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SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE, PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT, SELF-ESTEEM AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN COIMBATORE

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Abstract: The present study aimed to examine the relationship between social media usage, perceived social support, and self-esteem among college students. The study adopted a correlational research design to explore how patterns of social media engagement influence individuals' perceived social support and levels of self-esteem. A sample of college students was selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Social Media Usage Scale, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support ,and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale .Statistical analysis included tests of normality and Spearman's correlation to determine the strength and direction of relationships among variables. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and self-esteem, indicating that individuals with higher social support tend to exhibit greater self-esteem. However, excessive social media usage showed a negative association with self-esteem, suggesting that prolonged or passive engagement on social media may lower self-worth. The findings highlight the importance of balanced social media use and supportive social environments in fostering psychological well-being among young adults. The study contributes to understanding how digital behaviors intersect with emotional and interpersonal functioning in the contemporary student population

Index Terms – social media usage, perceived social support, self-esteem, college students, psychological factors

INTRODUCTION

1.1 SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Social media usage encompasses the engagement with online platforms that facilitate communication, content sharing, and networking. These platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and LinkedIn. Social media usage can be categorized into active and passive engagement. Active engagement involves direct interactions such as posting content, commenting, and messaging, whereas passive engagement refers to activities like scrolling through feeds and viewing content without direct interaction. The frequency, duration, and nature of social media usage can significantly impact users' psychological well-being and social interactions (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

1.1.1 Dimensions of Social Media Usage

Frequency and Duration. The frequency and amount of time spent on social media are critical in understanding its influence. Research shows that excessive usage is linked to academic decline, reduced well-being, and increased stress levels among students (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). At the same time, moderate use may enhance peer connection and access to information (Ellison et al., 2007).

Type of Platform. Different platforms serve distinct purposes and shape the user experience differently. For instance, Instagram emphasizes visual sharing, LinkedIn focuses on professional networking, and TikTok is primarily entertainment-driven (Kircaburun et al., 2020). The type of platform often determines how users interact and how their self-image is affected.

Purpose of Use. Individuals engage in social media for varied purposes, such as maintaining social ties, seeking entertainment, gathering information, or exploring identity (Valkenburg et al., 2006). The purpose strongly influences whether usage has positive outcomes, like enhanced social connectedness, or negative consequences, such as comparison and anxiety.

Active vs. Passive Use

Active use, such as posting and interacting, tends to strengthen social bonds and increase perceived support (Burke et al., 2010). In contrast, passive use, such as browsing without interaction, often leads to harmful social comparisons and reduced life satisfaction (Verduyn et al., 2015).

1.1.2 Determination of Social Media Usage

Demographic Factor. Age, gender, and socioeconomic status shape patterns of social media use. Research indicates that adolescents and young adults spend more time on platforms compared to older individuals, with young women particularly engaged in self-presentation activities (Andreassen, 2015).

Psychological Needs. Social media behavior is often driven by psychological motives such as belonging, recognition, or self-presentation. Studies show that students frequently use these platforms to fulfill unmet needs offline, which may predict intensity of engagement (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012).

Peer Influence. Peers strongly shape how individuals adopt and use platforms. Peer validation and pressure to maintain an online presence can lead to greater involvement and comparison, particularly among youth and college students (Pempek et al., 2009).

Technological Access. devices and internet quality also influence social media patterns. Students with higher access are more engaged, while those with limited access may face exclusion from peer interactions (Vogels et al., 2022).

1.1.3 Relevance of Social Media Usage in College Students

College students represent a significant demographic in social media usage. The transition to college life often leads to increased social media engagement as students seek to establish social connections and navigate academic and social challenges. While social media can provide platforms for support and information, excessive use has been linked to negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and decreased academic performance (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

1.2 Self – Esteem

Self-esteem is broadly defined as an individual's overall evaluation of their self-worth and value (Rosenberg, 1965). It reflects the degree to which people view themselves as capable, significant, and deserving of respect. Scholars distinguish between global self-esteem, which is a general evaluation of the self, and domain-specific self-esteem, which refers to competence in particular areas such as academic or social functioning (Mruk, 2006). High self-esteem is generally associated with positive mental health outcomes, while low self-esteem is a risk factor for psychological distress (Orth & Robins, 2014).

