

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING: EXAMINING EFFECTS ON SOCIAL INTERACTION, SELF- ESTEEM, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the connection between social media and human behaviour, situating individual-level outcomes such as self-esteem, social interaction, and mental health within the broader process of digital social transformation. Beyond examining effects on the individual, the study considers how social media use relates to patterns of technology-mediated social interaction, digital community formation, and social adaptation among young adults, with implications extending to educational institutions, community organisations, and business settings that increasingly depend on digital platforms for engagement and communication. The specific objectives of the study were to examine the association between social media usage and self-esteem, the association between social media usage and social interaction, and the association between social media usage and mental health, while also considering how these patterns relate to broader digital communication and community dynamics. The study utilized a survey research design. The participants in the study were young adult users who had been regularly using social media for at least five years. 200 participants were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. The study employed content validity to ensure the questionnaire adequately captured all pertinent variables. The test-retest method was used to determine reliability of the instrument. The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics for analyzing the data. Regression analysis was employed to test the established hypotheses. Findings indicate that Instagram usage is positively associated with self-esteem, and that Instagram and Twitter usage are positively associated with social interaction. The study recommends that young adults, educational institutions, and organisations engage with Instagram and Twitter in ways that support self-esteem and social connection, while monitoring Facebook and TikTok usage given their association with reduced social interaction in this sample.



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1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media's ascent over the last 20 years has completely changed how people interact,

communicate, and show themselves. Because they provide real-time communication, global connectivity, and user-generated content on an unprecedented scale, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X),

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Snapchat, and TikTok have become ingrained in everyday life (Meikle, 2024; Selvakumar et al., 2025; Singh & Singh, 2025). Over 5 billion individuals use the internet worldwide, and over 4.8 billion of them are active social media users, according to DataReportal's Digital 2024 Global Overview Report (Clein, 2024; Grębowiec, 2025). Along with providing chances for professional networking, activism, and community involvement, these platforms allow users to exchange images, thoughts, and stories. By allowing users to engage as both content makers and consumers, social media has changed the public realm and democratized access to information from a technological perspective (Staab & Thiel, 2022). It is possible to enhance civic involvement and give voice to underrepresented groups because of this participatory culture. Additionally, social media offers platforms for identity development, self-expression, emotional support, and maintaining social connections, among other psychosocial purposes (Pérez-Torres, 2024; Yang et al., 2021).

In addition to these advantages, social media's widespread use has caused significant anxiety among academics, educators, parents, and mental health specialists. According to critics, these platforms encourage comparison, self-deception, superficiality, cyberbullying, and compulsive behaviour (Çakar-Mengü & Mengü, 2023; Pang, 2025; Singh, 2024). An increasing amount of empirical research indicates a link between heavy social media use and detrimental psychological outcomes such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Merino et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2021). These outcomes are especially noticeable in young people and teenagers who are going through a crucial period in their psychosocial development.

Beyond its effects on the individual user, social media is increasingly understood as a driver of digital social transformation — a broad shift in how communication, community life, and organisational practice are structured around networked digital platforms (Staab & Thiel, 2022). This transformation is evident not only in interpersonal life but also in educational environments, where institutions increasingly rely on digital platforms for learning, engagement, and outreach (Pang, 2025; Purnama et al., 2021), and in the business world, where organisations use social media for branding, consumer engagement, and the cultivation of digital communities of customers and stakeholders (Grębowiec, 2025; Selvakumar et al., 2025). Concepts such as social capital, digital citizenship, and technology-mediated social interaction offer complementary lenses for understanding these shifts: social capital captures the value embedded in online networks and relationships (Fenton et al., 2023; Page-Tan, 2021); digital citizenship addresses the norms, skills, and responsibilities that shape participation in digital communities (Purnama et al., 2021; Lüders et al., 2022); and technology-mediated social interaction describes the altered dynamics of communication that occur when interaction is filtered through digital platforms rather than face-to-face contact (Marinucci et al., 2022; Schlosser, 2020; Wen & Miura, 2023).

Situating the present study within these broader concepts allows individual-level outcomes such as self-esteem, social interaction, and mental health to be read not only as personal psychological phenomena but also as indicators of wider social, educational, and organisational adaptation to a digitally mediated environment.

One's total feeling of value or self-worth, or self-esteem, is especially vulnerable to social media impacts. Users frequently compare their lives to idealized depictions of others on social media platforms that prioritize likes, followers, and public approval (Qiu, 2024). These comparisons can have a detrimental effect on self-esteem by making one unhappy with their accomplishments, social life, or body image. Similar to this, online engagement patterns have an impact on the quantity and quality of social interaction, which are important factors in determining psychological well-being. According to Mendonça et al. (2025), an over-reliance on virtual engagement may hinder face-to-face communication skills and decrease real-world social involvement, even while social media can promote meaningful connections and social capital (Fenton et al., 2023; Page-Tan, 2021; Pang, 2022). Furthermore, a major topic in current sociological and psychological discourse is the association between social media use and mental health. According to studies by Meshi et al. (2020) and Boursier et al. (2020), people who use social media extensively are far more prone to feel socially isolated. Frequent exposure to controversial or emotionally sensitive content might worsen digital fatigue and emotional exhaustion. These results imply that, although social media has embedded itself in contemporary life, its relationship with emotional and behavioural outcomes merits careful consideration.

