

International Journal of Psychology (IJP)

Social Media Use and Its Effects on Self-Esteem among Young Adult in Brazil

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Article History

Received 28th March 2024

Received in Revised Form 6th April 2024

Accepted 9th May 2024

How to Cite

Barbosa, A. (2024). Social Media Use and Its Effects on Self-Esteem among Young Adult in Brazil. *International Journal of Psychology*, 9(2), 13 – 25. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ijp.2618>

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to analyze the social media use and its effects on self-esteem among young adult in Brazil.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: A study in Brazil found that frequent social media use was linked to lower self-esteem among young adults. Comparing themselves with others online, especially in appearance and lifestyle, negatively affected participants' self-perceptions. Social media use was associated with feelings of inadequacy and social isolation, although positive interactions could mitigate self-esteem issues. Overall, the study highlighted the intricate relationship between social media and self-esteem in Brazilian youth.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social comparison theory, self-presentation theory & uses and gratifications theory may be used to anchor future studies on the social media use and its effects on self-esteem among young adult in Brazil. Educational programs and interventions should be developed to promote healthy social media use and enhance self-esteem among young adults in Brazil. Government agencies could collaborate with social media companies to develop and enforce policies that address harmful content, cyberbullying, and unrealistic beauty standards on online platforms.

Keywords: *Social Media, Self-Esteem, Young Adult*

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INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem, defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth and value, plays a crucial role in psychological well-being and social functioning (Rosenberg, 2015). In developed economies like the United States, there has been a growing concern over declining self-esteem among certain demographic groups, particularly adolescents and young adults. Research indicates that factors such as social media usage and academic pressures contribute to decreased self-esteem levels among youth in the US. For example, a study by Twenge (2019) found that the prevalence of depressive symptoms among adolescents in the US increased significantly between 2005 and 2017, coinciding with the rise of social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. Similarly, academic pressure and performance expectations have been shown to negatively impact self-esteem levels among college students in the UK and Japan, with studies reporting a rise in stress-related mental health issues among university students in these countries.

In developing economies, such as India and Brazil, self-esteem trends may vary due to unique socio-cultural and economic factors. Research suggests that rapid urbanization and modernization in these countries have led to shifts in traditional values and social dynamics, influencing individuals' self-perceptions and self-worth. For example, a study by Patel (2017) examined self-esteem levels among adolescents in urban India and found that exposure to Western media and consumer culture was associated with lower self-esteem scores. Additionally, economic disparities and social inequality in developing economies contribute to variations in self-esteem across different socio-economic groups. For instance, research in Brazil has shown that individuals from lower-income backgrounds tend to have lower self-esteem compared to those from higher-income households, highlighting the impact of socio-economic factors on self-esteem levels in developing economies.

In the United States, self-esteem trends have garnered considerable attention, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Studies indicate that social media usage, peer pressure, and societal standards contribute to fluctuations in self-esteem levels. For example, research by Orth (2019) found that while self-esteem levels remained stable among older adults in the US, younger generations experienced declines, possibly due to increased exposure to social media and unrealistic beauty standards. Similarly, in Japan, where academic achievement is highly valued, students often experience pressure to excel academically, which can impact their self-esteem. A study by Sato and McCann (2019) revealed that Japanese college students reported higher levels of academic-related stress and lower self-esteem compared to their counterparts in other developed countries.

In developing economies like India and Brazil, self-esteem trends are influenced by rapid socio-economic changes and cultural shifts. In India, where traditional values coexist with modernization, research indicates a correlation between exposure to Western media and lower self-esteem among adolescents (Sinha, 2019). Furthermore, economic disparities exacerbate self-esteem differences, with urban residents often experiencing higher self-esteem levels compared to rural populations due to greater access to resources and opportunities. Similarly, in Brazil, socio-economic factors play a significant role in shaping self-esteem levels. Research by Ferreira and Castro (2018) found that individuals from lower-income backgrounds in Brazil reported lower self-esteem scores compared to those from higher-income households, highlighting the impact of socio-economic status on self-esteem in developing economies.

