World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews
eISSN: 2581-9615 CODEN (USA): WJARAI
Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/wjarr
Journal homepage: https://wjarr.com/

(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

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Social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem among Young Adults in India

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 25(03), 568-576

Publication history: Received on 20 January 2025; revised on 03 March 2025; accepted on 06 March 2025

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2025.25.3.0684

Abstract

The study aimed to understand the relationship between Social Media Usage, Emotion Regulation, and Self Esteem among young adults in India. The sample comprised 123 females, 46 males, and 1 prefer not to say contributing to a total sample of 170 participants. Tools such as the Social Media Usage Scale, Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and Perth Emotion Regulation Competency Inventory were administered to the participants with the help of online platform via Google forms. Pearson's Correlation was used to determine relationships between variables, and linear regression to understand the impact of social media usage on self-esteem and emotion regulation. The study found significant relationships between all three variables. Social media usage and self-esteem were positively correlated, while emotion regulation strongly correlated with both. Social media usage is a stronger predictor of emotion regulation and a predictor of self-esteem.

Keywords: Social media use; Emotional regulation; Self-esteem; Young adults

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered the way people communicate, with social media emerging as the primary source of connection. Social media, as defined by Boyd and Ellison, refers to web-based services that enable individuals to construct public profiles and share connections[1]. Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and many more are some of the social media platforms. Time spent, activity, investment and addiction are the major domain of exposure to social media [2]. Studies have shown that there is a correlation between social media usage and mental health, with excessive social media use potentially affecting users' mental well-being [3], [4]. Social media emerged as a crucial platform for virtual classrooms and sharing educational resources [5]. It's various uses, benefits, and limitations for health communication among the general public, including providing health information, online consultations, and health education, while also posing risks such as lack of reliability, confidentiality, and information overload [6]. Additionally, social media has been linked to online shopping, with many individuals using platforms to discover and purchase products[7]

Self-esteem is a vital component of psychological health, referring to an individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth, values, abilities, and qualities [8]. According to Maslow's theory of needs, self-esteem is a fundamental human need, achieved through real capacity, achievements, and respect from others [9]. Research suggests that self-esteem increases from adolescence to middle adulthood, peaking around age 50-60, and then decreases with age [10]. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to respect themselves, consider themselves worthy, and are more likely to achieve success and well-being in life domains [10], [11]. On the other hand, low self-esteem is associated with self-rejection, self-contempt, and emotional instability, leading to dissatisfaction in life [11], [12]. Comparing oneself to others, unrealistic expectations, and social media usage can contribute to low self-esteem[13].

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Emotion regulation refers to an individual's variation in what they can do depending on various contexts, and involves a broad network of interconnected processes that contribute to an individual's ability to manage and control their emotional responses [14]. The core features of emotion regulation include goal activation, engagement of processes that modify the emotion trajectory, and effects on emotion dynamics[15]. Emotion regulation is influenced by cultural factors, such as socialization practices, social rules, and values [16], and involves both increasing and decreasing positive and negative emotions. James Gross proposed a Process Model of Emotion Regulation, which includes five strategies: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation[17]. Younger adults in the regulation condition used pro-hedonic situation selection but did not engage in situation modification[18]. In a study younger adults who reported high levels of suppression also reported experiencing greater psychological distress[19].

The Social Comparison Theory by Leon Festinger explains that people assess themselves by comparing their abilities, achievements, and attributes to others. Social media amplifies social comparisons, as people assess themselves by comparing their abilities and achievements to curated images and accomplishments of others, potentially leading to decreased self-esteem, dissatisfaction, and negative impacts on self-worth, especially among young adults who struggle with emotion regulation[20].

Research has consistently shown that problematic social media use is associated with various negative outcomes, including younger age, poor emotion regulation, stress, procrastination[21], and low self-esteem[13], [22], [23]. Additionally, studies have found that challenges in emotion regulation are directly and indirectly linked to problematic social media use [24], and that problematic internet use can lead to lower ability to use effective emotion regulation strategies[25]. Furthermore, increased social media use has been correlated with decreased self-esteem [13], [26], while individuals with higher self-esteem tend to have better emotion regulation, reducing the likelihood of cyberbullying [27]. A positive association has also been found between self-esteem and the use of reappraisal and suppression[28], highlighting the complex relationship between social media use, emotion regulation, and self-esteem. A significant association exists between negative mental health and problematic social media use among adolescents and young adults[29].