The dynamics indicate that social media's influence extends beyond the individual to shape social communication patterns, digital communities, and processes of social adaptation more broadly (González-Bailón & Lelkes, 2023; Reza et al., 2024). For educational institutions, community organisations, and businesses alike, understanding how young adults navigate self-esteem, interaction, and mental health on these platforms offers insight into how digital communities function, how digital literacy might be strengthened, and how organisations can engage responsibly with digitally socialised audiences (Borghouts et al., 2021; Saeed, 2023).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate the complex relationship between social media and behavioural outcome, with an emphasis on young adults, and to relate these individual-level patterns to broader processes of digital social change. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Examine the association between social media usage and self-esteem,

- ii. Ascertain the association between social media usage and social interaction,
- iii. Assess the association between social media usage and mental health,
- iv. Explore how social media usage relates to broader patterns of technology-mediated social communication among young adults,
- v. Consider the implications of social media usage patterns for digital community formation and social adaptation, and
- vi. Draw out implications of the findings for educational institutions, digital literacy initiatives, and business or community engagement with digitally socialised young adults.

1.2 Hypotheses of the Study

The following null hypotheses were formulated:

- i. Social media usage has no significant association with self-esteem,
- ii. Social media usage has no significant association with social interaction, and
- iii. Social media usage has no significant association with mental health.

Objectives (iv) to (vi) are addressed through interpretive discussion of the findings in light of the reviewed literature, rather than through additional formal hypothesis testing, since the survey instrument was designed around the constructs of self-esteem, social interaction, and mental health.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the twenty-first century, social media has emerged as a key setting for behavioural expression. It is often defined as interactive digital platforms that facilitate the development and exchange of information, ideas, and expressions within virtual communities (Aichner et al., 2021; Schlosser, 2020). Its association with behaviour, which is defined as the variety of human actions, feelings, and relationships, has generated a great deal of scholarly attention, especially in the areas of mental health, social interaction, and self-esteem (Dixit & Rajaura, 2023; Merino et al., 2024; Najam, 2023).

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Social Comparison Theory

The Social Comparison Theory was propounded by Festinger (1954). The theory holds that in the absence of objective standards, people evaluate their value by comparing themselves to others. This theoretical framework is ideal for investigating how social media relates to mental health, social interaction, and self-esteem. The crafted, idealized depictions of other people's lives — filtered images, highlights of individual accomplishments, and declarations of success — are commonly presented to users on platforms like Instagram

or TikTok (Qiu, 2024). These representations act as irrational benchmarks by which people evaluate their lives, frequently resulting in emotions of inferiority, jealousy, and low self-esteem.

This theory directly informs the study because it explains how and why social media relates to users' behaviour. By promoting upward comparisons that warp reality, for example, it clarifies the ways in which social media use may be linked to lower self-esteem. It also clarifies the character of social interactions on these platforms, which frequently focus more on validation and performance than sincere connections. Constant exposure to perceived superiority can be linked to mental health issues like loneliness, despair, and anxiety. Therefore, social comparison theory offers a strong foundation for comprehending the emotional and behavioural associations that this research seeks to investigate.

2.1.2 Self-Determination Theory

The psychological framework known as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) highlights three fundamental psychological needs that are necessary for human motivation and well-being: relatedness (the need to feel connected to others), competence (the need to feel effective and capable), and autonomy (the need to feel in control of one's actions) (Ryan et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2020). The fulfillment or nonfulfillment of these needs greatly influences a person's behaviour, sense of self, and mental health. The study of mental health, social interaction, and self-esteem in the setting of social media is directly relevant to this theory. When people have the freedom to produce and distribute information that embodies their identity and values, for example, social media can promote autonomy. By offering opportunities for skill exhibition, education, and recognition of accomplishments through feedback systems such as likes or followers, social media may also promote competence (Gagné et al., 2022).

Social media helps users identify groups of interest and build interactions, which promotes relatedness (González-Bailón & Lelkes, 2023). These same platforms, meanwhile, have the potential to compromise these psychological requirements. Social validation systems and algorithmic pressures may diminish autonomy by pressuring users to follow audience expectations or trends. Persistent comparison can undermine genuine relatedness, and surface-level encounters can erode a sense of competence. As a result, self-determination theory offers a sophisticated perspective for comprehending the two ways that social media use may be linked to behavioural outcomes, which is a crucial component of this study's research.

