

Navigating Hyperreality: The Influence of Social Media on Digital Identity, Self-Perception, And Psychological Well-Being

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ABSTRACT: The rise of digital technology has rapidly altered identity construction, with highly curated online personas increasingly shaping self-perception and overall psychological well-being. Therefore, this study focussed on examining the impact of hyper-realistic digital spaces on forming digital identities, self-perceptions and psychological well-being among young social media users. Based on Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyper-reality and Sigmund Freud's theoretical models of the psyche (id, ego, superego), the researchers investigated the nature of social media behavior and validation-seeking behaviours as they relate to forming a digital identity and potential mental health concerns. A cross-sectional quantitative survey was developed to measure the frequency of social media and related behaviors exhibited by 230 Indian social media users aged 18 – 25. A structured questionnaire was designed based on previously validated instruments that measured social media usage, digital identity, self-perception and psychological well-being. Reliability testing was performed utilizing Cronbach alpha; descriptive statistical analysis methods such as frequencies, percentiles, mean values and standard deviation were utilized to summarize the collected data. Results indicated that Instagram was the most commonly used social media platform; participants spent approximately 4.5 hours daily online. The research found that a large number of participants in this study engaged in social comparison and had body dissatisfaction and were modifying their online identities. Additionally, many participants experienced psychological concerns including anxiety, emotional exhaustion and decreased self-esteem due to excessive social media usage; these problems clearly show the negative effects of excessive social media use on mental health. These results support the existence of hyper-realistic digital environments where individuals engage in extensive self-curation, rely heavily on receiving digital validation and feel immense pressure to present their online identities as idealized versions of themselves consistently. Based on the collected data, this study adds to digital psychology and calls for better digital literacy, responsible social media use, and mental-health support to help young people develop authentic identities online.

KEYWORDS: Hyperreality, Digital Identity, Social Media, Self-Perception, Mental Well-being, Baudrillard.

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital technology is reshaping communication and social interaction and opening new paths for identity formation. Social media enables users to craft highly curated online personas that express desired self-images and, over time, shape their perceptions of themselves and others. With an ever-growing number of people using social media and interacting via mobile devices, digital interactions will continue to grow into daily life. This will make the difference between actual self and the constructed version increasingly unclear. In addition to social networking, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) platforms provide opportunities for self-expression and encourage an idealized digital image that may differ significantly from an individual's actual physical presence.

Social media has made a wide variety of tools available for self-expression and also encouraged idealized versions of self that do not always accurately describe their real lives. Within this rapidly changing digital world, Baudrillard's idea of "hyperreality" is a useful conceptual framework. Hyperreality refers to a situation where simulations become more important than experienced realities and begin to take over traditional concepts of what is real and true (Luke, 1991; Baudrillard & Glaser, 1994). While social media has increased communication, creativity, and access to social connections, it has also contributed to distorted perceptions of identity; excessive desire for validation; and increased psychological vulnerability.

Social media in many countries around the world, especially in developing countries like India, has greatly increased in recent years due to increased Internet access and availability of smartphones. Many Indians use platforms like Instagram, Facebook,

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YouTube and others as a major medium for communicating with friends and family, entertaining themselves, and expressing their identity. These mediums allow for selective self-presentations through algorithms that curate the content we see based on what we interact with, visually present our best self through pictures and videos, and receive constant social validation. Therefore, it is no surprise that our online identity is often created based upon the positive reactions of other people.

A significant gap exists between the curative online personas and the identities of their creators in real life. Studies have shown that comparisons between online personas and offline identities are related to social comparisons; anxiety; lower self-esteem; and feelings of cognitive dissonance. Younger adults, who are among the most active users of social media (Deogracias, 2015; Fardouly et al. 2015), experience these negative impacts more severely.