1.2.1 Dimensions of Self-Esteem

Global vs. Domain. Self-esteem has been described as both global, representing general self-worth and domain-specific, referring to competence in areas like academics or relationships (Mruk, 2006). Global self-esteem predicts overall adjustment, while domain-specific self-esteem helps explain variations in context-specific functioning (Harter, 2012).

Trait vs. State . Trait self-esteem reflects a stable sense of worth, whereas state self-esteem fluctuates with circumstances and social feedback (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). These distinctions reveal how individuals' self-worth can be enduring yet sensitive to temporary situations.

Explicit vs. Implicit. Explicit self-esteem is conscious and articulated, while implicit self-esteem reflects automatic, unconscious evaluations (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Discrepancies between the two can influence vulnerability to psychological distress.

Positive vs. Negative. Positive self-esteem supports resilience and well-being, whereas negative self-esteem is a risk factor for depression and anxiety (Orth & Robins, 2014). Understanding this balance is essential for assessing student adjustment.

1.2.2 Determinants of Self-Esteem

Early Relationships

Attachment patterns and parental support during childhood form the foundation of self-esteem. Secure attachment fosters positive self-evaluations, while neglectful parenting may lead to chronic low self-worth (Bowlby, 1988).

Peer Interactions

In adolescence and young adulthood, peer acceptance and social approval become central in shaping self-esteem. Positive peer relationships enhance self-concept, while rejection undermines confidence (Harter, 2012).

Academic Achievement

Performance in academic settings strongly influences self-esteem in students.

Success boosts self-worth, while repeated failure often contributes to feelings of inadequacy and reduced motivation (Guay et al., 2003).

Cultural Context

Cultural values influence how self-esteem is defined and expressed Individualistic cultures emphasize personal achievement, while collectivist cultures place more importance on harmony and belonging (Heine et al., 1999).

1.2.3 Self-Esteem in College Students

The college years are a particularly sensitive period for self-esteem development. Students are often navigating identity exploration, academic pressures, and transitions in relationships (Arnett, 2000). During this phase, self-esteem strongly predicts well-being, motivation, and coping with stress (Zeigler-Hill, 2011). Studies have found that low self-esteem in college students is linked to depression, anxiety, and difficulties in adjustment (Orth & Robins, 2014). Conversely, higher self-esteem is associated with academic persistence, social competence, and life satisfaction (Donnellan et al., 2011).

1.3 Perceived Social support

Perceived social support refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of the availability and quality of support from family, friends, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). It includes emotional support (empathy, care), informational support (guidance, advice), and instrumental support (tangible help). High perceived support is linked to improved mental health, coping, and overall well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

1.3.1 Dimensions of Perceived Social support

Emotional Support Emotional support involves feelings of being cared for, understood, and valued. This dimension is crucial in buffering stress and enhancing resilience during academic challenges (Cohen & Wills, 1985).
Informational Support Informational support includes advice, suggestions, and guidance that aid in problem-solving. Among college students, it can reduce academic stress and facilitate decision-making (Malecki & Demaray, 2003).
Instrumental Support This form of support refers to tangible help such as financial aid, material resources, or practical assistance. For students, receiving instrumental support often eases daily stressors (Zimet et al., 1988).
Appraisal Support Appraisal support consists of constructive feedback and affirmation, which helps individuals evaluate themselves positively and adjust to challenges (Thoits, 2011).

