

PASSIVE VS ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND ITS IMPACT ON SELF-ESTEEM: A Quantitative Survey Study Among Young Adults

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Abstract - The present study examined the relationship between passive and active social media use and self-esteem in young adults aged between 18–30. Through a detailed online survey of 56 participants, the study looked at whether passively interacting with social media (i.e., watching others' feeds) would be different from actively posting, commenting, and engaging with others on the platform. The questionnaire included items relating to active and passive use of social media (e.g., 'I spend time scrolling without engaging'), alongside a series of self-esteem items adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. In this sample of participants, passive and active use of social media appeared to be generally moderate, with slightly higher levels of passive use being present among respondents. However, in this study there was no clear and quantifiable correlation found between use of passive or active social media and self-esteem scores. Interestingly, male respondents were higher in their passive use of social media (i.e. browsing and observing), while females had higher levels of active social media use (posting and commenting). The highest levels of self-esteem and lowest levels of social media use among all respondents occurred in the older age groups (26–30), indicating that these factors are potentially linked to life stage and other life variables rather than simple amount of use or type of use.

Keywords: passive social media use, active social media use, self-esteem, social comparison, young adults, digital well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is an everyday part of life and a significant aspect of this for young adults. Social media applications like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X, formerly known as Twitter are used for a number of hours each day for people aged between 18–30 years. In a study conducted by Global Web Index (2024), the average length of time 18–30 year olds spent on social media was between 2.5 and 4 hours per day. The ways in which individuals use social media are very diverse, with individuals using it either in a passive or active

way. Passive use describes a way in which users scroll through feeds viewing other people's content without responding. Active use involves sharing updates and stories, liking other users posts and pictures, commenting, and directly interacting with individuals through instant messaging and comments. These two forms of use are intrinsically different and researchers have recently started to look at whether the nature of social media use has different outcomes for how individuals perceive themselves.

It is known that our level of self-esteem — how we value ourselves and the perception we have of ourselves — is mediated by social interaction, and social media provide an environment where we are exposed to others' self-representations and how these are displayed for consumption by others which in turn will either increase or decrease an individual's sense of self-worth.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although social media use and mental health is a popular research area, most researchers ask participants to report their usage in total hours and do not differentiate passive from active use of social media. This has been argued as a key missing piece of the puzzle; an individual who is scrolling through others' curated highlight reels for three hours is not experiencing a similar psychological process than one who is actively chatting and creating content with their friends. Passive social media use has been identified as leading to increased feelings of inadequacy, where active usage has been linked with feelings of validation, connectedness and self-expression. This research explores the latter.

1.3 Research Questions

In this research paper the following questions will be addressed:

1. Is there a relationship between self-esteem of young adults and passive social media use?
2. Is there a relationship between self-esteem of young adults and active social media use?

3. Are there differences in usage of social media depending on age or gender?
4. Is there a difference in self-esteem among passive and active social media users?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The research question is intended to investigate the following:

1. The prevalence of passive and active social media use among young adults.
2. The correlation between passive and active use of social media and self-esteem.
3. Whether or not age or gender affects usage patterns and self-esteem.
4. An explanation of the research findings in simple terms to aid in the development of digital wellness education programs.

1.5 Hypotheses

H1: Passive use of social media is negatively correlated with self-esteem; the greater people engage in non-participating behavior (scroll and look), the lower the self-esteem.

H2: Active use of social media is positively correlated with self-esteem; the greater people engage in participative behavior, the higher the self-esteem.

H3: There is a significant difference in self-esteem between predominantly passive users and predominantly active users.

H4: Females have a more negative association with passive use than males, which occurs because women engage in more appearance-oriented social comparisons due to the nature of visual platforms.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The study involved participants between the ages of 18 and 30, found through the use of the internet. 56 participants are an adequate number for useful implications, but the results cannot be generalized to larger and different populations. The survey took a snapshot of behavior, thus we are not able to conclude any cause and effects, just correlations. Participants may also be biased by social desirability when answering questions concerning personal self-esteem and comparison.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What Is Passive Vs Active Social Media Use?

Passive vs. Active social media use. One of the earliest publications formally differentiating these types of social media usage was Verduyn et al. (2015) who identified a passive use (scrolling without interacting on Facebook) linked to lowered well-being, which a more active direct communication type did not do. This differentiation has been

observed and replicated across many platforms and groups. Passive social media usage behaviors include scrolling through Facebook feeds, viewing stories and reels without engagement, and passive observing of the Facebook feeds of others without interaction. These passively interacting subjects looked at posts, photos, and status updates. These social media usage behaviors also include a quiet observation of other people's updates on how they have represented their lives on Facebook. Active social media usage behaviors include commenting on posts, reactions, messaging on Facebook, posting on Facebook walls, as well as actively engaging in conversations online.