In addition to shaping digital identities, hyperreal digital environments reshape both emotional wellbeing and social behavior. Features of social media such as likes; comments; shares; and personalized recommendations serve as forms of digital validation that encourage idealized self-presentations and lead to dependency on external approval. The continued presence of algorithmically generated content creates opportunities for upward social comparisons and reinforces the notion that digitally presented ideals are examples of successful lifestyles, appearances, etc. The extended time spent engaged with digital environments has resulted in reports of emotional exhaustion; fragmentation of identity; and decreased psychological wellbeing due to an increasing correlation between perceived digital recognition and one's sense of self-worth (Ballantine & Martin, 2005) among all age groups; however, the effects are more severe among younger generations who experience many years of their identity development during periods of continuous engagement with digital media.

Digital identity development through a psychoanalysis viewpoint using Freud's model of the psyche (Id, Ego and Superego) to understand psychological factors is associated with digital identity formation in social media environments (Freud, 1989; Keles et al. 2020). Digital identity formation in the context of social media represents an expression of the Id that focuses on achieving instant gratification (likes, comments, etc.). However, the Ego has two roles. First, it attempts to provide some level of authenticity by reconciling what one truly is (authenticity) with who they appear to be (the idealized digital identity). Second, the Ego continually attempts to mediate and adapt to influence from both external and internal forces including: societal expectations, peer evaluations and social media norms. As such, the Superego, which serves to encourage conformity to behaviors perceived to be appropriate within these contexts also impacts behavior. Therefore, considering Baudrillard's hyperrealism alongside Freud's psychoanalytic theory will provide a complete understanding digital identity development, validation and the psychological factors associated with developing this type of identity in modern day social media.

Research studies have identified an association with rising social comparison, body image concerns, validation-seeking behavior and emotional distress as a result of extended periods of social media engagement (Alimohammadi et al. 2024; Ferguson et al. 2024; Malik et al. 2024). However, prior studies have largely approached these issues through behavioral or psychological lenses, as compared to very few studies which have investigated these phenomena using the theoretical lens of hyperreality. Hyperreality, used in conjunction with digital identity and psychological wellness, represents a broader conceptual framework for exploring social media experience.

While numerous studies have researched social media use and its impacts on mental health, relatively few studies have studied hyperreality as a theoretical framework for investigating digital identity and self-concept among young adult social media users, particularly in the Indian socio-cultural context. Past research has focused extensively on addiction to digital media; presentation of self-online; and psychological distress. There exists limited descriptive data regarding hyperreal digital identity. Additionally, there exist limited empirical studies conducted in India that investigate hyperreality given India's rapid transition into a digital economy and the culturally distinct nature in which Indians engage in online activities.

Against this background, this current study will examine young adults' usage of social media as a way of constructing their identities and perceptions about themselves in addition to examining their psychological wellbeing. Additionally, an assessment of the relationships between social media behaviors and both self-concept/self perception and psychological wellness will be made from the perspective of Freud's structural model of the psyche and Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Digital identity can be understood as a multi-dimensional construct shaped by technological features, social expectations and psychological aspects of an individual. It represents an environment in which individuals create their own identities using digital media, and it is used as an instrument for the creation and negotiation of identity in social media environments. In addition to the creation and negotiation of identity, social media platforms provide an opportunity to evaluate oneself digitally. This allows for the possibility to compare one's digital identity with others. Due to the permanent availability of evaluations (e.g., likes, comments, etc.), individuals' digital identities may gain greater importance than their "real-life" experiences.

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard described modern society as being primarily based on simulation. He defines hyperreality as a system of representation in which simulations take precedence over real-world events (Baudrillard & Glaser, 1994). Goffman's theory of self-presentation can also explain the process of creating digital identity. According to his theory,

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social interaction is a performance that involves individuals managing impressions in front of different groups of people (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). While Goffman initially developed this concept in reference to face-to-face interaction, it applies even more so today to digital interaction, due to the increased degree of control users have over the photos they share, the stories they tell about themselves and their online behavior. Digital platforms allow users to edit, filter and continually refine the material they publish. Users thus create and present identities that align with societal ideals rather than reflect who they are in everyday life.

