



## The impact of social media on mental health: A psychological study of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem

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### ABSTRACT

The increasingly intensive use of social media in everyday life has raised various concerns about its impact on mental health, particularly in relation to anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. This study aims to comprehensively examine the relationship between social media use and these three aspects of mental health through a systematic literature review (SLR) approach. Data was obtained from scientific articles published between 2018 and 2025 with the following inclusion criteria: discussing the relationship between social media use and anxiety, depression, or self-esteem; using a psychological approach; and published in indexed journals. Qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns of relationships and psychological mechanisms that emerged from various findings. The results of the study show that intensive social media use is associated with increased anxiety and depression and decreased self-esteem. The main psychological mechanism found is *upward social comparison*, which is the tendency for individuals to compare themselves with the ideal standards displayed on social media, thereby triggering negative self-evaluation. Decreased self-esteem was found to be an important mediator linking social media use to the emergence of symptoms of depression and anxiety. This study confirms that uncontrolled social media use has the potential to worsen mental health, especially among adolescents and young adults. These findings have important implications for psychological interventions, digital literacy, and policies for healthier social media use.

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## Introduction

Nowadays, people communicate differently than in the past. The development of the Internet has enabled people to communicate not only face-to-face but also through social media. The emergence of various social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, WhatsApp, and others has offered many features that facilitate interaction, making social media an integral part of modern life.

Based on the results of the *Global Overview Report*, which is a combination of analyses by We Are Social and Meltwater, there are 143 million active social media users in Indonesia. This data makes Indonesia one of the countries with the largest number of social media users in the world. The existence of social media does indeed provide many benefits for modern human life, ranging from expanding social networks, long-distance interaction, means of self-expression, and many others. However, these benefits also undeniably have negative impacts if used intensively and massively.

Psychological research shows that the intensity of social media use is closely related to an increase in psychological disorders such as anxiety, stress, depression, and body image issues. Exposure to idealized lifestyles, academic achievements, or personal successes of others, which in many cases are manipulative and do not reflect reality, can trigger excessive social comparison, lower self-esteem, and create unrealistic expectations of oneself (Oktaviana et al., 2025). Various mental health problems arise as a result, such as anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and even depression.

Previous studies discussing the impact of social media and mental health have been conducted extensively. However, in general, the scope of discussion only relates to one variable to another, such as mental health and anxiety, mental health and self-esteem, and

mental health and depression. In this study, the integration of these three issues will be discussed in a single analytical framework, making this study important. This study will provide a more complete picture and a more comprehensive understanding of how social media use can affect mental health from various psychological dimensions.

## Method

The method used to examine the Impact of social media on Mental Health is a systematic literature review approach. The data used in this study is secondary data derived from various scientific publications published between 2018 and 2015. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were also applied to ensure the relevance and quality of the study. The inclusion criteria must meet the following: 1) The journal articles used discuss the relationship between social media use and aspects of mental health (anxiety, depression, self-esteem). 2) The research uses a psychological or socio-psychological approach. 3) The articles are published in peer-reviewed journals or indexed in the Google Scholar and Science Direct databases. The exclusion criteria must meet the following requirements: 1) Opinion articles, editorials, or reports that are not empirical in nature. 2) Publications that lack methodological clarity.

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying the main themes that emerged from the collected literature. This was followed by content analysis and thematic synthesis, which involved combining findings from various research sources. To maintain the credibility of the results, source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from various literature and peer checking with supervisors or experts in the field of social psychology. In addition, each source was cited according

to scientific principles to avoid interpretive bias and maintain academic integrity.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the literature review with the inclusion and exclusion criteria mentioned

in the research methods section above, the following review results were obtained.

Based on the above data, several findings were identified regarding the impact of social media on mental health, particularly in relation to anxiety, depression, and self-

**Table 1. Literature review on the topic**

No	Authors	Title	Methods & Samples	Main Variabels	Main Findings	Sources
1	Keyte, Mullis, Egan, et al. (2020)	<i>Self-Compassion and Instagram Use Is Explained by the Relation to Anxiety, Depression, and Stress</i>	Cross-sectional, N=173 young adults (mean age ~24.5)	Intensity of Instagram use; Self-compassion; Depression; Anxiety; Stress	Intensity of Instagram use is positively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress; self-compassion is negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress.	<i>Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science</i>
2	Blanco, Reyes García, Landa-Blanco, et al. (2024)	<i>Social media addiction relationship with academic engagement in university students: The mediator role of self-esteem, depression, and anxiety</i>	Non-experimental quantitative study, N = 412 students (University of Honduras).	Social media addiction; Depression; Anxiety; Self-esteem; Academic engagement.	Social media addiction does not directly reduce academic engagement, but does so indirectly through increased depression and decreased self-esteem.	<i>Heliyon</i>
3	Sekarlangit, Ridjab, Suryani, Juliawati (2022)	<i>Impact of Instagram Usage Intensity on Self-Esteem among Preclinical Medical Students</i>	Cross-sectional study, N = 108 preclinical medical students in Jakarta.	Intensity of Instagram use; Self-esteem.	30.6% of intensive Instagram users have low self-esteem; there is a significant relationship between Instagram use intensity and self-esteem (p = 0.031).	Althea Medical Journal
4	Kotijah, Yusuf, Fitryasari, Verayanti, Sumiatin (2023)	<i>Social Media and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem among Adolescents: A Systematic Review</i>	Systematic review (adolescents).	Social media use; Self-esteem.	Social media use has both negative and positive effects on self-esteem, depending on the context of use.	<i>Malaysian Journal of Public Health Medicine</i>
5	Karim, Oyewande, Abdalla, Chaudhry, Khan (2020)	<i>Social Media Use and Its Connection to Mental Health: A Systematic Review</i>	Systematic review, 16 studies selected from databases such as Google Scholar, etc.	Social media use; Anxiety; Depression.	High social media use is associated with increased anxiety and depression, although most of the studies employ cross-sectional designs.	Cureus
6	Gugala & Pacocha (2024)	<i>The Influence of Social Media on Mental Well-being – A Review of Literature</i>	Literatur review (Polandia)	Social media use; Anxiety; Depression; Self-esteem; Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).	Unlimited social media use increases the risk of mood disorders, anxiety, and depression, and also lowers self-esteem.	<i>International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science</i>
7	Massimiliano Sommantico, Ferdinando Ramaglia & Marina Lacatena (2023)	<i>Relationships between Depression, Fear of Missing Out and Social Media Addiction: The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem</i>	Quantitative study, N = 311 young adults in Italy (18–35 years).	Social media addiction; Depression; Fear of Missing Out (FoMO); Self-esteem.	It was found that self-esteem mediates the relationship between social media addiction and depression as well as FoMO.	<i>Healthcare (MDPI)</i>