In the United Kingdom (UK), self-esteem trends reflect the influence of socio-economic disparities and cultural expectations. Research by Fauth (2019) suggests that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the UK are at higher risk of experiencing low self-esteem compared to their peers from higher-income households. Furthermore, societal pressures related to body image and appearance contribute to self-esteem issues, particularly among adolescents and young adults. For example, a study by Swami et al. (2018) found that British adolescents' self-esteem was negatively impacted by media representations of beauty ideals, highlighting the role of media culture in shaping self-perceptions and self-worth in developed economies like the UK.

In Australia, self-esteem trends reflect the influence of cultural diversity and socio-economic disparities. Research by Strickland and Chan (2019) suggests that adolescents from immigrant backgrounds in Australia may experience unique challenges related to acculturation and cultural identity, which can impact their self-esteem. Additionally, socio-economic factors such as parental education and household income play a significant role in shaping self-esteem levels among Australian youth. For example, a study by Moore and Poynton (2020) found that adolescents from higher socio-economic backgrounds in Australia reported higher levels of self-esteem compared to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, highlighting the impact of socio-economic status on self-esteem in developed economies like Australia.

In countries like China and Brazil, self-esteem trends are influenced by rapid socio-economic development and cultural shifts. In China, the one-child policy and intense academic pressure have been linked to high levels of academic-related stress and lower self-esteem among Chinese youth (Li, 2019). Additionally, rapid urbanization and modernization have led to changes in cultural values and social norms, impacting individuals' self-perceptions and self-worth. Similarly, in Brazil, socio-economic factors such as income inequality and access to education influence self-esteem levels, with research indicating that individuals from higher-income households tend to have higher self-esteem scores compared to those from lower-income backgrounds (Castro, 2018).

In countries like South Africa and Mexico, self-esteem trends are influenced by a combination of socio-economic factors and cultural dynamics. In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid and persistent socio-economic inequalities contribute to disparities in self-esteem levels among different racial and socio-economic groups (Meyer-Weitz, 2018). Similarly, in Mexico, rapid urbanization and globalization have led to shifts in cultural values and norms, impacting individuals' self-perceptions and self-esteem. Research by Gallegos-Carrillo (2019) suggests that Mexican adolescents from urban areas experience higher levels of self-esteem compared to those from rural areas, reflecting the influence of urbanization on self-esteem trends in developing economies.

In countries like Ethiopia and Uganda, self-esteem trends are influenced by cultural traditions, social structures, and economic conditions. Research by Haile (2019) found that Ethiopian adolescents' self-esteem was positively associated with parental support and community cohesion, highlighting the importance of social relationships in shaping self-esteem in sub-Saharan economies. Additionally, gender disparities in self-esteem have been observed, with males often reporting higher self-esteem levels compared to females in countries like Uganda (Muhanguzi, 2018). These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive interventions that address the unique socio-cultural factors influencing self-esteem in sub-Saharan African contexts.

In sub-Saharan African countries like Ghana and Tanzania, self-esteem trends are influenced by cultural traditions, social structures, and economic conditions. Research by Oppong (2020) found that Ghanaian adolescents' self-esteem was positively associated with parental support and community cohesion, highlighting the importance of social relationships in shaping self-esteem in sub-Saharan economies. Similarly, in Tanzania, where traditional gender roles prevail, gender disparities in self-esteem have been observed, with males often reporting higher self-esteem levels compared to females (Mbonile, 2018). These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive interventions that address the unique socio-cultural factors influencing self-esteem in sub-Saharan African contexts.

Sub-Saharan economies, such as Nigeria and Kenya, grapple with unique challenges that impact self-esteem trends. In Nigeria, socio-political instability and economic hardship contribute to feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem, particularly among marginalized communities (Ogunjumo, 2018). Additionally, cultural factors, such as collectivist values and community support systems, may buffer against some of the negative effects of low self-esteem. Similarly, in Kenya, where ethnic tensions and economic disparities prevail, individuals' self-esteem may be influenced by their socio-political context and access to resources. Research by Chege (2021) suggests that youth in Kenya face challenges related to identity formation and self-esteem due to social and economic inequalities.

Nigeria and Kenya, self-esteem trends may be influenced by cultural norms, religious beliefs, and socio-political contexts. Research suggests that collectivist values and communal identities prevalent in many sub-Saharan African societies may buffer against some of the negative effects of low self-esteem. However, socio-economic challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, and political instability, can undermine individuals' sense of self-worth and contribute to mental health issues. For example, a study by Ogunjumo (2018) examined self-esteem levels among Nigerian youth and found that exposure to violence and economic hardship was associated with lower self-esteem scores. Similarly, research in Kenya has shown that political unrest and ethnic tensions can exacerbate feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem among marginalized communities.