Users now employ advanced methods of self-presentation thanks to the recommendation systems that guide them to produce visually appealing and socially approved content; due to influencer culture that promotes certain types of presentation; and because each platform establishes its own set of rules regarding the type of content most likely to generate user engagement. Therefore, users do not simply present their digital identities according to their personal preferences or traits but are constantly engaged in strategic performances of identity that are directed both by the technical possibilities offered by digital platforms as well as by feedback from their audiences. One major reason why users strive to maintain their curated online presence relates directly to their desire for validation and social comparison. Uses and Gratification Theory explains that people use media to fulfil several psychological and social requirements; among those are entertainment, social interaction, self-actualization, seeking new knowledge/information, and seeking recognition (Mizrak et al. 2025). Social media extends upon all those reasons by offering users clear signs of approval, such as likes, comments, shares, followers, views and many other metrics that make social interaction measurable in terms of validation. Those feedback mechanisms lead to repeated use and reinforce behaviors related to changing/optimizing your content to enhance your digital identity.

Festinger's Social Comparison Theory explains much of the drive for validation: people assess themselves by comparing with others. Social media offers countless chances for upward and downward comparison, presenting curated snapshots of others' successes through images and videos (Orben et al. 2019). Research studies have shown there is a relationship between heavy use of social media and decreased self-esteem, lower levels of life satisfaction, depression, anxiety, and body dissatisfaction. Higgins' Self-Discrepancy theory states that there is a form of psychological pressure (self-discrepancy) created in individuals as they have differences among what are referred to as: actual self, ideal self, or social self (Przybylski et al. 2013). Social Media provides users with platforms to create profiles (online personas), which in many cases do not represent who they actually are; thus providing a disparity between their "Online" Self and their "Offline" Self. As a result, self-worth based on external approval, can cause the self-difference to lead to internal conflicts, lower levels of psychological well-being, and a sense of ineptness.

Additionally, Freud's Structural Model of Psyche is an appropriate theoretical lens in which to view the Formation of Digital Identity. For example; in a Social Media environment – the Id seeks instant gratification through on-line recognition – whereas the Ego attempts to balance true identity with that of presenting a self that conforms to the expectations placed upon it within the digital world (Vogel et al. 2014; Voggenteiter et al. 2024). Similarly; the Superego influences conformity to what are considered acceptable on-line behaviors and idealized forms of Digital Self. Simultaneously, the desire for instantaneous gratification through digital validation is representative of the impulsiveness of the Id; thus, creating conflict for the Ego to manage. The psychoanalytical approach adds to hyperreality by providing insight into the internal psychological mechanisms involved in prolonged participation in digitally mediated environments.

More recently, researchers studying effects of social media on mental health are finding that prolonged engagement with social media has negative effects on several aspects of psychological well-being (Zhao et al. 2024; Mizrak et al. 2025). Research studies have identified correlations between frequent social media use and increased anxiety, emotional exhaustion/fatigue, fear of missing out (FOMO), body dissatisfaction, loneliness and depressive symptoms (Zhao et al. 2008). Additionally, research studies have established relationships between validation-seeking behaviors and continued monitoring of engagement metrics and higher levels of stress and lower levels of emotional resilience. More recent evidence indicates that the algorithms used to personalize content based on user preferences leads to longer periods spent on social media sites selecting exposure to idealized lifestyles and developing dependency on social validation from outside sources (Alimohammadi et al. 2024). While digital media enables connections with others, allows for creative expression, enables professionals to network and facilitates group activity; over-reliance on digitally mediated recognition may negatively affect psychological well-being and decrease a sense of authentic identity.

