

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Self-esteem and Social Anxiety in Young Adults With Social Networking Sites (SNS) in Klang Valley

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In an era where internet presence is increasingly ubiquitous, it is commonplace for young adults to engage with Social Networking Sites (SNS), commonly referred to as social media. This study aims to explore the prevalence of self-esteem and social anxiety among young adults engaged in SNS usage and to examine the interrelation between these psychological constructs. **Materials and methods:** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) were utilized to measure self-esteem and social anxiety levels. A total of 238 participants aged 18-25 years from various locales within Klang Valley, who maintain at least one active SNS account participated in this study. Data were analyzed using independent t-tests, Pearson Correlation Analysis and One-Way ANOVA. **Results:** A significant proportion of the sample, 67.2%, exhibited probable social anxiety, and 50.8% demonstrated low self-esteem levels. Despite the varied SNS platforms utilized, the results highlight a prevalent trend of anxiety and diminished self-esteem among the cohort. A notable negative and moderate correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety was identified, with a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.523. This suggests a significant relationship where lower self-esteem levels are associated with higher social anxiety. Gender was found to have a correlation with self-esteem levels, whereas employment and marital status exhibited a significant association with social anxiety. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that SNS usage among young adults in Klang Valley is linked to lower self-esteem and heightened social anxiety, underscoring a pivotal dynamic where increased self-esteem correlates with reduced social anxiety levels.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital era, the proliferation of social networking sites (SNS) has become a global phenomenon, further accelerated by advancements in internet technology and mobile connectivity. These platforms facilitate myriad forms of interaction among users, ranging from communication to the sharing of personal experiences. Global Digital Report stated that there was an unprecedented surge in social media engagement, marking the most rapid increase in the past three years with 4.2 billion users worldwide, a trend significantly influenced by global lockdown measures, including those in Malaysia (1). This report also highlights a notable expansion in Malaysia's digital landscape, with an increase of approximately 2 million social media users within the country, underscoring a growing digital footprint among Malaysians.

As of January 2021, the Digital Report indicates that Facebook leads as the most prevalent SNS among Malaysians, commanding a usage rate of 93%, followed by Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter. This trend of increasing engagement with social media platforms has been consistent over the years. Users engage with these platforms for various reasons, including maintaining connections with acquaintances, sharing joyful moments through photos and videos, and crafting profiles that reflect their 'ideal selves'. This latter practice aims to project a positive image to attract social or romantic relationships (2). Furthermore, the psychological impact of social media, noting that users often engage in social comparison with others they follow, leading to a variety of emotional responses (3). This dynamic underscore the intricate relationship between social media usage and individual psychological experiences, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of its implications on self-perception and social interaction.

In a study examining the motivations behind older adolescents' use of SNS, Barker (4) identified communication with peers and the reconnection

with former acquaintances as primary incentives. The research highlights the capability of users to discover shared interests and engage within specific communities or groups hosted on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (5). Beyond fostering connections, SNS serves as a medium for entertainment and leisure, facilitating the sharing of diverse content including music, videos, and original creations. This aspect is particularly evident in the functionalities of platforms like TikTok and Instagram (4). Moreover, SNS is posited to contribute positively to the youth's self-perception, their sense of community, and broader worldview (6) suggesting a multifaceted impact of social media engagement on individual and collective identity formation.

Self-esteem is conceptualized as an individual's assessment of their own worth, characterized by either positive or negative evaluations that influence feelings of worthiness or competence (7). While for some, self-esteem may present as a stable characteristic, for others, it exhibits variability and requires time to develop. Generally, individuals with lower self-esteem harbor negative perceptions about themselves, whereas those with higher self-esteem tend to hold more positive self-views (8). This self-perception significantly impacts interpersonal communication behaviors, with self-confidence levels directly affecting self-esteem.

Previous study demonstrates an inverse relationship between self-esteem levels and the frequency of Facebook usage, suggesting that increased Facebook interaction correlates with lower self-esteem (7). Similarly, Jan et al. (8) observed that the duration young adults spend on Facebook negatively predicts their self-esteem, quantifying a decline of 5.574 points in self-esteem for every hour spent on the platform. Martinez (9) further explores the dynamics of SNS, positing that the pursuit of "likes" serves as a mechanism for users to seek recognition and acceptance. Another study corroborates this by noting the compulsive behavior of users to frequently check their SNS for audience feedback, including friends or followers' reactions and the quantity of likes received (10). Such behaviors, if persistent, may evolve into problematic SNS usage, ultimately leading to diminished self-esteem. This body of research underscores the complex relationship between social media engagement and self-esteem, highlighting the potential for negative impacts on individual psychological well-being.

Social anxiety is characterized by feelings of apprehension and fear that arise during social interactions. Individuals experiencing social anxiety often encounter difficulties with social skills (11). Individuals with heightened social anxiety are inclined to substitute face-to-face interactions with digital communication channels, seeking to enhance their self-presentation in less threatening environments (12). This preference for online communication can lead to

difficulties in real-world social interactions, manifesting as introversion or challenges in communication and socialization, given the perceived safety and ease of online platforms (13). Research conducted in Indonesia among adolescents demonstrates a correlation between social media addiction and increased social anxiety scores, indicating a significant positive relationship between social anxiety and reliance on social media. Individuals with higher levels of social anxiety tend to have a greater dependency on social media, suggesting that social anxiety contributes to the development of social media dependency (14).