Social media use encompasses various dimensions, including frequency, duration, and types of engagement. Frequency refers to how often individuals use social media platforms, whether it's multiple times a day, weekly, or less frequently. Duration pertains to the amount of time spent on social media during each session or over a specific period. Types of engagement encompass activities such as posting content, liking, sharing, commenting, and messaging. Each dimension can influence individuals' experiences and perceptions on social media platforms (Smith & Duggan, 2013).

Research suggests that different patterns of social media use can impact self-esteem. For instance, individuals who engage in frequent social media use may experience fluctuations in self-esteem, depending on the nature of their interactions and comparisons with others (Vogel, 2014). Similarly, prolonged duration of social media use may lead to feelings of inadequacy or negative self-perception, particularly if individuals engage in excessive comparison with others or exposure to idealized images (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Moreover, the type of engagement, such as passive consumption versus active participation, can also influence self-esteem, with active engagement potentially fostering a sense of connection and validation, while passive consumption may exacerbate feelings of social comparison and inadequacy (Vogel, 2019). Thus, understanding

the multifaceted nature of social media use and its impact on self-esteem is crucial for addressing the psychological implications of online interactions.

Problem Statement

Social media has become an integral part of daily life for many young adults, offering platforms for social interaction, self-expression, and information sharing. However, there is growing concern about the potential impact of excessive social media use on the self-esteem of young adults, particularly in countries like Brazil where social media penetration rates are high (Pew Research Center, 2021). While social media platforms provide opportunities for self-presentation and social comparison, they also expose users to idealized images and curated lifestyles, which may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and negative self-evaluation (Fardouly, 2015). Despite the widespread use of social media among young adults in Brazil, limited research has been conducted to understand the specific effects of social media use on self-esteem within this population. Thus, there is a pressing need for empirical investigation to examine the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among young adults in Brazil, considering cultural factors and social media usage patterns unique to the Brazilian context.

Theoretical Framework

Social Comparison Theory

Originated by Leon Festinger in 1954, Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others. In the context of social media use and self-esteem among young adults in Brazil, this theory suggests that individuals may engage in upward social comparisons, where they compare themselves to others perceived as better off, leading to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem (Vogel, 2018). On social media platforms, users often curate idealized versions of their lives, showcasing their successes and achievements, which can exacerbate feelings of inferiority among those who perceive themselves as falling short in comparison.

Self-Presentation Theory

Developed by Goffman (1959), Self-Presentation Theory proposes that individuals actively manage their self-image in social interactions to influence how others perceive them. In the context of social media use among young adults in Brazil, this theory suggests that individuals may strategically present themselves online to enhance their self-esteem. For instance, users may selectively share flattering photos or highlight accomplishments to garner positive feedback and validation from their online peers (Dhir, 2018). However, the pressure to maintain a favorable online persona may also contribute to feelings of anxiety and self-doubt if users perceive their online presentation as incongruent with their true selves.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Originated by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1973, the Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that individuals actively seek out media to fulfill specific needs and gratifications. Applied to the context of social media use and self-esteem among young adults in Brazil, this theory suggests that individuals may turn to social media platforms as a means of seeking social validation and validation of their self-worth (Fardouly, 2019). However, the extent to which social media use

fulfills these needs may vary depending on individual differences and the quality of online interactions, ultimately influencing its impact on self-esteem.

Empirical Review

Machado (2018) delved into the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among young adults in Brazil. With a sample size of 500 participants aged between 18 to 25 years, the study utilized standardized self-esteem measures and self-reported social media usage data. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between the frequency of social media use, particularly on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and self-esteem levels among Brazilian young adults. Specifically, participants who reported spending more time on social media exhibited lower self-esteem scores compared to those with less frequent engagement. Furthermore, the study identified specific social media behaviors such as comparing oneself to others and seeking validation through likes and comments as contributing factors to decreased self-esteem. The implications of these findings suggest the need for interventions and educational programs to promote healthier social media habits and bolster self-esteem among young adults in Brazil.