This concern is especially relevant in India as social media usage has grown at an unprecedented rate amongst young adults in recent years. India is home to one of the largest digital populations globally; characterized by the proliferation of smartphones, relatively cheap Internet access, and growing engagement across multiple social media platforms. Although there are several studies that address some aspect of social media (use), social media (self-presentation), social media (social comparison), social media (mental health) and other related issues; and even though many researchers have studied the aforementioned areas individually, there are very few literature that examines these same areas collectively within a hyperreality model. In fact most prior research has generally focused on individual components (e.g., "digital addiction," "psychological distress") and/or behaviors exhibited by individuals using specific platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram). Furthermore, empirical research

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regarding the relationship of these variables as they relate to the youth population in India has been relatively non-existent. This study will seek to fill this void by integrating the theories of Baudrillard and Freud, to examine the relationship between social media use, digital identity construction, seeking validation, self-perceived identity and psychological well-being for a sample of young adults in India.

III. METHODOLOGY

The use of an online survey for collecting cross sectional secondary data was selected as the methodological approach for this study. The use of an online survey permitted researchers to gather primary data by allowing participants to complete a structured questionnaire on their behaviors associated with social media and other related constructs. This study sought to investigate the relationships among hyperreal digital environments; digital identity formation; and self-perceptions; and psychological well-being among young social media users within the context of India.

A. Participants and Sampling

The research group targeted the young adult (social media) user population within the Durgapur-Kolkata region that consisted of persons aged 18-25 years. Stratified Random Sampling was employed to collect the 230 responses of the study which provided a representation of respondents according to both of the two sample characteristics (gender and age). Eligible participants were individuals who use at least one social networking site. Data were collected via an online survey format by utilizing Google Forms over a defined time frame.

B. Research Instrument

The instrument included four sections. Section one provided demographic information about participants (age, gender, education level and work status). Section two assessed participants' social media behaviour, including each participant's preferred platforms, average daily hours spent on social media, posting frequency, frequency of image editing prior to posting, tendency to seek validation online, and motivations for engaging with social media. The third section assessed digital identity and self-perception, including social comparison, body dissatisfaction, online self-presentation, perceived authenticity of digital identity, pressure to maintain an idealized online persona, and conformity to social expectations. The fourth section evaluated psychological well-being using indicators related to anxiety, emotional stress, self-esteem, emotional exhaustion, perceived effects of social media validation, and digital detox behaviour. Most construct items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), while behavioural variables were measured using categorical response options.

C. Measurement of Study Constructs

The structure and the corresponding study constructs are presented in Table I.

Table No. I: Questionnaire Structure and Study Constructs			
Category	Variables Measured	Measurement Scale	Literature Basis
Social Media Behaviour	Daily usage duration, preferred platform, posting frequency, image editing, validation-seeking behaviour, motivation for use	Nominal, Ordinal, 5-point Likert Scale	Social media behaviour literature
Hyperreal Digital Identity	Curated self-presentation, idealized online identity, algorithmic validation, online persona	5-point Likert Scale	Baudrillard's Theory of Hyperreality
Self-Perception	Social comparison, body dissatisfaction, identity authenticity, identity modification	5-point Likert Scale	Freud's Structural Model and Digital Identity Literature
Psychological Well-being	Anxiety, emotional stress, self-esteem, emotional exhaustion, digital detox behaviour	5-point Likert Scale	Mental Well-being Literature

D. Data Analysis

The conceptual framework was developed based on Jean Baudrillard's Theory of Hyperreality and Sigmund Freud's Structural Model of the Psyche. The framework illustrates the conceptual organization of the study, in which social media behaviour provides the digital context for hyperreal identity construction, influencing self-perception and psychological well-being among young social media users. Microsoft Excel was used in combination with IBM SPSS Statistics to code the collected

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information and analyze it. A series of descriptive statistics (percentages, frequency distributions, means and standard deviations) were applied to provide an overview of the respondents' demographics, their social media habits, and their overall psychological health.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were categorized based on demographic information (gender, age), social media utilization, and how people perceive their "virtual" identity vs. "true" identity regarding their own self-image and mental health issues. In addition, there is a section concerning seeking validation digitally while employing coping mechanisms. The study results were analyzed from two theoretical viewpoints. One viewpoint concerns Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality; the other pertains to Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche. Additionally, before collecting data for this project, a pilot study was conducted to assess both the clarity and consistency of the questionnaire.

A. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study was conducted on 230 young adult active users of social media. The demographics show that the participants are part of a generation actively involved with their digital lives through regular use of online communities as well as social networks. Table II presents a balanced mix of men and women and a range of educational backgrounds, offering insight into contemporary young adults' engagement with technology.

Table No. II: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 230)			
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	51.3
	Female	112	48.7
Age	18–21 years	126	54.8
	22–25 years	104	45.2
Education	Undergraduate	154	67
	Postgraduate	76	33
Occupation	Student	168	73
	Employed	45	19.6
	Self-employed	10	4.3
	Others	7	3.1

In terms of employment status, the majority (73%) of the participants were students. Other than students, the next largest group (19.6%) consisted of people who were employed full-time; much fewer (4.3%) participants were self-employed; while another small number (3.1%) belonged to some type of occupation not listed above. Overall, the demographic makeup presents a fair representation of young adults; therefore, it has provided a good base from which we could examine social media behavior and the potential effects of social media on psychology.

B. Social Media Behaviour Patterns

Table III shows that Instagram was the most popular platform among survey respondents. In total, 60% of all participants (N= 138) prefer to use Instagram when compared to the 25% (N = 58) who prefer to use Facebook; 10% (N = 23) who prefer to use Twitter/ X; and 5% (N = 11) of those who identify with "other" social media sites. The dominance of Instagram indicates a shift toward the visually oriented nature of many social media sites for purposes of communication, expression, and identity creation and performance for young adults. Respondents reported spending an average of 4.5 hours per day on social media, indicating that digital platforms have become an integral part of their daily lives. Such prolonged engagement increases exposure to curated online content, which may influence self-perception and encourage social comparison. Furthermore, a majority of participants reported editing photographs or carefully selecting content before posting, suggesting that online self-presentation is often deliberate and strategically managed. This pattern reflects the tendency to construct favourable digital identities through selective self-presentation and impression management. Entertainment was identified as the primary purpose for the use of social media by approximately 55% of the participants. Self-presentation was identified as the second-most frequent purpose for the use of social media at approximately 25%; social interaction was ranked third at approximately 20%. Although entertainment continues to be the main purpose for social media use, the significant percentage of participants who utilize social media for self-presentation purposes illustrate the importance of digital identity formation. It appears that there is a coexistence of entertainment and self-presentational purposes for social media use, suggesting that social media does not solely serve as a means of relaxation but also serves as an arena where individuals develop and negotiate social approval, recognition, and personal identity.

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Overall, these findings align with Baudrillard's Theory of Hyperreality which states that simulations and mediated representations will eventually replace or overwhelm authentic reality. The fact that many participants choose to utilize visually-driven platforms, spend long periods of time each day engaging with social media, and deliberately curate their content suggest that participants are involved in developing idealized digital identities that may be perceived as being more relevant or desirable than their actual experiences. Therefore, social media sites function as places where symbolic representations often take precedence over lived realities, thus reinforcing the emergence of hyper-realities in today's digital culture.

Table No. III: Social Media Behaviour of Respondents (N = 230)			
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Preferred Platform	Instagram	138	60
	Facebook	58	25
	Twitter/X	23	10
	Others	11	5
Content Editing Before Posting	Yes	150	65
	No	80	35
Primary Motivation	Entertainment	127	55
	Self-presentation	58	25
	Social Interaction	45	20

