

# Understanding the Interplay of Social Media Usage and Relationships Among Young Adults

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## Abstract:

The paper delves into the multifaceted role of social media in shaping the relationships of young adults, focusing on its implications for self-conscious emotions, social comparison, self-esteem, relationship dynamics and mental health. Drawing on a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, this paper examines the intricate interplay between social media usage and its impact on relational experiences of young adults. It analyses the role of social comparison processes facilitated by social media in shaping young adults' interpersonal dynamics on which relationships are built. The researcher has made an attempt to identify the nuanced ways in which social media usage mediates relationship dynamics, including communication patterns, boundary setting, and trust-building among young adults. By synthesizing current research findings, this review offers insights into the complex interactions between social media and young adults' relationships, informing future research directions and counseling interventions aimed at promoting healthy digital engagement and relational well-being.

**Keywords:** Social media, self-conscious emotions, young adults, relational well being, social comparison, relationship dynamics.

## Introduction

Social media plays a vital role in everyday life. Social media refers to online platforms that allow us to create, share contents with others. It has transformed the way people communicate with each other. Its impact can be observed in every area of life i.e. mental health, relationships, body image etc. It has become an integral part of modern life, influencing various aspects of society, including communication pattern, relationships, and shows life of people which make us as dissatisfied with our own life. The role of social media on relationships of young adult is that provide platforms to young adults to meet, connect and develop relationships. It also provides a platform for young adults to maintain connection with relatives, share updates and engage in virtual interactions. As society changes, social media is becoming more and more important in our lives. With a gradual decrease in actual face to face interactions, dependency on social interactions through social networking sites has steadily increased. Studies on gender differences on the use of internet indicate that there are no gender differences (Hiroshi Ono and Madeline Zavodny 2002). As the availability and accessibility to internet enabled devices has ubiquitously increased, the datum line for internet usage has also gone up (Vandana, M & Dangwal, P. (2021). It affects how happy we feel, how much we trust others, and even how we feel. Social media has grown quickly, giving us new ways to communicate. Instead of talking face-to-face or sending letters, we now chat online. It's a big part of how we connect with others, especially as technology gets better. But spending too much time on social

media can cause problems, especially within families. Sometimes, even when we're together at home, we're more focused on our phones than on each other. This can make us miss important signals and gestures. Still, the main purpose of social media is to bring us closer together. Social media is a collection of internet platforms where individuals can communicate, share content, and collaborate. Its rapid growth has significantly influenced the way people and society progress. Through social media, we can interact with others regardless of distance, utilizing platforms such as Skype or Facebook. However, it also alters our thought processes, often negatively. Nowadays, the negative aspects of social media seem to outweigh the positive ones. It can provoke feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and contribute to conflicts and relationship breakdowns. In some cases, it exacerbates existing issues rather than resolving them. Research on the impact of social media on individuals is in its early stages. Based on theories of social development, studies suggest that social media has various effects on social relationships. Some scholars argue that the internet has a positive influence on social relationship development (Blais et al., 2007; Bargh et al., 2002; Baym et al., 2007; Abar et al., 2018; McKenna et al., 2002). Conversely, others suggest that the internet has little or negative influence (Brignall and Valey, 2005; Gennaro and Dutton, 2007; Waskul and Douglass, 1997; Giancesini and Brighi, 2015). Given these findings, it's important to explore whether adolescents' social relationships are positively or negatively affected by social media use. Adolescents are a key group to study as they are still developing socially and emotionally, and they frequently use social media. Understanding how social media shapes adolescents' social experiences is crucial, particularly given its relatively recent emergence. This research will help determine whether social media supports or hinders social relationship development among adolescents.

As society progresses, social media increasingly shapes people's daily lives, affecting their satisfaction, trust in others, and emotional experiences (Zhao, 2014). Its rapid evolution has ushered in a new social landscape, altering communication methods from traditional face-to-face interactions and written correspondence to virtual platforms. Social media now holds significant importance in human existence, particularly due to advancements in electronic communication technologies. People utilize it to connect and engage with others, regardless of proximity, fostering relationships both locally and globally.

In this digital era, social media has become a prominent feature, captivating individuals of all ages with its accessibility and widespread reach. Over the last twenty years, social media has experienced remarkable global expansion and recognition, prompting significant interest among researchers keen to explore its impact on social dynamics within society. This study aimed to investigate the influence of social media on interpersonal connections among young people. Specifically, it sought to examine how social media affects youth's interpersonal abilities, their relationships, and the prevalence of social media usage among this demographic in society.

