



Social media, absorption, and stress: Divergent paths to self-esteem

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ABSTRACT

Current research on social media and mental health has provided conflicting results, with some studies reporting negative results while others suggest that some aspects of social media use may contribute to beneficial outcomes. The present study examined the relationship between perception of Instagram use and self-esteem, focusing on the mediating roles of absorption and perceived stress. A total of 463 participants (85.1% female) responded to self-report measures assessing Instagram use, absorption, stress, and self-esteem. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlations, and PROCESS macro in SPSS. Results from a serial mediation indicated a significant total effect of Instagram use on self-esteem. While the direct effect remained significant, indirect effects indicated that stress mediated the relationship between Instagram use and self-esteem. In contrast, the indirect effect through absorption alone and a serial path through both absorption and stress failed to reach significance. These findings suggest that Instagram use may be associated with higher self-esteem, primarily through reductions in perceived stress. Absorption was not found to play a meaningful mediating role. The results highlight the importance of perceived stress in the relationship between Instagram engagement and psychological well-being, supporting the nuanced role of mediation in digital behavior research.

Keywords: perception of Instagram use, absorption, stress, self-esteem, social media

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INTRODUCTION

Background: General

Social media refers to the phenomenon of online applications and platforms designed for sharing content and networking; these applications have entrenched themselves in the social landscape and influence how we communicate with others. Globally, the prevalence of social media is estimated to reach a projected six billion users by 2027 (Marzo et al., 2024).

A large majority (about 72%) of Americans engage with at least one type of social media platform, and the use of these platforms continues to increase. In the USA, Instagram ranks as the second most popular social network after Facebook; 63% of adults report using Instagram daily, and 42% access the app several times a day. Young adults between 18 and 24 years old make up the largest segment of Instagram users, with 76% in this age range using the platform on a regular basis (Cary et al., 2024).

Algorithm-driven content feeds, highly curated content sharing, and direct access to audiences and communities are social media's hallmark characteristics with apparent impacts on mental health. Problematic social media use (or social media addiction) has been linked to negative mental health outcomes (Shannon et al., 2024). Studies have associated screen time with anxiety, depressive symptoms, social isolation, and ADHD symptoms (Xu et al., 2023). Social media also presents unique opportunities for creative expression, generating a sense of community, accessing health interventions, and finding valuable information (Balamurugan & Vijayarani, 2025). The negative effects of social media use are more thoroughly documented in existing literature than its positive effects (Naslund et al., 2020). A strong and well-established indicator of psychological well-being (Zell & Johansson, 2025), self-esteem is worth examining for insights into the positive and negative effects of social media on mental health.

Background: Specific

This study seeks to understand how social media use influences self-esteem, both directly and through cognitive-emotional processes, to examine the mental health consequences of online engagement. This is

not the first study of its kind, Jan et al. (2017) put forward the idea that increased social media use leads to decreased self-esteem, specifically looking at Facebook. This picture has been complicated by more recent work, Cingel et al. (2022) studied self-esteem finding that its impact as a result of social media use is person-specific while Miljeteig and Von Soest (2022) found person-specific effects with gender. Is social media's impact on self-esteem endemic or a product of individual differences?

Other effects of social media use, such as depression, reflect this inconclusive literature. Lin et al. (2016) found depression as a byproduct of use while more recent work, such as Vidal et al.'s (2020) review indicates that many factors, such as time and type of social media use, can influence psychological outcomes. On mental health outcomes, Marciano et al.'s (2024) review shows improvements in well-being across some dimensions related to social media use and deficits in others. Why are there such varied psychological effects linked to social media use and what factors contribute to an individual or cohort experiencing positive or negative effects at all?