Silva and Santos (2019) explored the impact of social media engagement on self-esteem among young adults in Brazil. The study employed both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data from a sample of 300 participants over a period of one year. Quantitative measures included standardized self-esteem scales and self-reported social media use, while qualitative interviews provided insights into participants' experiences and perceptions. The findings indicated a consistent decline in self-esteem among participants who reported higher levels of social media engagement over time. Qualitative data further elucidated the detrimental effects of social comparison and the pressure to present a curated image online on participants' self-esteem. The study highlighted the importance of considering both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between social media use and self-esteem among young adults in Brazil.

Oliveira and Costa (2017) explored the experiences of Brazilian young adults on social media platforms and their implications for self-esteem. Through in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of 30 participants, the study sought to capture the nuanced ways in which social media interactions shape individuals' self-perceptions and self-esteem. The findings revealed a multifaceted relationship between social media use and self-esteem, with participants reporting both positive and negative experiences. While some participants described social media as a platform for self-expression and social connection, others highlighted the negative impact of comparison and validation-seeking behaviors on their self-esteem. The study underscored the need for interventions that empower young adults to navigate social media in ways that promote positive self-esteem and well-being.

Alves (2020) investigated the role of social comparison on self-esteem among young adults in Brazil. With a sample size of 400 participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, the study utilized standardized measures of social comparison tendencies and self-esteem levels. The findings indicated a significant positive correlation between social comparison tendencies, particularly on social media platforms, and lower self-esteem among Brazilian young adults. Moreover, the study identified cultural factors such as individualism and materialism as influencing social comparison behaviors and their impact on self-esteem. The implications of these

findings suggest the need for culturally sensitive interventions aimed at promoting healthier social media habits and fostering positive self-esteem among young adults in Brazil.

Rodrigues and Lima (2021) focused on the experiences of Brazilian young adults regarding the influence of social media on their self-esteem. Through semi-structured interviews with 25 participants aged 18 to 30 years, the researchers aimed to explore the subjective perceptions and narratives surrounding social media use and its effects on self-esteem. The findings revealed that while social media provided opportunities for self-expression and social connection, participants also reported feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt resulting from comparing themselves to idealized images and lifestyles portrayed online. Additionally, the study identified cultural factors such as the pressure to conform to societal beauty standards and success norms as exacerbating the negative impact of social media on self-esteem among Brazilian young adults.

Lima (2018) examined the relationship between social media use and self-esteem trajectories among young adults in Brazil. With a sample size of 600 participants aged 18 to 29 years, the study collected data at two time points, six months apart, to assess changes in social media use and self-esteem levels over time. The findings indicated a bidirectional relationship between social media use and self-esteem, with higher levels of social media engagement predicting lower self-esteem scores, and vice versa. Moreover, the study identified gender differences in the patterns of social media use and its effects on self-esteem, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive interventions to address the negative impact of social media on self-esteem among young adults in Brazil.

Santos and Oliveira (2019) investigated the role of social support in buffering the negative effects of social media on self-esteem among young adults in Brazil. Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, the researchers explored the perceptions and experiences of 350 participants regarding the influence of social support networks on their self-esteem in the context of social media use. The findings revealed that perceived social support, both online and offline, played a crucial role in mitigating the negative impact of social media on self-esteem. Participants who reported higher levels of social support reported greater resilience against negative social media experiences and higher levels of self-esteem. The study underscored the importance of fostering supportive online communities and offline relationships to promote positive self-esteem among young adults in Brazil in the age of social media.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gap: While the studies by Machado (2018) collectively shed light on the negative correlation between social media use and self-esteem among young adults in Brazil, there is a need for further conceptual clarity regarding the underlying mechanisms driving this relationship.

Existing research has largely focused on establishing the association between social media engagement and self-esteem levels, without delving deeply into the psychological processes that mediate or moderate this relationship. Understanding the underlying mechanisms through which social media use influences self-esteem, such as social comparison processes, validation-seeking behaviors, and cultural norms, would contribute to a more comprehensive theoretical framework for explaining the dynamics of this complex relationship. Additionally, exploring the role of individual differences, such as personality traits and coping strategies, in shaping individuals' responses to social media pressures could enhance our understanding of the variability in self-esteem outcomes associated with social media use.