C. Hyperreal Digital Identity and Self-Perception

Figure 1 makes clear the extent of social media use among participants and its impact on their psychological self-perception. The findings indicate that 67.8% of the respondents frequently engaged in comparing themselves with others on social media, underscoring the widespread nature of social comparison among young adults. In addition, 52.2% reported experiencing dissatisfaction with their physical appearance, implying that continuous exposure to idealized online content may shape negative self-evaluations. Nearly half of the participants (47.8%) acknowledged altering their online identities to project a more favourable image. Likewise, 53.9% felt compelled to maintain an idealized online persona, while 65.2% regularly edited photographs before sharing them, reflecting the growing emphasis on curated self-presentation in digital environments. Therefore, it can be seen that the presentation of oneself through social media is generally a thoughtful and purposeful action as opposed to a truthful reflection of one's daily life. The amount of emphasis placed upon enhancing your photo and making a good impression when creating content for social media reflects the growing value placed on receiving social acceptance and having a positive digital presence.

Furthermore, the fact that 59.6% of all participants stated that their happiness was based on what they received online (such as likes, comments, and shares) shows that the opinions and reactions of strangers have had a significant role in influencing users' feelings of self-worth and mental well-being. This highlights that social media now plays a central role in shaping psychological self-view.

As reported above, participants' frequent social comparisons, body dissatisfaction, online identity adjustments, image editing, and reliance on strangers' reactions show these behaviours contribute to creating and sustaining idealised online selves. These "hyper-real" portrayals often eclipse everyday experiences and blur the boundary between reality and simulation. The study therefore demonstrates the impact of hyperreality on identity formation in contemporary digital communication.

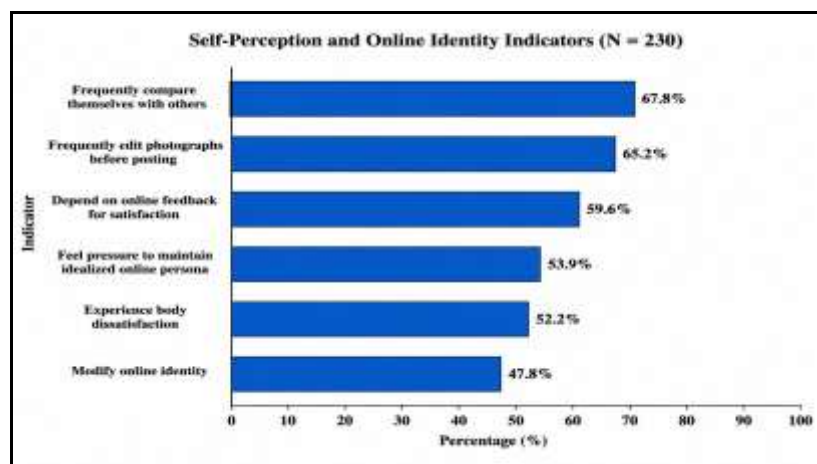


Figure 1: Graphical representation of Hyperreal Digital Identity and Self-Perception

D. Psychological Well-being

In line with Figure 2 data, results suggest that a significant portion of participants have had negative psychological experiences as a result of their social media usage. Anxiety at moderate to extreme levels were reported by 47% (n=108) of the participants; this was the highest level of psychological experience recorded in the study. It appears that regular interaction through social media could potentially contribute to increased levels of stress or anxiety for some users. The possible reasons include but are not limited to fear of missing out (FOMO), continued comparison with peers, and/or seeking validation through their online interactions. These results show that a significant percentage of young adult social media users experience negative mental health outcomes as a result of their prolonged social media engagement. More than two-fifths of study participants experienced emotional exhaustion due to prolonged social media engagement (43.9%), and similar percentages (42.2%) indicated lower self-esteem resulting from comparing themselves to digitally enhanced or otherwise idealized images of others. Further, nearly four-tenths of the sample (39.1%) stated they felt emotionally distressed about how much time was spent interacting via social media and the reliance on virtual communication. The evidence from this research supports Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality; the continued exposure to a created reality through digital imagery can affect an individual's perception of the world around them and his/her emotional state. The high incidence rates of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, decreased self-esteem and emotional distress suggest there are potentially serious psychological implications of immersing oneself in hyperreal virtual realities for extended periods of time.