One factor that may be significant in determining the effect of social media use on self-esteem is absorption. As it was first operationalized, absorption is a disposition towards having fully engrossed episodes of attention (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974). Furthermore, the cognitive engagement associated with absorption can lead to altered senses of reality and self (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974). Previous studies have explicitly connected absorption to the curiosity-driven and interest-driven use of Internet technology (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000) and related it to the concept of flow state as defined by Waterman (2025). A central feature of absorption and flow is temporal dissociation, often elicited by social media applications. In the context of social media use, extant literature widely points to the conclusion that absorption is associated with negative psychological outcomes. Evidence indicates that individuals with a greater disposition toward absorption are more vulnerable to addictive use of social networks (Cannito et al., 2022). Additional studies have supported this finding and further connected absorption with negative effects on self-esteem (Akkuş Çutuk, 2021). Despite positive short-term effects on stress being connected to absorbed engagement with social media, flow states in the context of social media use have also been associated with greater depression and anxiety (Brailovskaia et al., 2023); some platforms are also associated with higher levels of temporal dissociation compared to Instagram (Roberts & David, 2023).

Another common factor that may link social media use to negative psychological outcomes is stress. Social media platforms often expose users to a range of stress-inducing experiences, such as upward social comparison, which can lead individuals to evaluate themselves unfavorably against curated portrayals of others' lives (McComb et al., 2023). Additionally, the fear of missing out has been shown to be positively associated with time spent on social media and can lead to depression (Liu et al., 2023). Other contributors include cyberbullying (Maurya et al., 2022), pressure to maintain an idealized online persona (Samra et al., 2022), exposure to distressing or negative content (Huff, n. d.; Weir, n. d.), and disrupted sleep due to excessive screen time (Hökby et al., 2025; Nakshine et al., 2022). Collectively, these factors can increase perceived stress among users. Notably, elevated stress has been associated with diminished self-esteem, with evidence showing that chronic stress undermines individuals' sense of competence and self-worth (Galanakis et al., 2016). Given this established link, it is plausible that stress serves as a psychological mechanism through which

social media use exerts its influence on self-esteem. Clarifying this mediating role may provide a more nuanced understanding of the emotional costs of digital engagement and inform strategies to mitigate its adverse effects.

Present Study

While there is a growing body of research indicating a connection between social media and self-esteem, research exploring stress and absorption as mediating factors, independently and sequentially, remains limited. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between social media and self-esteem, modulated by cognitive and emotional mechanisms involving absorption and stress. Specifically, the following hypotheses were examined:

- H1. Social media use will be associated with self-esteem.
- H2. Absorption will mediate the relationship between social media use and stress.
- H3. Stress will mediate the relationship between social media use and self-esteem.
- H4. There will be a significant serial mediation path: social media use leads to absorption, leads to stress, which leads to changes in self-esteem.

METHOD

Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for social media research. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board of the City University of New York (protocol number 2024-0886-QC; 12/18/2024) prior to data collection. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as research participants, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed any study measures. Data were collected anonymously, and no identifying information was retained. All responses were treated with strict confidentiality and stored securely in compliance with institutional data protection policies.

Participants

A total of 463 individuals participated in the study. The sample included 394 females (85.1%), 47 males (10.2%), and 22 individuals who identified as non-binary (4.8%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 63 years, with a mean age of 23.6 years (standard deviation [SD] = 6.9). The ethnic composition of the sample was as follows: 68.9% White or European descent, 10.6% Black or African American, 8.4% Hispanic or Latino/a/x, 4.8% Asian or Pacific Islander, 4.8% Middle Eastern or North African, 4.8% multiple ethnicities, and 1.5% other backgrounds. In terms of education, 3.5% had some high school or less, 16.4% were high school graduates or equivalent, 13.2% had some college or technical school, 5.0% held an associate's degree, 30.2% had a bachelor's degree, and 31.7% held a graduate or professional degree. Regarding employment status, 33.5% were employed full-time, 22.0% part-time, 17.7% self-employed, 26.1% unemployed, and 0.6% retired. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and completed the study measures online. **Table 1** shows the demographic characteristics of the sample (n = 463).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (n = 463)