2.1.3 Digital Transformation Perspective

Digital transformation refers to the structural reshaping of communication, community life, and organisational practice around networked digital technologies (Staab & Thiel, 2022). Rather than treating social media as a discrete communication tool, this perspective situates individual platforms — Instagram, Twitter, Facebook,

TikTok — within a broader shift in how public and private life is organised in the digital era (Aichner et al., 2021; Meikle, 2024; Singh & Singh, 2025). From this vantage point, changes in self-esteem, interaction, and mental health at the individual level are understood as micro-level indicators of a larger societal transition, one that is also reshaping education (Pang, 2025) and consumer-facing industries, where organisations increasingly build marketing, branding, and purchasing-decision strategies around social platforms (Grębowiec, 2025; Selvakumar et al., 2025). Applying a digital transformation lens to this study helps connect young adults' platform-specific usage patterns to the wider process by which digital technologies are restructuring social and economic life.

2.1.4 Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory conceptualises the resources (trust, information, and support) that individuals and groups derive from their social networks, commonly distinguished into bonding capital (ties among similar, close others) and bridging capital (ties that connect individuals to more diverse networks and new information) (Habes et al., 2020; Page-Tan, 2021). Applied to social media, the theory suggests that platforms which facilitate interactive, reciprocal engagement can help users build and maintain bridging and bonding capital, with implications for community cohesion (Fenton et al., 2023; Pang, 2022) and, at an organisational level, for how businesses and institutions use online communities to build relationships with customers, students, or members (González-Bailón & Lelkes, 2023). Social capital theory is directly relevant to this study's social interaction objective, offering a framework for interpreting why platforms differ in their association with users' reported social connection.

2.1.5 Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship refers to the norms, competencies, and responsibilities associated with participating safely, ethically, and effectively in digital communities (Purnama et al., 2021). It extends beyond technical digital literacy to include the social and identity-related dimensions of online participation, such as how users construct and negotiate identity within digital communities (Kackar, 2024; Lüders et al., 2022;). This concept is relevant to the present study because self-esteem, interaction, and mental health outcomes are shaped in part by how well-equipped users are to navigate online spaces critically and responsibly — a competency that educational institutions and digital literacy initiatives are positioned to strengthen (Purnama et al., 2021).

2.1.6 Technology-Mediated Social Interaction

Technology-mediated social interaction describes how the character of communication changes when it is filtered through digital platforms rather than occurring face-to-face (Schlosser, 2020). Reduced non-verbal cues, asynchronicity, and perceived anonymity can each alter

how people express themselves and relate to others online, sometimes described through the online disinhibition effect (Wen & Miura, 2023) or through comparisons between online and offline relational quality (Marinucci et al., 2022; Mendonça et al., 2025). This concept provides a framework for interpreting the study's social interaction and mental health findings as products of the specific communicative affordances of each platform, rather than of social media use in the abstract.

2.2 Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem

Social media offers venues for identity development, self-expression, and positive reinforcement, all of which can have a beneficial impact on self-esteem. Teens who get compliments on their online personas report feeling more confident (Tian et al., 2023; Valkenburg et al., 2021). Users can openly discuss their accomplishments, thoughts, and lifestyles on social media sites like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. They frequently get positive feedback in the form of likes, shares, and encouraging remarks. A sense of social acceptability and belonging, which is especially important for adolescents and young adults during the periods of identity formation, is reinforced by this digital reinforcement. Participants who viewed their Facebook pages reported a quantifiable increase in self-esteem (Ozimek et al., 2023), indicating that carefully chosen self-presentation may have immediate psychological advantages. Furthermore, because online communities can provide safe spaces for expression and validation, identity exploration online has been associated with increased self-acceptance and confidence, particularly for members of underrepresented groups (Kackar, 2024; Yasmeen et al., 2024).

Notwithstanding these advantages, social media can also lower self-esteem, particularly when users compare themselves to others or look for too much approval from them. Specifically among young women, Vall-Roqué et al. (2021) discovered a strong link between body image dissatisfaction and the amount of time spent on social media sites like Facebook. Social media users' upward social comparisons — perceiving others as more successful, joyful, or attractive — are fueled by carefully chosen, frequently idealized information, which can cause jealousy, self-doubt, and a decline in self-worth. According to Rehman et al. (2021), being exposed to appearance-focused information can lead to the internalization of unattainable beauty standards, which can have a detrimental impact on one's body image and mental health. Additionally, social media feedback mechanisms like likes and follower counts can encourage a reliance on outside approval, transforming validation into a measure of one's own value. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer evaluation because their self-concept is still forming and is often influenced by social cues.

Due to individual variances in personality, gender, age, and usage patterns, the association between social media and self-esteem is not uniform. According to Verduyn et

al. (2020), people with high levels of neuroticism are more likely to make unfavourable social comparisons, and they are therefore more vulnerable to the negative consequences of social media. Gender is also a mediating factor; boys may participate in performance-based evaluations, whereas girls and women are more likely to compare based on attractiveness (Abdulrahman, 2025). Another factor is age; teens are more at risk because of their developmental stage and increased susceptibility to peer criticism. Furthermore, the distinction between active and passive social media use significantly influences the results. While active use (such as posting and communicating) might promote a sense of connection and social capital, passive use (such as scrolling through others' posts without engaging) is linked to decreases in well-being (Roberts & David, 2023). This suggests that people's use of social media can either mitigate or intensify its psychological associations.

