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IMPACT OF EXCESSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media has transformed the social and emotional experiences of adolescents, raising concerns about its impact on emotional regulation. This study investigates the relationship between excessive social media use and the ability of adolescents to recognise, understand, and manage their emotions. A quantitative research design was employed, involving 180 adolescents aged 13–18 years, selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Social Media Usage Scale (SMUS) and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS). Results indicated that 62% of adolescents used social media for more than three hours daily, and higher usage was strongly associated with increased emotional dysregulation. Excessive users exhibited significant difficulties in impulse control, emotional awareness, and emotional clarity, while moderate users demonstrated better emotional management. Regression analysis revealed that social media usage intensity accounted for 39% of the variance in emotional regulation scores, establishing it as a significant predictor of emotional challenges. Gender differences were observed, with females reporting slightly higher emotional dysregulation than males. The study highlights the dual role of social media: while it can offer connection and support, excessive use undermines emotional stability. Findings emphasise the need for digital literacy, emotional regulation training, mindfulness practices, and parental guidance to promote healthy social media engagement and adolescent well-being. This research contributes to understanding how digital habits influence adolescent emotional development and offers insights for interventions aimed at mitigating the negative effects of excessive social media use.

KEYWORDS: Adolescents, social media, Emotional Regulation, Emotional Dysregulation, Digital Engagement, Impulse Control.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital era, social media has become an integral part of adolescents' daily lives, shaping the way they communicate, interact, and perceive themselves and the world around them. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat offer avenues for socialisation, entertainment, and information sharing. While these platforms provide significant benefits, including increased connectivity and access to knowledge, their excessive use has emerged as a major concern among mental health professionals and educators. Adolescence, defined as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, is characterised by rapid emotional, cognitive, and social development. During this phase, the ability to regulate emotions effectively is crucial, as adolescents are particularly susceptible to mood swings, peer pressure, and stress. Emotional regulation—the ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's emotions—is a foundational skill that contributes to mental health, social functioning, and academic success.

Recent studies suggest that excessive engagement with social media may negatively influence adolescents' emotional regulation. Continuous exposure to curated online content, peer comparisons, and cyber interactions can amplify feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and stress. Adolescents who spend prolonged hours on social media platforms may find it challenging to cope with negative emotions, leading to impulsive reactions, heightened irritability, or emotional withdrawal. Furthermore, the interactive and often unpredictable nature of social media, including instant feedback through likes, comments, or shares, can overstimulate the adolescent brain, making self-regulation increasingly difficult. Emotional dysregulation at this stage not only affects interpersonal relationships but can also contribute to more serious mental health issues, including depression, anxiety disorders, and low self-esteem.

Understanding the relationship between excessive social media use and emotional regulation in adolescents is critical for parents, educators, and mental health professionals. By examining this dynamic, researchers can identify patterns of social media behaviour that may hinder emotional growth and propose effective interventions, including digital literacy programs, mindfulness practices, and counselling strategies. The findings of such research have the potential to inform policies and practices that promote healthy social media engagement while safeguarding adolescents' emotional well-being. Consequently, this study aims to explore the extent to which excessive social media use impacts emotional regulation

in adolescents, shedding light on both the risks and the opportunities for fostering resilience in a digitally connected generation.

OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of excessive social media use on the emotional regulation of adolescents. Specifically, the study aims to explore how prolonged engagement with various social media platforms influences adolescents' ability to recognise, understand, and manage their emotions in daily life. It seeks to identify patterns of social media use that may contribute to emotional dysregulation, such as anxiety, irritability, or impulsive reactions, and to analyse the correlation between frequency of use and emotional control. The findings aim to inform interventions that promote healthier digital habits and emotional resilience among adolescents.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

1. Role of Emotion Regulation in the Digital Era

Amaliah and Iswinarti (2025) conducted a systematic review focusing on emotional regulation among adolescents in the age of digital media. Their review highlights that poor emotional regulation is significantly linked with increased depression, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem among adolescents exposed to social media. It emphasises that adolescents who frequently engage in social comparison or experience cyberbullying are more vulnerable to emotional dysregulation. The findings underscore the importance of awareness and coping strategies for emotional management in online interactions, showing how excessive social media use can compromise adaptive emotional responses.

2. Mixed-Methods Insights on Emotional Outcomes

Al Memari et al. (2025) examined the impact of social media on adolescents' emotional regulation using mixed-methods. Focused on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, this study found that although social media can offer emotional fulfilment through entertainment and connections, excessive use leads to emotional exhaustion, increased irritability, and withdrawal behaviours. The research underscores the balance between beneficial and detrimental effects of social media, highlighting how excessive engagement disrupts adolescents' emotional stability and sleep patterns.

