AN EXPLORATION OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: A CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

A

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SUPERVISOR

Ms. Upasana Moten

Assistant Professor

INVESTIGATOR

Pawni Thappa

Roll No. 2208007

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SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that **Ms. Pawni Thappa,** student of **Bachelor of Arts (Honours with Research) in Psychology Semester VIII, Session 2022-2026**, bearing **Roll No 2208007,** has worked under my supervision on her dissertation entitled**:**

"AN EXPLORATION OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: A CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS".

Her dissertation is fit for submission, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree in **Bachelor of Arts (Honours with Research) in Psychology**

DATE:

(Ms. Upasana Moten)
SUPERVISOR

Head,
School of Social Sciences
and Humanities

श्रेष्ठ
B.C. Road Jammu
180 001
Ph.: 0191-2546078,2565098
Fax:0191-2548239
Email:principal@miercollege.in
Website: www.miercollege.in

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that the work presented in the dissertation entitled:

"AN EXPLORATION OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: A CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS"

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of B.A. (Honours) with Research in Psychology, to MIER College of Education (Autonomous), is an authentic record of my own research work carried out under the supervision of Ms. Upasana Moten, Assistant Professor.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	FULL FORM
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
BSMAS	Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale
RSES	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
DASS-21R	Depression Anxiety Stress Scales – 21 Items (Revised)
F	F-statistic
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out
Gen Z	Generation Z (born from 1997 onward)
HEXACO	Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual
M	Mean
N / n	Total Population / Sample Size
p	Probability Value (p-value)
r	Pearson Correlation Coefficient
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Standard Error
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SMAS-SF	Social Media Addiction Scale – Student Form
SSES	State Self-Esteem Scale
t	t-statistic (Independent Samples T-Test)

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become deeply integrated into the daily lives of college students, raising concerns about its potential impact on psychological well-being. The present study examined the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem among college students and further explored whether gender differences exist in these variables. A quantitative correlational research design was employed to address these objectives. The sample consisted of 178 college students who voluntarily participated in the study. Social media addiction was measured using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), and self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and Pearson correlation analysis.

The results indicated moderate levels of both social media addiction (M = 16.29, SD = 4.66) and self-esteem (M = 16.25, SD = 4.06). Independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant gender differences in social media addiction, t (176) = –0.715, p = .476, or in self-esteem, t (176) = 0.036, p = .971, suggesting that male and female students experience similar levels of these variables. However, a statistically significant negative correlation was found between social media addiction and self-esteem, r (176) = –.588, p < .001, indicating that higher levels of addictive social media use are associated with lower self-esteem.

These findings are consistent with social comparison theory, which suggests that individuals evaluate their self-worth through comparisons with others. In the context of social media, where content is often idealized and selectively presented, such comparisons may lead to negative self-evaluations and diminished self-esteem. The study highlights the potential psychological risks associated with excessive social media use and underscores the importance of promoting balanced and mindful digital engagement. The findings have implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers in developing interventions and awareness programs. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships and explore mediating variables such as personality traits, social comparison, and perceived social support.

Keywords: social media addiction, self-esteem, college students, gender differences, social comparison, digital well-being

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media platforms have become a pervasive force, fundamentally reshaping the social and psychological fabric of young adulthood. This period of life is already characterized by identity exploration and a heightened sensitivity to social feedback, making young adults particularly vulnerable to the curated realities and quantified social validation inherent in these online environments. While a growing body of research suggests a potential link between social media engagement and psychological well-being, the precise nature of the association between specific usage patterns and the core construct of self-esteem remains a critical area for further investigation. A nuanced, correlational analysis is essential to move beyond broad generalizations and quantify the strength and direction of this relationship. Therefore, this study aims to systematically explore the association between social media usage and self-esteem among young adults, seeking to illuminate the extent to which these two variables are intertwined.

1.1 YOUNG ADULTS

Young adults are defined as individuals who are in a developmental stage which begins at adolescence, particularly between the ages of 18 and 25, and potentially lasts up to 29 years (Arnett, 2000). This period, often referred to as "Emerging Adulthood," is a phase where youngsters are expected to be financially independent and take on some adult responsibilities and roles. Individuals belonging to this stage are in the process of exploring who they are and working towards establishing a clear sense of self (Arnett, 2000). Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development incorporates a stage as 'Intimacy vs Isolation', which talks about young adulthood, characterized by identity formation, forming meaningful, intimate relationships, and personal independence (Erikson, 1968; Mitchell et al., 2021). In their early twenties, young adults frequently encounter challenges such as identity confusion and various mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and loneliness. The Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council define Young Adults as individuals aged 18 to 26, who undergo several significant biological and psychological maturation (Bonnie et al., 2015). Youngsters are in a stage where they don't know what they want to do; they are in an 'in between' age, still learning and gaining experience as they are not yet fully mature. In this budding phase, they face a lot of difficulties and challenges. One such challenge is

Perfectionism; most young adults feel that they need to be perfect and meet societal expectations, be it in academics, relationships, or career pursuits. The pressure to conform to societal conventions impacts their personal as well as social life negatively, and this results in serious mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and loneliness, etc (Frost et al., 1990). Another challenge that they encounter is Body image. Body image refers to how an individual perceives or looks at themselves, particularly their outward appearance in terms of size and shape. This issue is triggered by many factors, like peer pressure, family environment, and the culture in which they live. The most significant contributory factor is the use of social media, where individuals are influenced by looking at the pictures or posts of others, particularly those of celebrities on various social media platforms that fascinate them. As a result, they start to compare themselves, longing for that 'perfect body'. This unfavorably affects their self-esteem and overall perception about themselves; as a consequence, young adults suffer from eating disorders and other severe conditions (Grabe et al., 2008). Other challenges involve the fear of missing out (FOMO), which means they are missing out on an important event, information, or experience that causes them anxiety and dissatisfaction with their lives (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). The psychological impact of social media on young adults cannot be fully understood without considering their ongoing brain development. Neuroscientific research confirms that the human brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex, continues to mature into the mid-to-late 20s (Giedd, 2015). This region governs executive functions such as impulse control, long-term planning, risk assessment, and emotional regulation. Consequently, while young adults are cognitively capable of complex thought, their neurological wiring for inhibitory control and delayed gratification is not yet fully optimized. This developmental stage coincides with a heightened sensitivity to social rewards, mediated by brain systems like the ventral striatum (Somerville et al., 2010). Social media platforms, engineered to deliver variable rewards through likes, comments, and notifications, directly tap into this sensitive socio-affective circuitry. The confluence of a reward-seeking brain and a digitally-mediated environment designed to exploit it suggests that young adults may be neurologically predisposed to find social feedback especially salient, potentially amplifying its impact both positive and negative on their developing sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Focusing on Generation Z (typically defined as those born from 1997 onward) reveals distinctive generational traits that are critical for contextualizing research on social media and self-esteem. Empirical studies indicate that Gen Z reports higher levels of psychological distress, including anxiety and loneliness, compared to Millennials at the same age (Twenge, 2017). They are the most racially and ethnically diverse generation and hold progressive attitudes on social issues,

valuing authenticity and individual expression (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Their social media use is characterized by a preference for visually-rich, ephemeral content (e.g., Instagram Stories, TikTok videos) and a platform migration toward spaces that feel more private or niche compared to the broad networks of Facebook. This generation is also acutely aware of the performativity and curated nature of online life, which can lead to both cynical consumption and strategic self-presentation. Understanding Gen Z's unique social media ecology marked by visual communication, platform fluidity, and an ethos of curated authenticity is essential for accurately interpreting how their online engagements influence self-evaluative processes and global self-esteem.

The experience of young adulthood and the relationship between social media use and self-esteem are not universal but are significantly moderated by cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic factors. Cultural orientation whether an individual's background emphasizes collectivism or individualism shapes the fundamental sources of self-worth. In collectivist cultures, self-esteem may be more tightly linked to familial approval and social harmony, while in individualist cultures, it may stem more from personal achievement and uniqueness (Heine et al., 1999). These cultural scripts influence how social validation (or its absence) on digital platforms is internalized. Furthermore, socioeconomic status (SES) creates differential access to technology and shapes online experiences; digital inequality can itself be a source of social comparison and diminished self-worth. Gender and sexual identity also intersect powerfully with these dynamics Therefore, it is pivotal to understand the characteristics, challenges and other components of this unique developmental stage as this will help to develop various interventions that support young adults.

1.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an online platform comprising various websites and applications that focus on communication, interaction with others, and content sharing. The term "Social" pertains to how individuals interact with each other, cooperate, coordinate, and share their ideas among others. In the context of social media, it indicates how technology enables a person to communicate and interchange their thoughts socially. On the other hand, the word "Media" is a plural of medium, which can be channels, tools, or platforms that act as a way or a means through which information is disseminated to the larger population at once. Social media is a form of computer-mediated communication or cyber communication through which users create their online accounts for transmitting their ideas, sending personal messages, and other content

(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It can be defined as the networks that allow users to create their own virtual identity and power to transmit information and communicate with others in real time (Treem et al., 2016). Andrew Weinreich is considered the father of social networking; he founded a social network named SixDegrees, which preceded Facebook by seven years (Weinreich, 2014). At the beginning of the year 2025, 94.2% of the internet-using population and 63.9% of the global population i.e. (5.24 billion users) used social media (DataReportal, 2025). Among all the social media sites, such as Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. Facebook remains the most well-liked social media site with around three billion users. While around 25% of the people say they use social media because they get to know about the latest news and trends, on the other hand 62% of the population says they use it for connecting with their friends and loved ones (DataReportal, 2025). Over the past ten years, there has been a lot of advancement in social media; it is not just a tool anymore that connects individuals, but in today's world, it is used for a lot many things. For example, Brands use it for the advertisement of their products by collaborating with influencers, social activists use it for sharing information or news with the vast population, even it's even been used for commerce. Families whose loved ones are far may be due to job or for studying, they use social media to communicate with them via video call, becoming a substantial part of both personal lives and commercial operations (Hanna & Lutkevich, 2025). However, social media presents both advantages and disadvantages; it can be seen as both a boon and a bane, akin to a double-edged sword. The population gets influenced very easily; many people post misleading content on social media to spread hatred, leading to arguments and serious conflicts among communities. With the widespread adoption of smartphones, the use of social media has increased, leading to more instances of mobile phone addiction especially among adults, resulting in many serious health-related concerns like reduced attention span, eye strain, neck and back pain. Additionally, some individuals have turned to gambling through social media, leading to the deterioration of their homes and relationships. On the positive side, social media serves as a platform for people to openly express their feelings and raise their voices against injustice, often awakening others to important issues. Businesses utilize these platforms to interact with customers and gather feedback, helping them understand their audience's needs. Mobile applications have massively broadened the scope for social media, making it reachable to a large no. of people at any time and from anywhere. Some popular platforms are Facebook, WhatsApp Snapchat, etc. Each has its own unique features and purpose (Hanna & Lutkevich, 2025). In today's world the youngsters are deeply influenced and occupied by the digital world, they might show the stuff or act like some different personality online which they might not

truly are. In this way their true-self does not align with their online identity, as a result they face challenges to explore who they actually are and what they want to be (Van Vuuren & Simpson, 2024). Beyond the technical features and usage statistics, social media platforms have generated fundamentally new norms of social interaction. A critical conceptual framework for understanding these changes is context collapse, which describes the phenomenon where previously distinct social spheres—such as family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances—converge into a single, undifferentiated audience on a platform (boyd, 2010). This collapse complicates identity performance, as individuals must navigate and reconcile the often-conflicting expectations of multiple audiences simultaneously within one digital space. Concurrently, social media has normalized quantified sociality, transforming abstract social capital into visible, measurable metrics such as friend counts, likes, shares, comments, and streaks (Venturini & Rogers, 2019). This quantification introduces a layer of publicly measurable validation into social life, redefining how approval, popularity, and relational value are perceived, pursued, and internalized. Together, these evolving norms create a digital social landscape where the management of a unified online persona and the pursuit of quantifiable validation become salient, and potentially stressful, components of everyday interaction, fundamentally altering the context in which self-concept is formed and maintained. This new environment reshapes fundamental psychological processes. The necessity to perform for a collapsed audience can lead to contextual frustration and a default to lowest-common-denominator or highly generic self-presentation, potentially creating dissonance between one's authentic self and one's online persona (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Moreover, the constant visibility of social metrics (likes, shares) fosters a gamification of social life, where interpersonal interaction can become subconsciously transactional, aimed at accumulating validation points rather than fostering genuine connection (Deterding et al., 2011). This environment demands constant impression management and affective labor, as users not only craft content but also strategically engage with others' content to maintain their own social standing within the quantified system. Consequently, social media does not merely reflect existing social dynamics but actively produces new, digitally-native forms of sociality that carry distinct psychological burdens and rewards, directly influencing the ecosystem in which young adults navigate and evaluate their self-worth.