Category	Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	394	85.1
	Male	47	10.2
	Non-binary	22	4.8
Ethnicity	Asian or Pacific Islander	22	4.8
	Black or African American	49	10.6
	Hispanic or Latino/a/x	39	8.4
Education	Middle Eastern or North African	5	1.1
	Multiple	22	4.8
	Other	7	1.5
Employment	White or European descent	319	68.9
	Associate's degree	23	5.0
	Bachelor's degree	140	30.2
Instagram use frequency	Graduate or professional degree	147	31.7
	High school graduate/equivalent	76	16.4
	Some college or technical school	61	13.2
Employment	Some high school or less	16	3.5
	Full-time employed	155	33.5
	Part-time employed	102	22.0
Instagram use frequency	Retired	3	0.6
	Self-employed	82	17.7
	Unemployed	121	26.1
Instagram use frequency	A few times a week	27	5.8
	Less than once a week	3	0.6
	Never	3	0.6
Instagram use frequency	Once a day	46	9.9
	Once a week	1	0.2
	Several times a day	383	82.7

Measures

Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979)

The Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) is a widely recognized measure of global self-esteem. The scale includes 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Items are phrased in both positive and negative directions, requiring reverse scoring for the negatively worded statements. The RSES is a Guttman scale and has been extensively employed in psychological research. It consistently demonstrates high reliability and validity and continues to serve as an accepted standard measure for evaluating overall self-esteem.

Perceived stress scale (Cohen et al., 1983)

The perceived stress scale (PSS) evaluates how individuals subjectively perceive and interpret stress in their lives, rather than assessing the presence of external stressors. The scale contains 10 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, from *never* to *very often*. It was designed for use with adolescents and adults and features broadly applicable questions that are intended to transcend cultural and demographic boundaries. The PSS has demonstrated robust internal consistency and validity and is frequently used in research exploring the psychological effects of stress, particularly in relation to anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Online social support scale (Nick et al., 2018)

The online social support scale (OSSS) assesses individuals' perceptions of social support received via online platforms. It includes subscales to measure emotional, informational, social, and instrumental support derived from online interaction on social media platforms. The first part of the scale includes 23 social media platforms, where

respondents indicate usage frequency on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* to *a lot*. The second part of the scale asks participants to rate their experiences on those platforms using the same scale. Nick et al. (2018) provide evidence for the OSSS' reliability and construct validity.

Tellegen absorption scale (Tellegen & Atkinson, 2017)

The Tellegen absorption scale (TAS) assesses an individual's tendency to become deeply engrossed. Composed of 34 true-or-false items, the scale captures a wide array of experiences such as being emotionally moved by art, visualizing vivid mental imagery, or experiencing a sense of unity with one's environment. The TAS is associated with psychological constructs like openness to experience and hypnotic suggestibility. It has been widely used in studies of altered states, personality traits, and aesthetic or transcendent experiences. Higher scores indicate a greater propensity for immersive engagement and emotionally resonant encounters in everyday life.

User perceptions of social media scale (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013)

The user perceptions of social media scale was developed by Chan-Olmsted et al. (2013) and evaluates how users perceive the functional aspects of various social media platforms. The measure includes thirty items assessing five aspects including openness, commonality, conversationalism, connectedness, and participation. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) and examines users' cognitive and emotional interpretations of their social media interactions, rather than how they behave on the platforms. For example, "I feel I can take an active part in the communities I care about," from the participation sub-scale evaluates the extent to which users feel they can actively contribute and support communities they care about. This scale is valuable in examining the psychological

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Instagram use	82.86	16.63			
2. Absorption	20.98	7.15	0.183***		
3. Perceived stress	19.78	6.46	-0.242***	0.179***	
4. Self-esteem	28.35	5.79	0.314***	-0.093*	-0.674***

dimensions of digital engagement, particularly among youth, and has informed research on digital identity, user satisfaction, and experiences of online fatigue. We found the internal consistency of the scale be good (Cronbach's alpha = .88).

Procedure

This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. Participants were recruited through posts shared on social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit, which contained a brief description of the study and a link to the online survey. After following the link, participants were first presented with an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation. Only those who indicated their consent were granted access to the survey. The survey was administered via Google Forms and included a series of self-report questionnaires assessing the variables of interest, along with demographic questions. Completion of the survey took approximately 15-20 minutes, and no identifying information was collected at any point during the study.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize participant demographics, social media use patterns, and key study variables, including means, SDs, and frequency distributions. Bivariate correlations were conducted to examine relationships among Instagram use, absorption, perceived stress, and self-esteem. To test the hypothesized serial mediation model, the PROCESS macro for SPSS (model 6) was utilized. In this model, Instagram use was specified as the independent variable, with absorption and perceived stress entered as sequential mediators, and self-esteem as the outcome variable. Bootstrapping with 5,000 samples was employed to generate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects, addressing potential non-normality in their sampling distribution. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant if the confidence interval did not include zero. All data were screened for missing values, normality, and outliers prior to analysis. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ for all analyses.

