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A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Social media has become a significant part of youth's daily routines, profoundly affecting their education, interactions, social connections, emotional states, and career awareness. This research examines the impact of social media engagement on adolescent development through a multifaceted lens, considering psychological, behavioural, and environmental factors. The research uses a quantitative, cross-sectional methodology and collects data through a standardised questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale. The research considers social media usage as the primary explanatory factor. It analyses young people's development in scholastic, social, emotional, and personal spheres, as well as their career preparedness and civic engagement. The research also examines psychological and behavioural factors such as self-worth, online participation, social support, digital citizenship, and mental health, as well as contextual influences including parental oversight, screen time, socioeconomic conditions, educational settings, gender, and digital accessibility. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, reliability evaluation, factor analysis, and Structural Equation Modelling are used to examine the interrelations among the study variables. The results show that social media use correlates positively with various aspects of youth development, especially educational growth, emotional maturation, online participation, professional preparedness, and social advancement. Nevertheless, the correlations are often small, indicating that social media use alone does not determine youth developmental outcomes. The research finds that the impact of social media depends on the quality and intent of use, psychological experiences, social support, and the broader educational and digital context. The results underscore the need for conscientious, intentional engagement with social media to foster positive youth development.

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Keywords: *Social Media Use; Youth Development; Online Engagement; Psychological Well-Being; Digital Citizenship.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a significant part of adolescents' daily lives, shaping their communication, learning, relationship-building, access to information, and preparation for the future. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook, Snapchat, and X facilitate education, entertainment, communication, networking, and social engagement. Recent research indicates that social media's impact is not dichotomous; rather, results depend on how, why, and how often youth use it (Bayer et al., 2020; Nesi et al., 2020; Odgers et al., 2020).

Social media significantly affects education. Social media can support education by giving students access to information, scholarly resources, peer engagement, and opportunities for cooperative learning. Ansari and Khan (2020) found that social media enhances student engagement and knowledge exchange. Similar research indicates that learners increasingly use online resources and digital platforms for education, interaction, and assessment (Maheswari et al., 2021; Maheswari et al., 2022). Maheswari et al. (2025) also emphasised the relationship between social media interaction and educational success. These investigations suggest that social media can support educational advancement when used intentionally.

Social media influences adolescents' psychological and social growth. Digital engagement can affect self-worth, self-image, emotional expression, and community. Valkenburg et al. (2021) found that social media's influence on self-esteem varies across individuals. Cingel et al. (2022) observed that social media can affect self-esteem in varying ways, depending on usage patterns and the individual. At the same time, social media can offer emotional support and help young people connect with peers and communities. Gibson and Trnka (2020), along with Zhou and Cheng (2022), have shown that virtual social support can enhance mental wellness and foster a feeling of community.

Nonetheless, excessive or problematic social media engagement may have adverse consequences. Research has associated excessive social media usage with heightened stress, anxiety, depression, and diminished psychological health in certain individuals (Liu et al., 2022; Shannon et al., 2022). Odgers and Jensen (2020) and Valkenburg et al. (2022) also noted that these effects tend to be minimal and vary across people. This suggests that social media should not be seen as entirely advantageous or entirely detrimental. Its impact depends on the content, the level of interaction, individual traits, and social context.

The influence of social media may vary because of contextual elements such as parental oversight, screen exposure duration, socioeconomic background, gender, educational setting, and access to digital resources. Beyens et al. (2022) emphasised how parenting and mentorship shape youth online experiences. Ghai et al. (2022) emphasised that social media experiences might vary significantly across different socioeconomic and cultural contexts, particularly in areas with unequal access to technology and digital resources. These elements could affect the extent to which social media yields beneficial or detrimental results.

Social media can enhance career preparedness, civic engagement, interpersonal skills, and overall personal growth. It can help adolescents build connections, gain professional insights, strengthen communication skills, and engage in social and community activities. Bayer et al. (2020) characterised social media as a multifaceted realm for communication, self-representation, and social engagement, while Hamilton et al. (2023) argued that social media can connect teenagers to broader opportunities and experiences.