1.3 SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem can be defined as an individual's positive and negative attitude toward oneself; it is an overall appraisal of one's value (Rosenberg, 1965). It is advantageous to have a positive self-esteem because owing it demonstrates positive self-regard, instead of conceit (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem comprises beliefs as well as affective states like achievement, self-satisfaction, hopelessness, and humiliation of an individual. It is a holistic judgement of one's own values, morals, and worth. It is an appealing framework in the field of psychology and is seen as an enduring personality trait. Having positive self-esteem is linked to optimistic academic accomplishment, better relational functioning, contentment, and less engagement in unlawful conduct. On the other hand, negative self-esteem leads to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and increased susceptibility to substance abuse (Orth & Robins, 2022). Everyone sees and judges themselves differently in this world, but according to the research, self-esteem follows a format in life. It begins to decline in the later years of life and increases till the age of 60. Self-esteem is dynamic; it keeps changing depending on professional endeavors and personal life, and it can go up and down. A person with a strong and positive self-esteem shows many signs, like they will not be scared of conflicts, will be able to maintain boundaries, will share their opinions and views with others confidently, will not be a people pleaser, etc (Orth & Robins, 2022). There are two basic types of self-esteem: high and low self-esteem.

1. High self-esteem- People who have high self-esteem have a positive perception about themselves; they see themselves as capable and worthy and are very confident about their abilities, which empowers them in their overall development. For example, in a classroom discussion, a student who feels that they are capable enough shares their ideas openly and assertively listens to others without showing any feelings of pride.

2. Low self-esteem- A person with low self-esteem sees themselves as unworthy of anything and feels that they are not capable of doing something. They are not ready to face setbacks and long for the approval of others. For example, A child who doubts their abilities will avoid participating in classroom discussions and group projects because they see themselves as worse and are afraid to voice their opinion.

The other two types of self-esteem include positive and negative self-esteem. Positive self-esteem means having an optimistic view about oneself, accepting who you are, and not fearing

challenges, facing them with bravery. Conversely, Negative self-esteem is characterized by feelings of insufficiency, self-condemnation, and lack of ambition in life (Mruk, 2013). Family plays a key role in shaping self-esteem. During childhood, when the self-concept, personality, and other abilities are developing, the feedback from significant others, like friends, family, becomes imperative, affecting our self-worth. For example, A child born in a family that has always supported him and encouraged him to become the better version of himself tends to have positive self-esteem. On the other hand, a child who has always seen disagreements within his family and has been raised in an unstable household usually has low self-esteem (Orth & Robins, 2022). Other factors that shape our self-esteem involve work environment, parenting styles, peer relationship, media influence, and societal pressure etc (Mruk, 2013). Self-esteem continues to be a cornerstone in the field of psychology linked to an individual's mental health, personal as well as professional development, and overall well-being (Muris & Otgaar, 2023).

A critical distinction in understanding how social interactions impact self-worth is the difference between stability and fragility in self-esteem. Trait self-esteem refers to a person's stable, enduring baseline of self-worth, while state self-esteem reflects momentary fluctuations in response to specific events, feedback, or social comparisons (Kernis, 2003). Individuals with fragile high self-esteem—those whose positive self-view is contingent on external validation or is inconsistent with implicit, unconscious self-assessments are particularly reactive to ego-threatening experiences. This fragility manifests as heightened sensitivity to criticism, defensive reactions to perceived slights, and significant emotional volatility following social feedback (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). For young adults navigating social media, where feedback is constant, public, and quantifiable, this distinction is paramount. The platform environment, with its "like" counts and comment sections, provides a continuous stream of state self-esteem triggers. A young adult with fragile high self-esteem may experience intense, rapid swings in self-feeling based on the engagement metrics of a single post, turning social media into an arena of heightened psychological vulnerability and emotional labor. In contrast, individuals with secure high self-esteem, characterized by a stable, well-anchored sense of worth, are theorized to be less emotionally dependent on such momentary validation and thus may experience social media's feedback loops as less psychologically potent. The sources, expressions, and psychological significance of self-esteem are not universal but are profoundly shaped by cultural context, a critical consideration for research on a global phenomenon like social media. In individualistic cultures, which emphasize independence and personal achievement (common in many Western societies), self-

esteem is typically derived from attributes that distinguish the self from others, such as individual success, autonomy, and self-consistency (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). High self-esteem in these contexts is often associated with self-enhancement and the internalization of personal praise. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, which prioritize interdependence and social harmony (common in many East Asian, African, and Latin American societies), self-worth is more closely tied to fulfilling social roles, maintaining relational bonds, and contributing to the in-group (Heine et al., 1999). Here, self-criticism and modesty are often more culturally sanctioned than overt self-praise. This cultural framework suggests that the very metrics of validation on social media may be interpreted differently. A "like" in an individualistic context may be read as validation of one's unique self-presentation, directly feeding self-esteem. In a collectivistic context, the same "like" may be interpreted as an affirmation of social connection or relational harmony. Therefore, the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem among young adults cannot be assumed to be uniform; it is likely mediated by the cultural scripts that inform how social feedback is processed, what constitutes valued social capital, and the very importance placed on "self-esteem" as a component of well-being

1.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF-ESTEEM

According to the research, there is a negative as well as a positive relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Social media is a vast structure comprising webpages and technological platforms that facilitate communication and enable the sharing of information and thoughts with others. It lets users connect and interact with others by making online accounts with their own identity or another identity they want to have. Whereas self-esteem refers to how an individual realistically assesses themselves, acknowledging their capabilities and strengths, and embracing them (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem plays a substantial role in human life, specifically among young adults. Adults make use of their perception as a means to answer some arising developmental questions, like who they are and how they see themselves, and why. Self-concept then sets the foundation for self-esteem. Findings from multiple studies show that overexploitation and problematic use of social media adversely affect various spheres of our lives, like scholastic achievement, interpersonal connections, cognitive functioning, overall quality of life, psychological well-being, and self-esteem (Verduyn et al., 2020). Most of the studies have indicated a negative correlation between social media use and self-esteem. Extensive use of social media among young adults is linked to

lower levels of self-esteem in them (Colak et al., 2023). Vogel et al. (2014) undertook two studies to investigate the relationship between social media use and self-esteem. The results suggest that social comparison is a driving force through which self-esteem and social media are affected by the use of social media. Globally, there are millions of people who use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, etc. The number of users is rising year by year; it becomes imperative to understand if such a big portion of the population is using social media, then how it impacts their overall health. The use of social media enables individuals to connect with others just with one click, which has actually resulted in improving users' mental health. Specifically, when talking about oppressed populations such as LGBTQIA and youth. The groups have reported finding friends online that are not only supportive but also empathetic towards them more than their in-person friendships. This results in improved mental well-being as well as better perception of oneself and demonstrates how social media can act as a refuge for receiving both emotional and social support (Voggenreiter et al., 2023). A critical advancement in understanding the social media-self-esteem link involves distinguishing between active and passive use (Verduyn et al., 2020). Active use involves content creation, direct messaging, and intentional interaction (e.g., posting a photo, commenting on a friend's update). This type of use is often linked to maintenance of social capital and can have neutral or even positive effects on self-esteem by fulfilling belongingness needs. In contrast, passive use (or lurking) involves consuming content without direct interaction—scrolling through feeds, viewing stories, and observing others' curated lives. This behavior is strongly associated with upward social comparison and envy, as users are exposed to idealized self-presentations without the balancing context of reciprocal social exchange. Research consistently finds that passive consumption is a primary driver of the negative relationship between social media use and self-esteem, while active use shows weaker or null associations (Verduyn et al., 2020). This distinction helps explain mixed findings in the literature and suggests that how young adults use social media is as important as how much they use it.

The relationship is not deterministic but is filtered through significant individual differences. Key moderators include:

- **Social Comparison Orientation**: Individuals with a high tendency to compare themselves to others are more vulnerable to self-esteem declines from passive social media use (Vogel et al., 2014).

- **Narcissistic Traits**: Those with vulnerable narcissism may seek excessive validation online but experience crashes when it is not forthcoming, while those with grandiose narcissism may use social media to bolster an inflated self-view (McCain & Campbell, 2018).
- **Pre-existing Mental Health**: Individuals with depression or anxiety may use social media for connection but are also more sensitive to negative social cues and comparisons (Twenge & Campbell, 2019).
- **Digital Literacy & Critical Awareness**: Understanding of platform algorithms and commercial motives can buffer against negative comparisons, as users can cognitively reframe curated content as strategic performance rather than reality (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2019).

These factors create a person-specific media effects landscape where the same platform activity can bolster one young adult's self-esteem through connection while severely undermining another's through comparative self-doubt.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK RELEVANT TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF-ESTEEM

1) **The Sociometer Theory**- It posits that self-esteem functions as an internal gauge or "sociometer" that monitors the quality of an individual's social relationships and their perceived social acceptance (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). According to this theory, self-esteem is not an end in itself but an evolutionary adaptation that alerts individuals to threats of social exclusion. When the sociometer detects low relational value or potential rejection, it triggers a drop in self-esteem and motivates behaviours to restore social connection. This theory is directly applicable to social media research, as platforms provide constant, quantifiable feedback on social acceptance (likes, comments, follower counts) that can directly influence the sociometer. For instance, a lack of expected engagement on a post could be interpreted as low relational value, leading to diminished state self-esteem.
2) **Self-Discrepancy Theory**- This explains emotional vulnerabilities by proposing that discomfort arises from discrepancies between different self-states: the actual self (who one is), the ideal self (who one aspires to be), and the ought self (who one believes they should be) (Higgins, 1987). Discrepancies between the actual and ideal selves lead to dejection-related emotions (e.g., disappointment, low self-esteem), while discrepancies between the

actual and ought selves lead to agitation-related emotions (e.g., guilt, anxiety). Social media is a potent environment for exacerbating these discrepancies. Users are constantly exposed to curated representations of others' "ideal" lives and societal "oughts," which can widen the perceived gap between their actual self and these standards, thereby lowering self-esteem.

3) **Social Comparison Theory-** It is foundational for understanding self-evaluation in social contexts. Festinger (1954) argued that individuals have an innate drive to evaluate their own opinions and abilities, and in the absence of objective standards, they do so by comparing themselves to others. Comparisons can be upward (to those perceived as better off) or downward (to those perceived as worse off). Social media platforms facilitate frequent, effortless, and often upward social comparisons with curated, idealized profiles. Consistent upward comparisons on attributes like appearance, success, and happiness can lead to negative self-evaluations and reduced self-esteem, a mechanism repeatedly identified in social media research.
4) **Contingencies of Self-Worth Theory-** This theory explains that individuals base their self-esteem on success and failure in specific domains, such as academic competence, appearance, approval from others, or virtue (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). These contingencies determine what events will affect self-esteem. Social media inherently taps into external contingencies like approval from others (via likes and comments) and appearance. For young adults whose self-worth is highly contingent on such external validation, social media use becomes a high-stakes activity where self-esteem fluctuates with online feedback. This theory helps explain individual differences in vulnerability; a person whose self-worth is contingent on academic achievement may be less affected by social media metrics than someone whose worth is contingent on physical appearance and social approval.
5) **The Tripartite Influence Model-** Originally developed to explain body image disturbances, the Tripartite Influence Model is highly relevant for studies linking social media, body image, and self-esteem. The model proposes that three primary sources—parents, peers, and media—contribute to body dissatisfaction through the mediating mechanisms of internalization of societal ideals and social comparison (Thompson et al., 1999). In the digital age, "media" and "peers" converge powerfully on social media platforms. The model provides a structured framework for investigating how social media exposure leads to the internalization of unrealistic appearance ideals, promotes social

comparison, and results in body dissatisfaction, which is a well-established correlate and contributor to low global self-esteem.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to share the pivotal information and understanding of the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem among young adults. The investigation will function as a data repository for providing a strong corroboration of the association between social media usage and self-esteem among youngsters. Analysing the correlation between social media usage and self-esteem in emerging adults is essential as it could elucidate some possible approaches for psychological wellness. Comprehending how using social media affects self-esteem levels may aid in the development of fruitful and effective interventions, improving overall well-being among young adults. This research could acquaint mental health professionals and educational institutions in designing support programmes to meet the specific requirements of the young adults in strengthening and boosting the levels of self-esteem.

1.7 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A study of the association between social media usage and self- esteem among young adults.

1.8 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

1. **Social Media Usage:** The level of addictive patterns in social media use, measured by the total score on the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS).
2. **Self-Esteem:** An individual's overall positive or negative attitude toward themselves, measured by the total score on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).
3. **Young Adults:** College students between the ages of 18 and 25 years who actively use social media.

1.9 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the research investigation encapsulates what is to be achieved by the study. In this view of the available literature and importance of the topic, the following objectives were set: -

i) To examine the relationship between social media use and self-esteem.

ii) To assess the gender difference in self-esteem levels.

iii) To assess the gender difference in social media usage.

1.10 HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

H1) There is a significant negative relationship between social media usage and self-esteem.

H2) There is no significant difference in the self-esteem levels of males and females.

H3) There is no significant difference in the social media usage of males and females.

1.11 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is restricted to young adults aged 18–25 years only.
- The sample is limited to one geographical region.
- Only social media usage and self-esteem are examined, excluding other factors.
- Only individuals who actively use social media are included in the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A literature review is a succinct summary and comprehensive review of present research and scholarly works relevant to a specific topic. It serves to provide context, identify knowledge gaps, assess approaches and techniques, construct a theoretical underpinning, and corroborate the thesis and claims within a research study. Conducting a literature review entails a structured and orderly investigation, interpretive assessment of information inputs, amalgamation of data and facts, recognition of recurrent structures and significant correlations, and pinpointing shortcomings and opportunities for further research. Overall, a flawlessly executed literature review is imperative for shaping the research design, facilitating understanding, and contributing to the scholarly conversation within a particular field.