esteem. The relationships between each variable are as follows.

### ***The relationship between social media and self-esteem***

In a study conducted by Sekarlangit, Ridjab, Suryani, Juliawati (2022), it was mentioned that intensive use of Instagram has a positive correlation with decreased self-esteem. This was also mentioned in a study conducted by Gugala & Pacocha (2024), which stated that unlimited use of social media carries the risk of mood disorders, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem.

### ***The relationship between social media and depression***

Several studies have also discussed the link between social media and depression. Research conducted by Karim, Oyewande, Abdalla, Chaudhry, Khan (2020) states that social media use has a positive correlation with depression. High social media use is associated with increased anxiety and depression. Research by Gugala and Pachoca (2004) also mentions that unlimited use of social media risks increasing mood disorders, anxiety, depression, and lowering self-esteem.

According to Social Comparison Theory, individuals automatically compare themselves to the ideal standards displayed by other users. When someone feels that they cannot achieve these standards, negative self-evaluation arises, leading to decreased self-esteem. Social media is a triggering factor that can lead individuals to engage in unrealistic self-evaluation. Individuals tend to compare themselves with the ideal representations displayed on social media without considering the reality that life has its ups and downs and is not always as ideal as it is portrayed on social media. This condition triggers a decline in self-esteem.

### ***The relationship between social media and self-esteem***

Research conducted by Blanco, Reyes Garcia, Landa, Blanco, et al (2024) states that addiction to social media can indirectly cause a decline in self-esteem. Other studies also mention that unlimited use of social media can also cause a decline in self-esteem. Overall, the analyzed research results show that the impact of social media on self-esteem, depression, and anxiety is interrelated in one main psychological mechanism, namely maladaptive social comparison. According to Festinger (1954), individuals have an intrinsic drive to evaluate themselves in relation to others, and one of the easiest ways to do this is to compare themselves with others. On social media, this drive is amplified by the unlimited availability of information, attractive visualizations, and the constant display of ideal standards. Therefore, social media becomes a fertile ground for *upward social comparison*, which is comparing oneself with others who are considered to be in a better position. This process is the main psychological mechanism behind the emergence of negative effects on mental health.

Several studies have shown that excessive *screen time* on Instagram can lead to a decline in self-esteem. This is because Instagram is dominated by images of ideal body types, luxurious lifestyles, and academic or professional achievements. Social comparison theory argues that individuals tend to develop negative self-evaluations when the ideal standards displayed are unattainable, leading to a decline in self-esteem. Social media acts as a powerful trigger that encourages individuals to evaluate themselves unrealistically, as they compare themselves to ideal representations that do not reflect real-life conditions. As a result, self-esteem becomes vulnerable to decline, especially among adolescents and

young adults who are still in the process of forming their identity.

A decline in self-esteem can become a trigger for depression in individuals. The cycle that forms in social comparison, for example, often becomes a negative stressor. At first, individuals will see the ideal lives of others and then compare themselves negatively, subsequently feeling that they have failed or are unable to achieve those standards, and ultimately begin to internalize negative feelings into a low self-perception. Low self-perception leads to low self-esteem, and low self-esteem can trigger stress. Accumulated stress can cause depression. Thus, the relationship between these three variables forms a psychological cycle that mutually influences and exacerbates the mental condition of social media users, especially if users lack good control over the intensity of their usage and cannot separate the virtual world from reality.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of a literature review, it can be concluded that the use of social media has a significant impact on mental health, particularly in terms of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. High intensity of social media use is consistently associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as decreased self-esteem in various age groups, especially adolescents and young adults. The main psychological mechanism linking these three variables is *upward social comparison*, which is the tendency of individuals to compare themselves with the ideal standards displayed on social media. This maladaptive social comparison triggers negative self-evaluation, which then lowers self-esteem and increases vulnerability to psychological disorders.

In addition, self-esteem has been shown to play an important mediating role in explaining how excessive social media use can lead to depression and anxiety. Thus, uncontrolled social media use can create a psychological cycle that exacerbates an individual's mental health. These findings underscore the importance of digital literacy, self-control in social media use, and psychological support to help individuals manage the psychological impact of social media exposure.

## Declaration of Ownership

This article is my original work.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

## Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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