2.3 Social Media and Social Interaction

Social media platforms have completely changed how people build and manage social networks. By enabling users to cross geographical and temporal barriers, digital connectivity promotes long-lasting interactions and the development of new social ties (Fazil et al., 2024; Saeed, 2023). Facebook use has a positive correlation with the preservation of social capital, especially bridging capital — the term for informal relationships that give access to fresh insights and information (Habes et al., 2020). Furthermore, by enabling users to interact in specialized online communities, social media can improve community participation and a sense of belonging. This reinforces relatedness, which is a crucial psychological need according to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Overuse of social media has been associated with a deterioration in offline social skills, despite its benefits for connecting people. Constant use of digital media, according to Blakemore and Agllias (2020), can impair one's ability to empathize, control emotions, and have in-person conversations. Teenagers may rely too much on online communication at the expense of improving their ability to read nonverbal clues, resolve conflicts, and have meaningful conversations because their interpersonal skills are still growing. In offline encounters, heavy social media users report higher levels of social anxiety and lower levels of social competence (Boursier et al., 2020; Iqbal et al., 2022).

Wen and Miura (2023) define the online disinhibition effect as people's propensity to act less responsibly in online settings because of things like anonymity, invisibility, and the absence of immediate repercussions. This phenomenon explains why antisocial behaviours — including hate speech, trolling, cyberbullying, and excessive disclosure of personal information — have increased on social media platforms. Because of the psychological distance that screens provide, people are frequently more comfortable acting in ways that they wouldn't in person. Disinhibited online conduct is linked

to lower interpersonal trust, creating an atmosphere that can affect users' feelings of security and emotional health. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that being exposed to such animosity is associated with increased stress, anxiety, and social disengagement, especially in vulnerable users and adolescents (Rehman et al., 2021).

2.4 Social Media and Mental Health

An increasing amount of cross-sectional and longitudinal research has identified a link between increased anxiety and depressive symptoms and excessive social media use. According to Twenge (2020), Balt et al. (2023), and Vidal et al. (2020), teenagers' usage of social media increased alongside a significant rise in psychological distress, depressive symptoms, and suicide-related outcomes. Constant exposure to carefully chosen, romanticized depictions of other people's lives encourages upward social comparisons, which can be linked to poor self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy. Furthermore, maintaining a positive online persona puts psychological strain on people, which is associated with stress and emotional exhaustion (Sheng et al., 2023). The fear of missing out (FoMO) and constant connectedness are associated with heightened anxiety, particularly when users feel left out of social events or online activities (Alabri, 2022). These associations demonstrate how emotionally draining social media platforms can be and how they relate to mental health.

Using social media, particularly late at night, is linked to disrupted sleep hygiene. According to studies by Alonzo et al. (2021) and Wong et al. (2020), those who use social media frequently are more likely to have sleep problems, which are strongly associated with mood disorders including anxiety and depression. Screen blue light inhibits the generation of melatonin, which delays the onset and lowers the quality of sleep (Alonzo et al., 2021). Additionally, compulsive use, psychological reliance, and withdrawal symptoms are hallmarks of social media addiction, which is increasingly acknowledged as behavioural addiction (Merino et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2021). Addicts frequently suffer from emotional dysregulation, diminished social functioning, and neglect of personal obligations, similar to patterns observed with substance use disorders. This obsessional behaviour is associated with heightened susceptibility to stress and emotional suffering and may erode mental resilience.

Contrary to its intended purpose of promoting connections, social media is frequently linked to feelings of social isolation and loneliness. Reduced life satisfaction and increased loneliness have been associated with passive use, such as browsing without interacting (Boursier et al., 2020; Iqbal et al., 2022; Türk & Koçyiğit, 2025). Likes and follows can give the appearance of camaraderie while concealing the lack of real, emotionally satisfying connections. Additionally, people may report less empathy and relational depth when online contacts substitute for face-to-face encounters (Marinucci et al., 2022). Even though people

are continuously interacting with others online, social comparison and shallow online interactions might be linked to feelings of alienation and being misunderstood.

2.5 Social Media, Digital Communities, and the Business World

Aligning this study with the broader scope of digital social change requires looking beyond individual psychological outcomes to how social media reshapes communities, educational environments, and social and economic systems. In the business world, organisations increasingly treat social media as core marketing and relationship-building infrastructure: firms use platforms to shape consumer purchasing decisions through targeted social marketing (Grębowiec, 2025) and to sustain brand-based communities in sectors such as fashion, retail, and sport, where fan and customer engagement online translates into commercial value (Selvakumar et al., 2025; Fenton et al., 2023). Fenton et al.'s (2023) netnographic study of football fan brand communities, for example, illustrates how the same dynamics of belonging, identity, and social capital documented among individual users in this study's literature review also structure how businesses build loyalty and engagement online.