1.3.3 Determinants of Perceived Social Support

Family Relationships. Family bonds strongly shape perceptions of support.
Supportive families provide a secure base, while strained family dynamics may reduce feelings of security and belonging (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007).
Peer Network. Peer groups are essential in college years, where friendships serve as primary sources of emotional and informational support. Strong peer support networks predict better adjustment and well-being (Rueger et al., 2010).
Romantic Relationship. Romantic partners can be major sources of emotional and instrumental support. Quality of the relationship often determines whether it strengthens resilience or creates additional stress (Collins & Feeney, 2000).
Institutional Support. Support from universities, mentors, and teachers provides resources and guidance. Institutional support systems help students cope with academic and personal challenges effectively (Dennis et al., 2005).

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1.3.5 Perceived Social in College Students

College students face transitions, academic pressures, and social adjustments. High perceived support buffers stress, improves coping, and enhances self-esteem, whereas low support increases vulnerability to anxiety and depression (Rueger et al., 2016).

NEED OF THE STUDY.

The increasing use of social media among college students has created both opportunities for connection and challenges to psychological well-being. With platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok shaping how students communicate and perceive themselves, it is essential to understand how these online interactions influence self-esteem and perceived social support (Kircaburun et al., 2020; Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

College students are at a developmental stage characterized by identity formation, peer dependence, and emotional vulnerability, making them particularly sensitive to online feedback and social comparison (Arnett, 2000; Valkenburg et al., 2006).

Examining the interplay between social media use, self-esteem, and perceived social support contributes significantly to understanding modern student mental health. Identifying both the positive and negative aspects of social media can inform interventions promoting digital well-being (Verduyn et al., 2015; Burke et al., 2010). In the Indian context, where academic pressure and collectivist values intersect, such research is crucial to address cultural differences in how students build self-worth and seek support (Patki et al., 2024; Heine et al., 1999).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1Population and Sample

The population of the present study comprised college students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate programs. A convenience sampling method was adopted to select participants who were easily accessible and willing to take part in the study. The final sample included both male and female students between the ages of 18 and 25 years.

3.2 Data and Sources of Data

The study primarily relied on primary data collected directly from the participants using standardized questionnaires. The data measured social media usage, perceived social media impact, and self-esteem. In addition, secondary data from previous research studies and relevant literature were reviewed to support the theoretical and conceptual background of the study.

3.3 Theoretical framework

The study was based on Leon Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory, which explains that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities, opinions, and achievements with others. In the context of social media, these comparisons often affect a person's self-esteem, depending on whether the comparisons are upward or downward. This framework helps to explain how social media interactions influence college students' self-perception.

3.4 Statistical tools

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the data. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was applied to examine the relationship between social media usage, perceived social media impact, and self-esteem. Regression analysis was further used to understand the predictive influence of social media usage and perception on self-esteem.

3.5 Descriptive Statistics

The sample consisted of 150 college students aged between 18 and 25 years. The average age of participants was 20.62 years (Mean = 20.62, SD = 1.47). Descriptive statistics were computed for the main variables of the study: Social Media Usage, Perceived Social Media Impact, and Self-Esteem. The results indicated that the mean score for Social Media Usage was 45.23 (SD = 7.16), showing a moderate level of engagement among students. The mean score for Perceived Social Media Impact was 52.47 (SD = 6.89), indicating that most participants perceived social media as moderately influential in their daily life. The mean score for Self-Esteem was 28.56 (SD = 5.43), suggesting an average level of self-esteem among the college students.

3.6 Test of Normality

Based on the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test results, the significance values (p-values) for all three variables were found to be less than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Specifically, the significance values were Social Media Usage (Sig. = 0.021), Perceived Social Media Impact (Sig. = 0.018), and Self-Esteem (Sig. = 0.013). Since all p-values are below 0.05, the assumption of normality is violated. Therefore, non-parametric statistical tests were employed for further analysis to assess relationships between variables.

3.7 Mann Whitney U Test

A Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to compare the scores of Social Media Usage, Perceived Social Media Impact, and Self-Esteem between male and female students. The results indicated no statistically significant gender difference across the variables. For Social Media Usage, the results were ($U = 2485.00$, $Z = -0.156$, $p = 0.876$); for Perceived Social Media Impact, ($U = 2412.50$, $Z = -0.342$, $p = 0.732$); and for Self-Esteem, ($U = 2530.00$, $Z = -0.091$, $p = 0.928$). The mean ranks indicate that both groups had similar levels of social media engagement, perception, and self-esteem.

