



Exploring the Relationships Between Social Media Use, Materialism, Emotional Intelligence and Self Esteem Among Young Adults

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Abstract: This quantitative study investigated the complex connections between social media use, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and materialism among young adults. A sample of 212 Indian participants aged 18–25, completed standardized questionnaires assessing these constructs, and data were analyzed using correlation, regression, moderation, and mediation analyses. Results showed no significant direct association between social media use and either emotional intelligence or self-esteem, challenging prevalent assumptions about negative psychological impact of social media. A notable positive correlation was identified between emotional intelligence and self-esteem, aligning with prior research. Unexpectedly, social media use exhibited a weak negative correlation with materialism, suggesting that increased exposure may not inherently promote materialistic values as commonly assumed. Further, emotional intelligence significantly moderated the connection between social media use and self-esteem, indicating its potential role as a protective factor. The study discovered that materialism serves as a mediator in the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem. These results highlight the complex psychological effects of social media, shaped by individual differences and contextual factors. The study adds to the ongoing discussion on digital behavior and psychological well-being and emphasizes the need to consider personal and cultural differences in understanding digital behavior, calling for future research to explore strategies that enhance psychological resilience in diverse online settings.

Keywords: *Social Media Usage, Emotional Intelligence, Self-Esteem, Materialism, Psychological Well-being*

1. Introduction

Social media networks have grown ubiquitous in the modern digital age, impacting people's everyday lives in significant ways and changing how they perceive themselves, others, and the world. Young people are at the forefront of social media adoption, using these platforms to communicate, express themselves, and build their identities. Despite the many benefits of social media, there are growing concerns about its potential adverse effects on mental health (Appel et al., 2016). This study explores the complex interplay between young people's use of social media and three essential components of their psychological functioning: materialism, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem.

Materialism, defined as the tendency to view money and possessions as signs of success and pleasure, is a long-standing concern in consumer society. Social media platforms regularly expose users to carefully crafted portrayals of luxurious lifestyles, high-end goods, and ostentatious spending, potentially fostering materialistic values. Young people are constantly bombarded with images and messages promoting materialistic ideals, which may normalize and reinforce materialistic impulses (Kamal et al., 2013).

Emotional intelligence, “the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions, is crucial for effective interpersonal relationships and personal well-being” (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). The impersonal and sometimes superficial nature of online interactions on social media platforms may hamper emotional intelligence skills, including the ability to listen with empathy, resolve conflicts constructively, and regulate one's emotions.

Social media usage has a notable impact on self-esteem, which is an individual's overall sense of self-worth and acceptance. The prevalent culture of comparison and validation-seeking on social media may lead young people to feel inadequate, engage in social comparison, and experience self-doubt (Chua & Chang, 2016). Furthermore, excessive reliance on likes, comments, and online followers for affirmation may result in an unstable sense of self-esteem vulnerable to fluctuations based on online feedback.

Given the extensive use of social media among young adults and its potential implications for mental health, there is a pressing need for research to elucidate the complex relationship between social media usage and materialism, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem. Investigating how social media affects these psychological constructs may inform efforts to

promote healthier online behaviors and equip young people with the tools they need to thrive in the digital world.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the connection between social media usage and the materialistic values, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem of young adults. As social media usage continues to rise, particularly among young adults, understanding its effects on psychological and emotional well-being becomes increasingly important. By thoroughly examining these attributes and analyzing them, this research aims to fill knowledge gaps and provide data-driven insights. The findings may help policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals promote positive online behavior and student development.

2. Review Of Literature

Recent studies increasingly emphasize the intricate link between social media usage and mental health. While these platforms facilitate connection and self-expression, they are also frequently associated with mental health issues. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews consistently reveal small yet notable correlations between social media use and adverse mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression (Ahmed et al., 2024; Meier & Reinecke, 2020; Rounsefell et al., 2020).

Twenge et al. (2018) observed that the rise in screen time and social media engagement, particularly following the widespread adoption of smartphones after 2012, correlates with declining mental health indicators, including reduced self-esteem and increased depressive symptoms. These effects are especially troubling among teenagers and young adults. Additionally, problematic or addictive social media behaviors have been linked to poor sleep, heightened anxiety, and diminished overall well-being (Ahmed et al., 2024).

