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IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON SELF-ESTEEM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly transformed communication patterns, social interactions, and lifestyle behaviors among university students. While social media provides opportunities for networking, information sharing, and self-expression, excessive usage has raised concerns regarding its psychological consequences. This study investigates the relationship between social media usage, self-esteem, and psychological well-being among university students. A descriptive survey design was employed involving 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students from various academic disciplines. Standardized instruments including the Social Media Usage Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Psychological Well-Being Scale were utilized for data collection. Findings revealed a significant negative relationship between excessive social media usage and self-esteem levels. Students who spent more than four hours daily on social media reported lower psychological well-being compared to moderate users. The study concludes that balanced and mindful social media engagement can contribute positively to social connectivity, whereas excessive and compulsive use may adversely affect self-esteem and emotional health. Recommendations are offered for educational institutions, parents, and policymakers to promote healthy digital habits among students.

KEYWORDS: *Social Media, Self-Esteem, Psychological Well-Being, University Students, Mental Health, Digital Behavior*

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technology has revolutionized human communication, with social media becoming one of the most influential tools of the twenty-first century. Social networking platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Snapchat, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become integral components of students' daily lives. University students constitute one of the most active user groups of social media due to their technological familiarity and desire for social interaction.

Social media offers numerous benefits including communication, academic collaboration, entertainment, and access to information. However, researchers have increasingly expressed concern regarding the psychological

consequences of excessive social media engagement. Constant exposure to idealized representations of others' lives can foster social comparison, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem.

Self-esteem refers to an individual's evaluation of personal worth and value. It influences emotional stability, confidence, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships. Psychological well-being encompasses positive mental functioning, emotional balance, life satisfaction, and resilience. Both self-esteem and psychological well-being are critical indicators of mental health among university students.

The increasing dependence on social media has generated debates regarding its influence on psychological development. While some studies suggest social media enhances connectedness and support, others report associations with depression, loneliness, and diminished self-esteem. This study aims to examine these relationships among university students and provide evidence-based recommendations for healthy digital engagement.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rosenberg (1965) emphasized that self-esteem develops through social experiences and interpersonal interactions. Individuals continuously evaluate themselves through comparisons with others, making social environments particularly influential.

Valkenburg and Peter (2009) reported that online social interaction can enhance self-esteem when it facilitates positive social support and meaningful communication. However, the quality of interactions remains a determining factor.

Kross et al. (2013) found that increased Facebook usage predicted declines in subjective well-being among young adults. The researchers suggested that passive browsing contributes to negative social comparison and reduced life satisfaction.

Twenge and Campbell (2018) highlighted a significant relationship between increased screen time and mental health concerns among adolescents and young adults. Excessive social media exposure was linked to anxiety, depression, and lower psychological well-being.

Andreassen (2015) introduced the concept of social media addiction, characterized by compulsive use and loss of control over online engagement. Such behaviors have been associated with psychological distress and impaired functioning.

Hunt et al. (2018) demonstrated that limiting social media usage to approximately thirty minutes per day resulted in reduced loneliness and depression among university students.

Recent studies indicate that image-based platforms such as Instagram may particularly affect body image, self-worth, and social comparison due to their visual emphasis. Researchers continue to investigate both the benefits and risks associated with social media engagement among young adults.

The literature suggests that while social media can foster social support and connectivity, excessive use may negatively affect self-esteem and psychological well-being.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The widespread use of social media among university students has generated concerns regarding its impact on psychological health. Excessive engagement may contribute to negative self-perceptions, social comparison, and emotional distress. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the relationship between social media usage, self-esteem, and psychological well-being among university students.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the level of social media usage among university students.
2. To assess the self-esteem levels of university students.
3. To evaluate the psychological well-being of university students.
4. To determine the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem.
5. To determine the relationship between social media usage and psychological well-being.
6. To identify gender differences in social media usage and psychological outcomes.

5. HYPOTHESES

H1: There is a significant relationship between social media usage and self-esteem among university students.

H2: There is a significant relationship between social media usage and psychological well-being among university students.

H3: Excessive social media users exhibit lower self-esteem than moderate users.

H4: Female students experience higher levels of social comparison than male students.

6. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between social media usage, self-esteem, and psychological well-being.

Sample

A total of 200 university students were selected through stratified random sampling from various academic departments.

Demographic Distribution

- Male Students: 100
- Female Students: 100
- Age Range: 18–25 years
- Undergraduate Students: 140
- Postgraduate Students: 60

Instruments Used

Social Media Usage Scale

Measures frequency, duration, and intensity of social media engagement.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Assesses global self-worth and self-acceptance.

Psychological Well-Being Scale

Measures autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Data Collection Procedure

Participants completed questionnaires in classroom settings after informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Statistical Techniques

- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- Pearson Correlation
- Independent Sample t-test
- Percentage Analysis

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Average Daily Social Media Usage

Usage Category	Percentage
Less than 1 Hour	12%
1–2 Hours	24%
2–4 Hours	38%
More than 4 Hours	26%

The majority of students reported spending between 2 and 4 hours daily on social media platforms.

Table 2: Correlation Between Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem

Variable	Correlation (r)
Social Media Usage & Self-Esteem	-0.48

The negative correlation indicates that increased social media usage is associated with lower self-esteem.

Table 3: Correlation Between Social Media Usage and Psychological Well-Being

Variable	Correlation (r)
Social Media Usage & Psychological Well-Being	-0.42

The findings suggest that excessive social media engagement may negatively affect overall psychological well-being.

Gender Differences

Female participants reported greater engagement in social comparison behaviors and were more likely to compare appearance, achievements, and lifestyle with online peers.

DISCUSSION

The results support previous research indicating that excessive social media use may contribute to reduced self-esteem and psychological well-being. Students who spent extended periods browsing social media reported feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and dissatisfaction.

The findings can be explained through Social Comparison Theory, which proposes that individuals evaluate themselves relative to others. Social media platforms often present idealized lifestyles and achievements, creating unrealistic standards that may negatively influence self-perception.

However, moderate social media use demonstrated positive outcomes including enhanced communication, academic collaboration, and social support. These findings suggest that the impact of social media depends largely on usage patterns and user behavior.

8. CONCLUSION

Social media has become an indispensable aspect of student life. While it offers numerous benefits including communication, information access, and networking opportunities, excessive usage may adversely affect self-esteem and psychological well-being. The present study found significant negative relationships between excessive social media engagement, self-esteem, and mental well-being among university students.

Students who spent prolonged periods on social networking platforms exhibited lower self-esteem and reduced psychological well-being compared to moderate users. The findings highlight the importance of promoting healthy and balanced social media habits.

Universities, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers should collaborate to increase awareness regarding responsible digital behavior and psychological well-being.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Universities should organize digital wellness workshops.
2. Students should monitor daily social media usage.

3. Mental health counseling services should address social media-related concerns.
4. Educational institutions should promote offline social interaction activities.
5. Parents and educators should encourage healthy digital habits.
6. Future studies should examine longitudinal effects of social media usage.

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