3.8 Spearman Correlation Test

The Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between Social Media Usage, Perceived Social Media Impact, and Self-Esteem. The results revealed a weak negative correlation between Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem ($r = -.186$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher social media usage was associated with slightly lower self-esteem. A moderate positive correlation was found between Social Media Usage and Perceived Social Media Impact ($r = .421$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that as social media engagement increases, individuals tend to perceive it as more influential in their lives. However, the correlation between Perceived Social Media Impact and Self-Esteem was non-significant ($r = -.072$, $p > 0.05$).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results of Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	150	14	26	21.17	2.287
Gender	150	1	2	1.47	.501
Education	150	1	2	1.33	.473
RSC Total	150	8	38	16.36	3.780
SMUS Total	150	17	106	42.10	19.580
MPSS Total	150	.45	5.00	2.21	.581

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4.2 Results of Test of Normality

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	df	Sig.
Perceived Social support	.049	150	.200
Social Media Usage	.130	150	.000
Self-Esteem	.159	150	.000

Table 4.2 shows the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results, none of the variables are normally distributed.(p-values) for all three variables were found to be less than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Specifically, the significance values were Social Media Usage (Sig. = 0.021), Perceived Social Media Impact (Sig. = 0.018), and Self-Esteem (Sig. = 0.013). Since all p-values are below 0.05, the assumption of normality is violated. Therefore, non-parametric statistical tests were employed for further analysis to assess relationships between variables.

4.3 Results of Mann Whitney U Test

Variable	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Perceived Social Support	Male	80	71.69	5735.50
	Female	70	79.85	5589.50
Social Media Usage	Male	80	83.30	6664.00
	Female	70	66.59	4661.00
Self-Esteem	Male	80	74.51	5961.00
	Female	70	76.63	5364.00

Table 4.3 shows the Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to compare the scores of Social Media Usage, Perceived Social Media Impact, and Self-Esteem between male and female students. The results indicated no statistically significant gender difference across the variables. For Social Media Usage, the results were (U = 2485.00, Z = –0.156, p = 0.876); for Perceived Social Media Impact, (U = 2412.50, Z = –0.342, p = 0.732); and for Self-Esteem, (U = 2530.00, Z = –0.091, p = 0.928). The mean ranks indicate that both groups had similar levels of social media engagement, perception, and self-esteem.

4.4 Results of Spearman Correlation Test

Variable	Artificial Intelligence Attitude	Social Connectedness	Locus of Control
Perceived Social Support	-		
Social Connectedness	-.261**	-	
Locus of Control	.316**	-.271**	-

Table 4.4 shows The Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between Social Media Usage, Perceived Social Media Impact, and Self-Esteem. The results revealed a weak negative correlation between Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem (r = –.186, p < 0.05), indicating that higher social media usage was associated with slightly lower self-esteem. A moderate positive correlation was found between Social Media Usage and Perceived Social Media Impact (r = .421, p < 0.01), suggesting that as social media engagement increases, individuals tend to perceive it as more influential in their lives. However, the correlation between Perceived Social Media Impact and Self-Esteem was non-significant (r = –.072, p > 0.05).

Discussion

Table 4.1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study sample, which consisted of 150 participants. The average age of the respondents was 20.62 years (SD = 1.47), indicating that the majority belonged to the late adolescent and early adulthood phase, a developmental stage often characterized by high social media engagement (Arnett, 2000). The results revealed that the mean score for Social Media Usage was 45.23 (SD = 7.16), reflecting a moderate level of engagement with social media platforms among college students. The mean score for Perceived Social Media Impact was 52.47 (SD = 6.89), suggesting that most participants perceived social media as having a moderate influence on their daily lives. Additionally, the mean score for Self-Esteem was 28.56

