



Relationship Between Social Media Use and Anxiety and Self-Esteem in Adolescents: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media platforms has significantly transformed the social lives of teenagers and raised important concerns about their mental health. Adolescence is a critical period marked by the development of self-identity, social connections, and self-esteem. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, facilitate constant interaction and comparison among peers, often shaping perceptions of popularity and belonging. Given these factors, the widespread integration of social media into daily life has encouraged researchers to investigate its potential effects on anxiety and self-esteem among teenagers. This review aims to examine the various aspects of social media use that are connected to anxiety and self-esteem in adolescents. The study employs a systematic analytical review of existing literature focused on teenagers aged 12 to 19 years. Twelve studies were analyzed to identify patterns and differences in their findings. The results showed that both intensive and problematic social media use are often associated with higher levels of anxiety among adolescents. Additionally, passive engagement with social media, such as merely observing others' content, appears to heighten the risk of anxiety. For example, viewing curated images and statuses can lead to negative self-comparisons and feelings of inadequacy. The findings related to self-esteem were more ambiguous. While some studies indicated a negative correlation between intensive social media use and adolescent self-esteem, others did not find a direct link. These results suggest that not only the amount but also the quality and context of social media interaction play important roles in shaping psychological outcomes among adolescents. Overall, the evidence points to a complex relationship between social media use and psychological well-being, influenced by multiple behavioral and contextual factors. Future research should utilize consistent longitudinal methods to more clearly determine the impact of social media on adolescent mental health.

Keywords: social media use, anxiety, self-esteem, adolescents, social comparison, cyberbullying, psychological well-being



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Introduction

Over the past decade, social media platforms have dramatically transformed the ways in which adolescents interact, form identities, and undergo psychological development (Kerr et al., 2025). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook have become ubiquitous in adolescents' daily routines. While these platforms offer new avenues for socialization, self-expression, and identity exploration, there remains ongoing debate regarding their impact on psychological well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2021; Ma, 2022). Adolescence is a formative period marked by heightened emotional sensitivity, a pronounced desire for social acceptance, and the development of self-esteem. During this stage, adolescents are particularly attuned to social feedback and the perceptions of others. The constant stream of social feedback, opportunities for comparison, and evaluative mechanisms facilitated by social media can significantly shape these developmental processes (Thorisdottir et al., 2019; Paul, 2025).

A substantial body of research indicates that social media use can negatively impact self-esteem. For example, a large-scale study involving 500 adolescents identified an inverse relationship between the intensity of social media use and self-esteem (Farooq et al., 2023; Paul, 2025). Specifically, adolescents who frequently engage in social comparison online tend to report lower self-esteem (Paul, 2025). These findings support social comparison theory, suggesting that exposure to idealized representations on social media can lead adolescents to perceive themselves as less adequate (Thorisdottir et al., 2019). Social media has also been linked to heightened anxiety levels. The perpetual environment of social evaluation fostered by these platforms can intensify fears of rejection and social anxiety (Aryal & Rajbhandari, 2024; Ciacchini et al., 2023). Viewing curated depictions of others' lives may generate uncertainty and anxiety about one's own social standing (Kerr et al., 2025). Moreover, elements such as cyberbullying and peer comparison have been shown to exert particularly strong effects on both anxiety and self-esteem (Gu, 2024; Aulia & Setiawan, 2024).

Nonetheless, not all studies report exclusively negative outcomes. Some research has failed to identify a statistically significant link between social media use and anxiety. For instance, a study with 60 adolescents found no significant correlation between social media engagement and social anxiety (Jolly, 2022). These results imply that the psychological impact of social media is neither uniform nor inevitable, but rather moderated by individual and contextual factors (Ma, 2022). The literature thus reflects the complexity and multidimensional nature of social media's psychological effects. These effects are shaped not only by the duration of use but also by the user's motivations, the quality of their interactions, and individual psychological traits (Valkenburg et al., 2021).

Gender appears to be one moderating factor. Research indicates that female adolescents tend to be more active in online social interactions, which may influence the relationship between social media use and self-esteem (Ma, 2022; Thorisdottir et al., 2019). Additionally, the impact of social media varies depending on the nature of its use. Active engagement, such as communicating and interacting with others, can foster social support and boost self-esteem (Thorisdottir et al., 2019). In contrast, passive consumption,

like scrolling through others' posts without interaction, may increase social comparison and is often associated with higher anxiety and lower self-esteem (Thorisdottir et al., 2019; Steinsbekk et al., 2021).