2.1 SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

Nguyen et al. (2025) carried out an investigation that demonstrated the connection between narcissism, social media, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and whether certain personality traits from the HEXACO model could modify the intensity of this relationship. From Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, a sample of 426 Gen Z population was collected. The criteria for selection were that the population who used social media for at least 2 hours per day was chosen. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Smart Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS) were put to use for statistical analyses, and many other tools, such as the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale, Narcissism scale (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), Social media addiction scale, and HEXACO personality trait questionnaire, were employed to assess the study constructs. The outcomes of the investigation showed that people with high levels of narcissist traits are more addicted to social media as they use it to seek admiration and attention and as they will get online recognition and validation it will increase the self-esteem in people with higher narcissism. Secondly, the study interpreted that excessive use of social media or addiction to it brings down the level of life satisfaction and self-esteem, mainly due to social comparison. Another finding was that high self-esteem automatically enhances life satisfaction among people, and it is determined by personality traits how strongly these elements will interact (for example who is low on characteristics like agreeableness and openness may be unfavourably affected by social

media than someone high on these attributes). Therefore, the findings validated all the proposed hypotheses.

Liţan (2025) showed in their study how social media addiction affects depression and anxiety levels among people of different age groups, through the mediation of self-esteem. The study had four hypotheses and a sample of 217 adults was collected from Romania, out of which 62% were women and 38.8% were men. Their age was between 18-62 years, and some were unemployed, around 65.9% were employed, 0.9% of the sample population was retired, and 0.9% were housewives. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale was employed for measuring self-esteem among them, and the social media addiction scale, which consisted of the questions about temperamental fluctuation, time invested in using social media, interpersonal problems, and relapse, etc. For analysing anxiety and depression (DASS-21R), demographics for employment status, age, and education. The investigation was done through a Google form, and Statistical Equation Modeling (SEM) was adopted, which is very useful in interpreting many complex relationships among variables. The findings of the study revealed that social media addiction lowers the levels of self-esteem (β = -0.769) and also heightens anxiety (β= 0.180) and depression (β= 0.213) among people but the study stated that young adults and those who are unemployed they are more susceptible to anxiety and depression because their self-esteem is most affected by social media addiction as compared to older people. The outcomes also revealed that housewives, unemployed, and retirees demonstrated a very significant drop in the levels of self-esteem from the use of social media, whereas students and employees had a moderate impact. The data from the study highly supported all four hypotheses, confirming each of them.

Maerevoet et al. (2025) designed this study to explore whether social media usage among college students has a causal influence on their mental well-being. This study measured various aspects of mental health, such as self-esteem, sleep quality, anxiety, depression, mindfulness, emotional complaints, etc. A total of 71 students aged 18-26 were recruited for this experiment through social media, flyers, and a mental health platform for students named Moodspace. Later, 4 students dropped out, so in total, 67 students were in. There was a criterion for joining the experiment, where the students are required to be students at a Flemish higher education institution, they must be using social media for at least 2 hours per day, and they are required to have their own smartphones. The study had 3 phases; each phase had 2 weeks, and a longitudinal study method was applied. Two mobile apps were installed: Mobile DNA, which

tracked participants' smartphones, and the other was sleep tracking app. Through randomization, participants were divided into an experimental group and a control group. In the first phase, no instructions were given, but only their natural behaviour was observed, like sleep quality and their time on social media. In the second phase, the experimental group was given the instructions to limit or reduce their social media use by 30 minutes daily; the goal was not to limit the active use, which involved posting or chatting, as they can actually improve well-being, but to cut down scrolling and absorbing useless content online. The control group continued normally. In the third phase, the effects of the intervention were analysed, which revealed that social media use during the restriction phase dropped by 1 hour in the participants that belonged to the experimental group, but after the experiment, they started using it as they used to it went back to the original level. The results also showed there was a little improvement in self-esteem levels, but in other aspects, no significant change was noticed.

Nagata et al. (2025) carried out a study to analyse the association between social media use and depressive symptoms. 11,876 children and adolescents were studied over a 3-year period that aged between 9-10 years, for this longitudinal cohort study. The findings concluded that higher depressive symptoms were associated with excessive use of social media in the following years, and future use of social media is not forecasted by depressive symptoms, therefore showing a one-way relationship.

Krok and Półtorak (2025) conducted a study on emerging adults to find out how psychological well-being is affected by their perception of social media and if stress and Facebook addiction are mediating factors between these two. 249 adults aged 18-29 were selected for this study, and measuring tools such as Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, Psychological Well-being Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and Social Media Mindsets Scale were employed. The results concluded that adults who had a positive attitude towards social media had healthier psychological well-being, and it also showed that Facebook addiction and stress had a sequential mediation effect on these two, i.e., a negative attitude towards social media can increase the levels of stress and can lead to addiction, which is unfavourable for the overall well-being.

Huang and Zhang (2025) conducted a six-month study to see if teaching young people how social media works could protect their self-esteem from the harmful effects of comparing themselves to others online. They surveyed 450 university students in China (58% female) at three different points in time. Participants filled out standardized questionnaires, including

the Social Comparison Orientation Scale to measure how much they compare themselves to others, a Digital Media Literacy Scale to assess their understanding of online content, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The results clearly showed that students with higher media literacy skills were much less affected by upward social comparisons; their self-esteem remained more stable even when they saw idealized posts from peers. The study concludes that integrating critical social media literacy into educational programs could be an effective way to safeguard young adults' psychological well-being in the digital age.

Meier and Krause (2025) carried out a comprehensive four-year project tracking how different types of social media use affect self-esteem as teenagers grow into young adults. Their sample included 1,200 adolescents from Germany (51% female), starting when they were between 13 and 15 years old. Each year, researchers collected data using surveys that distinguished between active use (like messaging friends and posting original content) and passive use (like scrolling through feeds and viewing stories), alongside the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Their analysis revealed a striking pattern: increases in passive, consumptive use was linked to gradual declines in self-esteem, a trend most pronounced during the middle adolescent years. In contrast, active, communicative use was associated with steadier or even slightly improving self-esteem in later adolescence. This research strongly argues that the nature of online engagement is more consequential for development than the sheer amount of time spent online.

Rodríguez and Pardo (2024) undertook a study to explore how students are affected by social media addiction. The study invited 521 students of psychology, out of whom 38% were male and 78% were female, and a minor share did not reveal their gender. The students' average age was 20.7 years; some were employed (23%), had children (6.7%), and most of them were single (91%). To obtain the result, the investigation employed the Social Media Addiction Scale-Student form (SMAS-SF; Sahin, 2018, as cited in Rodríguez & Pardo, 2024) State Self-esteem scale (SSES; Tomas et al., 2013, as cited in Rodríguez & Pardo, 2024), and the Sociodemographic questionnaire. As shown by regression analysis, the need to stay connected and abreast leads 11% difference in overall self-esteem and 13% performance-related self-esteem, and the results indicated that different parts of self-esteem, social (3%), appearance (11%), and performance (3%), are differently affected by social media addiction. In a nutshell, all the study's predictions were confirmed by the results.

Mahalwal and Maini (2024) carried out a study to examine the relationship between social media, and happiness, psychological well-being among young adults. A sample of 104 young

men and women was collected from Delhi, and a survey was conducted through an online Google form. The study employed cross sectional research design and various standardized tools were employed such as Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (Gupta & Bashir, 2018, as cited in Mahalwal & Maini, 2024) to assess how frequent people use social media, Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1990, as cited in Mahalwal & Maini, 2024) to evaluate how happy a person feels, Psychological Well Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) to measure how stable a person feels emotionally and their overall mental wellbeing. The results indicated that social media is not directly linked to a person's happiness and psychological health; other aspects also matter. It also found out that by using social media, people genuinely feel cheerful and mentally well. Thus, this study proves that there is a positive correlation between social media use, happiness, and overall well-being.

Yu et al. (2024) undertook an investigation to examine to the correlation between social media and its impact on mental health, specifically the study wanted to analyse if just posting or viewing social media makes any change in mental health over a period. Longitudinal study design was used and 15,836 adults from UK of the age 16 were involved using a long-term survey called Understanding Society. The study employed General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) to assess various mental health problems and questions related to social media use were asked such as how frequent they post themselves on social media platforms (active use) and how much time they spend on viewing social media posts (passive use). The results revealed that adults who updated their photos more often or every day they had higher mental health difficulties after a year. It also showed that just looking at the posts didn't affect psychological wellbeing much, also adults who posted and viewed every day resulted in elevating the mental health challenges.

Lee and Kim (2024) investigated how the specific features of popular platforms shape user behaviour and self-perception. They focused on 580 young adult users in South Korea (63% female) who were active on both Instagram and TikTok. Through a detailed survey, they measured participants' platform-specific curation behaviours, such as how much they edited photos on Instagram or created original videos on TikTok. They also administered the State Self-Esteem Scale to measure immediate feelings of self-worth. The findings presented a clear contrast: intensive self-presentation work on Instagram, involving filters and careful editing, was correlated with lower state self-esteem and higher appearance anxiety. Conversely, engaging in creative, narrative-driven video production on TikTok was linked to higher self-

esteem, largely because it fostered feelings of competence and authentic expression. The study concludes that the design and cultural norms of a platform directly channel user activity in ways that can either undermine or support a positive self-concept.

Wang et al. (2024) conducted a study among Chinese college students; the study showed the correlation between problematic social media use and self-esteem. For this study longitudinal research method was employed, which involves studying the same group over an extended period of time. This study investigates whether self-esteem is a consequence or a cause of social media use or vice versa. For analysing this, the whole-group sampling technique was used and a sample of 560 students was taken from the six 1st year classes from Fujian province, China. In October 2021 initial measurement was conducted where all 520 students answered the questionnaire, then for the second time, the survey was carried out in April 2022 on the same sample, in which 401 students answered it rest dropped out due to personal reasons. For the third time, measurement was conducted in October 2022, where 350 students answered the questionnaire; some more left due to suspension or other reasons. Out of 350, the valid students after checking their id cards came out to be 321, from which 137 were male and 184 were female, and their average age was 18.42 years. Two models that were used to understand this complex correlation between the two were the cross-lagged model for understanding the cause-and-effect relationship and the latent growth model for analysing the developmental trends. The results indicated a negative correlation between self-esteem and problematic social media use. It showed that students in which self-esteem is low they use social media more or excessively, as low self-esteem may trigger its use, leading to addiction. No results were found on whether social media use directly has an effect on lowering self-esteem among college students.

Schmuck et al. (2024) designed an experiment to directly compare the psychological impact of two major platforms. They recruited 315 young adults from Austria (60% female) and randomly assigned them to browse either a simulated Instagram feed featuring travel and lifestyle influencers or a similar "For You Page" on TikTok. Before and after this brief exposure, participants completed quick measures of their state self-esteem and feelings of envy. The results were significant: exposure to the polished, static imagery typical of Instagram led to a greater immediate drop in self-esteem and a stronger sense of envy compared to exposure to TikTok's often more casual and dynamic video content. The researchers argue

that Instagram's ecosystem, which emphasizes curated perfection, may inherently foster more damaging social comparisons than other platforms with different content formats.

Magis-Weinberg and Gámez-Guadix (2024) conducted a two-year longitudinal study investigating how social media use and online social support interact to influence adolescent self-esteem in a non-Western context. Their sample consisted of 600 Peruvian adolescents (aged 12–16; 52% female) from schools in Lima. Participants completed annual surveys that included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), measures differentiating active from passive social media use, and the Online Social Support Scale. The findings revealed a critical moderating role of social support. While passive social media use (e.g., scrolling) was generally associated with negative outcomes, this link was only significant for adolescents who reported low levels of meaningful online social support. For those who felt supported by their digital networks, passive use did not harm self-esteem. Conversely, active use (e.g., messaging) was linked to more positive self-esteem trajectories, but primarily when it facilitated high-quality supportive interactions. The study concludes that the psychosocial impact of social media is heavily dependent on the relational context it provides, challenging universal claims of harm and highlighting the protective role of digital social capital.

Fioravanti et al. (2024) performed a large-scale synthesis of existing research to definitively examine the link between addictive social media use and self-esteem. Their meta-analysis pooled data from 42 independent studies, encompassing over 25,000 participants globally. Using advanced statistical techniques, they calculated an overall effect size, finding a consistent, moderate negative correlation: higher levels of social media addiction were robustly associated with lower self-esteem. This relationship was even stronger in studies focusing on adolescents and users of visually-oriented platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. The authors conclude that the evidence is now overwhelming: problematic, addictive patterns of social media engagement are a significant risk factor for impaired self-worth, and this relationship appears to be particularly potent during adolescence and on image-centric platforms.