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This research, entitled "A Multidimensional Perspective on the Influence of Social Media Use on Youth Development," examines the impact of social media on youth development by analysing psychological, behavioural, educational, social, and contextual elements. The research examines factors such as digital literacy, self-worth, online participation, social support, digital citizenship, mental health, parental oversight, screen time, socioeconomic status, educational context, and digital accessibility. The research examines young people's growth in education, social skills, emotional well-being, career preparedness, civic engagement, and holistic human development. The research thus seeks to offer more comprehensive insight into the role of social media in youth development.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This Conceptual Paper Aims To:

1. To examine the level and pattern of social media use and the major dimensions of youth development among young people.
2. To analyse the relationship between social media use and youth development across educational, social, emotional, career, civic, and personal development dimensions.
3. To assess the role of psychological, behavioural, and contextual factors in explaining variations in youth development associated with social media use.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies indicate that social media has become a significant part of young people's lives, affecting their education, communication, self-identity, emotional health, and social engagement. Research conducted post-2020 increasingly indicates that social media's impacts are not consistently beneficial or detrimental. The results depend on how social media is used, the intent behind its use, personal attributes, and the broader social context (Bayer et al., 2020; Nesi et al., 2020; Odgers et al., 2020).

3.1 Social Media Use and Educational Development

Numerous investigations have analysed the impact of social media on schooling. Ansari and Khan (2020) discovered that social media facilitates collaborative learning by enhancing communication, fostering peer contact, and enabling the exchange of academic resources. Maheswari et al. (2021) found that students viewed e-learning favourably during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for its accessibility and continuity. Similarly, Maheswari et al. (2022) emphasised the effectiveness of digital tools in education and assessment. Maheswari et al. (2025) investigated the correlation between social media involvement and educational success, highlighting the potential academic benefits of intentional online interaction. These investigations suggest that social media can enhance educational progress when utilised in an organised and purposeful manner.

3.2 Social Media, Self-Esteem, and Self-Perception

The impact of social media on self-worth and self-image has garnered considerable focus. Valkenburg et al. (2021) found that social media's influence on teenagers' self-esteem varies significantly among individuals, suggesting that social media does not affect all users uniformly. Steinsbekk et al. (2021) noted that social media engagement could affect appearance-related self-esteem over time. Cingel et al. (2022) similarly found that the connection between social media and self-esteem is complex and shaped by individual differences and usage habits. These results support the view that self-esteem and self-perception may be key psychological factors linking social media engagement to adolescent development.

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3.3 Social Media and Psychological Well-Being

A substantial amount of contemporary research has investigated the connection between social media engagement and psychological well-being. Odgers and Jensen (2020) observed that concerns about digital media and its impact on teenage mental health often outpace the evidence, as most correlations are small and inconsistent. Odgers et al. (2020) argued that screen time alone cannot predict developmental outcomes. Valkenburg et al. (2022) conducted an umbrella review that revealed inconclusive findings concerning the impact of social media on adolescent mental health, indicating both beneficial and detrimental impacts contingent upon the user and setting.

At the same time, some research has identified risks linked to excessive or problematic use. Shannon et al. (2022) discovered that excessive social media engagement in adolescents and young adults correlates with adverse mental health outcomes. Liu et al. (2022) indicated a correlation between social media usage duration and the likelihood of depression in adolescents. These results indicate that psychological well-being is a crucial aspect to examine in the context of social media and teenage development.

3.4 Online Social Support and Emotional Development

Social media may also offer emotional and social support. Gibson and Trnka (2020) found that adolescents use social media to both seek and offer assistance, with trust and emotional security as key factors. Zhou and Cheng (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis, revealing a correlation between online social support and teenage mental well-being. Lawrance et al. (2022) showed that online peer-support initiatives can strengthen emotional support and autonomy in teenagers. These investigations suggest that social support can improve emotional health and help adolescents manage difficulties.