RESULTS

Instagram use was prevalent within the sample, as 82.7% reported using Instagram several times a day. Only a very small minority used the platform less than once per week or not at all. The mean score for perception of social media (Instagram) use was 82.86 (SD = 16.63),

indicating highly positive perceptions and engagement. For the meditation and outcome variables, participants reported a mean absorption score of 20.98 (SD = 7.15), perceived stress at 19.78 (SD = 6.46), and self-esteem averaged 28.35 (SD = 5.79) (Table 2).

Bivariate correlations revealed a complex pattern of relationships among the study variables. Perception of social media (Instagram) use was positively correlated with absorption ($r = .183$, $p < .001$) and self-esteem ($r = .314$, $p < .001$), but negatively correlated with stress ($r = -.242$, $p < .001$). In contrast, absorption was positively correlated with stress ($r = .179$, $p < .001$) and negatively correlated with self-esteem ($r = -.093$, $p < .05$). Finally, stress and self-esteem were negatively correlated ($r = -.674$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher stress was associated with lower self-esteem. These correlations suggest that while perception of social media (Instagram) use may be associated with both positive and negative outcomes, effects may depend on how individuals engage with content, other users, or the specific platform.

A serial mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS model 6 (Hayes, 2022) to examine whether the relationship between perception of social media (Instagram) use and self-esteem is mediated by absorption and stress. Perception of social media (Instagram) use was entered as the independent variable (X), self-esteem as the outcome variable (Y), and absorption (M1) and stress (M2) as serial mediators (Table 3).

The direct effect of perception of social media (Instagram) use on self-esteem was significant, $b = .0565$, $SE = .0125$, $t = 4.54$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.0320, .0810], indicating that more positive perceptions of social media (Instagram) use was directly associated with higher levels of self-esteem.

Two significant indirect pathways emerged:

1. The indirect path of stress linking perception of social media (Instagram) use to self-esteem (perception of social media [Instagram] use \rightarrow stress \rightarrow self-esteem) was significant, $b = .0628$, 95% CI [.0427, .0845]. This indicates that more positive perception of social media (Instagram) use was associated with lower stress, which in turn was related to higher self-esteem.
2. The serial mediation of absorption and stress in linking perception of social media (Instagram) use to self-esteem (perception of social media [Instagram] use \rightarrow absorption \rightarrow stress \rightarrow self-esteem) was also significant, $b = -.0093$, 95% CI [-.0162, -.0038], suggesting that more positive social media (Instagram) use increased absorption, which in turn heightened stress and subsequently reduced self-esteem.

These findings suggest that perception of social media (Instagram) use has both beneficial and detrimental indirect effects on self-esteem, depending on the mediational path involved. Figure 1 depicts the path model displaying mediation of absorption and stress between perception of Instagram use and stress.

Table 3. Total, direct, and indirect effects

Effect type	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Total effect of Instagram use on self-esteem	0.1094	0.0154	0.0791	0.1397
Direct effect of Instagram use on self-esteem	0.0565	0.0125	0.0320	0.0810
Indirect effect via absorption	-0.0005	0.0023	-0.0054	0.0042
Indirect effect via stress	0.0628	0.0108	0.0427	0.0845
Indirect effect via absorption and stress	-0.0093	0.0032	-0.0162	-0.0038

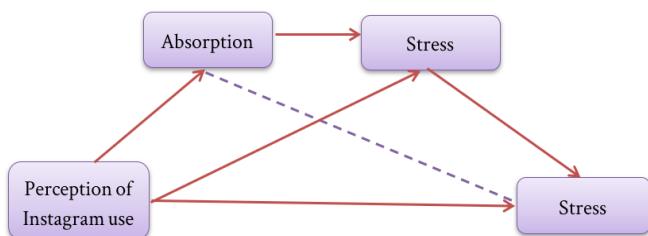


Figure 1. Path model displaying mediation of absorption and stress between perception of Instagram use and stress (paths in red are significant) (Source: Authors' own elaboration)