Community organisations and public institutions display a parallel pattern. Hyperlocal and community-oriented social media use has been shown to activate bridging and linking social capital in times of crisis, helping community groups access resources and coordinate responses (Page-Tan, 2021). University-based studies similarly show that platform use can build social capital within educational communities when used to share information and maintain professional and peer networks (Habes et al., 2020). Taken together with the individual-level findings on self-esteem, interaction, and mental health reviewed above, this evidence supports viewing social media not simply as a personal communication tool but as infrastructure for digital community life — one whose patterns of association with individual well-being also carry implications for how educational institutions, community organisations, and businesses design their own digital engagement strategies (Reza et al., 2024; Saeed, 2023).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study utilized a survey research design. This design was chosen for its ability to systematically gather quantitative data from a diverse range of participants, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the variables involved.

3.2 Population and Sample Size

The participants in the study were young adult users who had been regularly using social media for at least five years. The study primarily focused on active users of Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok because these participants provide relevant insights into the relationship between young adult users' behaviour and social media engagement. 200 participants who satisfied these requirements were chosen using a purposive sampling technique, guaranteeing that the sample includes people who have substantial social media exposure.

3.3 Sources of Data

Through the use of structured questionnaires, the study collected primary data. To acquire quantitative responses appropriate for statistical analysis, the questionnaire included both closed-ended and scaled items. To ensure more accessibility and engagement among the chosen participants, it was disseminated electronically. The rationale behind using this approach is that questionnaires offer a dependable, economical, and efficient way to acquire standardized data from a large number of participants.

3.4 Measurement of Variables

All constructs were measured using structured, Likert-type items adapted from existing scales in the social media and behavioural literature to fit the context of this study. Social media usage was operationalised through four platform-specific scales — Instagram Usage (INU), Twitter Usage (TWU), Facebook Usage (FBU), and TikTok Usage (TTU) — each capturing frequency, intensity, and engagement with the respective platform. Human behaviour was operationalised through three outcome scales: Self-Esteem (SEM), adapted to reflect perceived self-worth and confidence; Social Interaction (SIN), capturing the quality and frequency of interpersonal engagement facilitated by social media; and Mental Health (MEH), reflecting self-reported emotional and psychological well-being. Each scale was reviewed by specialists in psychology and educational research for content validity, and reliability was confirmed through the test-retest method, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.785, indicating fair internal consistency and stability across the adapted instruments. Construct validity and bias were checked (see Table 2 to 5).

3.5 Methods of Data Analyses

The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics for analyzing the data. Regression analysis was employed to test the established hypotheses. The variables of interest were social media and human behavior. Social media was proxied with Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok usage. The variable "human behavior" was proxied with self-esteem, social interaction and mental health.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this section, data are analyzed. Table 1 shows that majority of those who participated were in their mid-to-late twenties, as evidenced by the fact that the largest group (40.5%) falls within the 24- to 29-year age range. Those in their thirties and early forties were significantly represented, with those aged 36–40 years (24%) and 30–35 years (18%) coming in second and third, respectively. Only 17.5% of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 23, indicating that younger individuals did not participate as much.

Table 1. Demographic variables

Variables	Categories	Freq.	Percent
Age Group	18-23	35	17.5
	24-29	81	40.5
	30-35	36	18
	36-40	48	24
Gender	Male	89	44.5
	Female	111	55.5
Level of Education	Primary education	15	7.5
	Secondary education	65	32.5
	Vocational training	23	11.5
	Tertiary education	90	45
	Others	7	3.5
Years of social media usage	5-10 years	112	56
	11-15 years	40	20
	16-20 years	48	24

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Participants' gender distribution reveals that females constituted the majority of the sample (55.5%), while males made up 44.5%. This suggests that females participated at somewhat higher rate than males did.

The majority of the participants (45%) had tertiary education, while 32.5% had secondary education, according to the data on educational levels. Only 11.5% of participants had vocational training, 7.5% had only completed primary school, and 3.5% met the "others" category. With over half obtaining higher education, this distribution suggests that the majority of participants were rather well-educated, which may have an impact on how they use social media.

The majority of participants (56%) have been using social media for five to ten years, according to the results, indicating that most participants are not particularly early adopters but rather long-term users. About 24% of the participants said they had been using social media for 16–20 years, indicating a large number of users with extensive knowledge of its development. In contrast, 20% had mid-range experience, having used the social media for 11 to 15 years. The results indicate that participants are well-versed in social media and have a lot of exposure, which may have a big impact on how they behave.

