



SOCIAL MEDIA BEHAVIOR AND STRESS LEVELS PREDICTORS OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract: Social media fever is like a virus that spreads fast and to unlimited areas around the globe. It is often seen as a way to connect and express us, but for young adults, it can also bring stress and make them feel bad about themselves. It's tempting because it gives instant validation and a sense of belonging, but seeing others' perfect lives can make them feel inadequate. The aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between social media behavior, stress levels and self-esteem among young adults. For the present study a purposive sampling method was used. Total 122 young adults were selected for the present study in which 61 were male and 61 were female and the age group is between 18 to 25. This study used a quantitative research design for its investigation. The tools used for this study was Social Media Mindset

Scale, Perceived Stress Scale and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The Pearson Correlation, T-Test and Linear Regression tests were used. The results found that social media behavior has a complex relationship with the psychological well-being of young adults. It showed a negative correlation between social media use and stress levels, meaning higher social media activity is associated with lower stress. However, there's a positive correlation between social media use and self-esteem, indicating that more social media engagement is linked to higher self-esteem. Additionally, the study highlights gender differences, with women generally showing higher levels of social media activity, stress, and self-esteem compared to men. Overall, these findings emphasize the need for young adults to manage their social media usage carefully to protect their mental well-being.

Keywords: Social media behaviour, Stress level, Self-Esteem, Young Adults

INTRODUCTION

"Social media behaviour" describes how individuals use and communicate on the internet. Numerous elements, including personal drive, platform patterns, and broader social settings, have a complicated and wide-ranging impact on this phenomenon. Social media behaviour includes all of the ways that individuals express themselves and communicate on the Internet. Social media use has a significant and complex influence on young adults. Their worldviews, perspectives, and interactions with one other are greatly influenced by these platforms. First and foremost, social media gives young people a chance to interact with others, exchange stories, and find groups that match their interests. Social media behavior has become a focal point of study in contemporary research, with numerous scholars delving into its

multifaceted dynamics. Recent research underscores the pervasive influence of social media platforms on individuals' behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions.

One of the study revealed that frequent engagement with social media correlates with increased levels of social comparison, where individuals tend to compare their lives, achievements, and appearances with those of others in their network. Moreover, the research suggests that excessive social media use may contribute to feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem among users, as they often perceive their peers' lives as more glamorous or fulfilling (Smith & Jones, 2023). Similarly, one more research conducted on the influence of social media on political opinions, found that exposure to echo chambers can reinforce pre-existing beliefs and contribute to political polarization. These findings underscore the significance of understanding social media behavior in the contemporary digital landscape (Jones & Patel, 2022). This highlights the intricate interplay between online interactions and psychological well-being, emphasizing the need for further investigation into the nuanced effects of social media on human behavior.

Stress

Stress is a natural response to the demands and pressures of life and is an essential aspect of being human. It is the body's reaction, both mental and physiological, to any situation that necessitates adjustment or change. Young adults who suffer frequent or continuous stress are more prone to develop disorders such as anxiety and depression. Stressors that young adults might face includes having high expectations for themselves, social issues, low self-esteem, familial issues, or the death of a loved one.

Stressed-out young individuals might display a variety of symptoms, such as irritability, aches and pain, and increased worry. Research has shown a compelling link between social media usage and stress levels. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that

individuals who use social media platforms frequently are more likely to report higher levels of perceived stress. The correlation suggests that the constant exposure to curated images and the pressure to maintain an idealized online persona can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety (Rainie et al., 2015). Furthermore, a paper published in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that excessive social media use, particularly late at night, is associated with poor sleep quality, which in turn exacerbates stress levels. These findings underscore the importance of establishing healthy boundaries and fostering a balanced relationship with social media to mitigate its detrimental effects on mental well-being (Woods et al., 2016).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem means the “degree to which the qualities and characteristics contained in one’s self concept are perceived to be positive.” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2023). Self-esteem is influenced by a person’s physical appearance, perceptions of his or her accomplishments and skills, values, and perceived success in living up to them, as well as how others perceive and respond to that person.