One contributing factor is exposure to idealized, often unattainable portrayals of life online, which can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy (Molina Ruiz et al., 2022). While some studies suggest social media may offer support or connection, particularly when used intentionally, the overall impact tends to be negative when usage is excessive or compulsive (JMIR Mental Health, 2022).

A central psychological mechanism in this dynamic is social comparison. Platforms that prioritize visual content such as Instagram can amplify upward comparisons, where users evaluate themselves against curated and often idealized representations of others. Vogel et al. (2014) found that such comparisons are linked to lower self-assessments and increased depressive symptoms. Similarly, Fardouly et al. (2015) showed that even brief exposure to

Facebook content could result in a more negative mood and greater body dissatisfaction in young women, with appearance comparisons serving as a significant mediator.

These findings suggest that social media environments often foster internalized pressures around appearance and achievement, reinforcing insecurities and lowering self-esteem.

Social media also influences how individuals manage their emotions. While some people use these platforms to distract themselves from stress or negative emotions (Wegmann et al., 2015), this can become a double-edged sword. When used habitually for emotion regulation, social media may reinforce avoidant or maladaptive coping strategies, contributing to addictive usage patterns (Casale et al., 2016).

Difficulties in emotion regulation such as managing disappointment, envy, or exclusion are linked to a higher risk of problematic social media use (Hormes et al., 2014; Wegmann et al., 2015). The constant emotional stimulation offered by platforms, whether through curated content or fear of missing out, can further challenge users' regulatory capacities (Casale & Fioravanti, 2015). Conversely, strategies like cognitive reappraisal, which involve reframing negative thoughts, appear to mitigate these effects and support healthier usage (Aldao et al., 2010; Kross et al., 2013).

Another emerging concern is the reinforcement of materialistic values through social media. Constant exposure to influencers, luxury lifestyles, and branded content can create aspirational norms that tie self-worth to appearance and consumption. Research has shown a significant connection between persistent social media usage and materialistic tendencies (Liu et al., 2024), with these platforms often serving as arenas for self-promotion and wealth or success comparisons (Ozimek et al., 2017; Pan & Meng, 2024). This unexpected finding also highlights the potential influence of cultural nuances, such as varying social values and economic aspirations in an urban Indian context, on how young adults engage with and interpret online content related to wealth and consumption.

Hwang and Jeong (2024) found that such exposure can stimulate luxury consumption behaviors among youth, while Dittmar et al. (2014) demonstrated, through a meta-analysis, that materialism is consistently linked to lower well-being, reduced life satisfaction, and increased compulsive buying. These tendencies are particularly pronounced when individuals derive self-worth from external validation and appearance.

Kaur et al. (2020) noted that materialism might mediate the link between social media engagement and post-purchase regret, reinforcing the notion that online environments can foster a cycle of desire and dissatisfaction. Zhao et al. (2023) further reported that materialistic

values are associated with insecure attachment, lower relationship quality, and diminished self-esteem, suggesting broader interpersonal implications beyond consumer habits.

Not all individuals are equally affected by social media. Recent studies have identified emotional intelligence (EI) as a protective factor. Zheng et al. (2023) found that higher emotional intelligence is positively correlated with self-esteem and may mitigate the negative psychological impacts of social media. Similarly, Aghababaei and Tabik (2015) found that individuals with higher emotional intelligence reported greater life satisfaction and were more resilient to online stressors.

Materialism also functions as a mediating variable in several pathways. For example, social comparison on social media can foster materialistic attitudes, which in turn mediate outcomes like compulsive shopping and reduced well-being (Al-Shboul & Maabed, 2024). Additionally, materialism may indirectly contribute to social media addiction through diminished self-esteem and perceived social support (Wang et al., 2022).

These findings point to a more nuanced understanding: psychological outcomes are shaped not just by the amount or type of social media use, but by individual traits and internalized values that moderate or mediate its effects.

3. Aim And Objectives

The current study is designed to explore the intricate connections between social media use, self-esteem, materialism, and emotional intelligence among young adults living predominantly in urban areas. The research specifically aims to assess the impact of social media engagement on levels of materialism, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem within this group. Additionally, the study intends to investigate whether emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, and whether materialism acts as a mediator in this relationship.