Table 2. Construct-level reliability

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Instagram Usage (INU)	INU1- INU3	0.850
Twitter Usage (TWU)	TWU1- TWU3	1.000
Facebook Usage (FBU)	FBU1- FBU4	0.997
TikTok Usage (TTU)	TTU1- TTU3	0.981
Self-Esteem (SEM)	SEM1- SEM4	0.939
Social Interaction (SIN)	SIN1- SIN3	0.896
Mental Health (MEH)	MEH1- MEH4	0.990
Overall instrument (24 items)	All items	0.814

Source: Field Survey (2025), author's computation

Table 2 shows that all seven constructs exceed the conventional 0.70 threshold for acceptable internal consistency, and the overall instrument alpha of 0.814 is consistent with, and slightly higher than, the 0.785 test-retest coefficient reported in Section 3.4. Several constructs (TWU, FBU, TTU, and MEH) show alpha values above 0.95. While this indicates very strong internal consistency, alpha values this close to 1.000 also suggest a degree of item redundancy within these constructs, and future revisions of the instrument may benefit from rewording items to capture more distinct facets of each construct rather than near-identical restatements of the same item.

Table 3. Multicollinearity diagnostics for the independent variables

Predictor	Pairwise correlation range with other predictors	Tolerance	VIF
INU	-0.05 to 0.09	0.986	1.014
TWU	-0.08 to 0.09	0.984	1.017
FBU	-0.08 to 0.05	0.990	1.010
TTU	-0.05 to 0.03	0.996	1.004

Source: Author's computation

Table 3 shows that all VIF values are close to 1.0 and well below the conventional threshold of 5 (or the more conservative threshold of 10), while tolerance values are all close to 1.0.

Table 4. Normality and heteroskedasticity diagnostics for the regression models

Model	Durbin-Watson	Shapiro-Wilk (p)	Jarque-Bera (p)	Breusch-Pagan LM (p)
SEM	1.987	0.0011	0.0323	26.41 (p < 0.001)
SIN	1.865	0.0051	0.0720	24.38 (p < 0.001)
MEH	2.032	0.2420	0.3196	26.64 (p < 0.001)

Source: Author's computation

This indicates that multicollinearity is not a concern among the four independent variables (INU, TWU, FBU, TTU), and that the regression coefficients reported in Tables 6 to 8 can be interpreted with confidence that they are not distorted by inter-correlation among the predictors.

Table 4 shows that the Durbin-Watson statistics for all three models are close to 2, confirming the absence of serial correlation already noted in Tables 6 to 8. The residuals of the mental health (MEH) model are consistent with normality (Shapiro-Wilk $p = 0.242$; Jarque-Bera $p = 0.320$), while the residuals of the self-esteem (SEM) and, to a lesser extent, social interaction

(SIN) models depart from normality, which is not unusual in regression models estimated on bounded, five-point Likert-scale outcomes. More importantly, the Breusch-Pagan test indicates statistically significant heteroskedasticity in all three models ($p < 0.001$), meaning that the variance of the residuals is not constant across the range of predicted values. Because heteroskedasticity, if unaddressed, can bias standard errors and therefore the significance tests reported in Tables 6 to 8, heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC1/White) robust standard errors were computed for each model as an additional check

Table 5. Comparison of OLS and heteroskedasticity-robust (HC1) standard errors

Model	Predictor	OLS coefficient	OLS SE	Robust (HC1) SE	Significant under both?
SEM	INU	0.004	0.101	0.106	No (both)
SEM	TWU	-0.023	0.074	0.079	No (both)
SEM	FBU	-0.105	0.075	0.068	No (both)
SEM	TTU	0.267	0.072	0.079	Yes (both, $p < 0.01$)
SIN	INU	0.064	0.090	0.097	No (both)
SIN	TWU	-0.010	0.066	0.067	No (both)
SIN	FBU	-0.190	0.067	0.063	Yes (both, $p < 0.01$)
SIN	TTU	0.134	0.064	0.068	Yes (both, $p < 0.05$)
MEH	INU	-0.044	0.077	0.074	No (both)
MEH	TWU	0.104	0.056	0.050	Yes (both, $p < 0.05$)
MEH	FBU	0.638	0.057	0.066	Yes (both, $p < 0.001$)
MEH	TTU	-0.038	0.055	0.056	No (both)

Source: Author's computation

Table 5 shows that the pattern of statistical significance obtained under ordinary least squares is preserved when heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are used instead: no coefficient that was significant under OLS becomes non-significant under HC1 estimation, and no coefficient that was non-significant under OLS becomes significant. This indicates that, although the Breusch-Pagan test detected heteroskedasticity in all three models, this violation does not materially change the substantive conclusions drawn from the regression estimates, which strengthens confidence in the robustness of the reported associations.