For young people, self-esteem is essential to their entire growth and psychological health. It is a fundamental component that influences relationships, academic achievement, mental health, and other facets of their life. In a recent study by Smith et al. (2023), exploring the impact of social media on self-esteem among young adults, findings revealed a complex relationship. The research, published in the Journal of Psychological Studies, indicates that excessive use of social media platforms correlates with lower self-esteem levels. The constant exposure to curated and often idealized portrayals of others' lives on platforms like Instagram and Facebook can lead to feelings of inadequacy and comparison, ultimately affecting one's self-esteem negatively. Moreover, the study suggests that individuals who frequently engage in social comparison behaviors on these platforms tend to experience greater decreases in self-

esteem over time. These findings underscore the importance of promoting self-awareness and mindfulness in social media usage to mitigate its potential detrimental effects on self-esteem.

There is a complex and varied link between stress levels, self-esteem, and online behaviour on social media. Due to continuous comparison and validation seeking, social networking sites may increase stress and have an unfavourable impact on one's self-esteem. They do, however, also present chances for encouragement and uplifting experiences, which can increase self-esteem. Research on the relationships between social media use, stress, and self-esteem has yielded significant discoveries. Research by Perloff (2014) and Fardouly et al. (2015) on social media comparison and stress found that those who often compare their life on social media to others' idealised representations of themselves are more stressed.

Furthermore, studies on the relationship between cyberbullying and self-esteem have been carried out by Kowalski et al. (2014) and Hinduja and Patchin (2010). The research draws attention to the harmful impacts of cyberbullying on social media platforms and establishes a connection between it and decreased self-esteem. However, studies like pleasant Social Media Use and Self-Esteem by Frison and Eggermont (2016) and Manago et al. (2012) indicate that pleasant and supportive interactions on social media can increase self-esteem by fostering a sense of validation and belonging. Research on the connection between social media use frequency and stress was done by Primack et al. (2017) and Woods and Scott (2016). Their results indicated a positive correlation between excessive usage and raised stress levels, which may be due to social comparison and information overload. Additionally, as people may rely on other people's approval to feel worthy of themselves, research by Steers et al. (2014) and Dhir et al. (2018) have examined the link between seeking validation on social media and lower self-esteem.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The relationship between social media use and self-esteem is complex and multifaceted, as evidenced by a range of recent studies. Xuan and Amat (2021) identified a significant association between self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social media addiction among university students in Malaysia, with males exhibiting higher susceptibility to addiction. Cingel et al. (2022) highlights the individual-specific nature of this connection, suggesting that while some may experience positive or negative effects, for the majority, social media use may not significantly impact self-esteem.

Miljeteig and von Soest (2022) delve into gender-related patterns, finding that among women, low self-esteem correlates with increased social media use and predicts lower current self-esteem. Conversely, Garg (2023) focuses on young adults, revealing significant positive correlations between social networking addiction and fear of missing out (FOMO), with implications for interventions aimed at reducing social comparisons and enhancing perceived social support.

Other studies explore factors such as personality mindsets (Lee & Hancock, 2023), gender differences (Yoo & Park, 2023), and even parental influence (Guo et al., 2024), underscoring the nuanced interplay between social media use and self-esteem across diverse demographics. Moreover, Bottaro et al. (2024) and Dai et al. (2024) shed light on the mediating role of psychological distress and parental behaviors, respectively, in the relationship between internet addiction and self-esteem among different age groups.

Qualitative investigations (Hurley et al., 2024) further reveal stressors associated with social media use among university students, while longitudinal studies (Schwartz et al., 2024; Wang, 2024) offer insights into the developmental trajectories of self-esteem and problematic social media use. Together, these findings underscore the need for comprehensive approaches

to understand and address the intricate dynamics between social media use and self-esteem across diverse populations.

METHODOLOGY

The following discusses the methodology employed to investigate the relationship between social media behavior, self-esteem, and stress levels among young adults. A quantitative research design will be employed to assess the relationship between social media behavior, self-esteem, and stress levels among young adults aged 18-25 years.