2.2 Self-Esteem and Social Media

Self-esteem is a person's assessment of their own value and self-worth, and a key indicator of overall psychological adjustment. Research evidence clearly shows that people's levels of self-esteem are affected by their experiences in social contexts, and social media exposes individuals to a near-constant stream of social information, which can influence self-esteem levels.

One key aspect of passive social media use that influences self-esteem is its tendency to create "upward social comparison" — comparing yourself to those whose lives and appearances seem superior to your own. This form of comparison is typically detrimental to self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014). What social media contributes to in particular is that it consists primarily of positive portrayals of people's lives, and what is presented to viewers is a selected highlights reel of individuals' happiness and successes, rather than their normal, daily experiences.

In contrast, active use is likely to lead to improved psychological outcomes when interactions are authentic and meaningful, such as positive reinforcement following post reception, connection with friends, and social belonging which promotes and supports healthy self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2017). However, if active use is driven mainly by desire for likes and validation, it too can lead to unstable self-esteem levels (Sheldon et al., 2019).

2.3 Gender and Age Differences

Gender has also been proven to be influential. A difference has been observed where women use social media more frequently and to compare themselves based on looks and their appearance (especially the more visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok) compared to men. This can result in higher levels of body dissatisfaction and a lowered self-esteem (Fardouly et al., 2018). Men do engage in social comparison; however, it is mainly based on achievements and their status instead.

Age is another contributing factor. It is seen that individuals aged 25–29 were less susceptible to social comparison pressures which contribute to a lowered self-esteem on social media due to having a more formed identity. This implies the nature of social media's influence on self-esteem is not consistent and varies between age groups.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks

Social Comparison Theory: Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) postulates a basic human drive to assess ourselves through comparison with others. Social media platforms enable such comparisons at an incredible pace, due to their unlimited supply of colleagues' idealized "highlights." Passive users' vulnerability to comparison is enhanced, as they are constantly watching without posting their own, thereby placing them in an ongoing role of evaluating others rather than being evaluated themselves.

Uses and Gratifications Theory: The idea here is that people intentionally engage with media in order to fulfill certain needs. Those needs may be social, entertainment, self-presentation or information needs. The motivation behind someone using social media is just as important as the way in which they are using it. A user scrolling to relieve stress is having a different experience to the user who is scrolling out of need or fear.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative survey design was adopted in this study. A structured questionnaire was filled out by participants on the same occasion, enabling us to obtain quantifiable data from a range of participants and investigate associations and relationships between forms of social networking usage and self-esteem.

3.2 Participants

There were 56 young adults in this experiment, ranging in age from 18 to 30 years old. Participants were recruited through social media sites and networks. Eligibility requirements were that participants must be active users on social media within the age range required.

Of the 56 participants in the study, 29 were male (51.8%), 25 females (44.6%) and 2 refused to answer (3.6%). 53.6% were aged between 22 and 25, 25% were aged between 18 and 21, while 21.4% were between 26 and 30 years old.

3.3 Survey Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

Section A — Passive Social Media Use: This section contained 8 questions that measured behaviors such as, "I

scroll through without liking or commenting," "I watch others' stories without replying" and "I compare my life with those of others when on social media." Each question was measured on a scale of 1 (Never/Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Always/Strongly Agree).

Section B — Active Social Media Use: This section contained 6 questions that measured behaviors such as liking and commenting on posts, posting material on social media, messaging others, and being involved in discussions on social media.

Section C — Self-Esteem: This section contained 6 items based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale that measured "how I feel about myself and my abilities" from one aspect to another. Item "I feel that I do not have much to be proud of" was reverse-scored so that all of the items pointed in the same direction.

3.4 Data Analysis

In analyzing the survey data, average scores were computed for each section (passive use, active use, and self-esteem). These averages were compared across gender and age groups, and the relationship between social media use type and self-esteem was examined. Throughout this process, clear, easy-to-read patterns in the data were prioritized, rather than simply providing technical statistics.