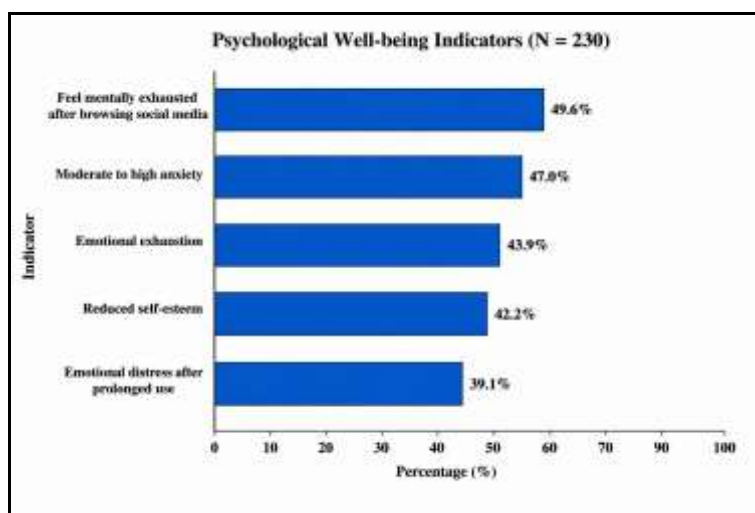


Figure 2: Graphical representation of Psychological Well-being Indicators

E. Social Media Validation and Digital Coping Strategies

The data clearly indicates (as seen in Figure 3) that social media validation is a significant factor for both user behavior and emotional responses. Most respondents (62.2%) stated they felt happier when their posts were popular and many responded (45.2%) by stating they felt unhappy when their post was poorly engaged. It is clear there is a significant dependency of feelings on receiving positive feedback through digital means. Approximately, 40.0% of the participants acknowledged that sometimes they will disconnect from social media temporarily to avoid additional stress caused by their digital presence. Approximately 33.0% have fewer anxious thoughts after taking breaks. Only about 25.2% engage in mindfulness practices or other off-line recreational activities frequently enough to be considered regular coping mechanisms. There appears to be an overall lack of awareness regarding long-term coping techniques to manage the negative impacts of excessive social media usage.

Overall, this analysis has shown that social media interaction creates a correlation between seeking validation and creating a virtual image; therefore, emotional attachment to feedback and the drive to produce a perceived "perfect" image online reflects the rapidly developing impact of social media feedback on mental health. This finding supports Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality in that mediated images are becoming increasingly influential over real-life experience. The increasing popularity of digital detox programs supports the notion that individuals recognize the importance of periodic separation from online life in order to maintain emotional stability and well-being.

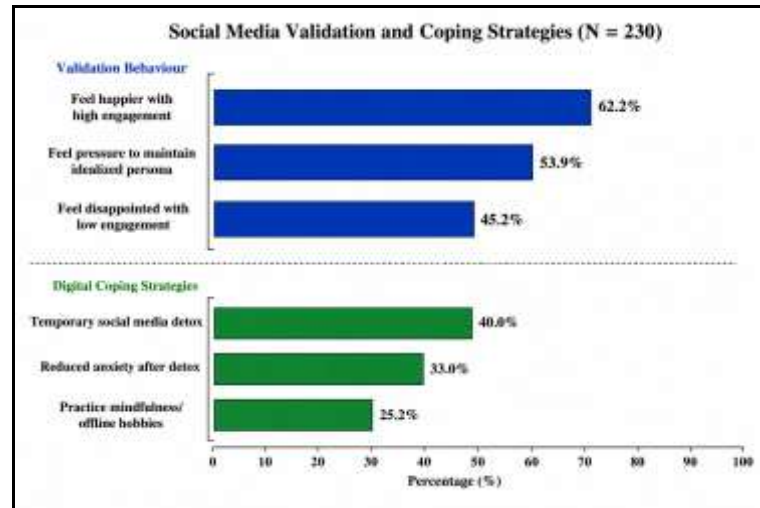


Figure 3: Graphical representation of Social Media Validation and Coping Strategies