A critical mediating factor is the process of social comparison. Adolescents often benchmark themselves against the idealized lives portrayed on social media (Paul, 2025). Such comparisons can generate feelings of inadequacy and diminished success, potentially leading to increased anxiety and reduced self-esteem (Colak et al., 2023).

At the same time, social media also provides opportunities for social support and emotional expression for adolescents (Ma, 2022). Social media platforms allow adolescents to express their emotions, build social connections, and receive social support. In some cases, these factors may help increase self-esteem and improve emotional well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2021). One of the important limitations of existing studies is that most of them are based on cross-sectional designs (Kerr et al., 2025). This makes it difficult to determine cause-and-effect relationships. Low self-esteem may lead to increased social media use, or social media use may lead to decreased self-esteem. This bidirectional relationship is one of the main research gaps in the current literature (Valkenburg et al., 2021). The aim of this review article is to analyze the relationship between social media use and anxiety and self-esteem based on a systematic synthesis of existing empirical studies, to identify general trends, to explain contradictory findings, and to determine future research directions.

Research Questions

This review article aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. How are the intensity and type of social media use related to anxiety and self-esteem levels in adolescents?
2. How do social comparison, peer validation, and cyberbullying act as mediators in the relationship between social media use and anxiety and self-esteem?
3. How do gender, social support, and socioeconomic status moderate the psychological effects of social media use?
4. Do active and passive use of social media have different effects on adolescents' psychological well-being?
5. Is social media use a cause of anxiety and self-esteem levels, or is this relationship reciprocal and bidirectional?
6. What theoretical and methodological gaps exist in explaining the relationship between social media and psychological well-being in current empirical research?

Methods

Our study is designed as a systematic review and was developed through the synthesis of 12 studies. The studies were sourced from ResearchGate, PubMed, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, the Journal of Adolescent Health, and BMJ Public Health. The keywords used in the search were: social media, adolescent, self-esteem, and anxiety. The studies were published between 2019 and 2025, all in English and in academic journals.

Procedure: The studies were identified by three researchers, who determined their eligibility for synthesis. Each study was carefully analyzed, an overall conclusion was drawn, and the final study was prepared.



Literature Review

Based on the literature review, the impact of adolescents' time spent on social media on anxiety, self-esteem, and other criteria is variable. One study found no significant direct relationship between overall online activities and self-esteem. However, gender was found to significantly moderate the relationship between social interaction activities and self-esteem. Specifically, female participants reported higher engagement in social interaction activities and higher levels of self-esteem compared to male participants. This paper suggested that the psychological impact of social networking site (SNS) use may depend more on individual characteristics, such as gender, rather than the frequency of online activity alone (Ma, 2022). This finding is further supported by another study, which reported no significant relationship between social media use and social anxiety among adolescents. The statistical analysis showed that social media use did not significantly predict social anxiety levels. These findings suggest that social anxiety may be influenced by other psychological, social, or environmental factors rather than social media usage alone (Jolly, 2022).

In addition to studies finding no association between adolescent social media use and anxiety, there is also research concluding that social media has a dual effect on adolescents. While it enhances social connection, emotional expression, and knowledge access, it simultaneously increases risks of social anxiety, depression, and over-dependence when misused. Social anxiety is not caused by social media alone but emerges from the interaction between psychological vulnerability, platform characteristics, and environmental factors (Gu, 2024).

According to one study, higher frequency (more than 7 times per day) and longer duration (more than 8 hours per day) of social media use were significantly associated with greater levels of anxiety. Adolescents who reported feeling dependent on social media and unable to go a day without it had higher odds of experiencing severe anxiety. Feeling anxious as a direct result of using social media was strongly associated with higher odds of severe anxiety. While those who began social media use at or before age 10 reported the highest proportion of severe anxiety, age of initiation alone was not a strong predictor. A clear gender disparity was evident: females were more prone to severe anxiety (45.2%) compared to males (28.3%) (Aryal & Rajbhandari, 2024).