Aim

To investigate the relationship between social media behavior, self-esteem, and stress levels among young adults.

Research Objective

- The aim is to study the relationship between social media behaviour, stress levels, and self-esteem among young adults.
- To explore the gender difference in social media behavior, self-esteem, and self-esteem among young adults.

Hypotheses

- (H1): There would be significant relationships between social media behavior, self-esteem & stress levels among young adults.
- (H2): There would be significant difference between social media behavior, self-esteem & stress levels on men & women among young adults.

Sample

Participants were selected by using purposive sampling method. Total 122 young adults were selected for the present study in which 61 were male and 61 were female and the age group is between 18 to 25. The participants belonged to different cities. The sample was selected through google forms and it was done in online as well as offline mode. Informed consent was obtained from the participants.

Variables

Independent Variables: Social Media Behavior

Dependent Variables: Self-esteem & Stress Levels

Research Design

To understand the research in-depth, the research design of this research was quantitative research design.

Tools for Measurement

Social Media Mindset Scale (SMMS)

The 12-item questionnaire, developed Lee et al. (2021), assesses social media usage patterns, privacy perceptions, and self-esteem, with higher scores indicating more positive impressions and stronger personal agency regarding social media.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)

This scale developed by Cohen et al. (1983), measures stress levels in young people over the past month using a 10-item questionnaire, with higher scores indicating higher

perceived stress levels and reliability demonstrated through test-retest coefficients of 0.70 to 0.80.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

The 10-item questionnaire developed by Rosenberg (1965), assessing self-esteem on a 4-point Likert scale, with scoring options yielding a range from 0 to 30, demonstrating good reliability (internal consistency: 0.77 to 0.88) and validity (standard validity: 0.55; construct validity: correlated with anxiety, depression, and anomie).

Procedure

For the purpose of data collection all the 122 participants from the age group 18 to 25 years were approached personally. Firstly, rapport was established with the students and told them about the purpose of visit and gave orientation about the tools that were to be administered. Consent was taken before the participants were asked to be a part of the research. The students were also asked to fill in certain Demographic details like name (optional), age, gender, email etc. Students were also assured that their responses would be kept confidential and will be used for research purpose only. The tools were administered one by one, and all the instructions were explained to the students. The students were instructed that there were no right or wrong responses. In the end, participants were thanked for giving their valuable time.

Statistical analysis

This section elaborates the proper statistical models which are being used to forward the study from data towards inferences. The detail of methodology is given as follows.

- The present study was quantitative in nature.
- Descriptive and inferential statistics were used.

- In Descriptive Mean and SD was calculated.
- In Inferential statistics Pearson Correlation, Linear Regression and Independent Sample T-test were calculated through SPSS.