Each survey item was marked on a five-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree, 1-Never to 5-Always). Each participant's overall mean score for passive use, active use, and self-esteem was computed by adding their responses for all items within that section and dividing by the number of items in the section. This created an individual average score (from 1, indicating low levels of the behavior or trait, to 5, indicating high levels of the behavior or trait) for each participant on each of the three constructs. These individual means were then averaged across the 56 participants in the sample; these group means are reported in the Results section. Means greater than 3.0 were considered moderate-to-high levels, and means below 3.0 were considered low levels.

Item-level analysis was used in addition to computing means, so as to describe more precisely the patterns of responses and the extent to which particular item-level phenomena were occurring across the participants. For each item, the percentage of participants who marked the two highest response options (4-Agree and 5-Strongly Agree for the agreement items, 4-Often and 5-Always for the frequency items) was used as an index of how frequently a particular item reflected the participants' experience.

To determine if particular social media use or self-esteem patterns vary by demographics, mean scores for each of the

three constructs were separated and averaged across respondents according to their response category for gender (male, female, prefer not to say) and by age range (18–21, 22–25, 26–30). This enabled a description of whether different demographic groups use social media more or less passively and actively, and whether or not this variation corresponded with their levels of self-esteem. It was felt inappropriate to use statistical inference, as tests like an ANOVA require larger samples to be reliably computed, so rather the direction and magnitude of the difference was described and interpreted in relation to prior research.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Who Responded? — Demographic Overview

There were a total of 56 participants, and as such they reflect the target young adult population well. The even gender split is reflective of young adult populations, as is the age grouping within the 22–25 age range.

[Figure 1: Gender and Age Distribution of Survey Respondents (N = 56) — See original report for charts]

The gender chart reveals that 51.8% of respondents were male and 44.6% female, fairly equal numbers overall. A small portion, just 3.6%, refused to answer. The age chart shows that over half of the respondents were between 22 and 25 years of age (53.6%), thus this was the most represented age range. The second highest percentage of respondents fell within the 18–21 age range, making up a quarter of all respondents, while the rest were 26–30 years old, constituting 21.4% of all respondents.

Variable	Category	Count (n) / Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	29 / 51.8%
	Female	25 / 44.6%
	Prefer not to say	2 / 3.6%
Age Group	18–21	14 / 25.0%
	22–25	30 / 53.6%
	26–30	12 / 21.4%

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants (N = 56)

4.2 Passive Social Media Use — What Did Respondents Report?

There were eight items used to measure the passive usage of social media. The average responses from participants was 3.12/5 which is roughly between "Sometimes" and "Often". This indicates that people here engage quite often in passively viewing without engaging.

[Figure 2: Passive Social Media Use — Items 1 to 3 (Section A) — See original report for charts]

"I scroll through social media without interacting with Posts" — Responses were evenly distributed among the options; however, the answer Agree (4) received the highest number of responses at 30.4 percent. Nearly one third of the survey respondents browse through without posting content. Approximately half (44.6 percent) the respondents said they disagree or strongly disagree. Thus about half the participants make at least a bit of an effort.

"I view others' posts without liking or commenting" — Answers were also distributed evenly; the most popular response said that they viewed other people's posts often (4) received the highest score (26.8 percent). Nearly 40 percent (39.3 percent) said they would either often (4) or always (5) view posts without posting a reply or showing that they had viewed the posts.

"I spend time watching stories/reels without responding to them" — This had the highest agreement rating of the three items discussed above with 44.7% agreeing (rated 4 or 5). It appears passive consumption of these types of short form videos are particularly commonplace, especially given the huge proliferation of content and popularity in the form of Reels and TikTok.

"I browse social media mainly to observe others rather than engage" — This statement came up with the most significant result in the passive section with a combined 55.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Observing and looking rather than interacting — using social media like a voyeur's window into other people lives — seems to be the most predominant passive activity in the sample population.

"I frequently check updates without posting anything myself" — Half of the sample (50%) agreed or strongly agreed with this. Many people seem to fall into the category of the habitual "lurker" — the user who frequently checks social media sites but posts little or nothing themselves.

"I compare myself to other users while scrolling" — The interesting finding for this statement is that it received the

lowest rating in the passive section. Only 26.8% agreed or strongly agreed while 32.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This is an important finding because it appears that many users will engage in passive observation but do not consciously recognize or accept that they are engaging in comparison in the process. Research implies that the comparison that can occur on social media happens automatically and below conscious awareness.

"I feel that others' lives are better than mine when browsing social media" — Half the sample (50%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This is a striking finding; while only 26.8% stated they deliberately compare their life to other people, a full 50% end up believing that other people have better lives. This suggests that comparison is being made implicitly — people still imbibe the idea that others have better lives, without the active notion of "comparison."