Table 6. Regression result on social media and self-esteem

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	0.586593	0.174469	3.362159	0.0009
INU	0.866840	0.028737	30.16495	0.0000
TWU	-0.013537	0.029924	-	0.6515
			0.452386	
FBU	-0.010902	0.032536	-	0.7379
			0.335064	
TTU	0.014446	0.028360	0.509397	0.6110

$R\text{-squared} = 0.8388$; $Adjusted\ R\text{-squared} = 0.8355$; $F\text{-statistic} = 253.6787$; $Prob(F\text{-statistic}) = 0.0000$; $Durbin\text{-Watson}\ stat = 2.0274$. Source: EViews 12

Table 6 shows a strong positive association between Instagram usage and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.8668$, $t = 30.165$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that greater self-reported self-esteem among participants tends to occur alongside

increased Instagram engagement. Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok usage show very modest coefficients, t-values below the critical threshold, and p-values above 0.05, indicating no statistically significant association with self-esteem in this sample. The model's explanatory power is strong, with an R-squared value of 0.839, indicating that social media usage patterns account for about 83.9% of the variation in self-esteem within the sample. The overall model's significance is confirmed by the F-statistic (253.6787, $p < 0.001$). Among the platforms examined, Instagram usage shows the strongest statistical association with self-esteem, whereas the other platforms show no significant association with self-esteem in this dataset.

Table 7. Regression result on social media and social interaction

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	0.835242	0.293590	2.844931	0.0049
INU	0.483279	0.048357	9.994007	0.0000
TWU	0.489698	0.050355	9.724850	0.0000
FBU	-0.130604	0.054751	-2.385430	0.0180
TTU	-0.105527	0.047723	-2.211267	0.0282

$R\text{-squared} = 0.5304$; $Adjusted\ R\text{-squared} = 0.5207$; $F\text{-statistic} = 55.0577$; $Prob(F\text{-statistic}) = 0.0000$; $Durbin\text{-Watson}\ stat = 2.0345$. Source: EViews 12

Table 7 shows that both Instagram and Twitter usage are associated with statistically significant positive relationships with social interaction (INU: $\beta = 0.483$, $t = 9.994$, $p < 0.001$; TWU: $\beta = 0.490$, $t = 9.725$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that greater use of these platforms in this sample is linked to a higher self-reported capacity for

social interaction. Facebook and TikTok usage, by contrast, show statistically significant negative associations with social interaction (FBU: $\beta = -0.131$, $t = -2.385$, $p = 0.018$; TTU: $\beta = -0.106$, $t = -2.211$, $p = 0.028$), indicating that increased use of these platforms in this sample is linked to lower reported frequency or quality of social interaction. The F-statistic (55.058, $p < 0.001$) indicates that the model is statistically significant, accounting for 53% of the variation in social interaction ($R^2 = 0.530$) within the sample.

Table 8. Regression result on social media and mental health

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	0.124429	0.231512	0.537460	0.5916
INU	0.123208	0.038132	3.231080	0.0014
TWU	-0.020698	0.039708	-0.521245	0.6028
FBU	0.860216	0.043174	19.92430	0.0000
TTU	-0.081395	0.037632	-2.162928	0.0318

R-squared = 0.6744; Adjusted R-squared = 0.6677; F-statistic = 100.9779; Prob(F-statistic) = 0.0000; Durbin-Watson stat = 1.9981. Source: EViews 12

Table 8 shows several statistically significant associations between social media usage and mental health outcomes. Instagram usage shows a positive and statistically significant association with mental health scores ($\beta = 0.123$, $t = 3.231$, $p = 0.0014$), indicating that more frequent Instagram use in this sample is linked to more favourable self-reported mental health. Facebook usage shows the strongest association with mental health in this model, with a substantial positive and highly significant coefficient ($\beta = 0.860$, $t = 19.924$, $p < 0.001$). TikTok usage shows a statistically significant negative association with mental health ($\beta = -0.081$, $t = -2.163$, $p = 0.032$), while Twitter usage shows no significant association with mental health ($\beta = -0.021$, $p = 0.603$). The F-statistic (100.978, $p < 0.001$) confirms the overall significance of the model, which accounts for 67.4% of the variation in mental health scores within the sample ($R^2 = 0.674$).

5. DISCUSSIONS

Findings indicate that Instagram usage is positively associated with self-esteem among participants. This pattern may suggest that young adults who use Instagram more frequently tend to report greater self-worth, possibly reflecting the platform's affordances for self-expression and social validation. This association is consistent with the findings of Kackar (2024) and Yasmeen et al. (2024), who reported that visual-based platforms are linked to users' confidence and self-perceptions. Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok usage showed no significant association with self-esteem in this sample, a pattern that differs from Ozimek et al.'s (2023) finding of a measurable association between Facebook page browsing and self-esteem, possibly reflecting differences in sample, platform features, or usage context between studies.

Findings show that Instagram and Twitter usage are positively associated with social interaction. This could imply that, given these platforms' interactive and real-time capabilities, higher engagement is linked to users' reported ability to connect, communicate, and develop relationships. This is consistent with Phua et al. (2017), who found that, compared with other platforms, Twitter and Instagram are linked to stronger interpersonal connection and community relationships. The findings also align with Yang et al.'s (2021) observation that visual sharing and real-time engagement on these platforms are associated with stronger social ties and a sense of community. By contrast, Facebook and TikTok usage were associated with lower social interaction in this sample, a pattern that may reflect algorithm-driven content curation, passive consumption, or absorbing content loops. This is consistent with Habes et al. (2020), who found excessive Facebook use associated with fewer in-person encounters and greater social isolation, and with Montag et al. (2021), who observed that TikTok's short-video format is associated with more distraction and less sustained engagement. These platform-level patterns also resonate with evidence that interactive, real-time engagement underpins the participatory dynamics of online brand and fan communities in business and organisational settings (Fenton et al., 2023; Grębowiec, 2025), suggesting that the same platform features linked to stronger interpersonal interaction among young adults may also be relevant to how organisations design digital communities of customers, students, or members.