According to a systematic review paper that was analyzed, over half of the included studies (56.3%, n=18) reported a positive association, indicating that more social media use was linked to higher levels of anxiety. Screen time measures predominantly showed positive associations (72.7%). However, "other measures"—such as passive use or experiences of victimization—yielded inconsistent results, with nearly half (45.8%) showing positive associations and the remainder reporting null findings (Kerr et al., 2025).

Another study corroborates these findings, reporting that girls were more likely than boys to be active users (e.g., posting photos). Passive use was consistently and positively associated with greater symptoms of both anxiety and depressed mood. While active use initially showed a negative association with emotional distress, the benefits of active use may be explained by other psychological factors (such as social comparison and poor body image) and social factors (including self-esteem and peer support). As expected, social comparison and poor body image were strongly linked to higher

levels of anxiety and depressed mood, whereas high self-esteem and offline peer support were associated with lower levels. Consistent with previously synthesized findings, the positive relationship between time spent on social media and symptoms of both anxiety and depressed mood was stronger for girls than for boys (Thorisdottir et al., 2019).

Another study revealed that a significant majority (62%) of respondents reported feeling anxious or depressed due to social media use, often triggered by comparing their own lives to idealized images encountered online. Additionally, 45% of participants—predominantly females—reported a decline in self-confidence resulting from exposure to edited or filtered content. Furthermore, 30% of participants had experienced cyberbullying, which led to feelings ranging from embarrassment to severe psychological distress. However, the study also identified a positive dimension: for some individuals, social media provided a sense of community and support, helping to alleviate loneliness by connecting them with others who shared similar interests (Aulia & Setiawan, 2024).

According to the literature review, the results revealed a strong negative correlation between social media usage and self-esteem. Adolescents who reported high social media use (more than 4 hours per day) demonstrated significantly lower self-esteem scores compared to moderate and low users. Peer validation through likes and comments was found to temporarily enhance self-esteem, while negative feedback or lack of engagement diminished self-worth. Moderate users, however, reported more balanced emotional outcomes and greater psychological stability (Paul, 2025).

Another study yields complementary findings. According to this paper, (1) There was a moderately significant negative relationship between participants' Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) scores and their Social Media Disorder-9 (SMD-9) scores. (2) Additionally, this research examined the impact of body image. The data revealed a moderately significant relationship between RSES scores and Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) total scores, indicating that a more positive body image was associated with higher self-esteem. (3) A negative, weak, yet significant correlation was found between SMD-9 and MBSRQ total scores, suggesting that higher social media addiction was associated with a less positive body image. No significant correlation was found between participants' RSES scores and their age or parental education levels. Social media addiction levels negatively predicted both self-esteem and body image. Furthermore, body image was found to have a partial mediating effect on the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem. This indicates that while social media addiction directly impacts self-esteem, it also exerts an indirect effect on self-esteem through its influence on body image (Colak et al., 2023).

The majority of studies converged on similar findings. For instance, one study found that self-esteem and everyday social media use had a marginally negative association. Participants who spent more time reading text rather than viewing images or videos on social media reported somewhat higher self-esteem scores compared to those who spent more time with image- or video-based content. After controlling for these factors, daily social media usage remained a significant predictor of self-esteem. Age, gender, and socioeconomic status did not significantly predict self-esteem in this model (Farooq et al., 2023).



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In an analysis examining feelings of isolation and state/trait anxiety, the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) was negatively correlated with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and positively correlated with the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-Y1 and STAI-Y2). Adolescents with higher addiction scores exhibited lower self-esteem and higher levels of both state and trait anxiety. No direct correlation was found between social media addiction and social isolation. The Compass of Isolation Scale for Adolescents (CSIQ-A) was negatively associated with trait anxiety and positively associated with self-esteem, suggesting that less isolated adolescents were more consistently anxious and had lower self-esteem. A weak positive correlation emerged between age and state anxiety, indicating that older adolescents were more anxious. Low self-esteem was linked to increased hours spent on social media, more frequent checking behaviors, and greater video game engagement. Feelings of loneliness were positively associated with time spent online. Anxious adolescents played more video games and perceived time as passing more quickly. A linear regression

model identified female gender and trait anxiety (STAI-Y2) as significant positive predictors of social media addiction (Ciacchini et al., 2023).