"I continue scrolling even when I am not actively interested" — The highest proportion to agree with any statement (53.5%) agreed or strongly agreed. This suggests that scrolling has become a bit of a compulsive habit and has been recognized by many digital wellness researchers as having design features like endless scroll that prevent users from realizing they could be doing something else.

4.3 Active Social Media Use — What Did Respondents Report?

Mean of Active social media usage was 3.00 out of 5, this was just lower than passive usage (3.12). This signifies that respondents on an average were slightly more likely to consume than to create/interact. Still it varied across the respondents, because everyone uses social media differently.

"I post updates, photos, or stories on social media" — Responses were widely spread and just under 40% (39.3) agreed/strongly agreed. Just over a third disagreed. From this we know a sizable segment of the population are not regular producers of original content on social media and may use the platform for commenting/reacting while avoiding public exhibition of their lives.

"I use social media to communicate directly with others (messages/comments)" — This item had the highest agreement rate of the active use set with nearly 45% (44.7) agreeing/strongly agreeing. Directly messaging others seems to be the most prevalent mode of active participation among this group and even more so than interacting with posts/comments publicly. This finding is in line with studies indicating that private, direct messaging has a more consistently positive impact on well-being than public self-presentation.

"I actively participate in conversations or discussions online" — This question also garnered strong agreement from just

under 47% (46.4) of participants. However the response to this question was strongly bi-modal, with 21.4% strongly disagreeing, which again highlights a distinct separation of users among the sample who are willing to engage in discussion online versus those who clearly are not.

"I share my thoughts, opinions, or experiences through posts" — Both 44.6% agreement and 33.9% disagreement. Sharing personal views seems a polarizing activity as majority do it on regular basis while considerable chunk never does it; perhaps depending on personal characteristics, privacy awareness, or fear of negative comment.

"I feel engaged when interacting with others on social media" — This item (positive active use) indicates the degree to which performing active usage brings sense of satisfaction. 53.6% reported that they agreed or strongly agreed while only 17.8% disagreed. Active users perceive social media interaction as rewarding and interesting which may suggest that active social media use, when felt to be rewarding, may lead to positive effects on self.

4.4 Self-Esteem — What Did Respondents Report?

Six items from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were adapted to measure self-esteem. The mean score was 3.13/5, meaning the mean level of self-esteem among the participants was moderate — it was not very high nor significantly low. Overall, this is an acceptable level to score, but there was a wide variability between individuals.

"I feel that I am a person of worth" — Roughly 46.4% of people reported agreement while 30.3% were neutral. The 30.3% reported ambivalence of self-worth is not surprising as individuals aged under 20 have issues about themselves, especially when developing a sense of self.

"I feel that I have a number of good qualities" — This was answered fairly positively with 60.7% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This was one of the strongest self-esteem markers in the survey; most people appear to know they have at least some positive traits, but perhaps only a superficial knowledge of these.

"I am able to do things as well as most people" — Quite many (46.4%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement; however almost the same number (25%) disagreed. This question reflects perceptions of competence, and the split is indicative of significant self-doubt among part of the sample — this may be connected to academic and job demands prevalent for the 18–30 age range.

"I feel confident about myself" — The answers to this were fairly average, with 42.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing; however, 25% also disagreed. Confidence is a tricky construct within self-esteem, it seems, as it can fluctuate depending on

social situations and expectations more than general self-worth.

"I feel satisfied with myself" — Slightly over 50% either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement and only 28.5% disagreed. This statement indicates satisfaction with the individual, and represents the core component of robust self-esteem.

"I feel I do not have much to be proud of" — On its face this statement is alarming, as 53.6% either strongly agreed or agreed. Since this statement is reverse scored, disagreement is indicated by agreement with the statement and represents an indicator of a deficiency in one's own perceived deservingness of positive feelings. This has direct relevance for self-esteem; one can't really have high self-esteem if one does not believe one has much to be proud of.