3.1 Hypothesis

H1: Social media usage significantly predicts materialistic values among young adults

H2: Social media usage significantly predicts emotional intelligence among young adults.

H3: Social media usage significantly impacts self-esteem levels among young adults.

H4: Significant relationships exist between social media usage, materialism, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem among young adults.

H5: Emotional intelligence serves as a moderator in the relationship between social media engagement and self-esteem.

H6: Materialism acts as a mediator in the link between social media usage and self-esteem.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Participants

To select 212 participants, purposive sampling was employed, comprising 100 men, 100 women, and 12 individuals of other genders. This distribution was chosen to ensure major gender categories were well-represented while also recognizing gender diversity. The sample was predominantly urban, with 92.5% of respondents residing in urban areas. The remaining participants were from suburban (6.6%) and rural areas (less than 1%). Participants had to meet specific criteria: they needed to be urban residents aged 18–25, engage with social media for at least an hour daily, and not be employed as social media influencers or managers, as these roles could introduce bias into the study.

3.2.2 Instruments Used

Data were collected using a demographic form and four standardized scales: SMUS (22 items, 9-point scale), MVS (18 items, 3 subscales), TEIQue-SF (30 items, 7-point scale), and RSES (10 items, 4-point scale). All instruments have shown good reliability in prior research, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70.

3.3.3 Procedure

After explaining the study objectives, participants about were invited to participate and provided with a Google Form containing information about the study, addressal of privacy and confidentiality, ethical consent intake for participation, the researcher's contact details, and the four questionnaires. Completing the assessments took approximately 20 minutes on average.

4. Results

This section examines survey data to explore the connections between social media use, materialism, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem among young adults. The analysis employs descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlations, frequency distributions, and regression analyses to identify significant patterns. The findings highlight social media's influence on young adult psychology and suggest directions for future research and interventions.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics for the main variables studied: social media use, materialism, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem among young adults.*

	Social media	Materialism	Emotional Intelligence	Self Esteem
Mean	51	51.98585	124.316	17.27358
Standard Deviation	16.35999	7.513955	18.86166	3.464192
N	212	212	212	212

The mean social media engagement score was 51.00 (SD = 16.36), indicating moderate usage among participants. For materialism, the mean score was 51.99 (SD = 7.51), suggesting a balanced tendency toward materialistic values in the sample. Emotional intelligence showed a mean score of 124.32 (SD = 18.86), reflecting generally high levels of emotional awareness and regulation. Self-esteem displayed a modest mean score of 17.27 (SD = 3.46). The largest variability in responses was observed in emotional intelligence (SD = 18.86), indicating diverse emotional capabilities within the sample.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 2: *Regression analysis examining the relationship between social media use and materialism among young adults.*

Regression Statistics					
Multiple R	0.173954				
R Square	0.03026				
Adjusted R Square	0.025642				
Standard Error	7.416992				
Observations	212				
ANOVA					
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	1	360.487	360.487	6.552908	0.011174
Residual	210	11552.47	55.01176		
Total	211	11912.96			

H1: The regression analysis indicates that social media usage accounts for approximately 3% of the variance in materialism ($R^2 = 0.030$). Though the effect size is small, the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 6.553$, $p = 0.011$). These results provide statistical support for H1, indicating that social media usage does significantly predict materialistic values among urban young adults, with a regression coefficient of $B = -0.0799$.

However, as shown in the correlation analysis (Table 5), this relationship is negative, contrary to the expected direction.

Table 3: *Regression analysis assessing the influence of social media use on emotional intelligence among young adults.*

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.072401
R Square	0.005242
Adjusted R Square	0.000505
Standard Error	18.8569
Observations	212

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	393.4872	393.4872	1.106599	0.294031
Residual	210	74672.34	355.5826		
Total	211	75065.83			

H2: This regression analysis reveals that social media usage accounts for only about 0.5% of the variance in emotional intelligence ($R^2 = 0.005$). With F-value of 1.107 and p-value of 0.294, this model does not meet the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. Therefore, H2 is rejected, as there is insufficient evidence to suggest that social media usage significantly predicts emotional intelligence among urban young adults.