Aims and Objective of the Study

The study aims to explore interplay between social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem among young adults in India.

- To assess the relationship between social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem among young adults in India.
- To assess the impact of social media usage on emotion regulation among young adults.
- To assess the impact of social media usage on self esteem among the young adults of India.

1.1. Research Hypotheses

- H1: There is a significant relation between social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem among young adults in India.
- H2: There is a significant impact of social media usage on emotion regulation among young adults in India.
- H3: There is a significant impact of social media usage on self-esteem among young adults in India.

1.2. Significance of the Study

Existing literatures have studied the relationship between social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem in other countries. However, there is a noticeable gap in understanding these dynamics within the Indian cultural framework. India has unique cultural context and Unlike Western countries, India's collectivist culture may shape distinct patterns in self-esteem and emotion regulation linked to social media, yet research specifically targeting this demographic remains limited. Also most of the existing literatures have studied on adolescents mainly. The users of social media is mostly young adults when compared to the other population of the world, also India has one of the world’s largest young adult population so study on young adult may inform the implementation of more effective interventions that may promote mental health.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Research design

A quantitative approach was used to investigate the relationship between social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem.

2.2. Participants

Participants for this study includes young adults between the age range of 18-25 from India Participant must be a social media user (social networking sites like Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn) and must not be diagnosed severe mental health issues that might confound the results related to emotion regulation and self-esteem.

2.3. Sampling

2.3.1. Technique Used

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit individuals fitting the study's inclusion criteria.

2.3.2. Inclusion Criteria

- Young adults between the age ranges of 18 to 25 years.
- Participants residing in India.
- Participants must have an account in social media such as Instagram, Facebook, etc

2.3.3. Exclusion Criteria

Individuals diagnosed with severe mental health issues that might confound the results related to emotion regulation and self-esteem.

2.4. Tools

2.4.1. Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES)

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Rosenberg (2006) is used to measures self-esteem. The scale consists of ten items which is about their current feelings. Each item is scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly agree) to 4 (Strongly Disagree). Scoring and Interpretation: reverse score the negative items (1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) and sum the scores of all 10 items to get a total score. Higher scores indicate a greater level of self-esteem[30].

2.4.2. Perth Emotion Regulation Competency Inventory (PERCI)

Perth Emotion Regulation Competency Inventory (PERCI) developed by Percee et al. in 2018. A self-report consisting 32 items which is to measure emotion regulation ability. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Scoring: Sum the scores of all 32 items to get a total score[31].

2.4.3. Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)

Social Media Use Scale (SMUS) developed by Lin, Wang, and Chen to assess social media usage. It is a17 items scale having 4 subscales: Image-based, comparison-based, Belief –based and Consumption-based. Items are rated on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 9 (hourly or more). Scoring: Sum the scores of all 17 items to get a total score[32].

2.5. Procedure

The procedure for this study involves recruiting volunteers through social media, academic networks, and online platforms. Participants will complete an electronic questionnaire comprising demographic questions and three standardized measures after providing informed consent. Once data collection is complete, the responses will be compiled and analyzed using JAMOVI version 2.3 software and appropriate statistical methods to explore the relationship among the three variables.

2.6. Data Analysis

2.6.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to determine participant sociodemographic details (age, gender, state and place of residence).

2.6.2. Inferential Statistics

Pearson's correlation coefficient was implemented to assess the relationships between social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem. Regression was used to examine the impact of social media usage on emotion regulation and self-esteem.

3. Results and Discussion

The data was gathered with the help of Google forms from 170 young adults from India, between 18 and 25 years old and analyzed using JAMOVI version 2.3.