4.5 Key Summary Statistics

Table 2: Average Scores Across the Three Survey Sections

Scale	No. of Items	Average Score (/5)	What This Means
Passive Social Media Use	8	3.12	Moderate — passive use is common but not extreme
Active Social Media Use	6	3.00	Moderate — active use is slightly less prevalent
Self-Esteem	6	3.13	Moderate — healthy but with notable individual variation

4.6 Gender Differences in Social Media Use and Self-Esteem

One clear and simple pattern that emerged was the sex difference in social media use. Males showed a greater degree of passive use (3.31) than females (2.90) and therefore were more likely to be observed passively scrolling and looking without interacting, whereas females' active use was higher than males (3.15) meaning that they were more likely to post content and interact directly with friends. Although there was a sex difference in usage, there was very little difference in self-esteem levels of the male and female respondents; female self-esteem was slightly higher (3.21) than that of males (3.11), but this difference was not significant. The findings relating to sex difference are interesting, as males who use social media in the more detrimental (passive) way in the theory were not showing lower self-esteem levels.

Table 3: Gender Differences in Social Media Use and Self-Esteem

Gender	n	Passive Use (avg)	Active Use (avg)	Self-Esteem (avg)
Male	29	3.31	2.89	3.11
Female	25	2.90	3.15	3.21
Prefer not to say	2	3.19	2.83	2.33

4.7 Age Differences

The one correlation about age was that older individuals (26–30) not only used less social media than any other group, but also had the highest self-esteem. Their averages were 3.01 for passive use and 2.89 for active use, which were the lowest means for any age group for both uses. Conversely, they have the highest average self-esteem (3.43). This may imply that the older a person gets and is within their twenties, they use less social media and gain more certainty in who they are. The middle group (22–25) had the lowest average self-esteem (3.00). The mean self-esteem of the young group (18–21) was mid-range at 3.14 while their usage of social media was also in mid-range for passive use and high for active use. This difference may be attributed to social comparison during this life stage which focuses on career, relationships and general success.

Table 4: Age Group Differences in Social Media Use and Self-Esteem

Age Group	n	Passive Use (avg)	Active Use (avg)	Self-Esteem (avg)
18–21	14	3.22	3.07	3.14
22–25	30	3.13	3.00	3.00
26–30	12	3.01	2.89	3.43

4.8 Does Social Media Use Type Relate to Self-Esteem?

Comparing participants with a high passive score versus low passive score, people who scroll more did have slightly lower self-esteem (3.08 vs 3.17), and people with a high active score compared to low active score also (somewhat unexpectedly) had slightly lower self-esteem (3.08 vs 3.16). However, both of these values are so small they were not statistically significant with such a small sample.

The reason the results from this study show what they show is that the directional associations do appear to exist: that passive use tends to lower self-esteem slightly, and active use doesn't boost self-esteem as predicted by many theories, but the associations are subtle. How the individual uses social media, their own personality, the type of information they use social media for, their reasons for using it, and their real-life social networks, seems to account for most of what's happening.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary of What We Found

The main objective of this research was to explore whether passive and active use of social media affects self-esteem. The following findings resulted from a survey of 56 young adults: Passive use is widespread. Over 50% look at social media just to see others and 50% log in and look around regularly but don't post anything.

Implicit social comparison. 26.8% say they actively compare themselves to others, yet 50% claim others are leading better lives than they are. There is a 23.2% gap which means they are implicitly comparing themselves to others on social media. Mindless scrolling is prevalent. More than 50% scroll through social media when they aren't actually looking at anything, which means that for over 50% using social media has become a habit.

Self-esteem is moderate. People mostly felt that they possessed generally good qualities and were skilled at things, but satisfaction and pride came with mixed feelings.

Gender differences appear. Men seem to scroll and observe, while women seem to post and interact. Despite this difference in how they use social media, self-esteem levels between men and women did not differ significantly.

Older individuals fared better. The older (26–30) participants scored higher in terms of self-esteem while simultaneously having the lowest rates of social media usage, showing they've gained perspective.

5.2 Why Weren't the Hypotheses Confirmed?

The study did not show a strong, clear correlation between social media type and self-esteem. This is contrary to the original hypothesis, which stated that passive use should decrease self-esteem and active use should increase it — neither is particularly prominent or consistent. There are several likely explanations for this.

Firstly, there is the matter of the sample size, which is relatively small at 56 participants. Subtle psychological effects often require a study to be conducted with hundreds of people. While the trends we are observing in the data align with the original hypotheses (passive use slightly decreases self-esteem; active use slightly increases it), they are too weak to be definitively claimed with 56 people.

Secondly, the act of using social media is subjective and context-specific. One person could be passively scrolling through food preparation videos on Facebook, whilst another might be constantly bombarded with images of others whom they believe to be better than themselves, rendering their passive social media use experience very different despite their behavior being classified the same way.