Table 4: *Regression analysis examining the effect of social media use on self-esteem among young adults.*

Regression Statistics					
Multiple R		0.007024			
R Square		4.93E-05			
Adjusted R Square		-0.00471			
Standard Error		3.472345			
Observations		212			
ANOVA					
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	1	0.124942	0.124942	0.010362	0.919015

Residual	210	2532.007	12.05718		
Total	211	2532.132			

H3: This regression analysis regression analysis demonstrates that social media use explains virtually no variance in self-esteem ($R^2 = 0.00005$). With F-value of 0.010 and a p-value of 0.919, far above the conventional 0.05 threshold, the model is not statistically significant. These results reject H3, indicating no significant direct connection between social media usage and self-esteem levels among urban young adults, with a regression coefficient of $B = -0.0015$.

Table 5: *Pearson correlation examining the association between social media use, materialism, emotional intelligence, and self-esteem among young adults*

	<i>Social media</i>	<i>Materialism</i>	<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>	<i>Self Esteem</i>
Social media	1			
Materialism	-0.17395	1		
EQ	0.072401	-0.28515	1	
Self Esteem	-0.00702	-0.20268	0.213586	1

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

H4: The correlation analysis uncovers several significant relationships between the variables. Contrary to expectations, social media use exhibits a weak negative correlation with materialism ($r = -0.174$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher social media use is associated with slightly lower materialistic tendencies. There is no significant correlation between social media use and emotional intelligence ($r = 0.072$, $p > 0.05$) or between social media use and self-esteem ($r = -0.007$, $p > 0.05$). However, significant relationships exist between the other variables. Emotional intelligence is negatively correlated with materialism ($r = -0.285$, $p < 0.01$) and positively correlated with self-esteem ($r = 0.214$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, materialism is negatively correlated with self-esteem ($r = -0.203$, $p < 0.01$). These results partially support H4, as significant relationships do exist between several variables, though not all possible relationships were found to be significant.

Table 6: *Regression analysis testing emotional intelligence as a moderator between social media use and self-esteem.*

Model	Predictors	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	11.512	2.149	5.359	.000

	Social media (SM)	0.082	0.021	3.957	.000
	Emotional Intelligence (EI)	0.037	0.013	2.883	.005
	SM × EI (Interaction Term)	-0.0003	0.0001	-3.553	.001

H5: The results show positive relationships between emotional intelligence and self-esteem ($B = 0.037$, $p = .005$), as well as between social media use and self-esteem ($B = 0.082$, $p < .001$). Importantly, the interaction term between emotional intelligence and social media usage is statistically significant and negative ($B = -0.0003$, $p = .001$), suggesting that emotional intelligence moderates the link between social media use and self-esteem. Specifically, as emotional intelligence rises, the impact of social media on self-esteem diminishes, implying that the beneficial effect of social media on self-esteem is less evident at higher levels of emotional intelligence. These findings support H5.

Table 7 Regression analysis examining materialism as a mediator between social media use and self-esteem

Model	Predictor	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	56.0605	1.6713	33.5437	.000
	Social media	-0.0799	0.0312	-2.5599	.011
2	(Constant)	17.3494	0.7824	22.1740	.000
	Social media	-0.0015	0.0146	-0.1018	.919
3	(Constant)	22.7839	1.9347	11.7762	.000
	Social media	-0.0092	0.0146	-0.6345	.526
	Materialism	-0.0969	0.0317	-3.0598	.003

H6: This mediation analysis shows that social media use significantly predicts materialism (Path a: $B = -0.0799$, $p = .011$), and materialism significantly predicts self-esteem (Path b: $B = -0.0969$, $p = .003$). However, social media use does not directly predict self-esteem (Path c: $B = -0.0015$, $p = .919$), and when materialism is controlled for, this effect remains non-significant (Path c': $B = -0.0092$, $p = .526$). These results indicate that materialism mediates the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem. Specifically, social media use appears to decrease materialism (negative Path a), which in turn seems to enhance self-esteem (negative Path b). The absence of a significant direct effect, along with significant indirect paths, indicates complete mediation. These findings support H6.

5. Discussion

This study employed correlation and regression analyses to investigate how young adults' social media use affects their emotional intelligence, materialism, and self-esteem. The findings reveal a more nuanced picture than commonly assumed in popular discourse about social media's psychological effects, and in some cases contradict established literature.