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the association between social media use (Instagram specifically) with self-esteem. Stress and absorption were included as potential mediators; social media use was found to be significantly positively related to absorption and negatively associated with stress. However, absorption was also positively associated with stress and negatively associated with self-esteem. Further, stress was negatively correlated with self-esteem. This suggests that stress can suppress social media's positive effect on self-esteem, even while being negatively correlated with social media use. This complexity implies that an accurate model must consider that while social media use may be able to positively affect self-esteem, it may also indirectly undermine this same effect by contributing to increases in absorption and stress. Maladaptive psychological effects may not be related to engagement, but user individual differences; when users have greater self-esteem and stress relief, they may engage in psychologically adaptive ways leading to positive outcomes (e.g., emotional support and strengthened bonds). For users with high absorption, compulsive or excessive engagement may lead to negative outcomes—greater stress and lowered self-esteem due to social comparison and anxiety. Use alone is not the whole story; this demonstrates the need to define type of engagement (mindful or not) and when talking about the impact of digital use.

The present study demonstrates that social media use is linked to heightened self-esteem. These findings support existing research that has found similar results and consider specific contexts and behaviors that may explain this positive correlation. For example, Trifiro and Prena (2021) found that intensity of use was a mediating variable between active Instagram use (using social media to proactively connect with others rather than engaging in passive comparison) and self-esteem; that is, respondents who identified as active Instagram users and reported using social media more intensely had higher levels of self-esteem. Further, such elevated social media activity is likely to expose users to interactions such as likes, comments, and shares that have been associated with increased self-esteem (Zulfanti et al., 2024). The role of other mediating factors associated with increased social media use, such as the building of social capital (Ostic et al., 2021), has been explored in connection with positive effects on psychological well-being. Other mediators, such as network size, have been shown to play a role (Lim et al., 2021) and may elucidate future research. Given the research presented here, a plausible model explaining this study's findings could be posited in the following way: certain types of social media activity (e.g., active use), in the right context (e.g., appropriately-sized networks), may have a higher likelihood of leading to rewarding short-term (likes and shares) and long-term (social capital) outcomes that positively affect self-esteem. Subjectively perceived gains and rewards,

associated with increased self-esteem, may incentivize the use of social media.

The first significant indirect effect found in this study highlights the potential beneficial impact of social media use on self-esteem through the reduction of stress. Specifically, greater social media use was associated with lower levels of stress, which in turn was linked to higher self-esteem. This aligns with previous research showing that reduced stress is associated with improved psychological well-being, including increased self-esteem, happiness, and productivity (Galanakis et al., 2016; Halkos & Bousinakis, 2010; Li & Hasson, 2020). One plausible explanation is that social media platforms facilitate social connection and support, which can serve as a buffer against stress. Online interactions offer opportunities for individuals to receive emotional validation, empathy, and practical advice through social learning (Deaton, 2015). Furthermore, sharing personal experiences in online communities can foster a sense of belonging and self-compassion, reducing the negative emotional impact of stress (Erfani et al., 2016). Social comparison processes on social media may also have a positive effect when individuals engage in downward comparison that affirms their own situation (Verduyn et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2014). These mechanisms collectively help users manage stress more effectively, contributing to enhanced self-esteem and overall well-being.

In contrast, the second indirect pathway suggests that social media use can also be detrimental to psychological well-being when it leads to higher cognitive absorption, which in turn increases stress and reduces self-esteem. This finding underscores the risks associated with heightened engagement with social media, which may reflect compulsive or problematic use. Cognitive absorption, characterized by deep involvement and loss of self-awareness during media use, has been linked to increased psychological strain and compulsion (Cannito et al., 2022; Turel & Serenko, 2012). Such absorption can foster constant exposure to idealized images and highlight reels of others' lives, encouraging harmful social comparisons that elevate stress and undermine self-worth (Cannito et al., 2022; Stapleton et al., 2017). Moreover, excessive engagement with social media has been associated with symptoms of behavioral addiction, such as withdrawal, mood modification, and loss of control (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2023; Denizci Nazligul et al., 2022; Griffiths & Kuss, 2017; Truzoli et al., 2023), all of which contribute to heightened stress. This chronic stress can erode self-esteem over time, especially when users begin to internalize unrealistic standards or feel inadequate by comparison. These findings emphasize the importance of mindful social media use, as high absorption may compromise mental health rather than enhance it.