Finally, individual factors are likely more important than the type of use of social media. Personality traits, the quality of an individual's offline relationships, the content a person consumes on social media, and the current circumstances of their life are likely all stronger determinants of self-esteem than how a person actually uses social media.

5.3 What Do Gender and Age Patterns Mean?

The fact that the men in this sample reported more passive use (which is arguably the psychologically more damaging type) yet had comparable levels of self-esteem to women is an interesting complication to conventional expectations. The relevant factors here may not be only whether someone scrolls, but what content they scroll through and how they conceptualize it. Indeed, due to algorithm personalization, men and women have demonstrably different and often very different types of information streamed through their feeds even on the same applications.

The trend of older individuals being less active on social media and also higher in self-esteem also provides support to the idea of a developmental trajectory. Over time during their twenties people become increasingly solidified on their values and do not rely as heavily on comparisons with others for their self-worth, which is a comforting thought as the susceptibility to negative impacts may simply diminish naturally over time.

5.4 Practical Implications

All of this is a critical first step in how we discuss the relationship between social media and self-esteem. Here are a few things we can learn from these findings:

We can't talk about "social media" and self-esteem in a generalized way. The relationship is far more nuanced than that. Telling young people to "use social media less" oversimplifies things. It would be much more effective to prompt them to ask "how am I using social media?" Am I looking at content that inspires and connects me, or do I continually scroll through content that makes me feel worse about myself?

Passive scrolling has consequences we aren't always aware of. The disparity between the percentage who reported consciously comparing their lives to others (26.8%) and the percentage who report feeling that other people have better lives (50%) means that many people are feeling negative effects of social media without really knowing it. Increasing people's awareness of this unconscious process is likely an important part of Digital Citizenship and Media Literacy training.

Active engagement helps — provided it's real. It's important to distinguish between posting on social media to elicit a positive response from others, and posting on social media to share and connect. Actively seeking to use social media for connection, while learning to manage feelings related to likes and validation, likely promotes an overall positive effect on self-esteem.

5.5 Limitations of This Study

Limitations of this study: Sample consisted of 56 individuals that were recruited through an online medium, so this sample

likely favors individuals that are already accustomed to technology and social media. The study was conducted at a specific point in time, so it cannot be inferred that social media usage actually leads to changes in self-esteem, or rather that those individuals that have certain levels of self-esteem are more likely to use social media in certain fashions. Survey measures relying on self-report can suffer from individual levels of honesty and self-perception which may not be comprehensive in regard to more delicate issues such as self-esteem.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

In order to examine the extent to which passive and active use of social media affect self-esteem in young people, a survey was given to 56 participants, producing the following findings. In this group, passive consumption, through viewing and habitually browsing social media, was extremely frequent and found to be linked with implicit social comparison, with 50% of the sample feeling that others had a superior life as they browsed social media. Those that use active social media felt it was positive for them, but it was not as popular as passive use, as it often felt less rewarding than consuming the sites passively. Neither passive nor active use predicted self-esteem in this study sample, with the predicted direction, despite expectations in the literature, being inconclusive for this age group. Gender and age provided some surprising results as males were more likely to browse passively, females were more likely to actively use social media, and older adults were less likely to use social media but were more confident than younger adults. These gender and age differences add depth to our understanding of how and why different individuals use social media.

6.2 Contributions of This Study

This project offers a transparent and comprehensible explanation of social media use patterns of young adults, and how these patterns relate to the sense of self. It confirms that the passive and active dimensions are valid and visible within survey data, though perhaps less potent in terms of effect on self-esteem in this sample. The inclusion of chart-based analysis of survey data gives a more visible and comprehensible perspective of what the participants actually wrote, giving readers a more transparent view of what the participants expressed.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Further work would need to extend the sample size and range of participants. These will enable effects to be sufficiently powered to enable small but statistically significant effects to

be discovered, increasing the reliability and generalizability of findings. Longitudinally tracking same participants over a longer period would enable further exploration into the causal nature of the relationship between alterations in social media use and variations in self-esteem. Researchers should not be satisfied by simply taking into account time used but also consider how such time is spent on social media. Details of the tasks users engage in on each platform, as well as the nature of content viewed by users will need to be investigated. User characteristics and motives for using social media should be taken into consideration (including personality type as this may influence psychology in different ways). Last but by no means least, research needs to distinguish between the different effects that different social media platforms can have on users' self-esteem; time used on Instagram may not produce the same effects as the same amount of time used on Twitter or on TikTok.

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