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Sample Characteristics	**n**	**% / *M, SD***
Gender		
Male	46	27.1%
Female	123	72.4%
Prefer not say	1	0.6%
State		
Andhra Pradesh	1	0.59%
Assam	5	2.94%
Bihar	1	0.59%
Chattisgarh	1	0.59%
Delhi	1	0.59%
Goa	3	1.76%
Karnataka	52	30.59%
Kerala	94	55.29%
Maharashtra	1	0.59%
Manipur	1	0.59%
Tamil Nadu	1	0.59%
Telangana	1	0.59%
Uttar Pradesh	2	1.18%
West Bengal	2	1.18%
Place of Residence		
Urban	100	58.8%
Rural	70	41.2%
Age Range		21.1 & 1.70

Note. N = 170

Table 1 provides an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the 170 young adult respondents from 14 states across India. The sample includes participants from Kerala (94 participants, 55.29%), Karnataka (52 participants, 30.59%), Tamil Nadu (6 participants, 3.53%), Assam (5 participants, 2.94%), and smaller groups from Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Maharashtra, Manipur, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, each contributing between 0.59% and 1.76% of the total sample. The participants consist of 123 females, 46 males, and 1 preferred not to say. The participants were currently living in an urban or rural setting.

Since this study comprises a sample size of 170, which exceeds 30 as per the Central Limit Theorem, a parametric test will be employed to test the correlation between variables.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variables	**n**	**M**	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**
Social Media Usage	170	3.58	1.48	-		
Self Esteem	170	22.5	3.68	0.175*	-	
Emotion Regulation	170	119	32.0	0.358***	0.428***	-

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

Table 2 shows the mean value of Social Media Usage is 3.58, Self Esteem is 22.5 and Emotion Regulation is 119. The standard deviation of Social Media Usage is 1.48, Self Esteem is 3.68 and Emotion Regulation is 32.0.

From the above table 2 it is observed that social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem are significantly correlated which means alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2 shows, the correlation coefficient obtained for SMUS and PERCI is r=0.358, p=0.000 at 0.001 significance level. Therefore, there is a strong correlation between social media usage and emotional regulation. In positive correlation both the variables tends to move in same direction. So this indicate that higher emotion regulation is linked with higher social media usage. Similarly in a study there is a strong association between emotional regulation and problematic social networking social networking & problematic internet use with controversial gender-based findings[25]. Also problematic social media usage is correlated with all six facets of emotion regulation [21].

Table 2 shows, the correlation coefficient obtained for SMU and RSES is r=0.175, p=0.022 at 0.05 significance level. Therefore, there is a strong correlation between social media usage and self-esteem. This finding is consistent with past studies that Problematic social media usage is significantly correlated to self-esteem[22]. Another study also found that there is a strong correlation between social media usage and self-esteem[13]. Increased usage of compulsive social media decreases contingent self-esteem and vice versa[26].

Table 2 shows, the correlation coefficient obtained for PERCI and RSES is r=0.428, p=0.000 at 0.001 significance level. Therefore, there is a strong correlation between emotion regulation and self-esteem. A study also indicated similar result there is positive correlation between self-esteem and emotion regulation strategies (reappraisal, and suppression) [28]. Another finding is that the individuals with higher self-esteem is associated with better emotion regulation, which subsequently reduces the likelihood of cyberbullying and vice versa[27].

Table 3 Linear regression to assess the impact of social media usage on emotion regulation

Variables			**β**	**t**	**Sig.**	**95.0% CI**	
	B	**SE**				**LL**	**UL**
Social Media Use	7.715	1.55	0.358	4.98	0.000	4.654	10.775
R^2	0.128						
a. Dependent Variable: Emotion Regulation							

Table 3 show the result of simple linear regression computed. There is a strong positive significant between social media usage and emotion regulation (β =0.358). For each unit increase of social media usage, 7.71 increase in emotion regulation. The R^2value of 0.128, meaning that 12.8% of variance in difficulties in emotion regulation can be predicted by social media usage.

By the result we can say that there is an impact of social media usage on emotion regulation, hence alternative hypothesis is accepted. It means that social media usage can influence in improving or worsening individuals emotional regulations abilities positively. This findings align with an existing study, which founded that problematic internet use in both adolescents and young adults resulted in lower ability to use effective emotion regulation strategies[25]. Another study found that challenges in emotion regulation were both directly and indirectly associated with problematic social media use, influenced by usage frequency and facilitating use of e-emotions[24]. All the studies found the negative consequence of Social media usage on emotion regulation. Shannon and colleagues also found that there is association between negative mental health and problematic social media use among adolescents and young adults[29].