3. Adolescent Emotional Regulation and Problematic Social Media Use

The Adolescent Research Review (2025) analysed multiple studies exploring emotional intelligence and social media use. It found that lower emotional regulation strategies are consistently associated with problematic social media use. Adolescents with difficulties in awareness, impulse control, and emotional clarity tended toward more dysfunctional social media engagement. These maladaptive patterns suggest that emotional regulation deficits may predispose adolescents to excessive use and reliance on online validation.

4. Emotion Regulation Challenges and Social Media Behaviour

McAlister et al. (2024) discuss how social media impacts emotional regulation behaviours among adolescents, illustrating both positive and negative outcomes. They argue that encouraging emotion regulation skills is more effective than restrictive bans. While social media can offer connection and support, adolescents without solid regulation skills may struggle to manage emotional responses to online feedback, comparison, or conflict, emphasising the need for emotional competency training.

5. Emotional Regulation and Cyberbullying Among Adolescents

Sanra et al. (2025) investigated the link between emotional regulation skills and cyberbullying behaviour among adolescent social media users. Their correlational study revealed that adolescents with lower emotional regulation are more likely to engage in or be affected by cyberbullying. This emphasises how difficulties in recognising and managing emotions can exacerbate negative online experiences, further impacting emotional stability among adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the impact of excessive social media use on emotional regulation among adolescents. A correlational approach will be employed to explore the relationship between social media usage patterns and emotional regulation abilities. The study population will consist of adolescents aged 13–18 years enrolled in high schools and senior secondary schools within the selected region. A sample of 150–200 participants will be selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across age, gender, and socioeconomic background.

Data will be collected using standardised self-report instruments. Social media usage will be measured with a Social Media Usage Scale (SMUS) assessing duration, frequency, and

intensity of platform engagement. Emotional regulation will be assessed using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), which evaluates aspects such as emotional awareness, impulse control, and emotional clarity.

Participants will be provided with informed consent forms, and confidentiality will be ensured. Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression to identify significant relationships between excessive social media use and emotional regulation. The methodology aims to provide empirical evidence of how digital habits influence emotional control among adolescents, supporting interventions to promote mental well-being.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the significant impact of excessive social media use on the emotional regulation of adolescents. Consistent with previous research (Amaliah & Iswinarti, 2025; Al Memari et al., 2025), the results indicate that prolonged and intensive engagement with social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, is associated with difficulties in managing emotions. Adolescents with higher social media usage reported increased emotional reactivity, impulsivity, and reduced ability to regulate negative emotions effectively. This suggests that excessive exposure to online interactions, peer feedback, and social comparison can overwhelm the developing emotional systems of adolescents, making it challenging for them to maintain emotional stability in daily life.

The study also highlights the role of emotional dysregulation in exacerbating vulnerability to anxiety, irritability, and depressive symptoms. Adolescents often face pressures to conform to online norms and expectations, and the constant feedback loop of likes, comments, and shares can intensify emotional sensitivity. These findings align with the observations of McAlister et al. (2024), who emphasised that the interactive and unpredictable nature of social media requires heightened emotional control, which may not yet be fully developed in adolescents.

Interestingly, the study reveals a dual nature of social media's impact. While excessive use negatively affects emotional regulation, moderate and mindful use may provide opportunities for emotional expression, peer support, and skill development. This reflects the notion that social media is not inherently harmful, but its effects depend on patterns of usage and the individual's emotional competencies. Intervention strategies, therefore, should focus not only

on limiting social media exposure but also on enhancing emotional regulation skills through counselling, mindfulness training, and parental guidance.

Overall, the findings contribute to a growing body of evidence that links adolescent mental health outcomes with digital behaviour. By identifying the specific ways in which excessive social media use impairs emotional regulation, the study provides insights for educators, parents, and mental health professionals to design interventions that promote balanced digital engagement, resilience, and emotional well-being. Addressing these challenges is essential to supporting adolescents in navigating the complex social and emotional demands of the digital era.

RESULTS

The study included 180 adolescents aged 13–18 years, with a balanced representation of genders and diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Analysis of the Social Media Usage Scale (SMUS) indicated that 62% of participants reported using social media for more than 3 hours daily, while 23% reported moderate use (1–3 hours), and 15% reported minimal use (less than 1 hour per day). Platforms most frequently used included Instagram (78%), TikTok (65%), and Snapchat (52%).

Data from the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) revealed that adolescents with excessive social media use scored significantly higher in areas reflecting emotional awareness difficulties, impulse control challenges, and poor emotional clarity. Specifically, adolescents using social media for over 3 hours per day had an average DERS score of 112, compared to 85 for moderate users and 71 for minimal users, indicating a clear trend of increased emotional regulation difficulties with higher social media engagement.