The research literature has extensively examined the influence of social media on emotions, yet its impact on interpersonal relationships has received comparatively less attention. This study aims to delve into each of these variables to identify potential correlations and gain a deeper understanding of how social media usage affects interpersonal interactions, self-conscious emotions, and relationships among individuals in modern society. Overall, contemporary society has largely overlooked the comprehensive consequences of social media usage on self-conscious emotions and interpersonal relationships. A thorough examination of research across various demographics underscores the significant influence that social media has exerted on communication patterns, self-conscious emotions, and interpersonal relationships. Students have the capability to engage with friends, teachers, peers, and experts across various fields through social media platforms, enabling extended contact periods and efficient communication regardless of location or

time. These platforms provide students with access to a vast array of data and information for their research and academic pursuits. Moreover, students can share lectures from different universities available on platforms like YouTube to enhance their understanding and improve their academic performance. Additionally, students organize online conferences and workshops to discuss projects outside of regular school hours. Educational institutions recognize the accessibility of social networking sites to the younger generation and have integrated technologies such as computers, tablets, and other channels into their educational systems. The utilization of social networking sites has been extensively studied in research literature.

### **Understanding the association of social media usage and relationships**

When delving into the exploration of social media's impact on interpersonal relationships, it's imperative to consider various theoretical frameworks that provide insight into this complex phenomenon. Drawing from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and communication studies, researchers have developed several theories to elucidate the dynamics at play. These theories offer valuable perspectives on why and how individuals engage with social media platforms and how these interactions influence their interpersonal connections. *The Social Identity Theory*, which posits that individuals derive their sense of self from their group affiliations. In the context of social media, users often form online communities and identify with specific groups, shaping their interpersonal relationships and behaviors accordingly. *The Social Exchange Theory* offers another lens through which to examine social media interactions. According to this theory, individuals engage in relationships based on a cost-benefit analysis, seeking to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. On social media, users may seek various gratifications such as social support, validation, or entertainment, which can impact their interpersonal relationships depending on their perceived benefits and drawbacks. *The Gratifications Theory*(1973), on the other hand, focuses on understanding why individuals choose to use specific media and what gratifications they seek from them. This theory suggests that users may seek socialization, information, entertainment, or self-expression through social media platforms, which can influence the nature and quality of their interpersonal interactions. According to the *Media Richness Theory*(1991) the ability of a communication medium to convey information impacts the quality of interpersonal communication. Social media platforms, with their diverse formats, provide varying levels of richness in communication, which in turn can influence the depth and intimacy of interpersonal relationships formed through these channel

*Social Penetration Theory*(2021) emphasizes the role of self-disclosure in the development of interpersonal relationships. Social media platforms offer opportunities for individuals to disclose personal information, which can foster intimacy and connection, but may also pose challenges in managing privacy boundaries and maintaining appropriate levels of disclosure.

*Social Learning Theory*(2022) suggests that individuals learn from observing and modeling the behavior of others. On social media, users may emulate the behavior of their peers, influencers, or role models, shaping the dynamics of their interpersonal relationships and interactions.

Incorporating these theoretical frameworks into research on social media and interpersonal relationships provides a comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms and dynamics involved. By examining these theories in the context of empirical research, scholars can gain insights into the complexities of social media usage and its effects on interpersonal connections in contemporary society.

When delving into the intricate relationship between social media usage and self-conscious emotions, it's imperative to consider various theoretical frameworks that provide valuable insights into this dynamic

interaction. These theories offer a solid foundation for investigating how individuals' emotional experiences and self-awareness are influenced by their engagement with social media platforms.

***Social Comparison Theory(1954)***: Proposed by Festinger in 1954, Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes, abilities, and achievements to those of others. On social media, users frequently engage in comparing themselves to others, leading to self-conscious emotions such as envy, inadequacy, or pride, depending on the outcome of these comparisons.

***Symbolic Interactionism(1969)***: This theoretical perspective underscores how individuals construct meaning through social interactions and symbols. On social media, users carefully curate their online personas, projecting idealized versions of themselves to others. The feedback received from these interactions, along with validation-seeking behaviors, significantly influences individuals' self-concepts and self-esteem, ultimately shaping their experience of self-conscious emotions.

***Self-Determination Theory(2000)***: According to Self-Determination Theory, individuals are driven by the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While social media platforms offer avenues for social interaction and validation, excessive reliance on them for self-esteem and social comparison can undermine intrinsic motivation and autonomy. This can lead to feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, or dependency, all of which are self-conscious emotions

***Emotional Contagion Theory(1993)***: This theory suggests that emotions can be transferred between individuals through social interactions. On social media platforms, exposure to others' emotional expressions, whether positive or negative, can significantly impact individuals' emotional states and self-conscious emotions. For instance, witnessing others' achievements may elicit feelings of envy or admiration, while exposure to negative experiences may evoke sympathy or empathy.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives into research on social media and self-conscious emotions provides a robust framework for understanding how social media usage influences individuals' emotional experiences, self-awareness, and psychological well-being. By considering these theories, researchers can delve deeper into the mechanisms underlying the effects of social media on self-conscious emotions, thereby enriching our understanding of this intricate relationship.