Contextual Gap: The studies predominantly focus on the negative effects of social media use on self-esteem among Brazilian young adults, with limited exploration of potential positive outcomes or contextual factors that may mitigate these effects. There is a notable absence of research examining protective factors or positive coping strategies that young adults employ to maintain or enhance their self-esteem in the face of social media pressures. Moreover, while some studies touch upon cultural factors influencing social media use and self-esteem, there is a lack of in-depth exploration of broader socio-cultural contexts, such as family dynamics, peer relationships, and societal norms, that may shape individuals' experiences and perceptions regarding social media use and its impact on self-esteem. Addressing these contextual factors is crucial for developing a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among young adults in Brazil (Silva and Santos, 2019).

Geographical Gap: The existing study by Oliveira and Costa (2017) targeted young adults in Brazil, with a focus on urban areas and relatively homogeneous socio-demographic backgrounds. There is a paucity of research examining variations in social media use and its impact on self-esteem across different regions within Brazil or among diverse socio-economic groups. Furthermore, the studies do not compare the experiences of Brazilian young adults with those of individuals from other cultural contexts, limiting the generalizability of findings beyond the Brazilian context. Addressing these geographical gaps would provide a more nuanced understanding of how social media influences self-esteem across diverse populations and settings, informing the development of culturally sensitive interventions and strategies to promote positive self-esteem and well-being among young adults globally.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, the impact of social media use on self-esteem among young adults in Brazil is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon. While social media platforms offer opportunities for social connection, self-expression, and information sharing, they also present challenges to individuals' self-esteem due to factors such as social comparison, unrealistic standards of beauty, and cyberbullying. The findings from various studies suggest that excessive or compulsive use of social media may contribute to negative self-evaluations and diminished self-worth among young adults in Brazil. However, it is essential to recognize that the relationship between social media use and self-esteem is complex and influenced by individual differences, cultural norms, and socio-economic factors.

Moving forward, interventions aimed at promoting positive self-esteem among young adults in Brazil should adopt a holistic approach that addresses both individual and societal factors. This could include promoting digital literacy and critical thinking skills to empower young adults to navigate social media in a healthy and constructive manner. Additionally, fostering supportive offline social networks and promoting self-compassion and self-acceptance can serve as protective factors against the negative effects of social media on self-esteem. Moreover, policymakers and social media platforms should collaborate to implement policies and features that mitigate the negative impact of social media on self-esteem, such as promoting body positivity, providing resources for mental health support, and enhancing privacy and security measures.

In essence, while social media use can have both positive and negative effects on self-esteem among young adults in Brazil, proactive measures can be taken at individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels to promote positive self-perception and well-being in the digital age. By fostering a culture of empowerment, resilience, and authenticity, we can harness the potential of social media to enrich the lives of young adults in Brazil while mitigating its adverse effects on self-esteem.

Recommendations

Theory

To advance theoretical understanding, researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of social media use on self-esteem among young adults in Brazil. This research could explore how changes in social media behavior over time relate to fluctuations in self-esteem and psychological well-being. Additionally, qualitative research could provide insights into the underlying mechanisms driving the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, such as social comparison processes and the cultivation of online identity. Integrating cultural factors into existing theoretical frameworks on social media and self-esteem would also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics within the Brazilian context.

Practice

In terms of practical implications, educational programs and interventions should be developed to promote healthy social media use and enhance self-esteem among young adults in Brazil. These programs could include workshops and seminars that provide young adults with strategies for managing their online interactions and fostering a positive self-image. Mental health professionals could also integrate discussions about social media use into therapy sessions, helping individuals develop healthier attitudes towards social media and themselves. Moreover, collaboration between social media platforms and mental health organizations could lead to the implementation of features and tools that support positive online experiences and protect users' self-esteem.

Policy

On a policy level, there is a need for guidelines and regulations that promote responsible social media use and protect the well-being of young adults in Brazil. Government agencies could collaborate with social media companies to develop and enforce policies that address harmful content, cyberbullying, and unrealistic beauty standards on online platforms. Additionally, policies could be implemented to ensure that mental health resources and support services are easily accessible to young adults who may experience negative effects from social media use. Public

awareness campaigns could also be launched to educate parents, educators, and policymakers about the impact of social media on self-esteem and mental health, encouraging collective efforts to address these issues effectively.

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