Another study employing a three-week experience sampling method found that the between-person association between mean levels of social media use and mean levels of self-esteem was significantly negative: participants who spent more time on social media across the three-week period had a lower average level of self-esteem compared to those who spent less time. The within-person correlation, however, was close to zero, though significant—on average, participants' self-esteem did not increase or decrease as a function of their social media use in the previous hour. There was significant between-person variance in the extent to which social media use in the previous hour predicted changes in self-esteem. These results revealed no significant differences in the between-person relationships or within-person effects across different platforms (Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat) (Valkenburg et al., 2021).

Table 1: Key points of the articles

Authors	Sample size	Aim	Findings
Cecilia M.S.Ma 2022	193 secondary school students (111 males, 81 females, 1 not reported)	To examine the relationships between different types of social networking site (SNS) activities and adolescents' self-esteem. To explore whether gender moderates the relationship between SNS use and self-esteem.	The results revealed that there was no significant direct relationship between overall online activities and self-esteem; however, gender was found to significantly moderate the relationship between social interaction activities and self-esteem, with a statistically significant interaction effect where female participants reported higher engagement in social interaction activities and higher levels of self-esteem compared to male participants.
Cheryl Jolly 2022	60 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 (30males, 30 females)	To examine the relationship between the extent of social media use and levels of social anxiety among adolescents.	The results revealed that the relationship between social media use and social anxiety was not statistically significant, suggesting that social anxiety may be influenced by other psychological, social, or environmental factors rather than social media usage alone.
Sutong Gu 2024	A theoretical and analytical review study	To analyze the impact of social media use on adolescent social anxiety from multiple dimensions.	The study concludes that social media has a dual impact on adolescents, as while it enhances social connection, emotional expression, and knowledge access, it simultaneously increases risks of social anxiety, depression, and over-dependence when misused, suggesting that social anxiety is not caused by social media alone but emerges from the interaction between psychological vulnerability, platform characteristics, and environmental factors.
Mary Ann Paul C 2025	500 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18	To explore the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem among adolescents. To identify mediating psychological factors such as social comparison, peer validation, and body image concerns.	The results revealed a strong negative correlation between social media usage and self-esteem, as adolescents who reported high social media use (more than 4 hours per day) demonstrated significantly lower self-esteem scores compared to moderate and low users, and peer validation through likes and comments was found to temporarily enhance self-esteem, while negative feedback or lack of engagement lowered self-worth.
Mehmet Colak, Ozlem Sireli Bingol, Ali Dayi 2023	204 adolescents between the ages 14 and 18 (67 girls, 137 boys)	To examine the relationship between self-esteem and social media addiction levels in adolescents and the mediating role of body image in the relationship between these two variables.	The results revealed a negative moderate significant relationship between the RSES scores and SMD-9 scores of the participants (indicating higher social media addiction was associated with lower self-esteem), a positive moderate significant relationship between their RSES and MBSRQ total scores (indicating a more positive body image was associated with higher self-esteem), and a negative, weak, and significant correlation was found between the SMD-9 and MBSRQ total scores of the participants (indicating higher social media addiction was associated with a less positive body image).
Humera Omer Farooq, Hafsa Farrukh, Zainab khan 2023	500 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 (250 male, 250 female)	To intricate relationship between teenage social media use and self-esteem.	The results revealed that self-esteem and everyday social media use had a marginally negative connection, where participants who spent more time reading text than images or videos on social media had somewhat higher self-esteem scores than participants who spent more time watching images or videos, and after controlling for these factors, daily social media usage remained a significant predictor of self-esteem, while age, gender, and socio-economic status did not significantly predict self-esteem in this model.
Rebecca C., Graziella O. et al. 2023	258 secondary school students between the ages of 14 and 22	To explore the psychological correlates of social media and internet problematic use during the first year of the covid-19 pandemic.	In the total sample, BSMAS was negatively correlated with RSES and positively with STAI-Y1 and STAI-Y2, indicating that adolescents who were more addicted also presented low self-esteem and high state and trait anxiety, while no direct correlation was found between social media