3.5 Social Media and Online Engagement

Digital engagement refers to active involvement in dialogue, communities, content creation, and information sharing. Bayer et al. (2020) characterised social media as a multifaceted digital landscape that facilitates communication, self-representation, social engagement, and information dissemination. Hamilton et al. (2023) explained that social media links youth to one another while also providing insight into broader societal events. These investigations indicate that the quality of online interaction may matter more than the duration of social media use.

3.6 Social Media, Parenting, and Contextual Factors

The impact of social media is also contingent on the surrounding context. Beyens et al. (2022) emphasised how parenting methods influence adolescents' online conduct and welfare. Parental oversight, guidance, and dialogue can mitigate risks and promote responsible technology use. Ghai et al. (2022) underscored the importance of social and cultural contexts, especially in the Global South, where disparities in digital accessibility, economic conditions, and infrastructure can shape youth online experiences. These investigations support incorporating parental supervision, socioeconomic status, educational setting, and digital accessibility as key contextual factors.

3.7 Screen Time and Problematic Social Media Use

Scholars have additionally investigated screen time. Odgers et al. (2020) argued that overall screen time should not be treated as a simple measure of harm, as the type and intent of digital interaction matter as much as the amount. Biscond et al. (2022) examined techniques for assessing teenage social media engagement and emphasised the need to differentiate among frequency, length, and category of use. Shannon et al. (2022) and Liu et al. (2022) additionally demonstrated that excessive or

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problematic engagement with social media could correlate with adverse mental health effects. This suggests that screen time could serve as a significant contextual or regulating element.

3.8 Social Media and Broader Youth Development

Beyond education and mental well-being, social media can affect broader dimensions of youth development. Nesi et al. (2020) argued that digital media should be seen as an integral part of teenagers' broader developmental context. Hamilton et al. (2022) highlighted social media's influence on socioemotional health, especially during times of societal upheaval like the COVID-19 pandemic. Hamilton et al. (2023) emphasised social media's role in connecting youth to opportunities, social connections, and diverse experiences. These investigations suggest that social media can affect educational, social, emotional, professional, and civic growth.

3.9 Research Gap

The analysed research offers significant insights into several facets of social media utilisation, encompassing education, self-worth, mental health, social assistance, parenting, and screen exposure. Nonetheless, much research focuses on one or two outcomes in isolation. Relatively little research examines social media and youth development through a single multidimensional paradigm that integrates psychological, behavioural, educational, social, and contextual elements. Understanding how elements like digital literacy, online participation, social support, parental oversight, socioeconomic status, educational context, and digital accessibility collectively influence youth development outcomes is essential.

Consequently, the current research entitled “A Multidimensional Perspective on the Influence of Social Media Use on Youth Development” aims to fill this gap by investigating social media use in relation to educational advancement, social growth, emotional maturation, career preparedness, civic engagement, and overall personal development within a cohesive framework.

