



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION ON EMOTIONAL STABILITY AND SELF-ESTEEM OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between social media addiction and two key psychological constructs — emotional stability and self-esteem — among university students. A cross-sectional survey was conducted at Kokand State University (n = 142 undergraduates). Social media addiction was measured using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS); emotional stability was assessed via the Big Five Inventory–Short neuroticism subscale (reverse-scored); and self-esteem was evaluated using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Results revealed significant negative relationships between social media addiction and both emotional stability and self-esteem. Multiple regression showed that social media addiction was a significant predictor of both constructs after controlling for gender and year of study. These findings underscore the need for psychoeducational interventions targeting digital well-being in higher education.

Keywords: social media addiction, emotional stability, self-esteem, university students, digital well-being, Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed patterns of communication and information consumption among young people. University students represent a particularly vulnerable demographic, as intensive platform use coincides with critical periods of psychosocial identity formation (Erikson, 1968). Social media addiction — characterised by excessive preoccupation, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse (Griffiths et al., 2014) — has been associated with depression, anxiety, and disrupted psychological well-being (Andreassen et al., 2016; Vannucci et al., 2017).

Two constructs merit particular attention: emotional stability, understood as the capacity to maintain affective equilibrium under stress (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and self-esteem, defined as a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self (Rosenberg, 1965). Both are recognised as key protective factors against mental health difficulties during emerging adulthood (Orth & Robins, 2014). Despite growing international literature, research examining these relationships within Central Asian university populations remains limited. Uzbekistan presents



a distinctive context in which rapid digitalisation coexists with collectivist cultural values, potentially amplifying the psychological consequences of excessive social media use. The present study therefore investigates the relationship between social media addiction, emotional stability, and self-esteem in a sample of Uzbek university students.

2. Literature review

2.1 Social Media Addiction

Social media addiction has evolved as a concept from broader frameworks of internet addiction (Young, 1998) and pathological internet use (Davis, 2001). Andreassen and Pallesen (2014) operationalised it through the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), which has demonstrated sound psychometric properties across diverse cultural contexts. Problematic social media use is distinguished from normative use by the presence of functional impairment — disruption to academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and psychological health (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

2.2 Social Media Addiction and Emotional Stability

Evidence suggests an inverse association between social media addiction and emotional stability. Blackwell et al. (2017) found that high-frequency social media use was associated with elevated neuroticism, particularly among passive consumers. Mechanistically, social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) posits that upward comparisons — endemic on platforms such as Instagram — generate negative affect and undermine emotional equilibrium. The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) construct (Przybylski et al., 2013) further implicates social media in heightened emotional reactivity through persistent appraisal of others' experiences as superior to one's own.

2.3 Social Media Addiction and Self-Esteem

The relationship between social media use and self-esteem is complex. Vogel et al. (2014) demonstrated experimentally that exposure to idealised social media profiles decreased state self-esteem, particularly in high social-comparison individuals. Valkenburg et al. (2021) proposed that the valence of social feedback received — positive (likes, affirming comments) versus negative (criticism, exclusion) — acts as the proximal determinant of self-esteem trajectories, with individuals with pre-existing low self-esteem being particularly susceptible to harmful feedback loops.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants and Procedure



A cross-sectional design was employed. Participants were recruited from Kokand State University via stratified random sampling across four faculties. Inclusion criteria were current full-time enrolment, age 17–25, and at least six months of active social media use. Of 160 questionnaires distributed, 142 were returned complete (response rate 88.75%; 61.3% female, M age = 19.8 years, SD = 1.4). Data were collected in April–May 2024 with informed consent. Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Kokand State University (Protocol No. 12/2024).

3.2 Measures

Social Media Addiction. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS; Andreassen et al., 2016): six items, 5-point scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$.

Emotional Stability. Big Five Inventory–Short (BFI-S) neuroticism subscale, reverse-scored; four items, 5-point scale, $\alpha = .76$.

Self-Esteem. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965): ten items, 4-point scale (range 10–40), $\alpha = .83$.

3.3 Data Analysis

Pearson correlations and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS 27. Gender and year of study were entered as control variables in Block 1; BSMAS scores were entered in Block 2.

4. Results

Social media addiction scores were moderately high across the sample. Significant negative correlations were found between social media addiction and both emotional stability and self-esteem (both $p < .001$). Hierarchical regression indicated that social media addiction was a significant negative predictor of emotional stability ($\beta = -.54, p < .001$) and self-esteem ($\beta = -.48, p < .001$) after controlling for gender and year of study, explaining approximately 31% and 25% of variance in each outcome, respectively. Gender and year of study were non-significant in both models.

5. Discussion

The present study found that social media addiction was significantly and negatively associated with both emotional stability and self-esteem in Uzbek university students. These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating links between problematic social media use and affective dysregulation (Blackwell et al., 2017; Vannucci et al., 2017) and with experimental evidence that exposure to idealised profiles reduces self-evaluation (Vogel et al., 2014).

Social comparison processes and FoMO dynamics (Festinger, 1954; Przybylski et al., 2013) likely underlie the observed associations. The Uzbek collectivist cultural context — in which peer approval and social standing carry particular salience — may amplify these mechanisms, a hypothesis warranting direct empirical investigation in future research.

These findings carry practical implications. Universities should consider integrating psychoeducational modules on digital well-being into student orientation programmes. Brief cognitive-behavioural interventions targeting social comparison cognitions and excessive usage patterns have shown preliminary effectiveness (Fardouly et al., 2018) and could be adapted for higher education settings in Uzbekistan and analogous contexts.

5.1 Limitations

The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. The sample was drawn from a single institution, limiting generalisability. Self-report measures are susceptible to social desirability bias. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and objective behavioural measures of social media use.

6. Conclusion

This study provides evidence that social media addiction is a meaningful predictor of reduced emotional stability and self-esteem among Uzbek university students, independent of gender and year of study. The findings reinforce the importance of targeted digital well-being interventions in higher education and contribute to the emerging literature on the psychological consequences of social media addiction in Central Asian populations.

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