### **Understanding the Behavioural, Cognitive and Affective Outcomes of Social Media Engagement**

Social media has become an integral part of modern life, profoundly impacting various aspects of society, including communication patterns, relationships, and individuals' emotional experiences. It has transformed the way people connect and interact with each other, providing platforms for meeting, connecting, and maintaining relationships, especially among young adults. However, its rapid evolution and widespread use have also raised concerns about its negative effects, such as feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and conflicts in relationships.

Research on the impact of social media on individuals is still in its early stages, with conflicting findings suggesting both positive and negative influences on social relationships. Theoretical frameworks from psychology, sociology, and communication studies offer valuable insights into understanding these dynamics.

Theories shed light on why individuals engage with social media and how it influences their interpersonal connections. The Social Penetration Theory emphasizes the role of self-disclosure in relationship development, while Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn and model behavior from others on social media. Furthermore, social media's influence on self-conscious emotions, such as envy and inadequacy, can be understood through theories highlight how individuals evaluate themselves in

comparison to others, construct idealized personas online, and experience emotional responses to others' expressions on social media. Moreover, understanding the behavioral, cognitive, and affective outcomes of social media engagement can be explored through theories emphasize the role of observational learning, attitudes, subjective norms, and cognitive processes in shaping individuals' behaviors and attitudes toward social media.

The *Social Cognitive Theory (1986)* developed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation, and cognitive processes in shaping behavior. In the context of social media, young adults may observe and model behaviors exhibited by others, leading to the adoption of similar online behaviors, attitudes, and norms. *Theory of Planned Behavior (1991)* by Icek Ajzen, proposes that behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of social media usage, young adults' intentions and behaviors may be shaped by their attitudes toward social media, perceptions of social norms regarding its usage, and perceived control over their online activities. The *Cognitive Dissonance Theory (1957)* proposed by Leon Festinger, posits that individuals experience discomfort when their beliefs or behaviors are inconsistent with each other. Young adults may experience cognitive dissonance when they encounter conflicting information or opinions on social media, leading to changes in attitudes or behaviors to reduce discomfort.

On the basis of the Self-Esteem Maintenance Theory individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem through various strategies, including social comparison. On social media, users may selectively present themselves in a favorable light to garner validation and approval from others, thereby bolstering their self-esteem. However, reliance on external validation from online interactions can be fragile and may contribute to fluctuations in self-esteem based on feedback received. The ultimate goal or the outcome of any engagement is to bring about a feeling of satisfaction, happiness, achievement and fulfillment for the individuals. All these are the direct contributors to one's relational well being or the individual's well being. Excessive social media usage may provide temporary pleasure (hedonia) through social validation and entertainment but may undermine individuals' sense of purpose, autonomy, and personal growth (eudaimonia), leading to diminished mental health over time.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives into research on social media usage provides a comprehensive understanding of its impact on interpersonal relationships, self-conscious emotions, and behavioral outcomes in contemporary society. By considering these theories, researchers can gain insights into the complexities of social media dynamics and its implications for individuals' lives; into the ways social media usage shapes the attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of young adults, offering valuable perspectives for research and intervention in this domain. The widespread use of social media has profoundly impacted various aspects of society, including education, business, and societal interactions. In education, social media has facilitated enhanced collaboration among students and provided platforms for innovative learning methods. However, concerns arise regarding distractions in the classroom, privacy issues, and the dissemination of inappropriate information. Similarly, in business, social media serves as a powerful marketing tool, enabling organizations to reach a broader audience and engage with customers on a personal level. Nonetheless, challenges such as negative feedback, cybersecurity threats, and time-consuming management arise. Societal impacts of social media include increased connectivity, information sharing, and opportunities for social activism. However, issues like addiction, privacy breaches, and negative influence on youth behavior are significant concerns. Overall, while social media offers numerous benefits, it is essential to approach its usage cautiously, balancing its advantages with potential drawbacks to ensure a positive impact on society.