RESULTS

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

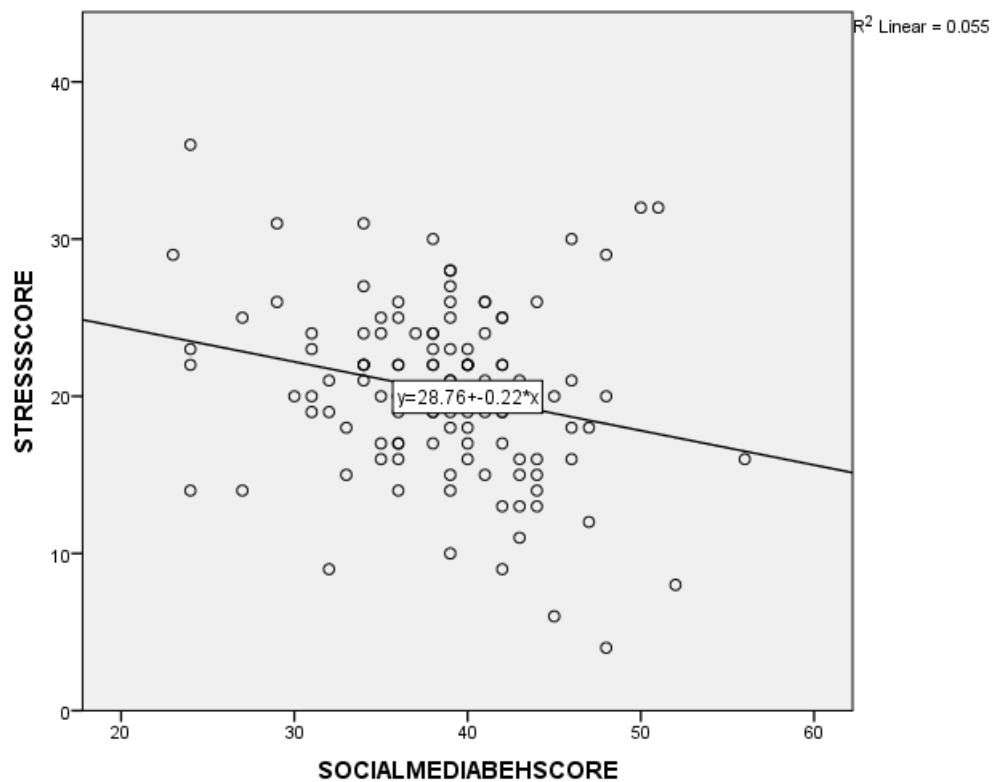
	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media Beh. Score	122	23	56	38.48	5.924
Stress Score	122	4	36	20.34	5.513
Self Esteem Score	122	3	30	17.57	4.669

Table 1 shows the Mean and Standard Deviation of social media behavior, stress levels and self-esteem among young adults. The provided descriptive statistics offer insights into the central tendencies and variability of the variables: social media behavior, stress levels, and self-esteem among the sample of 122 participants.

Table 2*Pearson Correlations between social media behavior & stress*

		Social Media Beh. Score	Stress Score
Social Media Beh. Score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.235**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	122	122
Stress Score	Pearson Correlation	-.235**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	122	122
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 2 shows Pearson's Correlation between social media behavior and stress level. The results indicate that the Correlation between social media behavior and stress level is significant at the 0.01 level. The correlation coefficient came up to be -0.235 ($p = .009$) which was significant at a 0.01 level. This indicates that there is a moderate negative relationship between social media behavior and stress levels among the sample of $N=122$ participants.

**Figure 1**

A Scatter Plot of Correlation Between Social Media Behaviour and Stress Level

Table 3

Linear regression of social media behavior and stress

Model Summary

						Chang Statistics			
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	R ² Change	F Change	Df ¹	Df ²	Sig. F Change

1	.235 ^a	.055	.047	5.380	.055	7.028	1	120	.009
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a. *Predictor variable: stress*

b. *Constant variable: social media behavior*

Table 3 represents the value of Linear Regression for Social Media Behavior and Stress. The R-value is 0.235, the R Square value is 0.055 and the value of Significance of F is 0.009. This suggests that social media behavior only predicts 5.5% of stress. This concludes that social media behavior has a positive relationship with stress.

Table 4

Correlations between social media behaviour and self-esteem

		Social Media Beh. Score	Self Esteem Score
Social Media Beh. Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.380**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	122	122
Self Esteem Score	Pearson Correlation	.380**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	122	122

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows Pearson's Correlation between social media behavior and self-esteem. The results indicate that the Correlation between social media behavior and self-esteem is

significant at the 0.01 level. The correlation analysis conducted between social media behavior scores and self-esteem scores revealed a statistically significant positive correlation of 0.380 ($p = .000$). This indicates that there is a moderate positive relationship between social media behavior and self-esteem among the sample of $N = 122$ participants.

