (2) rarely,
- (3) sometimes,
- (4) often,
- (5) very often.

5.You become restless or troubled if you are prohibited from using social media.

- (1) very rarely,
- (2) rarely,
- (3) sometimes,

(4) often,

(5) very often.

6. You use social media so much that it has had a negative impact on your job/studies.

(1) very rarely,

(2) rarely,

(3) sometimes,

(4) often,

(5) very often.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

Please record the appropriate answer for each item, depending on whether you Strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

(1) Strongly agree

(2) Agree

(3) Disagree

(4) Strongly disagree

2. At times I think I am no good at all.

(1) Strongly agree

(2) Agree

(3) Disagree

(4) Strongly disagree

3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

(1) Strongly agree

(2) Agree

(3) Disagree

(4) Strongly disagree

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

(1) Strongly agree

- (2) Agree
- (3) Disagree
- (4) Strongly disagree

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

- (1) Strongly agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Disagree
- (4) Strongly disagree

6. I certainly feel useless at times.

- (1) Strongly agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Disagree
- (4) Strongly disagree

7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.

- (1) Strongly agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Disagree
- (4) Strongly disagree

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

- (1) Strongly agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Disagree
- (4) Strongly disagree

9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.

- (1) Strongly agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Disagree
- (4) Strongly disagree

10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

- (1) Strongly agree
- (2) Agree
- (3) Disagree
- (4) Strongly disagree

Work timeline

Date	Task
01-09-2025	Onset of the research process
02-09-2025	Selection of variables
04-09-2025	Review of literature is done
05-09-2025	Reliability and validity is checked
07-09-2025	Outline of study formulated
09-09-2025	Completion of google form questionnaire
09-09-2025	Deployment of google form
10-09-2025	Beginning of data collection
18-09-2025	Completion of data collection
19-09-2025	Data processing and interpretation
20-09-2025	Formation of conclusion



22-09-2025	Completion of the study
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