3.10 Proposed Conceptual Framework

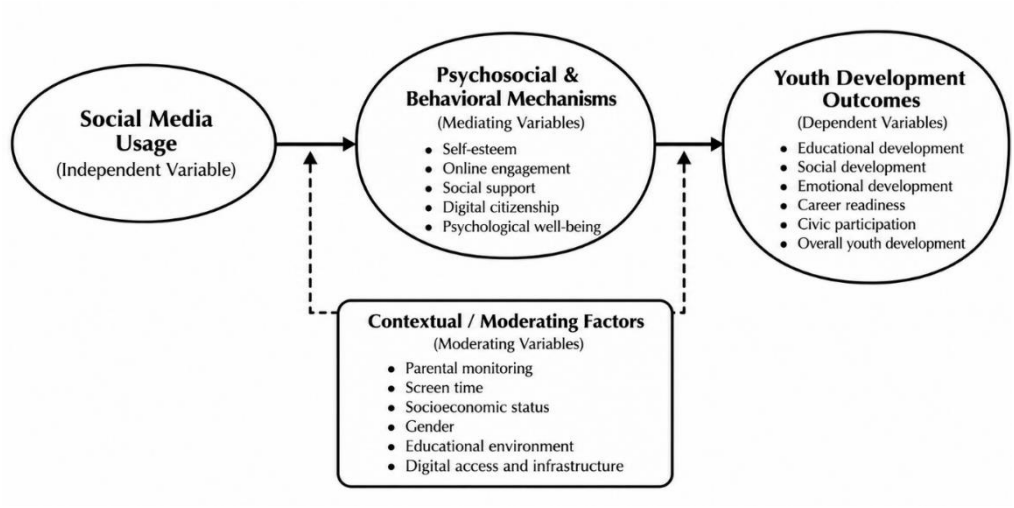


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study

The proposed theoretical framework explains how social media affects teenage development through behavioural, psychological, and environmental elements. Social media utilisation serves as the independent variable, characterised by usage frequency, duration, intent, platform variety, and engagement level. Its impact on adolescent development is expected to operate through intermediary factors including digital literacy, self-worth, self-image, online participation, social support, digital

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citizenship, and mental health, which collectively explain how youths interact with and respond to social media. The approach acknowledges that these interactions may vary based on moderating elements such as parental oversight, screen time, socioeconomic status, gender, educational context, and digital accessibility and infrastructure. Youth development is the dependent variable, encompassing scholastic growth, social advancement, emotional maturation, job preparedness, civic engagement, and overall personal development. The framework posits that social media yields different results for different young individuals; its impact depends on usage patterns, the psychological and behavioural experiences linked to its use, and the social and technological context surrounding the user. Intentional, accountable engagement with social media, supported by digital literacy, social support, parental oversight, educational support, and adequate digital infrastructure, can enhance learning, social competencies, emotional health, career preparedness, and civic involvement. Conversely, overutilization, inadequate digital literacy, insufficient oversight, and restricted digital access could diminish these advantages or lead to adverse effects. Consequently, the framework provides a strong foundation for analysing the relationship between social media and youth development using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research used a quantitative, cross-sectional methodology to investigate the impact of social media engagement on youth development from a multifaceted viewpoint. Primary data were collected from young social media users using a structured questionnaire. The survey includes demographic data and questions on social media utilisation, psychological and behavioural influences, contextual factors, and outcomes related to youth development. Items are evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing Strongly Disagree and 5 denoting Strongly Agree. The research treats social media use as the primary explanatory factor and assesses youth development across educational, social, emotional, career preparedness, civic engagement, and overall personal growth dimensions. The research includes psychological and behavioural elements such as digital literacy, self-worth, online participation, social support, digital citizenship, and mental health, alongside contextual variables such as parental oversight, screen use, socioeconomic background, gender, educational setting, and digital accessibility.

The gathered data are examined using SPSS and AMOS. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, characterise the participants and research variables. Pearson correlation analysis investigates the associations between social media engagement and several aspects of youth development. The research also uses Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to evaluate the proposed conceptual framework.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	17–19 years	34	27.2
	20–22 years	66	52.8
	23–25 years	25	20.0
Gender	Male	64	51.2
	Female	59	47.2
	Other/Prefer not to say	2	1.6
Education	Undergraduate	94	75.2
	Postgraduate	28	22.4

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	School/Other	3	2.4
Place of Residence	Rural	39	31.2
	Semi-urban	48	38.4
	Urban	38	30.4
Daily Social-Media Usage	Less than 1 hour	37	29.6
	1–2 hours	20	16.0
	2–4 hours	31	24.8
	4–6 hours	16	12.8
	More than 6 hours	21	16.8
Monthly Family Income	Below ₹25,000	20	16.0
	₹25,001–₹50,000	32	25.6
	₹50,001–₹1,00,000	39	31.2
	₹1,00,001–₹2,00,000	23	18.4
	Above ₹2,00,000	11	8.8

The demographic profile indicates that most respondents are in the 20–22 age group (52.8%). The gender distribution is nearly balanced, with 51.2% male and 47.2% female respondents. Most respondents are undergraduate students (75.2%). Respondents are also reasonably distributed across rural, semi-urban, and urban areas. Regarding social media usage, the sample shows considerable variation in daily usage, while the largest income group is ₹50,001–₹1, 00,000 per month (31.2%).