Joshi et al. (2023) sought to investigate the psychological and social elements of cell phone social media behaviours in order to better comprehend internet-related diseases. According to humanistic theories of positive functioning, it was hypothesized that undergraduate students' psychological wellbeing would be positively correlated with their use of social media on their cell phones, specifically their sense of engagement, interest, pleasure, and accomplishment.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it was also predicted that undergraduate students' social media connectedness (affiliation, feeling rewarded, being liked by others, and contributions to others' well-being) would have a favourable impact on their psychological wellbeing. The undergraduate students from a major public institution took part in this study in the fall of 2019 by completing verified quantitative surveys about their use of cell phones and psychological health. To analyse the results, Spearman's rho and ordinal logistics were used. According to correlational data, undergraduate students' psychological wellbeing was favourably correlated with their use of social media on their cell phones, both for connecting with others and for connecting with themselves. Ordinal logistics revealed that being linked to oneself and others on social media using a cell phone increased the likelihood of psychological wellbeing. While cell phone social media connectivity to others was not a significant predictor of undergraduate students' psychological well-being, it did strongly predict connectedness to one's own social media accounts using the medium effect. Undergraduate students' psychological well-being was enhanced by their increased use of social media on their cell phones, involving both associating with others as well as reconnecting with themselves. The study revealed that their mental health was not linked to how connected they felt to others, but was closely associated with how integrated they felt to themselves while using social media. This underscores that personal participation on social media influences the psychological well-being more than social networking.

Colak et al. (2023) examined self-esteem and social media addiction level in adolescents: The mediating role of body image. The findings concluded that extensive use of social media among young adults is linked to lower levels of self-esteem in them, and this relationship is partially explained by negative body image.

Wartberget et al. (2023) analysed data from a major national survey to identify which teenagers might be most vulnerable to negative social media outcomes. Their sample was a nationally representative group of 1,823 German adolescents (48% female). They used validated scales to measure symptoms of ADHD, levels of problematic social media use, and self-esteem. Their statistical model revealed a clear pathway: adolescents with more pronounced ADHD symptoms were more likely to report addictive social media behaviors. Crucially, this connection was partly explained by their lower self-esteem. The study suggests a cycle where teens with attention challenges and fragile self-worth may turn to social media for stimulation and validation, but their engagement may paradoxically worsen their self-esteem through

negative online interactions. This highlights adolescents with ADHD as a key at-risk group needing targeted support for healthy digital habits.

Kircaburun et al. (2023) explored what psychological strengths might protect young people from developing unhealthy relationships with social media. Their study involved 1,015 adolescents and young adults from Turkey (54% female). Participants completed established scales measuring social media addiction, trait emotional intelligence (the ability to understand and manage emotions), and self-esteem. Results from their analysis indicated that both higher emotional intelligence and higher self-esteem served as protective shields. Young people with these strengths were less likely to fall into patterns of addictive use, likely because they were better at regulating their emotions and did not rely on online affirmation to feel worthy. The study advocates for prevention programs that build emotional skills and intrinsic self-worth as a buffer against the risks of social media.

Vagka et al. (2023) investigated to find out how self-esteem and nomophobia (the anxiety or fear people feel when they are without their smartphones) are related. The study had 1,060 participants (725 females and 308 males) from the University of Attica (Athens, Greece), and their average age was between 18-20 years. Out of them, 26% had part-time jobs. The parents' education was separated into two groups: non-graduates and university graduates. Tools like the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) and the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q) were used for data collection. The outcomes of the study concluded that participants whose fathers didn't have a university degree, along with women, young and non-working students, suffered from higher levels of nomophobia, and adults with low self-esteem continuously used their cell phones. It also showed that around 68.7% of the students with lower levels of self-esteem stated that using a phone negatively impacted their academic achievement in comparison to 45% of the students who have high self-esteem. Students who have severe nomophobia used their phones almost every time, during eating, classes, etc, they spent more than 8 hours using their phones.

Cingel et al. (2023) focused on the critical early adolescent period to understand the process by which social media use can lead to lower self-esteem. They collected data from 450 U.S. early adolescents (mean age 12.8%; 51% female) at two time points. They measured frequency of social media use, engagement in appearance-based social comparisons, exposure to appearance-related comments online, and self-esteem. Their longitudinal model found that more frequent social media use led to increased social comparison and more attention to

comments about looks. These experiences then predicted a subsequent decline in self-esteem. The study provides a clear map of the mechanism for younger users: social media amplifies peer feedback and comparison, which can directly disrupt the developing self-image during a vulnerable life stage.

Vanden Abeele and Postma-Nilsenová (2023) explored the psychological trade-offs between online validation and authentic self-expression through a 14-day daily diary study. The research involved 350 Belgian young adults (mean age = 21.3; 58% female) who completed nightly reports on their posting behavior, the authenticity of their posts, and their state self-esteem. The results identified a clear paradox: posting curated, idealized content often led to greater online engagement (e.g., likes), yet it consistently predicted lower end-of-day state self-esteem. In stark contrast, sharing more authentic, less-edited content was associated with higher daily self-esteem, even when it received less social feedback. The authors argue that the strategic effort to craft a perfect online image may create a psychological burden and a sense of dissonance, whereas authentic posting aligns with one's true self, fostering internal consistency and well-being. This study underscores that the quality of self-presentation is a more potent predictor of momentary self-worth than the quantity of validation received.

Tobin and Graham (2023) delved into the personality traits that might make someone more susceptible to seeking and being harmed by online validation. They surveyed 412 undergraduate students at a U.S. university (65% female). Participants completed questionnaires assessing contingent self-worth (the extent to which their self-esteem depends on external approval), their tendency to seek feedback on social media, and their overall trait self-esteem using the Rosenberg scale. The analysis showed that students who based their self-worth heavily on others' opinions were more active in seeking likes and comments online. This constant quest for external validation, in turn, predicted lower overall, stable self-esteem. The research concludes that the link between social media and self-esteem is deeply intertwined with an individual's fundamental need for approval, suggesting that interventions should address these underlying insecurities.

Huo and Li (2023) provided a detailed model explaining how Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) ultimately leads to lower self-esteem in young adults through a chain of social media-specific experiences. Their study of Chinese young adults identified a sequential mediation pathway: individuals with higher FoMO engaged in more intensive social media use, which in turn led to greater social media fatigue a state of feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by online

interactions. This fatigue was critical because it degraded the perceived quality of online social support, meaning users felt less connected and supported despite being highly active online. The final step in the model confirmed that this diminished sense of support was directly linked to significantly lower self-esteem. Thus, the study illustrates a counterproductive cycle where anxiety-driven use undermines the potential relational benefits of social media, resulting in a net negative outcome for self-worth.

Shannon et al. (2022) examined the interconnected roles of social media, sleep, and self-esteem. They analysed survey data from 1,784 U.S. young adults aged 18-30 (55% female). Participants reported on their nighttime social media use, sleep quality and duration (using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index), and self-esteem (RSES). Their analysis revealed that using social media at night was linked to poorer sleep. Crucially, this disrupted sleep fully explained the connection between high social media use and lower self-esteem. The study highlights an indirect but powerful pathway: social media can harm self-esteem by first degrading the quality of sleep, a foundational element of mental health.

Nesi and Prinstein (2022) conducted a one-year study with 600 U.S. adolescents (53% female) to see how social factors like gender and popularity change the impact of social media. They tracked specific behaviours like online feedback-seeking and social comparison, and measured outcomes like depressive symptoms and self-esteem. They found that the negative effects of these behaviours were much stronger for girls and for teens who felt less popular. For these groups, seeking validation online or comparing themselves to others was more closely tied to drops in self-esteem and increases in depressive symptoms a year later. This research underscores that social media risks are not evenly distributed and are heightened for those navigating social challenges.

Oberst et al. (2022) conducted a one-year longitudinal study to unravel the cognitive mechanisms that create a vicious cycle between social media use and declining self-esteem. They followed 450 German young adults (mean age = 20.1; 60% female), collecting data at two time points on their social media engagement, frequency of upward social comparisons, cognitive preoccupation (e.g., constantly thinking about online interactions), and self-esteem. A cross-lagged panel analysis revealed a self-reinforcing pattern: higher initial social media use predicted increased upward social comparison and greater cognitive preoccupation over time. These maladaptive cognitive patterns subsequently predicted a significant decrease in self-esteem at the one-year follow-up. Lower self-esteem then fed back into the cycle,

predicting even greater cognitive preoccupation with social media at the next measurement point. The study concludes that social media can trap users in a negative feedback loop where use fuels harmful thought patterns that damage self-view, which in turn drives further problematic engagement as a misguided coping mechanism.

Blease (2022) applied an evolutionary psychology perspective, proposing that social media taps into deep-seated human drives for social status. In a theoretical paper supported by survey data from 300 university students, Blease argued that individuals with a strong innate "drive for status" feel more distressed by social media metrics like follower counts. When their online status seems inadequate, it directly hits their self-esteem. This framework helps explain why social media evaluations feel so personally significant to self-worth.

Keles et al. (2022) published a major review, combining data from 59 previous studies on young people and social media. Their meta-analysis confirmed a small but significant overall negative correlation between social media use and self-esteem. However, they stressed that this average hides tremendous variation. The strength of the link depended heavily on factors like user age, personality, and what they actually did online. Their key conclusion urged a shift in research, moving away from simply counting screen time toward understanding the nuanced quality of online experiences.

Valkenburg et al. (2021) examined in their study the connection between social media use and self-esteem to analyse this link. A sample of 387 youngsters was obtained who were aged between 13-15 years. Most of them were born in the Netherlands, and around 4% were from other countries. The participants were of different educational levels. The study lasted for about 3 weeks, and each participant got 6 surveys per day, 126 per person, through the Experience Sampling Method. In total, they received 47,900 surveys; the remaining 862 were not obtained due to a technical glitch. The survey involved questions that every study participant needed to answer. It was about their social media activity, i.e., (how much time they spent on Instagram, Snapchat, and various other social media apps last hour, answered on the scale of 0-60 mins) and their present self-esteem, which was calculated between the range of 0-6. The findings concluded mixed results i.e., both positive and negative associations between the two constructs being examined. About 4% of the students reported positive effects and 8% had negative effects, the remaining 88% stated a very little to a negligible amount of influence i.e. ($-.10 < \beta < .10$). The study interpreted that for the participants with low self-esteem, social media had a positive impact on them, but it was not the same for the teens who had higher self-esteem.

On the other hand, social media had an unfavourable influence on those participants who do social comparison online. In essence, this investigation revealed that the correlation between social media use and self-esteem varies from person to person.

Piteo and Ward (2021) used a two-part, mixed-methods approach. First, they surveyed 200 Australian adolescents aged 16-18 (58% female) and found a link between passive scrolling and lower self-esteem. Then, they conducted in-depth interviews with 30 of these teens to understand why. The teens described how passive scrolling led to "comparison spirals" and feelings of inadequacy, while active chatting with close friends made them feel supported and better about themselves. Combining numbers with personal stories, the study provided a rich, firsthand account of how different online activities feel and their impact on self-perception.

Vanithamani et al. (2021) examine the effect of social media among college students in Sulur, Coimbatore, India. A sample of 100 college students was collected through a survey and unveiled four key themes: social media usage trends, impact on academic achievement, effect on psychological health, and influence on social connections. The results revealed social media use is frequent among college students in Sulur, Coimbatore, and can have both positive and negative impacts on their academic performance, mental health, and interpersonal relationships. The study provides useful insights into the impact of social media on college students in this region of India and spotlights the need for further research and interventions to promote healthy use of social media.

Hawi and Samaha (2021) surveyed 510 university students in Lebanon (59% female) to connect social media addiction to broader life satisfaction. They used the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and a Life Satisfaction Scale. Their statistical model showed a clear chain: social media addiction predicted lower self-esteem, and lower self-esteem then predicted reduced overall life satisfaction. This shows that the consequences of problematic use extend beyond momentary mood to affect how young people evaluate their lives as a whole.

Twenge and Farley (2021) analysed longitudinal data from 1,200 U.S. adolescents over two years. They made a critical distinction, finding that while total screen time wasn't a consistent predictor, increased time in passive consumption (like viewing others' posts) specifically predicted small rises in depressive symptoms and drops in self-esteem. Active use, like

messaging, did not show this link. The takeaway is clear: it's not just "being online," but the specific, passive behaviour of watching others' curated lives that is most risky for self-esteem.

Adhikari (2020) talks about the influence of social media on Navodit College students. While social media is a tool that lets us connect and communicate with others, it can have both pluses and minuses. The excessive use of social media could have a severe impact on the mental and physical health of students and unfavourably affects their academic achievement. The study reports that students use social media mainly to remain updated on trends and make learning technology easier. However, the research also underscores concerns such as confidentiality matters, parental control, and group influence in creating an account on a digital platform. Therefore, the investigation suggests that adults know better what is beneficial and detrimental for them, and it is important to be conscious of both the pros and cons of social media.

Przybylski et al. (2020) provided critical large-scale, longitudinal evidence that helped define a threshold for "harmful" social media use. Their confirmatory cohort study analysed data from approximately 12,000 adolescents in the United Kingdom (aged 14–16), examining the link between various digital screen activities (including social media) and psychosocial functioning, which included a measure of self-esteem. After applying extensive statistical controls for prior mental health and demographic factors, they identified a non-linear, quadratic relationship. The analysis showed that moderate social media use (up to 1-2 hours daily) showed no reliable association with lower self-esteem. However, engagement beyond this point, particularly exceeding 3 hours per day, demonstrated a clear and consistent negative association with self-esteem and other well-being indicators. This research is pivotal for moving the field away from simplistic "more time is worse" narratives and toward a more nuanced understanding of digital dosage, suggesting that it is excessive, displacing use that becomes detrimental to self-worth.