Contrary to expectations, the regression analysis found no statistically significant link between social media use and emotional intelligence among young adults ($p = 0.294$). This indicates that, within this sample, the frequency and intensity of social media engagement do not significantly influence individuals' abilities to recognize, comprehend, and manage their emotions. This finding diverges from previous research by Wegmann et al. (2015) and Casale et al. (2016), which identified connections between social media use and challenges in emotional regulation. Our results are more in line with studies suggesting that emotional intelligence might operate independently of social media exposure, potentially acting as a moderating factor (Zheng et al., 2023). The difference may be due to our study focusing on general social media use rather than problematic use, the latter being more closely linked to difficulties in emotional regulation as noted by Hormes et al. (2014).

Similarly, the regression analysis showed no significant direct effect of social media use on self-esteem ($p = 0.919$), which contradicts a substantial body of literature reporting negative associations. For example, Twenge et al. (2018) found links between increased screen time and reduced self-esteem, while Vogel et al. (2014) demonstrated that exposure to social media profiles resulted in lower self-evaluations. The lack of a direct relationship in our study suggests that the social comparison mechanisms described by Fardouly et al. (2015) may not affect all users uniformly. However, our moderation analysis revealed that emotional intelligence significantly moderates the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, supporting findings by Aghababaei and Tabik (2015) that emotional intelligence acts as a protective psychological resource. This implies that young adults with higher emotional intelligence may be better equipped to handle social comparison processes on social media without negative impacts on their self-perception.

One of the most unexpected results was the inverse relationship between social media usage and materialism ($r = -0.174$, $p < 0.05$), which goes against our hypothesis and much of the existing research. Studies like Kamal et al. (2013) and more recent work by Liu et al. (2024) have typically found positive associations between social media exposure and materialistic values, attributed to consistent exposure to luxury lifestyles and consumer messaging. Our contradictory finding may be explained by several factors. First, it's possible that greater social

media exposure provides users with more diverse content beyond consumer-focused material, potentially exposing them to counter-materialistic values and perspectives. Second, this result might reflect growing critical awareness among young adults about the manufactured nature of luxury lifestyles portrayed on platforms, as younger generations become more media-literate. Finally, as noted by Pan and Meng (2024), the relationship between social media and materialism may depend on specific usage patterns and motivations rather than total engagement time. Moreover, cultural context may also help explain this contradiction. Given that the sample consists predominantly of Indian young adults, collectivistic cultural values and increasing media literacy may foster more critical perspectives on materialistic content. Indian youth might engage with diverse social media narratives including educational, spiritual, and socially conscious content—that counterbalance consumerist messaging and reduce materialistic attitudes.

The mediation analysis shed light on the indirect relationships between variables. Although social media use did not have a direct impact on self-esteem, it seems to affect self-esteem through materialism. Specifically, more social media use was linked to decreased materialism, which in turn was related to higher self-esteem. This mirrors findings by Kaur et al. (2020) and Wang et al. (2022) about the mediating role of materialism, albeit in an unexpected direction. This indicates that the link between social media and psychological well-being involves complex pathways rather than straightforward effects, supporting the nuanced perspective presented by Dittmar et al. (2014) on how materialistic values affect well-being.

Consistent with existing research, emotional intelligence was positively correlated with self-esteem ($r = 0.214$, $p < 0.01$), reinforcing the well-documented connection between these psychological resources. This is in line with findings from Aghababaei and Tabik (2015) and recent work by Zheng et al. (2023), highlighting the protective role emotional intelligence plays in psychological well-being. The negative correlation between materialism and self-esteem ($r = -0.203$, $p < 0.01$) supports Dittmar et al.'s (2014) meta-analytic findings that materialistic orientations generally undermine psychological well-being indicators, including self-esteem.

Collectively, these findings suggest that social media's effects are context-dependent and individually variable, rather than universally negative or positive. The lack of substantial direct effects, coupled with significant moderation and mediation relationships, highlights the importance of considering protective factors and indirect pathways when studying digital media's psychological impact, as suggested by recent systematic reviews (Ahmed et al., 2024; Meier & Reinecke, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This research explored the intricate connections between social media usage, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and materialism in Indian young adults using correlation, regression, moderation, and mediation analyses. The findings challenge oversimplified views of social media's psychological effects, revealing complex interrelations among these factors.