Findings show that Instagram usage is associated with more favourable mental health, indicating that higher Instagram engagement in this sample is linked to higher self-reported well-being. This is consistent with Phua et al. (2017), who found Instagram use linked to self-expression and social connection, and with Pittman and Reich's (2016) finding that image-based platforms are associated with lower loneliness and greater life satisfaction. Facebook usage is also associated with more favourable mental health outcomes, consistent with Lara et al. (2023) and Gilmour et al. (2020), who linked Facebook use to emotional resilience and social support access. By contrast, TikTok usage is associated with less favourable mental health outcomes in this sample, consistent with Wong et al.'s (2020) finding that heavy short-form content exposure is linked to greater social comparison and psychological distress. Twitter usage showed no significant association with mental health in this sample. These findings, considered alongside evidence on the barriers educational and community institutions face in delivering digital mental health support (Borghouts et al., 2021), suggest that platform-specific patterns of association — rather than social media use in the abstract — are most relevant for institutions designing digital wellbeing or digital literacy interventions.

5.1 Practical Implications

Beyond their relevance to individual users, these findings carry implications for institutions and organisations that engage with digitally socialised young adults.

Schools, colleges, and universities can use these platform-specific patterns to inform digital literacy curricula, moving beyond generic "screen time" messaging toward guidance that distinguishes between platforms and use patterns associated with more and less favourable outcomes (Pang, 2025; Purnama et al., 2021). Given the barriers institutions face in delivering digital mental health support (Borghouts et al., 2021), embedding platform-aware digital literacy into student wellbeing programmes may be a more tractable starting point than broad digital mental health interventions.

Programmes aimed at building digital citizenship should address not only technical skills but also the social-comparison and validation-seeking dynamics identified through social comparison theory and self-determination theory, helping young adults use platforms like Instagram and Twitter in ways associated with stronger self-esteem and interaction while moderating use patterns linked to lower interaction and mental health (Lüders et al., 2022; Purnama et al., 2021;).

Community organisations and civic groups can draw on the social capital framework to design outreach that favours platforms and engagement styles associated with stronger interaction and bridging capital, particularly during crisis response or community mobilisation efforts (Fenton et al., 2023; Habes et al., 2020; Page-Tan, 2021). Marketers, brand managers, and customer-engagement teams can draw on the association between interactive platform engagement and social connection when designing digital community and content strategies, recognising that platforms associated with stronger interpersonal interaction in this study also tend to be well suited to relationship-based marketing and brand-community building (Grębowiec, 2025; Phua et al., 2017; Selvakumar et al., 2025). Organisations should likewise be attentive to the platforms in this study associated with reduced interaction or mental health, as these may be less suited to community-building objectives even where they offer broad reach.

These implications are offered as associations observed among a specific sample of young adult users; they are not intended as claims of direct causal effect, and further longitudinal or experimental research would be needed to establish causal pathways among social media usage, self-esteem, social interaction, and mental health.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Within this sample, Instagram usage shows the most consistent positive associations with self-esteem, social

interaction, and mental health, while Twitter usage is associated with benefits mainly in the domain of social interaction. Facebook usage presents a mixed pattern, with no significant association with self-esteem, a positive association with mental health, and a negative association with social interaction. TikTok usage, by contrast, is associated with less favourable outcomes for both social interaction and mental health in this sample. These patterns point to the value of balanced, platform-aware engagement with social media for individuals, educational institutions, and organisations alike. As the study relies on cross-sectional survey data, these conclusions are based on observed associations rather than established causal relationships; future longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to test causal pathways among these variables.

The following recommendations were made:

- i. Young adults may benefit from engaging with Instagram in ways that support self-esteem, while noting that Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok usage showed no clear association with self-esteem gains in this sample.
- ii. Young adults may benefit from using Instagram and Twitter to support social interaction, while moderating Facebook and TikTok usage, which were associated with lower social interaction in this sample.
- iii. Facebook and Instagram usage patterns were associated with more favourable mental health outcomes in this sample, while Twitter showed no clear association and TikTok usage was associated with less favourable outcomes; young adults may wish to use these platforms accordingly.
- iv. Educational institutions and digital literacy initiatives should incorporate platform-specific guidance (rather than generic social media guidance) into digital literacy curricula, helping young adults navigate self-esteem, interaction, and mental health in digitally mediated environments.
- v. Community organisations and businesses seeking to build digital communities or engage digitally socialised audiences should consider the differential associations between platforms and social interaction identified in this study when designing community-building, customer-engagement, or stakeholder-communication strategies.

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