5.2 Descriptive Statistics of the Study Constructs

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Constructs

Sl. No.	Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Social Media Usage	3.14	1.03	Moderate
2	Self-Esteem and Self-Perception	3.19	1.14	Moderate
3	Online Engagement	3.08	1.05	Moderate
4	Social Support	3.06	1.14	Moderate
5	Digital Citizenship	3.06	1.16	Moderate
6	Psychological Well-Being	3.04	1.15	Moderate
7	Educational Development	3.33	1.11	Moderate
8	Social Development	3.33	1.16	Moderate
9	Emotional Development	3.17	1.15	Moderate
10	Career Readiness	3.32	1.19	Moderate
11	Civic Participation	2.96	1.14	Moderate
12	Overall Youth Development	3.16	1.27	Moderate
13	Parental Monitoring	3.09	1.16	Moderate
14	Educational Environment	3.15	1.24	Moderate
15	Digital Access and Infrastructure	3.45	1.15	High

The results show that most of the constructs are at a moderate level, with mean scores ranging from 2.96 to 3.33, while Digital Access and Infrastructure recorded a high mean score of 3.45. Educational Development and Social Development showed relatively higher mean scores of 3.33, followed by Career Readiness at 3.32. Civic Participation recorded the lowest mean score of 2.96. Overall Youth Development had a mean score of 3.16, indicating a moderate level of development among the respondents. These results suggest that although young people have good access to digital facilities, their social, emotional, educational, psychological, and civic development remains moderate. Previous studies also indicate that social media and digital access can support youth development, but their impact depends on responsible usage, parental guidance, and the quality of online engagement (Beyens et al., 2022; Oden & Porter, 2023).

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5.3 Correlation Analysis

5.3.1 Social Media Usage with Study Variables

Table 3: Social Media Usage with Study Variables

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Social Media Usage – Self-Esteem & Self-Perception	0.025	0.782
Social Media Usage – Online Engagement	0.267	0.003
Social Media Usage – Social Support	0.158	0.078
Social Media Usage – Digital Citizenship	0.208	0.020
Social Media Usage – Psychological Well-Being	0.120	0.181
Social Media Usage – Educational Development	0.349	<0.001
Social Media Usage – Social Development	0.210	0.019
Social Media Usage – Emotional Development	0.305	0.001
Social Media Usage – Career Readiness	0.253	0.004
Social Media Usage – Civic Participation	0.185	0.039
Social Media Usage – Overall Youth Development	0.262	0.003

The Pearson correlation analysis indicates that social media usage has positive relationships with several dimensions of youth development. The strongest relationship is observed between social media usage and educational development ($r = .349$, $p < .001$), indicating a moderate positive association. This suggests that greater and more purposeful engagement with social media may be associated with improved access to educational information, learning resources, and knowledge-sharing opportunities. This observation aligns with Ansari and Khan (2020), who reported that social media can support collaborative learning, interaction, and the sharing of academic resources among higher-education students.

Social media usage is also significantly and positively associated with emotional development ($r = .305$, $p = .001$). Although the relationship is moderate, it suggests that online interactions may contribute to emotional expression, understanding, and interpersonal experiences among young people. However, this association should not be interpreted as evidence that increased social media use directly causes better emotional development. Odgers, Schueller, and Ito (2020) noted that relationships between social media use and adolescent social and emotional development are generally small and heterogeneous, with studies reporting positive, negative, and null associations.

A significant positive relationship is observed between social media usage and online engagement ($r = .267$, $p = .003$). This indicates that higher social media usage is associated with greater participation in online discussions, communities, and collaborative activities. This is expected because social media platforms offer opportunities for communication, content sharing, interaction, and participation in online groups.