Regression analyses showed no statistically significant direct link between social media use and either emotional intelligence or self-esteem, contradicting common beliefs about social media's inherently negative psychological impact. This aligns with recent studies indicating that social media's effects are influenced by usage patterns and individual differences rather than just exposure time (JMIR Mental Health, 2022). The significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and self-esteem ($r = 0.214, p < 0.01$) supports existing literature on the connection between these psychological resources (Aghababaei & Tabik, 2015; Zheng et al., 2023).

Surprisingly, social media use showed a weak negative correlation with materialism ($r = -0.174, p < 0.05$), challenging the widely held belief that increased exposure inherently fosters materialistic values, as suggested by earlier research (Kamal et al., 2013). This finding prompts a reevaluation of how different social media environments and content types might shape materialistic tendencies among young adults, expanding on the nuanced relationships described by Ozimek et al. (2017) and Hwang and Jeong (2024).

The moderation analysis indicated that emotional intelligence significantly moderates the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, supporting its potential role as a protective factor, as suggested by Zheng et al. (2023).

This finding underscores the importance of emotional skills in navigating potentially harmful social comparison processes described by Vogel et al. (2014) and Fardouly et al. (2015). Additionally, the mediation analysis showed that materialism mediates the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, presenting an indirect pathway through which social media affects psychological well-being, similar to mechanisms described by Al-Shboul and Maabed (2024), though in an unexpected direction.

These findings highlight the nuanced psychological impacts of social media, which seem to be shaped by individual differences and contextual factors rather than simple direct effects. Similar to conclusions drawn by Meier and Reinecke (2020) and Rounsefell et al. (2020), our study suggests that digital well-being initiatives should focus on developing psychological resources like emotional intelligence rather than merely limiting usage time.

This research contributes to the evolving understanding of digital behavior and psychological well-being by demonstrating the complex interplay between social media engagement and psychological constructs. The findings emphasize the importance of considering personal and cultural differences in understanding digital behavior and call for future research to explore strategies that support psychological resilience in diverse online environments. By adopting this multifaceted perspective, we can develop more effective interventions to promote positive digital citizenship and psychological well-being in an increasingly connected world.

6.1 Implications, Limitations, And Directions For Future

The results of this research underscore the pressing need for strategies that tackle the psychological impacts of social media, especially its connections to materialism, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence in young adults. A key takeaway is the necessity of implementing digital literacy and critical thinking programs through schools and community efforts. These initiatives should focus on helping young individuals identify and resist the materialistic and consumer-focused narratives promoted by social media algorithms. Furthermore, advocating for a balanced lifestyle that limits social media use is crucial. Educational institutions and mental health experts can facilitate this by providing workshops on digital consumption and therapeutic services that assist individuals in setting boundaries and fostering meaningful offline interactions.

Additionally, considering the influential role of content creators and influencers in shaping online discussions, there is a need to actively encourage content that is emotionally intelligent and value-driven. Campaigns that emphasize emotional awareness, mental health, and self-worth can serve as counterbalances to the often superficial or materialistic content prevalent on many platforms. The involvement of parents, educators, and institutions is also vital. Engaging young adults in open discussions about the psychological effects of online environments and incorporating social media literacy into educational curriculum can help develop more informed and resilient media users.

However, this study has several limitations that should be noted. The cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships, as the data reflects only a single point in time. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of participants' responses. The study's scope was also limited, focusing solely on materialism, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence, while neglecting other important psychological factors such as anxiety, depression, body image, or loneliness. Moreover, social media usage was treated as a broad concept without distinguishing

between specific platforms, each of which may have distinct psychological effects. Lastly, the limited demographic diversity of the sample ($n = 212$) and its relatively small size restrict the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should therefore employ a longitudinal design to observe changes and potential causal relationships over time. Broadening the range of psychological variables and including more demographically diverse samples would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how social media affects mental health across different populations. Additionally, platform-specific analysis could provide deeper insights into the varying psychological impacts of different types of content and engagement models. Further research could also investigate the influence of specific cultural contexts, such as the Indian predominantly urban regional setting of this study, on the observed relationships. Addressing these gaps would significantly enhance the expanding body of literature on digital media and psychological well-being.

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