			addiction and social isolation, suggesting that less isolated adolescents were more steadily anxious and had less self-esteem; additionally, a weak positive correlation emerged between age and state anxiety, revealing older individuals to be more anxious, and feeling lonely and spending time online were positively associated, with anxious adolescents playing more video games and perceiving time as passing faster, and a linear regression model identified female gender and trait anxiety (STAI-Y2) as significant positive predictors of social media addiction.
Patti V., Ine B. et al. 2021	387 early and middle adolescents from secondary school between the ages 13 and 15 (54% girls, 46% boys)	To investigate the momentary effects of SMU on self-esteem. To assess heterogeneity in these effects	The results revealed that participants who spent more time with social media across the three weeks had a lower average level of self-esteem compared to participants who spent less time with social media across this period, and there was significant variance between participants in the extent to which their SMU in the previous hour predicted changes in their self-esteem; however, results did not show significant differences in the between-person relationships and within-person effects of the use of these platforms on self-esteem (across Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat), and no significant curvilinear relationship was found between SMU and self-esteem.
Nishika Aryal, Anuja Rajbhandari 2024	401 adolescents between the ages 14 and 17 (58.1% male, 41.6% female)	To evaluate the patterns of social media (SM) usage and the levels of anxiety among school adolescents.	The results revealed that higher frequency (more than 7 times per day) and longer duration (more than 8 hours per day) of social media use were significantly associated with greater levels of anxiety, and adolescents who reported feeling dependent on social media and unable to go a day without it had higher odds of experiencing severe anxiety, while feeling anxious as a direct result of using social media was strongly associated with higher odds of severe anxiety, and a clear gender disparity was evident: females were more prone to severe anxiety compared to males.
Bradley K., Amrutha G. et al. 2024	32 original research articles (individual study sample sizes ranged from 51 to over 10,000)	To evaluate and synthesize the existing research on the associations between social media (SM) use and anxiety among adolescents.	The results revealed that studies (56.3%, n=18) reported a positive association, indicating that more social media use was linked to higher levels of anxiety, with screen time measures predominantly showing positive associations (72.7%); however, "other measures"—such as passive use or experiences of victimization—yielded inconsistent results, with nearly half (45.8%) showing positive associations and the remainder reporting null findings.
Ingibjorg E.T., Rannveig S. et al. 2019	10563 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 16 (50.3% girls, 49.7% boys)	To investigate the relationship between different types of social media use—specifically active versus passive use—and symptoms of emotional distress (anxiety and depressed mood) among Icelandic adolescents.	The results revealed that girls were more likely than boys to be active users (e.g., posting photos), while passive use was consistently and positively associated with greater symptoms of both anxiety and depressed mood, and although active use initially showed a negative association with emotional distress, the benefits of active use may be explained by other psychological factors (such as social comparison and poor body image) and social factors (including self-esteem and peer support); furthermore, social comparison and poor body image were strongly linked to higher levels of anxiety and depressed mood, whereas high self-esteem and offline peer support were associated with lower levels, and the positive relationship between time spent on social media and symptoms of both anxiety and depressed mood was stronger for girls than for boys.
Rina Aulia, Arif Setiawan 2024	200 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18	To investigate the effects of social media usage on the mental health of adolescents. The research specifically focused on understanding how different aspects of social media (prolonged exposure to content, peer comparison, cyberbullying, contribute to anxiety, depression, and issues with self-esteem.)	The results revealed that the majority (62%) of respondents reported feeling anxious or depressed due to social media use, often triggered by comparing their own lives to idealized images encountered online, while 45% of participants—predominantly females—reported a decline in self-confidence resulting from exposure to edited or filtered content, and 30% of participants had experienced cyberbullying, which led to feelings ranging from embarrassment to severe psychological distress; however, the study also identified a positive dimension: for some individuals, social media provided a sense of community and support, helping to alleviate loneliness by connecting them with others who shared similar interests.

Discussion

This literature review synthesizes 12 articles examining the relationship between social media use and anxiety and self-esteem in adolescents. The findings suggest that the relationship between social media use and adolescents' self-esteem and anxiety levels involves complex dynamics rather than a simple linear association. This complexity appears to stem from the interaction between patterns of use, individual characteristics, and underlying psychological mechanisms.