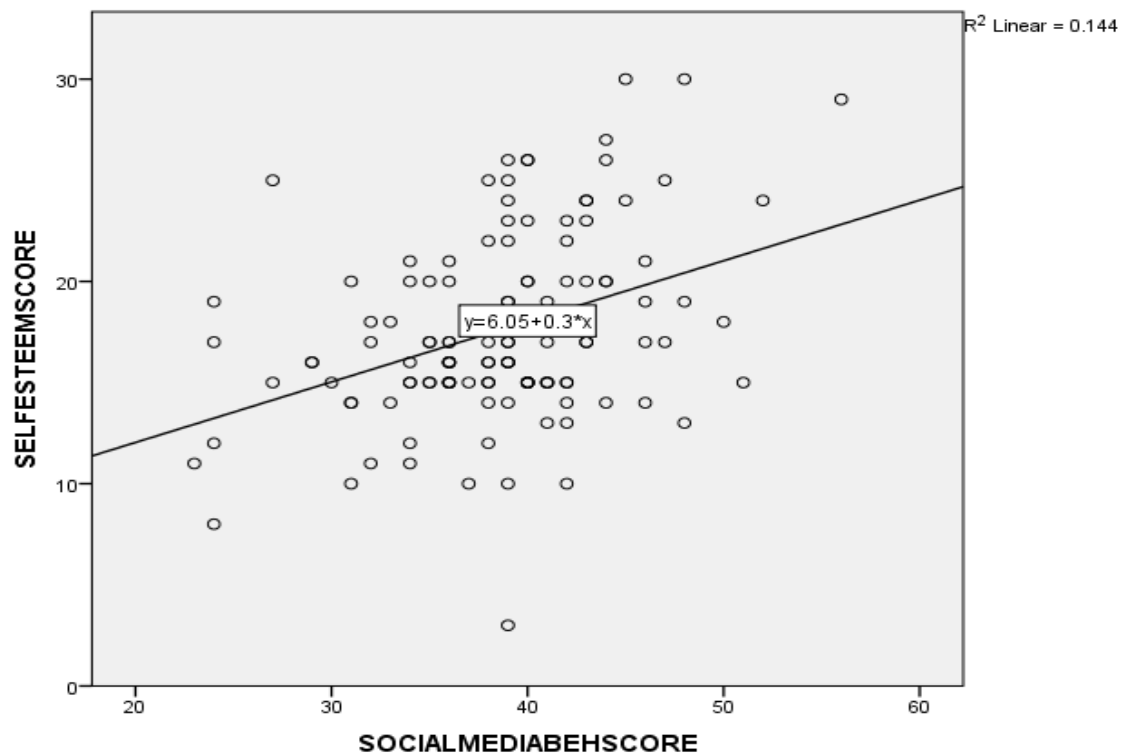


Figure 2

Scatter Plot of Correlation Between Social Media Behavior and Self-Esteem

Table 5

Model Summary of Social Media Behavior and Self-Esteem

Model Summary

						Change Statistics			
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Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	R ² Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	.380 ^a	.144	.137	4.337	.144	20.249	1	120	<.001

a. Predictor variable: self-esteem

b. Constant variable: social media behavior

Table 5 represents the value of Linear Regression for Social Media Behavior and Self-esteem. The R-value is 0.380, the R Square value is 0.144 and the value of Significance of F is 0.000. This suggests that social media behavior only predicts 14.4% self-esteem. This concludes that social media behavior has a moderate positive relationship with self-esteem.

Table 6

T value obtained for Males & Female for Social Media Behavior, Stress, And Self-Esteem

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Social Media Beh. Score	1	61	38.00	5.610	.718
	2	61	38.95	6.233	.798
Stress Score	1	61	20.07	5.546	.710
	2	61	20.61	5.511	.706
Self Esteem Score	1	61	17.48	4.190	.536
	2	61	17.67	5.137	.658

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tail ed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Social media beh. score	Equal variances	.2	.589	.8	120	.3	-	1.07
	assumed	93		86		78	.951	4
	Equal variances not assumed			.8	118.	.3	-	1.07
Stress score	Equal variances	.0	.777	.5	120	.5	-	1.00
	assumed	81		40		90	.541	1
	Equal variances not assumed			.5	119.	.5	-	1.00
Self-esteem score	Equal variances	1.	.220	.2	120	.8	-	.849
	assumed	523		32		17	.197	
	Equal variances not assumed			.2	115.	.8	-	.849
				32	336	17	.197	