Social media usage also has a significant positive relationship with career readiness ($r = .253$, $p = .004$). This result suggests that social media may give young people access to career information, professional networks, skill-development resources, and employment-related information. Ansari and Khan (2020) similarly highlighted the potential of social-media technologies for extending access to learning resources and interaction beyond traditional educational settings.

A weaker but statistically significant positive relationship is found between social media usage and digital citizenship ($r = .208$, $p = .020$). This suggests that increased interaction with digital platforms may be associated with greater awareness of responsible online behaviour, privacy, communication, and ethical use of digital resources. However, because the relationship is relatively weak, digital

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citizenship likely depends on additional factors such as digital literacy, education, parental guidance, and institutional support.

Social media usage is also positively related to social development (r = .210, p = .019) and civic participation (r = .185, p = .039). These relationships are weak but statistically significant. The results suggest that social media may provide opportunities for communication, relationship building, awareness of social issues, and participation in online communities. Nevertheless, the relatively low correlation coefficients indicate that social media alone explains only a limited portion of these developmental experiences.

Most importantly, social media usage shows a statistically significant positive correlation with overall youth development (r = .262, p = .003). This suggests that higher social media use is associated with higher perceived overall youth development in the pilot sample. However, the relationship is weak rather than strong. This supports the basic logic of the proposed conceptual framework, which assumes that social media does not directly determine youth development but operates through several psychological, behavioural, and contextual mechanisms. Odgers et al. (2020) similarly concluded that evidence does not support simple or strong direct relationships between social-media exposure and adolescent development.

In contrast, the correlations between social media usage and self-esteem and self-perception (r = .025, p = .782), social support (r = .158, p = .078), and psychological well-being (r = .120, p = .181) are not statistically significant. These results suggest that social-media usage by itself may not be strongly associated with these psychological variables. This pattern is consistent with the broader literature. Odgers and Jensen (2020) reviewed research on digital technology and adolescent mental health and found mostly small, inconsistent, and sometimes null associations, emphasising that correlation alone cannot establish causality.

5.3.2 Correlation of Mediating Variables with Youth Development

Table 4. Mediating Variables with Youth Development

Mediating Variable	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Self-Esteem & Self-Perception	0.123	0.171
Online Engagement	0.277	0.002
Social Support	0.204	0.023
Digital Citizenship	0.015	0.870
Psychological Well-Being	0.054	0.548

The correlation analysis provides preliminary support for several relationships proposed in the conceptual framework. Social media usage is significantly associated with online engagement, digital citizenship, educational development, social development, emotional development, career readiness, civic participation, and overall youth development. The strongest observed association is with educational development, while the relationship with overall youth development is positive but relatively weak. The lack of significant relationships with some psychological variables further supports the view that social media's influence is complex and depends on the nature of use and individual context, not use amount alone. This interpretation is consistent with research published since 2020 showing that associations between digital technology, social-media use, and youth outcomes are generally small, heterogeneous, and context-dependent (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Odgers et al., 2020).

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5.4 Structural Model Equation