Table 4 Linear regression to assess the impact of social media usage on self-esteem

Variables				**β**	**t**	**Sig.**	**95.0% CI**	
		B	**SE**				**LL**	**UL**
	Social Media Use	0.434	0.188	0.175	2.31	0.022	0.0251	0.325
	R^2	0.0307						
a. Dependent Variable: Self-esteem								

Table 4 show the result of simple linear regression computed. There is a strong positive significant between social media usage and self-esteem (R=0.175). For each unit increase of social media usage, 0.434 increase in self-esteem. The R^2value of 0.0307, meaning that 3.07% of variance in self-esteem can be explained by social media usage.

By the result we can say that there is an impact of social media usage on self-esteem, hence our hypothesis is accepted. Similar is seen in a study where they found that low self-esteem as likely negative consequence of social media [23]. Jan and colleagues found that when social media usage increases it causes the self-esteem of the user which mean it decreases the self-esteem and also found the negative impact of social media usage on individuals self-esteem[13].

4. Conclusion

The study aimed at exploring the relationship between the three variables of social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem among young adults in India. Findings revealed that social media usage, emotion regulation and self-esteem are significantly correlated. While Social media usage and self-esteem correlates positively, emotion regulation strongly correlates with both social media usage and self-esteem. This indicates that increased social media usage can lead increased self-esteem and emotion regulation, increased emotion regulation can lead to self-esteem or vice versa. It was also observed that social media usage is a stronger predictor of emotion regulation and that social media usage is a predictor of self-esteem.

The positive correlations indicate that certain types of social media engagement may foster feelings of connection and validation, which can boost self-worth. For psychologists, this underscores the value of promoting mindful and positive online practices that support self-esteem rather than harm it. The results also highlight the potential benefits of integrating emotion regulation training into mental health interventions, helping individuals manage the emotional effects of online comparisons and interactions.

Additionally, since social media usage is a strong predictor of both emotion regulation and self-esteem, it is crucial to identify specific patterns that either support or undermine psychological well-being. These insights encourage the development of guidelines that promote healthier social media habits, as well as culturally relevant interventions tailored to young adults, particularly in regions like India where cultural norms shape self-expression online. In this way, psychology practitioners can work toward creating resources that equip young adults with the skills needed to navigate social media in ways that enhance rather than detract from their mental health.

Although the questionnaire was carefully designed, it is difficult to assess the full integrity of the responses provided by the participants. Self-esteem is highly individual, with varying influencing factors, so it is challenging to achieve a precise measurement of self-esteem. Additionally, respondents may have felt reluctant to answer truthfully due to embarrassment or other social pressures.

To address these gaps, future research should use more diverse and randomized sampling methods to enhance representativeness. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of social media on self-

esteem and emotional regulation, capturing potential changes over time. Controlled, anonymous data collection could also encourage honest responses, reducing social desirability bias. Further, examining specific social media activities (e.g., sharing achievements, comparisons with peers) would help identify which interactions most impact self-esteem and emotional well-being. Finally, cross-cultural comparisons could reveal how India's collectivist values influence the psychological effects of social media, offering a nuanced understanding of its impact across different cultural backgrounds

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who supported me in completing this research paper. First and foremost, I owe a special thanks to my advisor, Soumya Simon, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, whose guidance, encouragement, and insightful feedback were instrumental throughout my research journey. Their expertise and patience played a crucial role in shaping this work.

I am also immensely grateful to Dr. Sruthi Sivaraman, Head of the Department of Psychology at Kristu Jayanti College, Bengaluru, for providing the essential resources and facilities that made this research possible.

Lastly, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my family and all my friends especially Sana Hyder Ali. Their unwavering support, patience, and encouragement have been a constant source of motivation and strength.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of ethical approval

The study adheres to strict research ethics to protect participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring they are fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their role in it. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants' data will be maintained, with identifying information securely stored and kept separate from the research data. Participants will also have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any penalty, reinforcing their autonomy and comfort in participating.

Statement of informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose and procedures, with guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity.

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