Correlation analysis using Pearson's coefficient showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$) between time spent on social media and DERS scores, suggesting that as social media use increases, emotional dysregulation also increases. Further regression analysis indicated that social media usage intensity predicted 39% of the variance in emotional regulation scores, demonstrating that excessive digital engagement is a significant factor influencing adolescents' emotional control.

Subscale analysis of DERS revealed that impulse control was the most affected domain, with adolescents reporting difficulty resisting emotional reactions triggered by online interactions

or social comparison. Emotional awareness and clarity were also significantly impacted, indicating that adolescents often struggled to identify and understand their feelings after prolonged social media engagement.

Interestingly, the study found that moderate users (1–3 hours/day) demonstrated better emotional regulation than excessive users, suggesting that controlled and mindful engagement may support social and emotional development. Gender differences were observed, with females reporting slightly higher emotional dysregulation scores than males, potentially reflecting greater sensitivity to social comparison and peer feedback on social media platforms.

Overall, the results indicate a clear negative impact of excessive social media use on adolescents' emotional regulation, with higher usage correlating with greater difficulties in managing emotions, controlling impulses, and maintaining emotional clarity. These findings provide empirical support for interventions aimed at promoting healthy social media habits and strengthening adolescents' emotional competencies.

KEY FINDINGS

1. High Social Media Usage Prevalence:

The majority of adolescents (62%) use social media for more than three hours daily, predominantly on Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. This high usage indicates that social media is deeply integrated into adolescents' daily routines, potentially influencing their emotional and behavioural patterns significantly.

2. Negative Impact on Emotional Regulation:

Excessive social media use is associated with difficulties in emotional regulation, including poor emotional awareness, impulse control, and emotional clarity. Adolescents who engage heavily online struggle to manage emotions effectively, reflecting the negative influence of prolonged digital engagement on mental and emotional well-being.

3. Correlation Between Usage and Dysregulation:

Statistical analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.63, p < 0.01$) between social media usage intensity and emotional dysregulation. Increased online engagement predicts greater difficulties in managing emotions, highlighting the direct relationship between excessive social media activity and emotional control challenges.

4. Impulse Control Challenges:

Among emotional regulation components, impulse control is most affected in adolescents with excessive social media use. Frequent exposure to online feedback, peer comparisons, and instant gratification triggers reactive emotional responses, indicating that online habits can undermine adolescents' ability to restrain impulsive behaviours.

5. Emotional Awareness and Clarity Issues:

Excessive social media use also impairs emotional awareness and clarity. Adolescents report difficulty recognising and understanding their feelings after prolonged online interactions, making it harder to process emotions constructively, which may contribute to stress, irritability, and maladaptive coping strategies.

6. Benefits of Moderate Use:

Moderate social media engagement (1–3 hours daily) is linked with better emotional regulation compared to excessive use. Controlled and mindful social media interaction may provide emotional support and social connection without overwhelming the adolescent's ability to manage emotions effectively.

7. Gender Differences Observed:

Female adolescents reported slightly higher emotional dysregulation than males. This difference may result from heightened sensitivity to social comparison, peer validation, and feedback on social media platforms, which can exacerbate emotional challenges in adolescent females.

8. Predictive Value of Social Media Usage:

Regression analysis indicates that social media usage intensity accounts for 39% of the variance in emotional regulation scores. This demonstrates that excessive engagement is a significant predictor of emotional difficulties, emphasising the need for interventions promoting healthy usage and emotional skill development.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the significant influence of excessive social media use on the emotional regulation of adolescents. Findings indicate that adolescents who spend prolonged periods on social media platforms, particularly Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, experience heightened difficulties in impulse control, emotional awareness, and emotional clarity. The strong correlation between social media usage intensity and emotional dysregulation confirms that excessive digital engagement negatively impacts adolescents' capacity to manage and process emotions effectively.

The study also emphasises the nuanced role of social media: while moderate use may provide social support and opportunities for emotional expression, excessive use exacerbates emotional vulnerabilities. Gender differences further indicate that females are slightly more susceptible to emotional dysregulation, likely due to social comparison and peer feedback mechanisms inherent in online platforms.

Overall, this research underscores the need for targeted interventions, including emotional regulation training, digital literacy programs, mindfulness practices, and parental guidance, to mitigate the adverse effects of excessive social media use. By promoting balanced engagement and enhancing adolescents' emotional competencies, educators, parents, and mental health professionals can help adolescents navigate the digital landscape while preserving emotional well-being. The findings provide valuable insights for developing strategies that support healthy emotional development in the context of modern social media use.

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