Coyne et al. (2020) reported on a rare eight-year study following 500 individuals from age 13 to 21 in the United States. Their long-term analysis found that being a heavy social media user in early adolescence did not predetermine poor self-esteem in adulthood when other factors were considered. However, at times when a person used social media more than their own usual amount, they reported feeling slightly worse about themselves at that same time. This suggests that social media may not cause lasting personality changes, but it can influence how a person feels about themselves in the moment.

Sherlock and Wagstaff (2020) ran an experiment with 150 young adult women. Participants were randomly assigned to browse either an Instagram account full of idealized "fitspiration" imagery or a neutral travel account. Women who saw the fitness images reported significantly higher body dissatisfaction and lower state self-esteem afterward. The effect was strongest for women who already had a habit of focusing on their appearance. The study provided causal evidence that exposure to idealized body images on Instagram can directly harm women's self-image.

Fardouly and Vartanian (2020) also conducted an experiment, focusing on Facebook. 112 female undergraduates spent 10 minutes either browsing their own Facebook feed or reading neutral online articles. The group that used Facebook reported higher body image concerns and worse mood afterward. The researchers found this was because browsing Facebook increased their tendency to compare their appearance to others. This experiment solidly demonstrates that routine social media use can trigger comparison processes that lead to immediate negative self-evaluation.

Cunningham and Huxley (2019) surveyed 300 young adults, exploring the role of personality. They found a significant interaction: for introverted individuals, more social media use was linked to lower self-esteem, possibly because online interactions felt overwhelming or unsatisfying. For extraverts, social media use showed a slight positive link to self-esteem, likely acting as an extension of their active social life. This highlighted the importance of personality in determining whether social media is a helpful social tool or a source of stress.

Marengo et al. (2019) surveyed 700 Italian adolescents to map a pathway from social media to mental health. They found that use of highly visual apps like Instagram and Snapchat was linked to greater concern about body image. These body image concerns, along with lower self-esteem, then helped explain why these teens experienced more anxiety and depression. The study showed a clear progression from specific platform use to broader mental health issues through damaged self-perception.

Kelly et al. (2019) used data from the large, nationally representative UK Millennium Cohort Study, following thousands of young people. They found that very frequent social media use (over 5 hours/day) at age 14 was associated with higher symptoms of depression and lower happiness, even after accounting for their previous mental state. This large-scale study

provided strong, real-world evidence linking heavy adolescent social media use to poorer well-being.

Jan et al. (2019) provided a cultural perspective through a survey of 500 university students in Pakistan. They found a significant negative link between time on social media and self-esteem, mirroring Western findings. A key factor was cyberbullying; students who experienced online harassment had notably lower self-esteem. This pointed to universal risks, like cyberbullying, that transcend cultural context.

Burnell and Kuther (2019) followed 200 U.S. college freshmen across their first semester. They found that students who engaged in more social comparison on social media at the start of term saw their academic confidence and overall self-esteem decline by the semester's end. The study connected social media behavior to the critical task of academic adjustment, showing it can disrupt a successful transition to university life.

Lup et al. (2019) conducted a cross-sectional study with 300 young adult women, focusing on Instagram. They found that more frequent Instagram use was linked to more depressive symptoms. This relationship was explained by a two-step process: Instagram use led to more negative social comparisons, which in turn lowered self-esteem. The research offered a clear, tested pathway from using the platform to feeling depressed.

Holland and Tiggemann (2018) ran an experiment highly relevant to the "selfie" era. 160 young women were asked to take and post a selfie under different conditions: with a beauty filter, after editing, or with no changes. Women who used filters or heavy editing reported lower subsequent satisfaction with their natural appearance and lower immediate self-esteem. The study warned that the very tools designed to enhance online presentation may ultimately make users more critical of their real-world selves.

Shensa et al. (2018) surveyed a national sample of 1,787 U.S. young adults (19-32). Using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, they found that participants with higher addiction scores reported significantly lower self-esteem. This was one of the first large-scale U.S. studies to specifically link problematic, addictive use patterns not just frequent use to poorer self-worth in young adulthood.

Valkenburg and Peter (2018) presented the influential Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (DSMM). This theoretical framework synthesized evidence to argue that social media's effect on self-esteem is never uniform. Instead, it depends on the user's disposition (e.g., personality), developmental stage (e.g., age), and social environment (e.g., parental support). This model provided a crucial foundation for understanding why effects vary so much from person to person, guiding future research toward more personalized inquiries.

Berryman et al. (2017) did not find evidence of negative effects but have seen positive impacts of social media use on mental health. Studies have discovered the positive influence on self-articulation is associated with higher social media use.

Woods and Scott (2016) evaluated trait self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and anxiety and depression levels using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). Emotional investment in social media was measured using a modified version of the Social Integration and Emotional Connection subscale of the Social Media Use Integration Scale (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012). 467 secondary school students in the United Kingdom, ages 11 to 17, made up the sample. Higher anxiety levels and increased social media use and emotional investment in social media were found to be significantly positively correlated. Likewise, increased usage of social media and emotional investment in it were linked to higher depression levels. Social media use and self-esteem were found to be negatively correlated, with higher levels of social media use and emotional involvement in social media being linked to lower self-esteem ratings. People who use social media, particularly teenagers and young adults, are more likely to suffer from depression. It is among the most prevalent mental health conditions brought on by social media. Without even realizing it, comparing your life to others' might make you feel lonely and envious. The lack of real-time human interaction on social media is one of its main drawbacks. You will inevitably compare your life to those on the internet, the more time you spend browsing through your feed. Jealousy and even melancholy are further exacerbated by the comparison cycle.

Jha and Chauhan (2016) investigated the impact of social media on the academic efficiency of college students. Through a survey of randomly selected students, the study found a pervasive yet dualistic effect. While social media use was reported to aid in developing knowledge and social skills, it concurrently had a detrimental impact on study efficiency and academic focus. The research identified Facebook as the most commonly used platform among college students, followed by YouTube and Twitter, with 78% of college students reported spending time on

platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The study concludes that the freedom and connectivity offered by social networks, which allow students to share content and interact broadly, also introduce significant distractions that can negatively affect academic performance. Vogel et al. (2014) undertook two studies to investigate the relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Study 1 analysed whether regular and frequent use of Facebook, which is a social networking site, is linked to low levels of self-esteem, and the results revealed poorer self-esteem among those participants who used Facebook the most, and it also showed that the users do upward social comparison on social media, which affects their subjective well-being negatively. Study 2 examined the influence of short-term social media usage on self-esteem. The result demonstrates that even temporary use of social media impacts self-esteem and can lower it when people compare themselves to others online. The results suggest that social comparison is a driving force through which self-esteem and social media are affected by the use of social media.

Allen et al. (2014) highlighted that one of the key benefits of social media is that it enhances social connectedness and camaraderie among people. This aspect of digital communication became especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic when the world faced lockdowns and other restrictions. During this time, various organizations utilized social media to maintain work, education, and social connections (Taylor-Jackson et al., 2021).

The existing literature consistently shows a significant relationship between social media usage and self-esteem among young adults. Most studies report a negative correlation, indicating that problematic or addictive social media use is linked to lower self-esteem. This relationship is largely explained by social comparison theory, where users engage in upward comparisons with idealized online content, leading to feelings of inadequacy. Research distinguishes between passive use (scrolling, viewing) which is harmful, and active use (posting, messaging) which is neutral or positive. Platform features, personality traits, body image, FoMO, and sleep quality act as mediators or moderators. Protective factors like media literacy and authentic self-presentation buffer negative effects. While most findings confirm a negative association, some studies report person-specific effects depending on individual dispositions and usage patterns.

2.2 RESEARCH GAP

Although a substantial body of literature has examined the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among young adults, several gaps persist in the existing research. Most

studies have been conducted in Western contexts, with limited empirical evidence available from the Indian cultural setting, particularly among college students in smaller cities like Jammu. Furthermore, prior research has often focused on general social media use rather than specifically measuring addictive patterns of use, which may have different psychological implications. Findings regarding gender differences in both social media addiction and self-esteem have also remained inconsistent across studies, warranting further investigation. Additionally, very few Indian studies have simultaneously examined social media addiction, self-esteem, and gender differences within a single correlational design. Therefore, the present study aims to address these gaps by exploring the association between social media addiction and self-esteem among college students in Jammu, India, while also examining whether gender differences exist in these variables.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODLODY

Research is a systematic and scientific process designed to gather, analyze, and interpret data to answer specific questions or solve particular problems (Kothari, 2004). It involves a structured approach to inquiry, ensuring that findings are both reliable and valid. As explained by Kumar (2011), research methodology serves as the foundation of any study, guiding the selection of appropriate techniques and tools for data collection and analysis. The careful planning of methodology not only enhances the credibility of the research but also ensures that the objectives are met effectively. This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted in the present study, detailing the research design, sampling strategy, instruments used, and analytical procedures employed to investigate the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem among young adults.

3.1 SAMPLING METHOD

There are several methods of collecting data, but the selection of the research method is determined by the nature of the problem. The correlational research design is employed in the present study after considering the nature, need, and purpose of the research. A correlational design is used to examine the relationship between variables without manipulation, making it suitable for exploring the association between social media usage and self-esteem among young adults (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study also adopts a cross-sectional survey method to collect data at a single point in time, allowing for the assessment of current patterns and relationships among the variables under investigation. This approach enables the researcher to gather quantitative data efficiently and test the proposed hypotheses regarding gender differences and the nature of the relationship between the key constructs.

3.2 POPULATION

This research focuses on young adults, aged 18–25 years, who are active social media users.

3.3 SAMPLE

Sampling is the soul of scientific study. A good sample minimizes the error of estimation, is less time-consuming, and economical in terms of time and money. The size of the sample varies

from study to study, method, and nature of the population. In the present study, keeping in view the limitation of time, the researcher has to be content within the limited samples.

Table 3.1

Distribution of Sample of Adults

S.No.	Category	No. of Adolescents
1.	Male	77
2.	Female	101
	Total	**178**

3.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

In the present study, the Random Sampling Technique was used for data collection. This method ensures each member of the defined population has an equal chance of selection, supporting unbiased and generalizable results. The process involved compiling a list of eligible young adults and randomly selecting 178 participants. This approach minimizes selection bias and aligns with the study's correlational design.

3.5 VARIABLES

The following variables have been included for investigation in the present study:

- Social Media Usage: refers to the frequency, duration, and types of activities (e.g., posting, scrolling, liking, commenting, and messaging) individuals engage in on digital platforms.
- Self-Esteem: can be defined as an individual's positive and negative attitude toward oneself; it is an overall appraisal of one's value.

3.6 RESEARCH TOOLS AND IT'S DESCRIPTION

The selection of vital importance for successful research. Different tools are suitable for collecting different kinds of information for various purposes. The selection of tools for the data collection depends on the nature of the problem being undertaken. For the current research, the researcher has used the following tools for research:

ii) Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES): The scale is a widely used instrument designed to measure an individual's overall level of self-esteem. It was developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965. The original sample consisted of 5,024 high school juniors and seniors from ten randomly selected schools in New York. The scale has ten items, and all the items have to be answered on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree, to strongly disagree. Among these items, some items are reverse-scored to control for research bias. The scale has demonstrated high reliability and validity across various populations and provides a global measure for self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965).

iii) Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS): The scale is considered a resilient tool for assessing addictive patterns of social media use. It was developed by Andreassen and colleagues in 2016. It is derived from the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale and is based upon core addiction components such as mood modification, salience, withdrawal tolerance, conflict, and relapse. It is a reliable and valid instrument that is used to evaluate the level of social media addiction among individuals. The scale is based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1(very rarely) to 5(very often) and consists of six items in total (Andreassen et al., 2016).

3.7 STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED

In order to analyse the data, the investigator used the following statistical techniques:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Mean and Standard Deviation
2. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation (r)
3. Independent Samples t-test

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This chapter presents the findings of the study and offers interpretations based on the collected data. The primary objective was to examine the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem among college students. Specifically, the study sought to determine whether higher levels of social media use are associated with lower self-esteem. A total of 178 college students participated in the study. Social media addiction was measured using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), and self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-tests, and Pearson correlation. The results are presented systematically through tables and figures to facilitate clarity and interpretation.

The chapter begins with a description of the demographic characteristics of the sample, including gender, age, and year of study. Next, gender differences in social media addiction and self-esteem scores are examined. Following that, the correlation between social media addiction and self-esteem is reported. Finally, the findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

In summary, participants reported moderate levels of social media addiction (M = 16.29, SD = 4.66, range 0–30) and a mean self-esteem score of 16.25 (SD = 4.06, range 0–30). No significant gender differences were observed for either variable, BSMAS: t (176) = −0.715, p = .476; RSES: t (176) = 0.036, p = .971. However, a significant negative correlation was found between social media addiction and self-esteem, r (176) = −.588, p < .001, suggesting that students with higher social media addiction scores tended to report lower self-esteem. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for understanding the interplay between social media use and psychological well-being in college settings and highlights directions for future research.