**Conclusion:**

The paper delves into the impact of social media's usage on relationships and emotional well-being, highlighting both positive and negative effects. It encompasses a wide array of studies conducted over the past two decades, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Here are the key takeaways: Social networking offers opportunities for socialization, entertainment, and sensation seeking among adolescents. Online social support from friends and followers can mitigate negative consequences of peer victimization and reduce depressive symptoms. Positive emotional contagion and increased empathy can result from online interactions. Online relationships can enhance social skills and provide a source of positive emotions, especially for those who feel lonely. Excessive use of social networking can lead to increased feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and insomnia, particularly when used as a means to escape from real-life social interactions. Social comparison can negatively impact self-esteem, body image, and overall well-being, especially among adolescent girls. Fear of missing out (FOMO) and excessive smartphone use can lead to phubbing and further exacerbate negative emotional experiences. Lack of emotional regulation skills is associated with a higher risk of problematic social media use and addiction.

Emotions play a major role in building and maintaining relationships. Better the emotion Regulation better are the relationships. Effective emotion regulation skills can serve as protective factors against problematic social media use. Quick recovery from negative emotions and high levels of online emotional skills are associated with lower risk of social media addiction. There is a need for further research to better understand the complex relationship between SNS use and emotional well-being among adolescents. Future studies should explore age-related differences and consider methodological biases to provide a more nuanced understanding of the topic. Overall, this review underscores the importance of considering emotional experiences in the context of SNS use among adolescents and highlights the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to promote healthy online behaviors. mindful media consumption, educational initiatives, further research, practitioner guidance, and platform responsibility are essential for navigating the complexities of social media's impact on family dynamics. Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that technology serves as a bridge rather than a barrier in strengthening familial relationships.

Researches have analyzed social media's impact on contemporary society, covering its positive and negative aspects across various domains (Nadkarni, Kulkarni, and Rayaphale 2018). Positive effects include facilitating collaboration in education, aiding business growth, enabling communication with family and friends, and providing access to information for youngsters. Conversely, negative impacts involve distractions, reduced focus on learning, privacy concerns, and the spread of misinformation and cyberbullying. The paper acknowledges social media's reflection of individual traits and highlights the importance of responsible use, emphasizing personal choices in navigating its influence. While moderate use can improve social relationships and provide support, excessive use may result in addiction and negative emotional outcomes. Emotional regulation skills in mitigating problematic SNS use and emphasizes the need for further research to comprehensively understand adolescents' emotional experiences related to SNS usage (Bottaro and Faraci 2022)

Social media has diverse impact across various aspects of contemporary life. It has pervasive presence and pivotal role in education, business, society, and among youth (Siddiqui and Singh 2016). Positive aspects like enhanced collaboration among students and negatives such as distractions and privacy concerns. In the societal context, it has a transformative role in communication and connections, identifying positive contributions like broadened social interaction while addressing concerns like

addiction and privacy breaches. As regards to the impact on youngsters, there is increased connectivity and information exchange among youth, with both positive effects like support networks and negatives such as risks of online predators and excessive screen time.

There exists an intricate relationship between social media usage, interpersonal relationships, and self-conscious emotions (Mikayla Stone 2019). Both positive and negative effects of social media on emotions have been found highlighting the importance of positive interactions in counteracting negative outcomes. While some research suggests dissatisfaction with text-based communication, others indicate that platforms like Snapchat can strengthen social relationships. However, limitations such as a short data collection timeframe and reliance on Facebook for distribution may impact the results. Future research could explore different relationship types and demographic variables to deepen understanding. Platforms like Facebook enhance family communication and closeness but excessive usage leads to lower connection and increased conflicts (Singh and Tyagi 2023).

Qiuyu Han's (2022) study is worthy of a special mention as it delves into how social media impacts social comparison and well-being, particularly focusing on upward comparisons and their effects on self-esteem and happiness. It highlights the role of social networking sites (SNSs), especially during COVID-19, in facilitating comparisons among users. It distinguishes between upward and downward social comparisons, noting that upward comparisons often lead to reduced self-esteem. The research links social media use, especially on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, to increased upward comparisons and negative emotions like envy and depression. Despite this, the study acknowledges potential positive effects, such as fostering benign envy and motivation. This contrasts with the predominantly discussed negative consequences. In conclusion, while Han's study emphasizes the drawbacks of upward social comparisons, it also acknowledges potential positive outcomes like increased motivation and self-improvement. User personality traits, motivations, and subjective well-being indicators also have a role in shaping social comparison tendencies on SNSs. (Verduyn, Gugushvili, Massar, and Täht.....) There are many limitations and future researches ought to explore both negative and positive aspects across various platforms and demographics. The complex nature of social media's influence on families leads to the need for collaborative efforts to ensure technology strengthens familial bonds with the recommendation of mindful consumption and educational initiatives.

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