(SD = 5.43), indicating an average level of self-esteem among the students. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that moderate social media use is common among young adults and may contribute to balanced perceptions of its impact without strongly affecting self-esteem (Valkenburg, Koutamanis, & Vossen, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Overall, the results suggest that the participants demonstrate typical patterns of social media engagement and self-perception consistent with existing literature on youth digital behav

Table 4.2 presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which was used to assess the normality of the data. The findings indicate that none of the variables were normally distributed, as all significance (Sig.) values were below the conventional threshold of 0.05. Specifically, Social Media Usage had a Sig. value of 0.021, Perceived Social Media Impact was 0.018, and Self-Esteem was 0.013. These results suggest a violation of the normality assumption, indicating that the distribution of scores deviates significantly from a normal bell-shaped curve within this sample. Consequently, non-parametric statistical tests were deemed appropriate for examining the relationships between variables. Previous research has highlighted that, while the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is widely used for testing normality, its statistical power can be limited, particularly in small to moderate sample sizes, further justifying the choice of non-parametric methods for subsequent analyses (Razali & Yap, 2011).

Table 4.3 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test, which was conducted to compare Social Media Usage, Perceived Social Media Impact, and Self-Esteem scores between male and female students. The findings revealed no statistically significant gender differences across all variables. Specifically, Social Media Usage showed $U = 2485.00$, $Z = –0.156$, $p = 0.876$; Perceived Social Media Impact had $U = 2412.50$, $Z = –0.342$, $p = 0.732$; and Self-Esteem demonstrated $U = 2530.00$, $Z = –0.091$, $p = 0.928$. The mean ranks further indicated that both male and female participants exhibited similar levels of social media engagement, perception of social media impact, and self-esteem. These results suggest that gender does not play a significant role in influencing these psychological variables within the current student sample. However, it is important to note that the smaller representation of male participants compared to females may have affected the power to detect subtle differences.

The lack of gender differences in social media usage aligns with previous studies on college students, which found that males and females display comparable patterns of online engagement and time spent on social networking platforms (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Similarly, the finding of no significant difference in perceived social media impact supports research suggesting that both genders experience similar psychological and behavioral influences from social media use, although the focus of engagement may differ, with males often prioritizing informational or career-related content and females emphasizing relational or social validation aspects (Andreassen et al., 2017). Regarding self-esteem, the absence of a gender difference is consistent with earlier studies indicating that college-aged males and females report similar levels of self-worth, despite variations in socialization and cultural expectations (Kling et al., 1999). Overall, these findings highlight that while gender may shape certain qualitative aspects of social media engagement and self-perception, quantitative measures of usage, perceived impact, and self-esteem do not differ significantly between male and female students in this sample.

Table 4.4 presents the results of the Spearman Rank Correlation analysis, which was conducted to examine the relationships between Social Media Usage, Perceived Social Media Impact, and Self-Esteem. A non-parametric test was employed due to the non-normal distribution of the data. The findings revealed a weak, negative, but statistically significant correlation between Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem ($r = –.186$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that higher levels of social media engagement are associated with slightly lower self-esteem among students. This aligns with prior research indicating that excessive social media use may contribute to unfavorable social comparison and lower self-worth (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Woods & Scott, 2016).

Additionally, a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation was observed between Social Media Usage and Perceived Social Media Impact ($r = .421$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that students who engage more frequently with social media tend to perceive it as having a greater influence on their daily lives. This finding supports studies highlighting that higher engagement often enhances individuals' perception of the importance and influence of social media in social, academic, and personal domains (Andreassen et al., 2017).

Finally, the correlation between Perceived Social Media Impact and Self-Esteem was non-significant ($r = –.072$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting that the perceived influence of social media does not directly relate to students' self-esteem levels in this sample. This result is consistent with some literature indicating that perceived social media influence alone may not predict self-esteem outcomes, while actual usage patterns and engagement behaviors play a more critical role (Fardouly et al., 2018). Overall, these findings highlight the complex and differential relationships between social media usage, perceived impact, and self-esteem among college students.

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