This study revealed one pathway linking social media use to self-esteem, modulated by stress. This implies that increased social media use is associated with reduced stress, which in turn contributes to high self-esteem. This positive outcome can be underscored by the stress-relieving benefits acquired from increased social media use. Whiting and Williams (2013) highlight some common motivating factors of social media usage, such as social interaction, information seeking, passing time to relieve boredom, providing entertainment and enjoyment, and providing relaxation. These factors help users to relieve day-to-day stress and escape the realities of the world (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

In contrast, this effect is negatively impacted by increased social media absorption. This suggests that increased social media use is associated with increased absorption, which elevates stress and

consequently reduces self-esteem. One explanation is given by Gao and Chen (2021): they explain that the excessive use of social media results in increased social stress, *fear of missing out*, which is also related to compulsive checking behaviors and social comparisons that subsequently lead to reduced self-esteem.

The outcomes of this study point to the importance of moving beyond overly simplistic ideas that treat social media as either entirely beneficial or harmful. Instead, the findings resonate with dual-pathway models in media psychology which suggest that the effects of social media use are shaped by how it is used and what psychological processes it activates. Reinecke and Trepte (2014) argue that digital media can promote well-being when it fulfills personal and social needs, but it can also trigger negative emotions when it fuels stress or social comparison. Similarly, Valkenburg et al., (2022) emphasize that different users may experience different outcomes depending on individual susceptibilities and the nature of their engagement with media. Keles et al., (2020) reinforce this idea by showing that the harmful effects of social media often emerge in patterns linked to anxiety and emotional strain. In line with these models, the current study found that social media use can follow either a supportive route—reducing stress and boosting self-esteem—or a harmful one, where over-involvement increases stress and undermines self-worth. Taken together, these insights highlight the need for more balanced frameworks that consider both the helpful and the potentially damaging sides of online behavior.

The literature on social media is thus inconclusive; social media has been implicated in both positive and negative effects for connectivity and self-esteem. Though the findings share that increased engagement in social media results in increased self-esteem, negative self-esteem can also develop with high absorption. In one study, 59% of teens reported experiencing some form of online harassment, and 95% of teens reported witnessing mean or cruel media online that led to heightened anxiety and depression symptoms as well as lowered self-esteem (Jones & Omar, 2023). Intervention markers like parenting approaches, school policies, and public health campaigns to monitor screen time and compulsive engagement can reduce social media use and its negative effects while promoting the positive ones (George et al., 2023). Furthermore, digital literacy programs that encourage specific training activities in secondary school have increased students' awareness of leveraging the collaborative power of social media and avoiding compulsive and chronic use (Andersen et al., 2024). Children and adolescents should be taught to be mindful with social media use due to its varied effects dependent on the engagement approach.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, we cannot infer causation because we use a cross-sectional design. Moreover, our self-report measures may have introduced bias. Various sample characteristics and our lack of greater demographic diversity may make it difficult to generalize results across populations. Future research could address some of these limitations by making use of a longitudinal or experimental research design. Future directions could also look at personality and motivation factors resulting from or influenced by social media engagement. Future researchers could also look more explicitly at platform-specific effects and content-specific effects of social media use; finally, future work could also be aimed at exploring new mediating factors such as social comparison or emotional regulation in better understanding the nature of the proposed pathway(s).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study underscores that social media use is not inherently psychologically beneficial or harmful; its impact depends on the specific psychological makeup of individual users (i.e., absorptive tendencies). While social media can support well-being by reducing stress and enhancing self-esteem, it can also become emotionally taxing as a result of absorption. By identifying the underlying mechanisms determining outcomes related to social media use, such as absorption and stress, we can move toward more nuanced, evidence-based approaches to digital well-being.

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