Findings from a large-scale Icelandic study by I.E.Thorisdottir et al.2019 highlight the importance of distinguishing between active and passive social media use. In particular, passive activities—such as viewing others' profiles and consuming content

without engagement— were strongly associated with elevated anxiety and depressive symptoms. This form of use exposes adolescents to upward social comparison by repeatedly confronting them with others' idealized lives. In contrast, active use, such as messaging, sharing content, and direct interaction, initially appears to be positively associated with self-esteem. Findings by Thorisdottir et al. (2019) suggest that this association is largely explained by factors such as social support and pre-existing self-confidence. Thus, active engagement itself may not be inherently protective, but rather a reflection of already available psychological resources.

Involvement of adolescents in social media is associated with their anxiety levels, with factors like gender, usage patterns, and behaviors on these platforms playing important roles (Nishika



[Aryal and Anuja Rajbhandari,2023](#)). The study demonstrated a positive association between social media dependency and elevated anxiety levels. Paradoxically, individuals who reported stepping away from social media were more likely to exhibit severe anxiety symptoms than those who maintained continuous use. These findings suggest that the relationship between social media use and anxiety is not straightforward, but reflects a nuanced and multifaceted connection.

The association between time spent on social media and symptoms of anxiety and depressed mood appears to be stronger among girls than boys. Regardless of observed gender differences, the limited research consistently shows that actively using social media may confer protection against emotional distress (i.e., [Thorisdottir et al.,2019](#)). While social media platforms offer opportunities for connection and self-expression, they also present risks that need to be addressed ([Rina Aulia and Arif Setiawan,2024](#)).

An interesting exception is the study by Cheryl Jolly ([2022](#)), which found no significant relationship between social media use and social anxiety. Jolly's findings did not reveal a statistically significant association, suggesting that the direct impact of social media may not be as strong as commonly assumed. Instead, the results imply that social anxiety may be more strongly influenced by individual personality traits, environmental factors, and offline social experiences than by social media use alone. The absence of a significant association in Jolly's ([2022](#)) study provides empirical support for one of the central arguments advanced by Kerr et al. ([2024](#)). Contrary to the widely held assumption that social media use directly causes anxiety, the evidence does not consistently demonstrate a strong or direct link between overall time spent online and anxiety levels. In fact, Kerr et al.'s review highlights that a substantial proportion of time-based studies report null or mixed findings, further questioning the simplicity of this commonly accepted narrative. Together, these studies underscore the need for more nuanced, specific, and multidimensional approaches in research on social media and psychological well-being. Rather than focusing solely on the question of "how much" social media is used, it may be more informative to examine "how" it is used, which platforms are involved, the underlying psychological mechanisms at play, and "for whom" these effects are most relevant.

One of the most important findings of the literature is that the quality of social media use is more crucial than the quantity. This difference is particularly evident in the effects on self-esteem. Our results showed that the effects of social media use on self-esteem are unique for each individual adolescent ([P. Valkenburg et al.,2021](#)). This finding challenges the oversimplified narrative that social media universally harms self-esteem. In reality, for the majority of adolescents, daily social media use appears to have minimal impact on self-esteem, while for a smaller subgroup, its effects can be meaningfully negative or, in some cases, even positive. As per the results of Colak et al.'s ([2023](#)) study, there was no significant relationship between the self-esteem levels of the adolescents and their ages, and the education levels of their parents.

There is a substantial inverse relationship between the number of hours per day that teenagers spend on social media and their self-esteem, indicating that more time spent on social media is linked to lower self-esteem scores ([H.O. Farooq et al.,2023](#)). Young

people who spend more time alone show lower levels of self-esteem.

The aim of this systematic review is to identify the main gaps in the existing literature examining the relationship between social media use and anxiety and self-esteem in adolescents by analyzing 12 empirical studies. To this end, the following gaps were identified:

- The platform, the type of content, and the purpose of interaction (e.g., entertainment, information gathering, or seeking social approval) have not been sufficiently examined;

- Perceptions of adolescence, social media use norms, family structures, and societal expectations differ across cultures. However, the impact of these differences has not been systematically compared.

- Individual differences in personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, extroversion), psychological resilience, and pre-existing mental health conditions have not been sufficiently studied;

- Differences in measurement tools limit the comparability of findings and the feasibility of meta-analysis;

- The positive aspects of social media, such as social support, a sense of community, and identity expression, have not been systematically studied enough.