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	77	43.3
	Female	101	56.7
Age	18–20	31	17.4
	21–23	95	53.4
	24+	52	29.2
Year of Study	First Year	13	7.2
	Second Year	41	22.5
	Third Year	25	13.5
	Fourth Year	43	23.6
	Other	56	30.8

Table 4.1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. A total of 178 college students participated in the study. Females constituted a higher proportion (56.7%) compared to males (43.3%), providing a basis for examining gender differences in social media addiction and self-esteem. The majority of participants belonged to the 21–23 years age group (53.4%), followed by those aged 24 years or older (29.2%) and 18–20 years (17.4%), indicating that the sample primarily consisted of young adults in their early to mid-twenties. In terms of year of study, participants were distributed across different academic levels, with the largest group in the "Other" category (30.8%), followed by Fourth Year (23.6%), Second Year (22.5%), Third Year (13.5%), and First Year (7.1%). This distribution ensures representation across different stages of college education, supporting the study's objective of examining social media addiction and self-esteem among diverse college students.

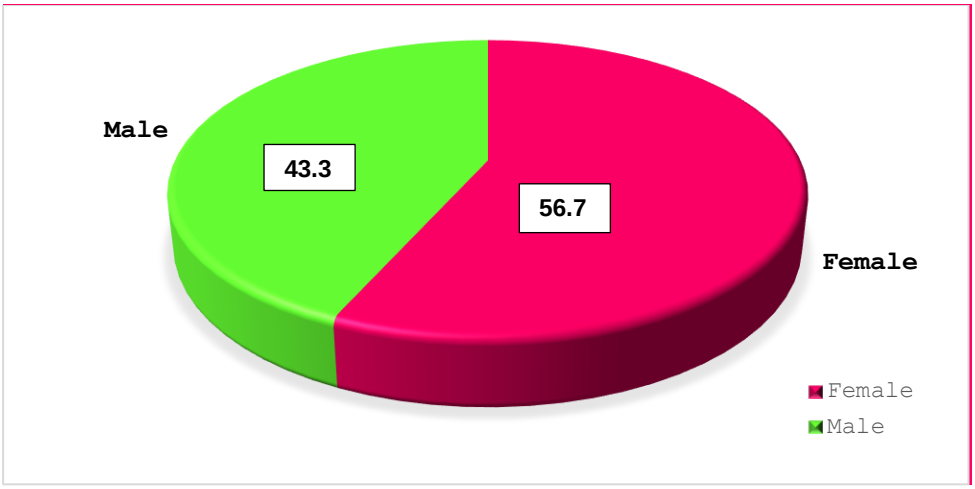


Figure 4.1a Gender Distribution of Participants

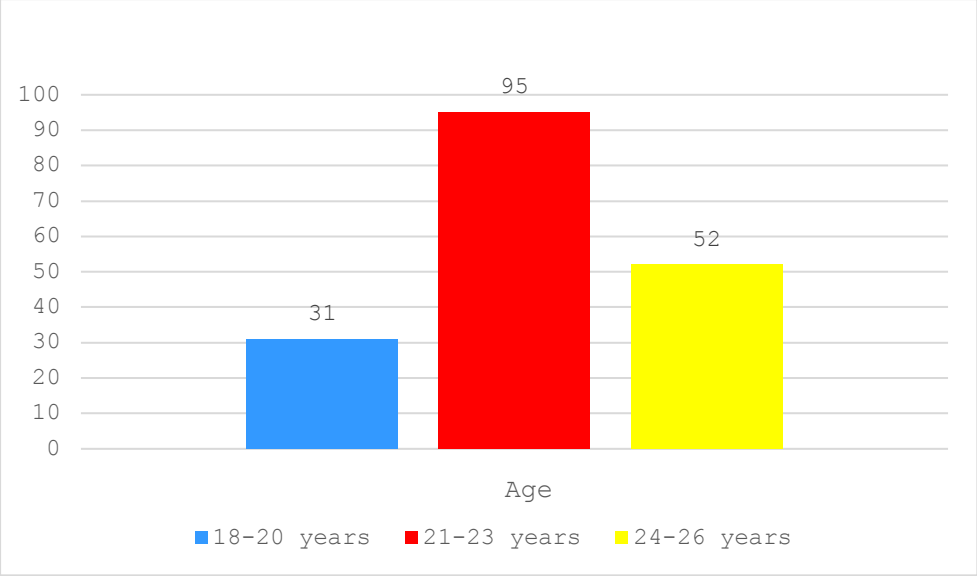


Figure 4.1b Age Distribution of Participants

Note. Age groups were coded as follows: 18–20 = 3, 21–23 = 4, 24+ = 5.

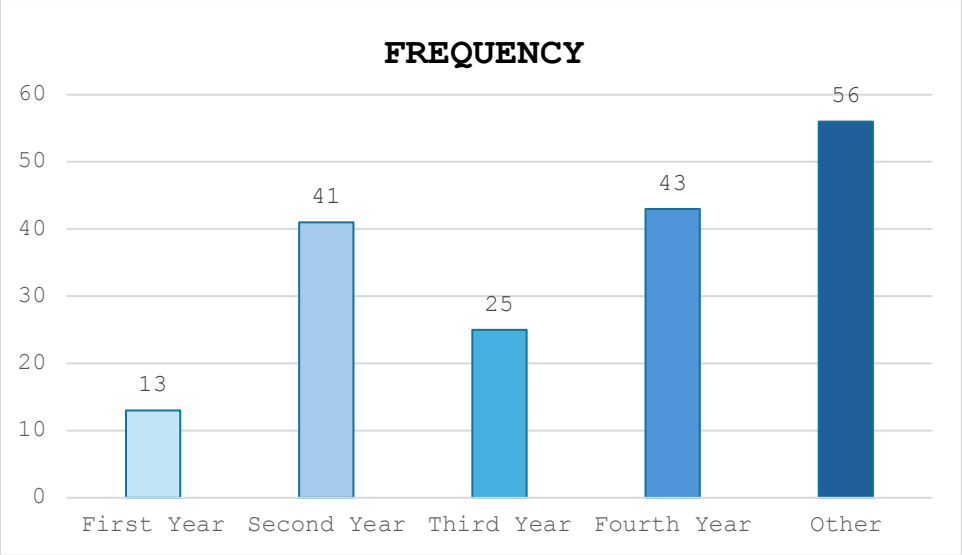


Figure 4.1c Year of Study Distribution

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics for BSMAS and RSES Scores n=178

Variable	***M***	***SD***
BSMAS Total Score	16.29	4.663
RSES Total Score	16.25	4.061

Note. BSMAS =Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale; RSES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

Table 4.2 presents the descriptive statistics for the total sample (n = 178). The mean BSMAS score was 16.29 (SD = 4.66), and the mean RSES score was 16.25 (SD = 4.06). Both scales have a possible range of 0 to 30, allowing for direct comparison between the two measures. The mean BSMAS score of 16.29 falls slightly above the midpoint of the scale (15), indicating moderate levels of social media addiction among college students. This suggests that while participants do not exhibit extreme or clinically significant addiction levels, many endorse behaviors consistent with problematic social media use, such as salience, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms. Similarly, the mean RSES score of 16.25 also falls slightly above the

midpoint, reflecting moderate levels of self-esteem. According to Rosenberg, scores below 15 are typically considered indicative of low self-esteem; thus, the sample mean of 16.25 suggests that most participants hold a moderately positive view of themselves, though individual variability exists. The standard deviations (*SD* = 4.66 for BSMAS; *SD* = 4.06 for RSES) indicate moderate variability around the means, suggesting that some students report much higher social media addiction and lower self-esteem, while others report the opposite pattern.

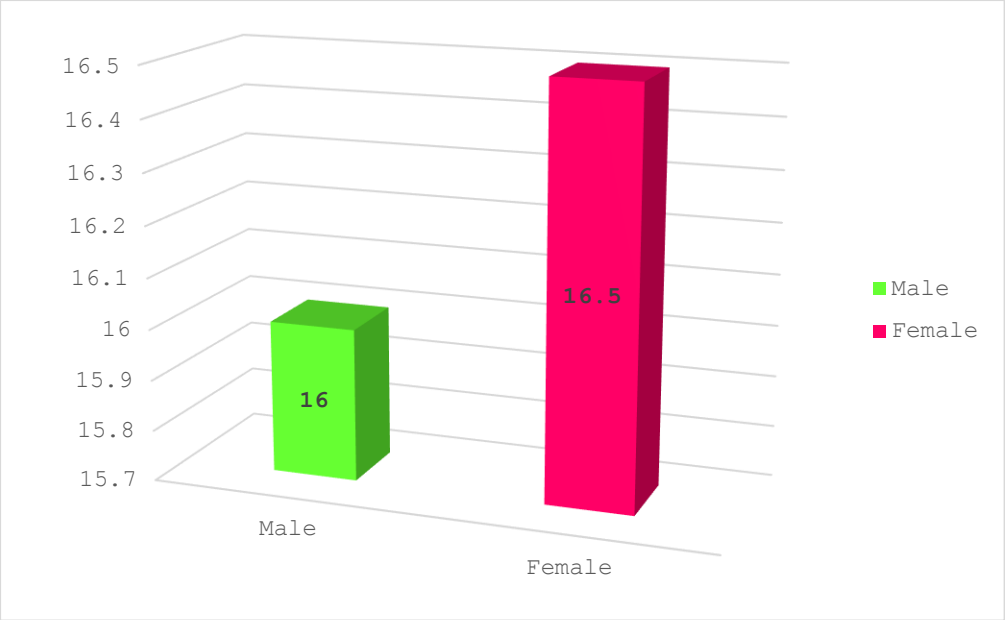


Figure 4.2a Mean Social Media Addiction Scores by Gender

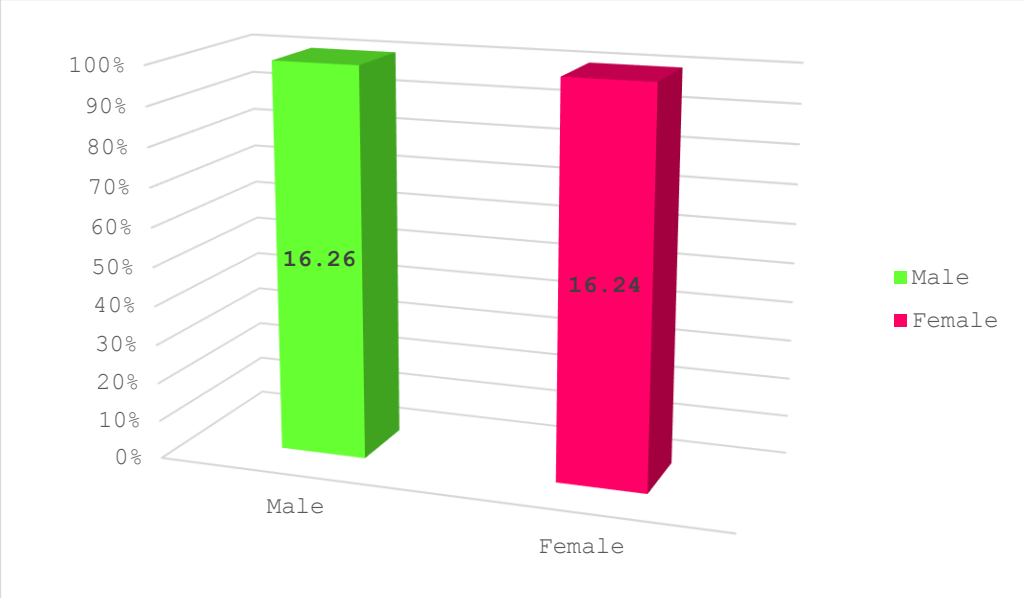


Figure 4.2b Mean Self-Esteem Scores by Gender

Table 4.3

Group Statistics for BSMAS and RSES Scores by Gender

Variable	Gender	*M*	*SD*	*N*
BSMAS Total Score	Male	16.00	4.96	77
	Female	16.50	4.43	101
RSES Total Score	Male	16.26	4.03	77
	Female	16.24	4.11	101

Note. BSMAS =Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale; RSES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

The group statistics for BSMAS and RSES scores by gender are presented in Table 4.3. For the BSMAS scores, male participants reported a mean of 16.00 (SD = 4.96, n = 77), while female participants reported a slightly higher mean of 16.50 (SD = 4.43, n = 101). Although females showed marginally higher social media addiction scores, the difference between the groups appears minimal. This slight variation may be attributed to individual differences rather than systematic gender-based patterns. Similarly, for RSES scores, male participants had a mean of 16.26 (SD = 4.03, n = 77), whereas female participants had a nearly identical mean of 16.24 (SD = 4.11, n = 101). This indicates that self-esteem levels were almost equal across genders. The standard deviations for both genders are comparable, suggesting similar variability in responses among male and female participants. Overall, the descriptive statistics suggest very small differences between male and female participants in both social media addiction and self-esteem, which is consistent with the subsequent inferential analysis indicating no statistically significant gender differences. These findings collectively suggest that gender does not play a significant role in shaping either social media addiction or self-esteem among college students in this sample.