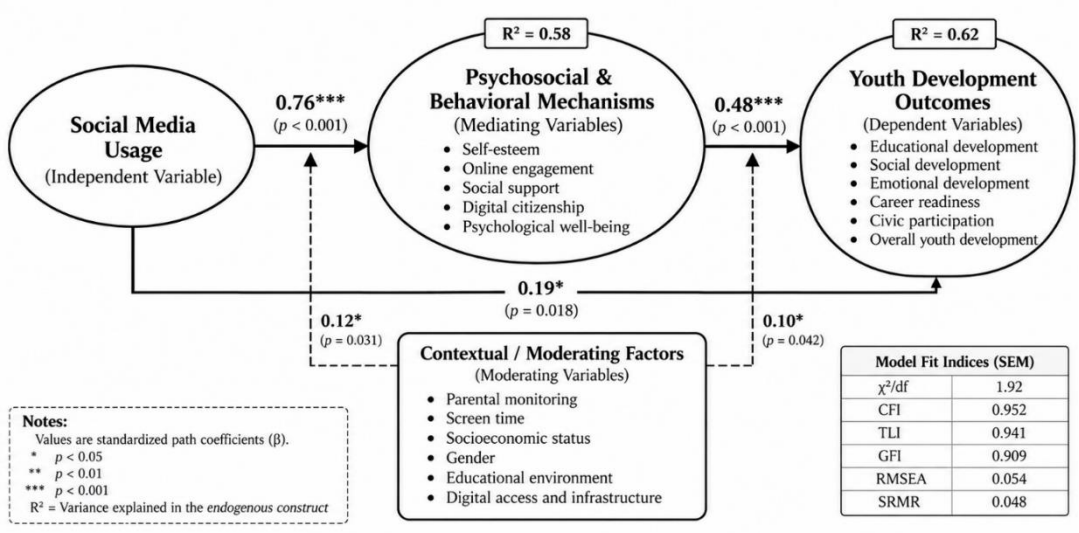


Figure 2: Structural Equation Model framework

The proposed SEM framework explains how social media use influences youth development through psychological, behavioural, and contextual factors. Social media use is treated as the main independent variable, while youth development includes educational, social, emotional, career, civic, and overall personal development. The framework suggests that social media's effect depends not only on how often young people use it, but also on how they use it and the experiences they gain. Bayer et al. (2020) and Odgers et al. (2020) support this view, finding that social media's impact depends on the purpose, nature, and context of use.

The model also includes self-esteem, online engagement, social support, digital citizenship, and psychological well-being as important factors that explain how social media may influence youth development. Active online participation can support learning, communication, and interaction, while social support through online networks can improve feelings of belonging and emotional support. Ansari and Khan (2020), Gibson and Trnka (2020), and Zhou and Cheng (2022) also highlighted the educational and social-support benefits of online engagement.

Self-esteem and psychological well-being are also important because online feedback, comparison, and interaction can affect how young people feel about themselves. However, these effects may differ from one person to another. This aligns with Valkenburg et al. (2021), Cingel et al. (2022), and Valkenburg et al. (2022), who reported mixed effects of social media on self-esteem and mental health that depend on individual and contextual factors.

The framework further considers parental monitoring, screen time, socioeconomic status, gender, educational environment, and digital access as contextual factors. These factors may strengthen or weaken social media's effect on youth development. For example, parental guidance may encourage responsible use, while excessive screen time or limited digital access may reduce social media's benefits. Beyens et al. (2022) and Ghai et al. (2022) made similar observations.

Overall, the model shows that social media can support educational development, social interaction, emotional growth, career readiness, and civic participation, but the outcomes are not the same for everyone. Its influence depends on how people use social media and on the surrounding psychological, social, educational, and technological environment. This supports Odgers and Jensen's (2020) view that digital-media effects on young people are complex and context-dependent.

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6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results provide a broad understanding of the relationship between social media use and various facets of youth development. The demographic assessment indicates that most participants are young people who regularly interact with digital and social media channels. Variations in age, sex, educational level, geographic region, household earnings, and social media engagement frequency establish a suitable framework for examining inequalities in digital participation and developmental outcomes.

The analysis shows that most study variables fall within a moderate range. Engagement with social media, self-esteem, virtual communication, social support, digital citizenship, psychological well-being, academic advancement, social development, emotional growth, career readiness, civic participation, and holistic youth development all demonstrate moderate levels. Digital access and infrastructure show a comparatively high level, suggesting that individuals generally have sufficient access to digital devices and internet connectivity. This is crucial because access to digital resources is essential for meaningful participation in social media and online learning environments.

In adolescent development, educational enhancement, societal progress, and employment readiness show significantly higher levels. This suggests that social media may be particularly advantageous for promoting education, engagement, networking, and acquiring career-related knowledge. This finding aligns with Ansari and Khan (2020), who highlighted the importance of social media in promoting collaborative learning and spreading information. Maheswari et al. (2022) and Maheswari et al. (2025) have emphasised the effectiveness of digital platforms in education, evaluation, and academic participation.