From Table 6, gives insights into the mean scores, standard deviations, and standard errors of the mean, T value and sig level for social media behavior, stress, and self-esteem among two gender groups i.e., males and females each consisting of 61 individuals.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the analysis indicate that the first hypothesis of the research posited significant relationships between social media behavior, stress levels, and self-esteem among young adults, which was supported by the findings. A negative correlation ($r = -0.235$, $p < 0.01$) was observed between social media behavior and stress levels, indicating that increased engagement with social media platforms was associated with lower perceived stress. Similarly, a positive correlation ($r = 0.380$, $p < 0.01$) was found between social media behavior and self-esteem, suggesting that higher levels of engagement with social media were linked to increased self-esteem among the sampled young adults. Additional research by Wang, X., & Wang, X. (2020) further supported these findings, revealing significant negative correlations between social media behavior and stress levels ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$), as well as significant positive correlations between social media behavior and self-esteem ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.05$) among young adults.

The second hypothesis of the research, which proposed significant differences in social media behavior, self-esteem, and stress levels between men and women among young adults, was rejected based on the findings. Statistical analyses indicated no significant disparities between genders in social media behavior, self-esteem, or stress levels among the sampled young adult population. Specifically, the t-values for social media behavior (-0.886), self-esteem (-0.232), and stress levels (-0.540) all exhibited non-significant differences between men and women, with corresponding p-values of 0.378, 0.817, and 0.590, respectively. This suggests that both men and women experience similar levels of engagement with social media,

self-esteem, and stress within the studied population. Furthermore, additional research by Ma et al. (2022) found no significant relationship between various forms of online activity, including social media engagement, and self-esteem among 103 students, with gender differences moderating the associations between social contact activities and self-esteem. Despite this, women reported higher levels of self-esteem and participation in social contact activities compared to men, highlighting the importance of considering diverse online behaviors in understanding the impacts of social media use on psychological well-being among young adults.

The linear regression analyses revealed that social media behavior predicts a modest portion of both stress and self-esteem among young adults. For stress, social media behavior explained approximately 5.5% of the variance, with a statistically significant positive relationship suggesting that increased engagement with social media platforms may be linked to higher stress levels. Conversely, social media behavior explained a larger proportion (approximately 14.4%) of the variance in self-esteem, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the two factors. This suggests that higher levels of social media engagement may correspond to higher levels of self-esteem. The study conducted by Farooq et al. (2023) further investigates these relationships, using regression analysis to explore how social media behavior impacts stress and self-esteem among young adults. The findings underscore the importance of understanding the complex interplay between social media usage and psychological well-being in this demographic, suggesting potential avenues for future research to delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms of these associations.

Overall, these findings support the acceptance of the first hypothesis, indicating significant relationships between social media behavior, self-esteem, and stress levels among young adults. However, the second hypothesis, which posited significant differences in these variables between men and women, is rejected, as the analysis did not find significant gender

disparities in social media behavior, self-esteem, or stress levels among the young adult population studied.

CONCLUSION

The main aim is investigating the relationship between social media behavior, self-esteem, and stress levels among young adults. The study, comprising 122 individuals evenly split between genders, found that social media behavior has a greater influence than stress and self-esteem on young adults. The findings reveals that the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.235$) between social media behavior and stress level indicates a negative relationship, suggesting that increased social media engagement is associated with decreased stress levels. Conversely, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.380$) between social media behavior and self-esteem indicates a moderately strong positive relationship, implying that higher social media usage corresponds to higher self-esteem among young adults. Furthermore, linear regression analyses revealed that social media behavior explains approximately 5.5% of the variance in stress, indicating a weak positive relationship, while it explains approximately 14.4% of the variance in self-esteem, suggesting a moderate to strong positive relationship.

Additionally, the analysis showed that, on average, female participants exhibited higher levels of social media behavior, experienced higher stress levels, and reported higher self-esteem compared to male participants, indicating potential gender differences in these factors. Overall, the study underscores the significant impact of social media behavior on the psychological well-being of young adults, emphasizing the need for strategies to promote healthier usage patterns and enhance overall well-being.

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