F. Reliability Analysis

The findings from the descriptive statistics as illustrated in Table IV show that social media behavior was the highest scored variable (mean $M = 3.91$, $S.D. = .72$), showing an extremely strong propensity for participants to engage in social media behaviors. The second most highly scored variable was Hyperreal Digital Identity and Self- Perception (Mean = 3.74, $S.D. = 0.81$). This suggests that there was a significant amount of social comparison, identity formation and dependency on social media for self-validation. The lowest scoring variables both moderately scored (Means 3.38, $S.D. = 0.84$ & Means 3.29, $S.D. = 0.78$ respectively), which indicated a large number of participants experienced anxiety, emotional exhaustion and low self-esteem. The results provide evidence that all of the dependent variables had reasonably small variability, indicated by a deviations between 0.72 & 0.84, indicating that participants' perceptions of each construct are generally consistent. Overall, these findings demonstrate that excessive use of social media has a significant impact upon participant's tendency to develop their identities in hyper-realistic ways and moderate levels of psychological distress, providing support for the theory that the extended periods spent immersed in digitally mediated environments may affect one's self-perception and emotional health.

Construct	No. of Questions	Cronbach's α	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Social Media Behaviour	5	0.86	3.91	0.72	High level of social media engagement and active online participation.
Hyperreal Digital Identity and Self-Perception	6	0.89	3.74	0.81	Moderate to high tendency towards social comparison, identity modification, and dependence on online validation.
Psychological Well-being	5	0.84	3.38	0.84	Moderate psychological distress characterized by anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced self-esteem.
Social Media Validation and Coping Strategies	6	0.82	3.29	0.78	Moderate dependence on social validation with limited adoption of positive digital coping strategies.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study draws on Baudrillard's Theory of Hyperreality and Freud's Structural Model of the Psyche to examine the experiences of young adults in social media environments. It explores the interplay between social media use, digital identity formation, self-perception, and psychological well-being through an integrated theoretical perspective. Visual platforms—Instagram being particularly prominent—are used daily by most young people surveyed. Young people surveyed were found to be engaged in creating curated versions of themselves through self-presentation on visual platforms; comparing themselves socially to others on those same platforms; and selectively altering their representation of themselves on-line so they would fit into the

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current norms of what is acceptable social behavior. Many of the young people surveyed also reported feeling anxious, emotionally exhausted, less confident about who they are and reliant on digital validation (e.g., likes, comments and other forms of engagement) from others to feel good about who they are. Therefore, it can be seen that the idealized representations of oneself on-line have a real effect on one's perception of oneself and emotions.

This research extends previous studies by utilizing sociological and psychoanalytical theories in relation to India, which represents a rapidly developing country in terms of technology, but still has deeply rooted expectations of its citizens based on traditional values. Mental health professionals will also require education/training in order to effectively treat clients whose issues may be directly related to their use of social media. Social media platforms should be designed to allow users to express themselves authentically without relying solely upon engagement metrics (i.e., likes, shares etc.) to validate the user.

Some limitations exist in regards to the methodology utilized in this study. Specifically, because the data collected was based on participant self-reporting; there existed restrictions placed on the sample population (i.e., young adults); and due to the fact that the data collection process involved a cross-sectional survey method, causation could not be determined. As stated previously, recommendations for future research include having a more representative sample size; collecting data over a longer period of time than a single snapshot (i.e., longitudinal or experimental designs); incorporating multiple methods of data collection/analysis (i.e., qualitative and quantitative methodologies); and studying new forms of interactive technologies (such as augmented reality and virtual reality) along with artificial intelligence-mediated content to determine whether these technologies continue to contribute to the formation of identity and various psychological processes.

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