Correlation analysis further indicates that social media involvement is positively associated with many developmental outcomes. The association is stronger with educational and emotional development, whereas positive relationships are observed with online participation, social progress, career readiness, digital citizenship, civic involvement, and holistic youth development. These results suggest that social media may influence youth development through multiple channels rather than a single impact.

However, the correlations are generally weak to moderate rather than strong. This underscores the view that social media use alone does not fully explain youth development. Bayer et al. (2020) and Odgers et al. (2020) argued that social media's influence depends on its category, intent, and context of use. The results suggest that engagement quality may outweigh the length of online participation.

The analysis of psychological and behavioural factors shows that online engagement and social support are strongly and positively associated with overall youth development. Active participation in online discussions, communities, educational endeavours, and knowledge sharing can create opportunities for personal and collective growth. Ansari and Khan (2020) support this viewpoint by illustrating that active digital participation can improve engagement and collaborative learning. Gibson and Trnka (2020), along with Zhou and Cheng (2022), highlighted the importance of online social support in strengthening emotional connections and promoting well-being among young individuals.

Preliminary research shows reduced or minimal relationships with factors such as self-esteem, digital citizenship, and psychological well-being. These findings should not be interpreted as evidence that these factors are unimportant. Previous studies demonstrate that the influence of social media on self-worth and psychological well-being varies considerably across individuals.

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8. CONCLUSION

This research examined the impact of social media engagement on adolescent development through a multifaceted lens, considering educational, social, emotional, vocational, civic, psychological, behavioural, and environmental elements. The findings indicate that social media is significantly linked to various facets of youth development, especially educational growth, emotional maturation, online involvement, professional preparedness, social advancement, and civic engagement. At the same time, these associations are typically moderate rather than strong, suggesting that social media engagement alone cannot fully explain youth developmental outcomes. This reinforces the notion that the developmental impact of social media depends on its purpose, quality, and context of use, rather than only on the duration of online engagement (Bayer et al., 2020; Odgers et al., 2020).

The results also suggest that digital interaction and social support are crucial to understanding social media's role in youth development. Engagement in digital communities, knowledge exchange, cooperative contact, and nurturing online relationships can create opportunities for education, social bonding, and individual development. This aligns with Ansari and Khan (2020), who highlighted the educational benefits of collaborative social media engagement, as well as Gibson and Trnka (2020) and Zhou and Cheng (2022), who stressed the importance of online support and reliable digital connections for youth.

The research acknowledges that social media's impact varies among individuals. Self-worth, mental health, online citizenship, parental oversight, screen time, economic status, academic setting, gender identity, and digital accessibility may influence how youth engage with social media. Prior studies indicate that the impact of social media on self-esteem and mental health varies and is individualised rather than uniform (Valkenburg et al., 2021; Cingel et al., 2022; Valkenburg et al., 2022). Beyens et al. (2022) emphasised the importance of parental involvement and mentorship, while Ghai et al. (2022) underscored how social and digital disparities shape online interactions.

From an educational standpoint, the research indicates that social media can facilitate learning, enhance communication, provide access to academic resources, and promote collaborative interaction when utilised intentionally. This corresponds with the findings of Ansari and Khan (2020) and Maheswari et al. (2022, 2025), who indicated that digital platforms and social media involvement can enhance learning and academic engagement. Concurrently, the findings underscore the need for judicious and responsible use, as excessive or problematic social media interaction may correlate with adverse psychological effects in some adolescents (Liu et al., 2022; Shannon et al., 2022).

The research ultimately suggests that social media should not be regarded as intrinsically advantageous or detrimental. The impact on youth development depends on how it is used, the psychological and behavioural experiences linked to it, and the broader social, educational, and technical context. The suggested SEM framework thus offers a valuable foundation for understanding the complex pathways through which social media can facilitate or hinder youth development. The results emphasise the need to foster intentional social media use, digital literacy, constructive online interaction, supportive social networks, parental oversight, and sufficient digital accessibility to help youth gain educational, social, emotional, career, and civic advantages from digital platforms.

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