Conclusion

The most important and consistent finding of the research is that the quality of social media use plays a more crucial role than the quantity. Research shows that the impact of social media is strongly dependent on individual characteristics, gender, current level of self-esteem, and personality type. Innovative research by Valkenburg et al. ([2021](#)) shows that for the vast majority of young people, the impact of daily social media use on self-esteem is minimal, but for a small group, this impact can be significantly negative or positive. The geographical diversity of the studies (Nepal, Turkey, Pakistan, Italy, Iceland, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Indonesia, the United States). In conclusion, this literature review shows that social media is an integral part of modern adolescents' lives and that its impact on psychological health is more complex than a simple cause-and-effect relationship.

R.Q.1: Intensive and problematic social media use, especially passive forms of use, is associated with higher levels of anxiety in adolescents. There is a more complex and nonlinear relationship between self-esteem and social media use. While some studies have reported strong negative correlations, others have not found a direct effect. This suggests that the effect is related to the pattern of use and individual characteristics, rather than intensity.

R.Q.2: Social comparison, especially upward comparison, can make teens feel like they are not good enough, increasing anxiety and lowering self-esteem. While peer approval can provide a temporary boost to self-esteem, lack of approval or negative feedback can lead to self-doubt. Cyberbullying, on the other hand, can directly cause psychological trauma, increasing both anxiety and lowering self-esteem.

R.Q.3: Gender is one of the most important moderators. Although girls are more active on social media, they are more vulnerable to symptoms of anxiety and depression. Social support, especially offline peer support, acts as a protective factor.



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Socioeconomic status, however, has not been found to be directly related to self-esteem or anxiety in most studies.

R.Q.4: Passive use- content consumption only- is associated with anxiety and low self-esteem, leading to more social comparisons. While active use- communication and sharing- may initially appear protective, much of this effect is explained by available psychological resources (high self-esteem, social support). Therefore, the impact of active use also depends on individual characteristics.

R.Q.5: It is difficult to establish causality because existing studies are largely cross-sectional in design. Just as adolescents with low self-esteem are more likely to engage in social media use, social media use may also lower self-esteem. Therefore, the relationship is thought to be bidirectional and cyclical.

R.Q.6: Theoretical gaps: mediating mechanisms such as social comparison, body image, and cyberbullying have not been systematically modeled.

Methodological gaps: most studies are fragmentary, rely on self-report measures, and lack objective indicators of social media use. There is also a need for conceptual clarification between forms of use (active/passive).

Future Research

Future research should adopt more objective and nuanced measures of social media use.

Mediators such as social comparison, fear of missing out (FoMo), cyberbullying, and body image dissatisfaction should be examined more systematically.

Future studies should pay greater attention to individual differences. Factors such as personality traits, pre-existing mental health conditions, resilience, and offline social support may moderate the effects of social media.

Limitations

This research has limitations to consider. Although studies attempt to differentiate between active and passive use, this

distinction is not always clear-cut, especially when based on participant self-reports. Although the studies included in the compilation are geographically diverse (Nepal, Iceland, Indonesia, etc). These cultures have different norms for social media use, perception of adolescence, and family dynamics. This limits the generalizability of the results to the entire universe.

Mediating factors such as social comparison and cyberbullying are frequently emphasized in theoretical discussions; however, the predominance of cross-sectional research design limits the ability to rigorously and reliably test whether these variables genuinely mediate the relationship between social media use and psychological health.

Author Contributions

Ganira Ramizzada: Contributed to the writing of the Abstract, Introduction, and formulation of the Research Questions.

Gizgayit Imanova: Contributed to the development of the Methods, conducted the Literature Review, and prepared the Table.

Gulay Vahidova: Contributed to the Discussion, Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research sections.

Gulshan Aliyeva: Contributed to the study as an advisor, providing supervision and guidance.

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Competing Interests

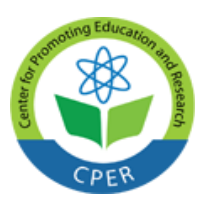
All Authors disclose that there is no conflict of interest at the time of submission, and other matters that may influence the manuscript. None of the authors has a conflict of interest to disclose.

AI-Assisted Technologies Statement

The authors did not utilize any AI-powered software or assistant in the development of the research design, analysis, interpretation, or overall preparation of this manuscript. All content, ideas, and intellectual contributions are solely the responsibility of the authors. AI tools were used exclusively for grammar checking and language refinement.

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