Table 4.4

Independent Samples T-Test Results for BSMAS and RSES Scores by Gender

Variable	Male		Female			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
BSMAS	16.00	4.96	16.50	4.43	-0.715	.476
RSES	16.26	4.03	16.24	4.11	0.036	.971

Note. No significant gender differences were found. All p values are two-tailed.

Table 4.4 presents the mean comparison between male and female college students on social media addiction (BSMAS) and self-esteem (RSES) scores. For the BSMAS variable, male participants (n = 77) reported a mean score of 16.00 (SD = 4.96), whereas female participants (n = 101) reported a slightly higher mean score of 16.50 (SD = 4.43). The independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant gender difference, t = –0.715, p = .476. For the RSES variable, male participants had a mean score of 16.26 (SD = 4.03), and female participants had a nearly identical mean score of 16.24 (SD = 4.11). The t-test confirmed no significant gender difference, t = 0.036, p = .971. These findings indicate that both male and female college students report similar levels of social media addiction and self-esteem, suggesting that gender does not play a significant role in shaping these variables within the sample.

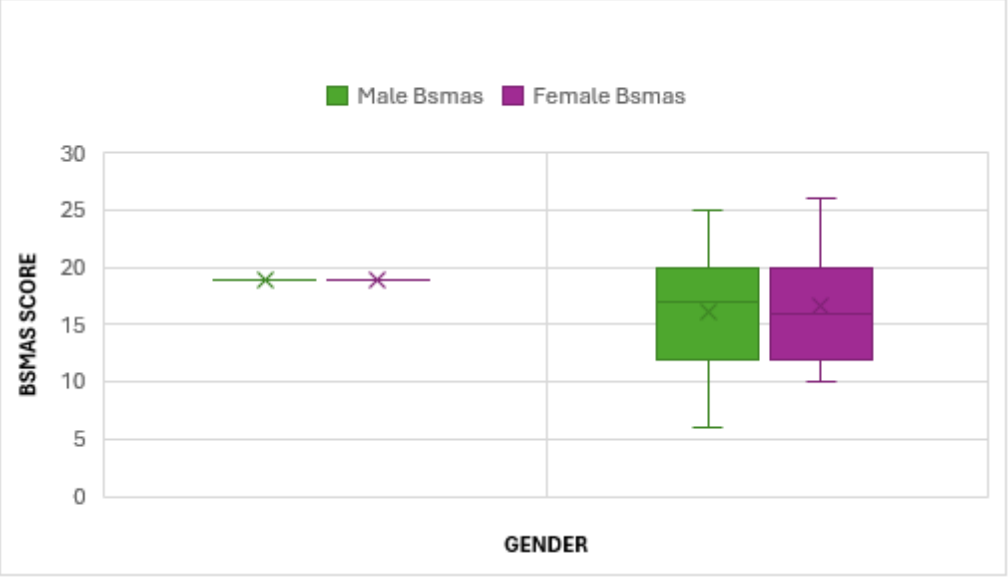


Figure 4.3a Showing BSMAS Scores by Gender

Note. It illustrates the distribution of BSMAS scores for male and female participants, showing the median (middle line), interquartile range (box), and any outliers (dots beyond whiskers).

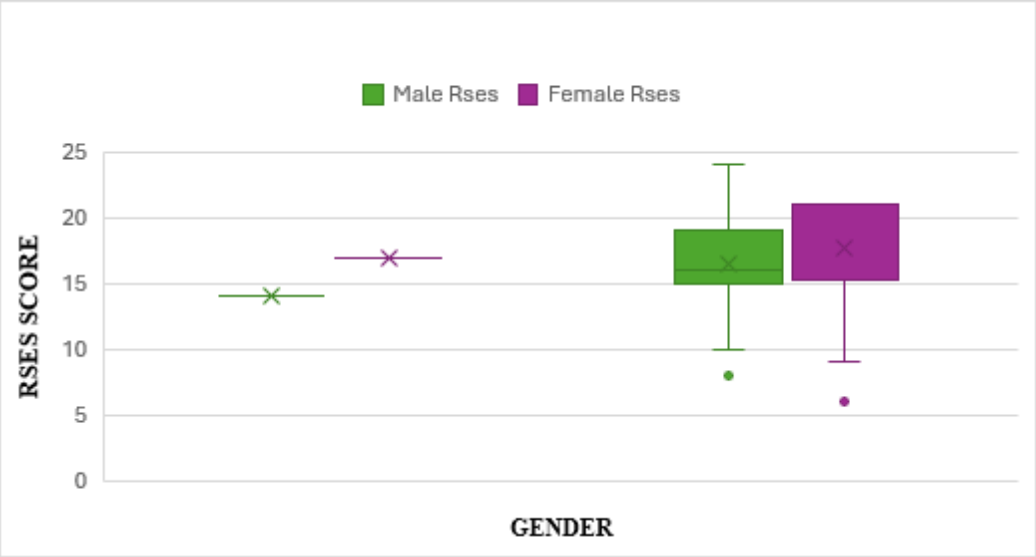


Figure 4.3b Showing RSES Scores by Gender

Note. It illustrates the distribution of RSES scores for male and female participants, showing the median (middle line), interquartile range (box), and any outliers (dots beyond whiskers)

Table 4.5

Pearson Correlation Between BSMAS and RSES Scores

Variable	***M***	***SD***	**1**	**2**
BSMAS Total Score	16.29	4.66	1.00	-.*588***
RSES Total Score	16.25	4.06	-.*588***	1.00

Note **p < .01 (two-tailed).

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between social media addiction (BSMAS) and self-esteem (RSES) among college students. The results revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between the two variables, r = −.588, p

< .001. This indicates a moderately strong inverse relationship, suggesting that as levels of social media addiction increase, levels of self-esteem tend to decrease. The strength of this correlation suggests that the association between social media addiction and self-esteem is meaningful within the sample. Students who reported higher levels of addictive social media use were more likely to experience lower self-worth and reduced confidence. This relationship may be influenced by factors such as increased social comparison, where individuals evaluate themselves against idealized portrayals of others, as well as continuous exposure to curated online content. Furthermore, reliance on external validation through likes, comments, and online interactions may contribute to diminished self-esteem over time. As individuals become more dependent on social approval, their sense of self-worth may become unstable. The negative correlation also implies that interventions aimed at reducing problematic social media use could potentially contribute to improvements in self-esteem. Additionally, the moderate strength of the correlation ($r = -.588$) suggests that while social media addiction is an important factor, other psychological and environmental variables also play a role in shaping self-esteem. Overall, these findings highlight the potential negative psychological impact of excessive social media use among college students.

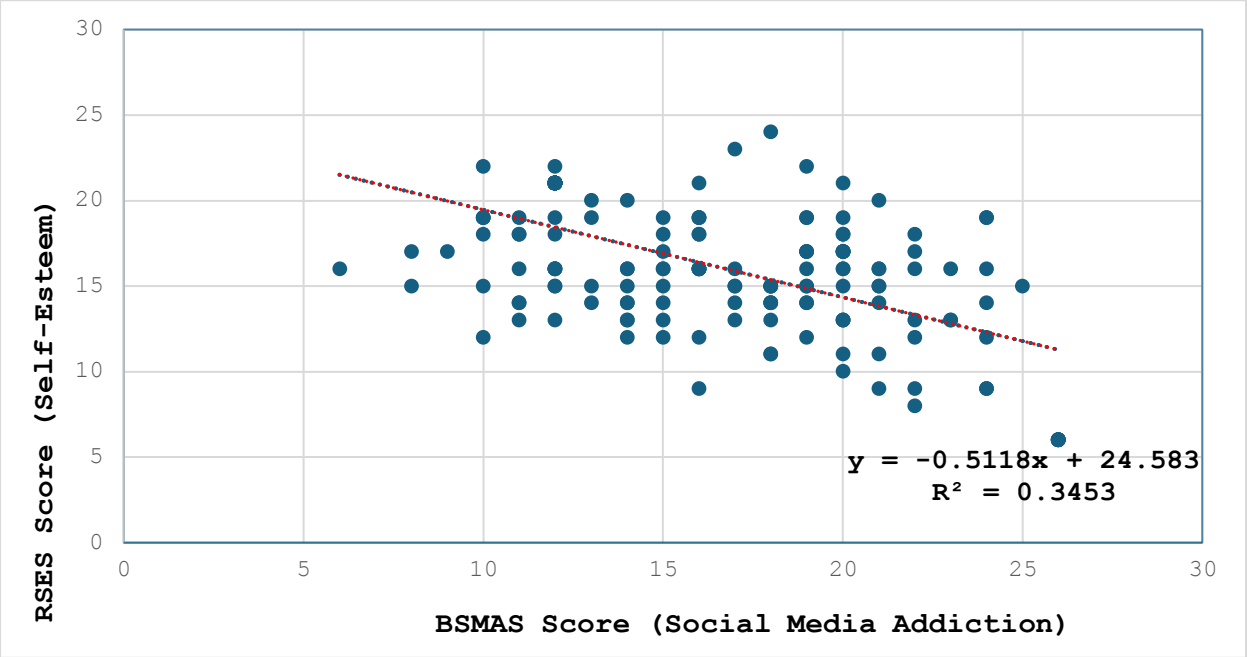


Figure 4.4 Scatter Plot Showing the Correlation between BSMAS and RSES Scores

Note. The scatter plot shows the negative correlation between BSMAS and RSES scores. Each point represents one participant. The regression line indicates the linear trend, showing that higher BSMAS scores are associated with lower RSES scores.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, FUTURE IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the study by summarizing its key components, discussing the major findings in relation to the stated hypotheses, and outlining the conclusions and implications derived from the analysis. The primary objective of the research was to examine the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem among college students using a quantitative correlational design. Additionally, the study investigated whether gender differences exist in levels of social media addiction and self-esteem.

With the increasing integration of social media into the daily lives of young adults, it has become essential to understand its psychological implications. While social media platforms facilitate communication, self-expression, and social interaction, excessive and maladaptive use has been associated with adverse psychological outcomes. Self-esteem, as a crucial psychological construct, plays a significant role in determining individuals' mental well-being, emotional stability, and interpersonal functioning.

This chapter interprets the findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, particularly in light of the stated hypotheses. It also discusses the broader implications for psychological research, educational practices, and mental health interventions. Furthermore, the limitations of the study are acknowledged to provide a critical perspective, followed by suggestions for future research.

5.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the research investigation encapsulates what is to be achieved by the study. In this view of the available literature and importance of the topic, the following objectives were set: -

i) To examine the relationship between social media use and self-esteem.

ii) To assess the gender difference in self-esteem levels.

iii) To assess the gender difference in social media usage.

5.2 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

H1) There is a significant negative relationship between social media usage and self-esteem.

H2) There is no significant difference in the self-esteem levels of males and females.

H3) There is no significant difference in the social media usage of males and females.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted to examine the association between social media addiction and self-esteem among college students. In response to growing concerns about the psychological impact of excessive social media use, the study specifically aimed to test whether higher levels of social media addiction are associated with lower levels of self-esteem (H1), and whether gender differences exist in these variables (H2 and H3).

A quantitative correlational research design was employed. The sample consisted of 178 college students. Social media addiction was measured using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), while self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Data analysis included descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and Pearson correlation analysis.

The results indicated that participants reported moderate levels of social media addiction (M = 16.29, *SD* = 4.66) and moderate levels of self-esteem (*M* = 16.25, SD = 4.06). The findings revealed no statistically significant gender differences in social media addiction, $t = –0.715$, = or in self-esteem, $t = 0.036$. Therefore, H2 and H3 were supported.

Importantly, a statistically significant negative correlation was found between social media addiction and self-esteem, $r = –.588$, $p < .001$. This result supports H1, indicating that higher levels of social media addiction are associated with lower levels of self-esteem among college students.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn in relation to the stated hypotheses:

First, the study provides strong support for H1, demonstrating a significant negative relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem. This indicates that as individuals'

engagement with social media becomes more excessive or addictive, their levels of self-esteem tend to decrease. This relationship may be explained by processes such as upward social comparison, exposure to idealized self-presentations, and dependence on external validation through likes, comments, and online feedback.

Second, the findings support H2, as no significant gender differences were observed in self-esteem levels. This suggests that both male and female students experience similar levels of self-worth within the studied sample, indicating that gender may not be a determining factor in self-esteem in this context.

Third, the results also support H3, as no significant gender differences were found in social media addiction. This implies that both males and females engage with social media in a similar manner in terms of intensity and potential addictive patterns.

Overall, the findings highlight that social media addiction is moderately prevalent among college students and has meaningful psychological implications, particularly in relation to self-esteem. These results emphasize the importance of promoting balanced and mindful social media use.

5.5 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the present study carry significant theoretical, practical, clinical, educational, and policy-level implications, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological impact of social media use.

From a theoretical perspective, the study strengthens existing literature by providing empirical support for the negative association between social media addiction and self-esteem (H1). The findings align with social comparison theory, suggesting that individuals evaluate their self-worth through comparisons with others, particularly in highly curated digital environments. Additionally, the results can be interpreted through the lens of self-determination theory, where excessive reliance on external validation (e.g., likes, comments) may undermine intrinsic self-worth and autonomy. The findings also resonate with cognitive-behavioral frameworks, where repeated exposure to idealized content may reinforce maladaptive cognitions such as negative self-evaluation and feelings of inadequacy. Thus, the study contributes to integrating multiple theoretical perspectives in understanding digital behavior and psychological well-being.

From a practical and clinical standpoint, the results have direct relevance for mental health professionals. Psychologists and counsellors can incorporate these findings into assessment and intervention strategies by identifying problematic social media usage patterns as potential risk factors for low self-esteem. Therapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can be utilized to address maladaptive thought patterns arising from social comparison and online validation dependency. Additionally, interventions can focus on enhancing self-concept clarity, promoting self-acceptance, and building resilience against negative online experiences. Preventive mental health programs can also be designed to target at-risk populations, particularly college students.

In the educational context, the findings highlight the need for integrating digital well-being education into academic curricula. Educational institutions can play a proactive role by organizing workshops, seminars, and awareness programs that educate students about the psychological effects of excessive social media use. Training students in media literacy can enable them to critically evaluate online content and recognize unrealistic portrayals. Furthermore, promoting balanced lifestyle habits, including offline social interaction and time management, can help mitigate the negative effects identified in the study.

From a student and individual perspective, the findings encourage the adoption of mindful and self-regulated social media usage. Strategies such as setting screen-time limits, engaging in purposeful rather than passive use, and reducing reliance on external validation can help maintain healthier self-esteem levels. Encouraging engagement in offline activities, hobbies, and real-life relationships can further strengthen an individual's sense of identity and well-being.

At the policy level, the study underscores the importance of broader initiatives aimed at promoting digital mental health. Policymakers and educational authorities can incorporate digital literacy and psychological well-being into national education frameworks. Social media companies also bear responsibility and can be encouraged to implement ethical design features, such as usage tracking tools, prompts for breaks, and reduced emphasis on comparison-driven metrics (e.g., likes and follower counts). Additionally, collaboration between psychologists, educators, and technology developers can help create healthier digital environments.

Finally, the absence of gender differences (H2 and H3) suggests that interventions and policies can be designed in a gender-neutral manner, focusing on universal patterns of social media use rather than targeting specific groups.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations.

First, the correlational design restricts causal interpretation. Although H1 was supported, it cannot be concluded whether social media addiction leads to lower self-esteem or vice versa, or whether the relationship is bidirectional.

Second, the use of self-report measures may introduce biases such as social desirability and recall errors, potentially affecting the accuracy of responses.

Third, the sample was limited to college students, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Variations in age, cultural background, and socioeconomic status may influence both social media use and self-esteem.

Additionally, the study did not examine qualitative aspects of social media use, such as type of platform or nature of engagement. Furthermore, potential confounding variables such as personality traits, mental health conditions, and social support were not controlled, which may have influenced the results.

5.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should build upon the present findings by addressing its limitations and exploring new dimensions to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem.

First, longitudinal research designs are strongly recommended to examine the directionality and causality of the relationship identified in H1. Such studies would help determine whether excessive social media use leads to decreased self-esteem, whether individuals with low self-esteem are more prone to addictive usage, or whether a reciprocal relationship exists over time.

Second, experimental and intervention-based studies should be conducted to test the effectiveness of strategies aimed at reducing social media addiction and enhancing self-esteem. For instance, controlled interventions focusing on reducing screen time, limiting exposure to comparison-based content, or promoting self-compassion could provide causal evidence and practical solutions.

Third, future research should explore qualitative dimensions of social media use. While the present study focused on quantitative measures, qualitative approaches such as interviews, focus groups, and narrative analysis can provide deeper insights into individual's lived experiences, emotional responses, and meaning-making processes related to social media engagement.

Another important direction is the examination of different patterns of social media usage, particularly the distinction between active use (e.g., posting, interacting) and passive use (e.g., scrolling, observing). Previous research suggests that passive consumption is more strongly associated with negative psychological outcomes, and this distinction warrants further investigation.

Additionally, platform-specific research is needed to understand how different social media environments (e.g., image-based vs. text-based platforms) influence self-esteem. Features such as algorithmic content delivery, filters, and feedback mechanisms (likes, comments, shares) should be examined as potential contributors to social comparison and self-evaluation processes.

Future studies should also incorporate additional psychological variables, such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, body image dissatisfaction, and personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, extraversion). These variables may function as mediators or moderators, providing a more comprehensive model of how social media addiction affects self-esteem.

Expanding the sample is another critical area. Research should include diverse populations across different age groups (adolescents, working adults), cultural contexts, and socioeconomic backgrounds to improve generalizability. Cross-cultural studies, in particular, can reveal how cultural norms and values influence social media behaviors and self-perception.

Furthermore, future research should adopt mixed-method approaches, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights. This would allow for both statistical generalization and in-depth understanding, thereby enriching the overall findings.

Finally, there is a need to explore protective factors and resilience mechanisms. Future studies can investigate how factors such as strong social support, high self-compassion, emotional intelligence, and digital literacy buffer the negative effects of social media addiction on self-esteem. Identifying these protective variables can inform the development of more effective interventions and preventive strategies.

SUMMARY

TOPIC: AN EXPLORATION OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: A CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

SUPERVISOR

Ms. Upasana Moten

Assistant Professor

INVESTIGATOR

Pawni Thappa

Roll No.2208007

Semester VIII

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media platforms have become a pervasive force, fundamentally reshaping the social and psychological fabric of young adulthood. This period of life is already characterized by identity exploration and a heightened sensitivity to social feedback, making young adults particularly vulnerable to the curated realities and quantified social validation inherent in these online environments. Social media is an online platform comprising various websites and applications that focus on communication, interaction with others, and content sharing. At the beginning of the year 2025, 94.2% of the internet-using population and 63.9% of the global population i.e., 5.24 billion users used social media (DataReportal, 2025). While a growing body of research suggests a potential link between social media engagement and psychological well-being, the precise nature of the association between specific usage patterns and the core construct of self-esteem remains a critical area for further investigation.

Self-esteem can be defined as an individual's positive and negative attitude toward oneself; it is an overall appraisal of one's value (Rosenberg, 1965). Having positive self-esteem is linked to optimistic academic accomplishment, better relational functioning, contentment, and less engagement in unlawful conduct. On the other hand, negative self-esteem leads to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and increased susceptibility to substance abuse (Orth & Robins, 2022). According to research, there is a negative as well as a positive relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Most studies have indicated a negative correlation between

social media use and self-esteem, suggesting that extensive use of social media among young adults is linked to lower levels of self-esteem (Colak et al., 2023)

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to share pivotal information and understanding of the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem among young adults. The investigation will function as a data repository for providing strong corroboration of the association between social media usage and self-esteem among youngsters. Analyzing the correlation between social media usage and self-esteem in emerging adults is essential as it could elucidate some possible approaches for psychological wellness. Comprehending how using social media affects self-esteem levels may aid in the development of fruitful and effective interventions, improving overall well-being among young adults. This research could acquaint mental health professionals and educational institutions in designing support programmes to meet the specific requirements of young adults in strengthening and boosting the levels of self-esteem.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study is entitled as "An Exploration of the Association Between Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem Among Young Adults: A Correlational Analysis."

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Social Media Usage: In the present study, it refers to the level of addictive patterns in social media use.

Self-Esteem: In the present study, it refers to an individual's overall positive or negative attitude toward oneself.

Young Adults: In this study, young adults refer to college students aged 18–25 years who are active social media users.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives were formulated for the present study:

i) To examine the relationship between social media use and self-esteem.

ii) To assess the gender difference in self-esteem levels.

iii) To assess the gender difference in social media usage.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

H1) There is a significant negative relationship between social media usage and self-esteem.

H2) There is no significant difference in the self-esteem levels of males and females.

H3) There is no significant difference in the social media usage of males and females.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population for the study comprises young adults aged 18–25 years who are active social media users.

SAMPLE FOR THE STUDY

In the present study, Random Sampling Technique has been employed for selecting the sample. Young adults from Jammu city have been selected randomly as a sample. Thus, a total of 178 (77 male, 101 female) college students have been selected for collecting data.

TOOLS USED

The following tools were selected for the present study:

i) Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES): Developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965. The scale has ten items answered on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale has demonstrated high reliability and validity across various populations.

ii) Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS): Developed by Andreassen and colleagues in 2016. It consists of six items based on core addiction components such as mood modification, salience, withdrawal, tolerance, conflict, and relapse. The scale is based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from very rarely to very often.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In this study, the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem among college students was investigated. The descriptive statistics revealed that participants reported moderate levels of social media addiction ($M = 16.29$, $SD = 4.66$) and moderate levels of self-esteem ($M = 16.25$, $SD = 4.06$).

The second objective's results show that male participants had a mean self-esteem score of 16.26 (SD = 4.03) and female participants had a mean of 16.24 (SD = 4.11). The calculated t-value is 0.036 which is not significant. Thus, it can be inferred that there is no significant difference in self-esteem levels of males and females.

The third objective's results show that male participants had a mean social media addiction score of 16.00 (SD = 4.96) and female participants had a mean of 16.50 (SD = 4.43). The calculated t-value is -0.715 which is not significant. Thus, it can be inferred that there is no significant difference in social media usage of males and females.

The Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between social media addiction and self-esteem, $r = -.588$, $p < .001$. This indicates a moderately strong inverse relationship, suggesting that as levels of social media addiction increase, levels of self-esteem tend to decrease.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study has brought out how social media addiction is associated with self-esteem among young adults. These results suggest further research to be carried out as follows:

The present study cannot be called final and comprehensive. More work can be done on different samples of different age groups.

Present study deals with college students. Similar types of work can be done on adolescents, working adults, and older populations.

A sample of 178 students was taken in the present study. A similar study can be done on a larger sample also.

A similar study can also be undertaken in other cities, as the present study was confined to Jammu city only.

Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships between social media addiction and self-esteem.

Experimental and intervention-based studies should be conducted to test the effectiveness of strategies aimed at reducing social media addiction and enhancing self-esteem.

- A comparative study can be undertaken to investigate social media addiction across different social media platforms (Instagram vs. TikTok vs. WhatsApp).
- A study can be conducted to examine the mediating role of variables such as social comparison, body image, and sleep quality in the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to explore the association between social media addiction and self-esteem among young adults. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between social media addiction and self-esteem, indicating that higher levels of addictive social media use are associated with lower self-esteem. No significant gender differences were found in either social media addiction or self-esteem, suggesting that both male and female students are equally affected. These findings support social comparison theory, which proposes that individuals evaluate their self-worth by comparing themselves to others. In the context of social media, where content is often idealized and selectively presented, such comparisons may lead to negative self-evaluations and diminished self-esteem. The study highlights the need for promoting balanced and mindful social media use among young adults to protect their psychological well-being.

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APPENDIX – A

ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM SCALE (RSES)

Developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a widely used self-report instrument for evaluating individual self-esteem. It consists of 10 statements related to overall feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance.

Instructions: Please indicate your agreement with each statement using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly Agree

Item	Statement	Never (0)	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)
1	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	□	□	□	□	□
2	At times, I think I am no good at all. *	□	□	□	□	□
3	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	□	□	□	□	□
4	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	□	□	□	□	□
5	I feel I do not have much to be proud of. *	□	□	□	□	□
6	I certainly feel useless at times. *	□	□	□	□	□

7	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	□	□	□	□	□
8	I wish I could have more respect for myself. *	□	□	□	□	□
9	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. *	□	□	□	□	□
10	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	□	□	□	□	□

Scoring Instructions:

- Items marked with an asterisk (*) are reverse scored (1↔4, 2↔3).
- After reversing the appropriate items, sum all item scores to get the total score.
- Total scores range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem.

Interpretation:

- 30–40 = High self-esteem
- 26–29 = Normal self-esteem
- 10–25 = Low self-esteem

Source:

Rosenberg, M. (1965). Society and the adolescent self-image. Princeton University Press

APPENDIX – B

BERGEN SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION SCALE (BSMAS)

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is a 6-item self-report scale developed by Andreassen et al. (2016) to assess addictive social media use. The items are adapted from the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS) and reflect core addiction components such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse.

Item	Statement	Never (0)	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)
1	You spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning how to use it.	□	□	□	□	□
2	You feel an urge to use social media more and more.	□	□	□	□	□
3	You use social media in order to forget about personal problems.	□	□	□	□	□
4	You have tried to cut down on social media use without success.	□	□	□	□	□
5	You become restless or troubled if you are prohibited from using social media.	□	□	□	□	□

6	You use social media so much that it has negatively impacted your job/studies.	□	□	□	□	□

Scoring Instructions:

Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Very rarely

2 = Rarely

3 = Sometimes

4 = Often

5 = Very often

Total score range: 6–30

Higher total scores indicate higher levels of social media addiction. A score of 19 or above is sometimes used as a threshold for problematic use in research contexts.

Reference:

Andreassen, C. S., Pallesen, S., & Griffiths, M. D. (2016). The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem: Findings from a large national survey. *Addictive Behaviors*, 64, 287–293

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