While existing studies have explored the relationship between self-esteem and social media usage, as well as the association between social media dependency and social anxiety, gaps remain in understanding these phenomena in specific cultural and regional contexts. For instance, much of the existing literature focuses on Western populations, leaving a significant gap in understanding how these dynamics manifest in diverse cultural settings, such as Malaysia. Moreover, while studies have highlighted the negative implications of excessive social media use on psychological well-being, limited research has specifically examined the interplay between self-esteem and social anxiety among young adults within urbanized, digitally connected regions like the Klang Valley making them a crucial group to be the respondents of this study.

The objective of this study is to assess the prevalence of social anxiety and self-esteem among young adults engaging with SNS within the Klang Valley region. Furthermore, it seeks to examine the relationship between demographic factors and self-esteem in this demographic. Additionally, the research aims to explore the potential correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety among young adults utilizing SNS.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional design due to its capacity to facilitate the simultaneous comparison of multiple variables. Participants were required to complete an online standardized questionnaire, which was disseminated through several social networking platforms, including Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. The recommended sample size for this research is 385 participants, determined to be the most appropriate for the target population in the Klang Valley, estimated at approximately 8 million in total for the years 2019 and 2020, as reported by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (15).

Participants

The inclusion criteria for participants stipulate that individuals must be aged between 18 to 25 years, without gender restriction. They should be residents of

the Klang Valley region during the period of the study. Additionally, participants are required to be users of at least one social networking site (SNS), such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or any other social media platform, irrespective of their level of activity on these sites. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study through an online consent form embedded at the beginning of the survey. Participants were required to read an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of their participation before providing consent. Anonymity was ensured by not collecting any identifying information.

Instruments

The questionnaire utilized in this study comprised three distinct sections, each designed to gather specific types of data from the participants. The initial section collected demographic information, including gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, employment status, income level, and the social networking sites (SNS) utilized by the participants. No pilot testing was conducted as the study utilized standardized and validated questionnaires with established reliability and validity in previous research. These instruments were deemed appropriate for the study objectives and population.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

RSES is an instrument to assess self-esteem levels (16). The RSES is widely recognized for its robust psychometric properties and remains the most frequently employed measure of self-esteem in research. This scale demonstrates high test-retest reliability, with scores ranging between 0.82 and 0.88. Within the Malaysian context, the RSES has exhibited excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8, as reported by Yaacob (17). The scale consists of 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). It includes both positively (items 1, 3, 4, 7, 10) and negatively (items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9) worded items.

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS)

SIAS is developed to assess social interaction anxiety (18). The SIAS is known for its excellent internal consistency, with scores ranging from 0.88 to 0.93 across its 20 items. It utilizes a 5-point Likert scale for responses, from 0 (Not at all characteristic or true of me) to 4 (Extremely characteristic or true of me). The SIAS's total score is calculated by summing the scores of all items, with specific items (5, and 11) requiring reverse scoring.

Data analysis

The objectives of the research were addressed using descriptive statistics to characterize the population of young adults in the Klang Valley. To assess the normality of the data, both histogram visualizations and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were employed. The levels of self-esteem and social anxiety among the respondents

were determined through the application of frequency and percentage analyses in the descriptive data.

Furthermore, the exploration of the association between demographic variables and both self-esteem and social anxiety within the young adult population of the Klang Valley was conducted via the Independent t-Test or One-Way ANOVA, contingent upon the nature of the variables and whether they encompassed two or multiple groups.

Additionally, the investigation into the correlation between self-esteem and social anxiety among young adults utilizing SNS in the Klang Valley was performed using Pearson's correlation analysis, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of these psychological dimensions within the context of SNS usage.

Ethical Clearance

We obtained approval from the UiTM Research Ethics Committee, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam (REC/12/2021 -UG/MR/1169).

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of respondents

In this study, a total of 238 individuals participated, including 22 men and 216 women, all within the age range of 18 to 25 years, who voluntarily consented to partake in the survey. The gender distribution skewed towards female participants, who represented 92% (N = 219), with male participants accounting for the remaining 8% (N = 19). The participants were categorized by age into three groups: 18-19 years (N = 52, 21.8%), 20-22 years (N = 56, 23.5%), and the majority being within the 23-25 years age range (N = 130, 54.6%). Ethnicity-wise, the majority were Malay (N = 221, 92.9%), with a small number of Chinese (N = 5, 2.1%), and an assortment of other ethnicities (N = 11, 4.6%) including Bajau, Melanau, Bidayuh, and Javanese, some of whom identified as "Bumiputera Sabah", and one Indian participant (N = 1, 0.4%).

The survey revealed that most of the respondents were single (N = 229, 96.2%), with a few married individuals (N = 9, 3.8%), and none reported being divorced. A significant portion of the participants were students (N = 169, 71.0%), while others were either fully employed (N = 38, 16%), part-time employed, or unemployed (N = 12, 5% and N = 19, 8%, respectively). Regarding household income, the largest group (N = 95, 39.9%) fell within the RM1201-RM4850 range, positioning them within the Bottom 40% (B40) of Malaysian household incomes. Additionally, 83 respondents (34.9%) reported incomes less than RM1200, while the remainder were distributed between incomes of RM4851-RM10970 (Middle 40% or M40) and higher than RM10971 (Top 20% or T20), making up 17.6% (N = 42) and 7.6% (N = 18) of the

sample, respectively. Table I shows the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table I: Demographic data of the respondents (n=238)

Variable	Category	N (%)
Gender	Female	219 (92.0)
	Male	19 (8.0)
Age	18-19	52 (21.8)
	20-22	56 (23.5)
	23-25	130 (54.6)
Ethnicity	Malay	221 (92.9)
	Chinese	5 (2.1)
	Indian	1 (0.4)
	Others	11 (4.6)
Marital status	Single	229 (96.2)
	Married	9 (3.8)
Employment status	Student	169 (71.0)
	Full-time employed	38 (16.0)
	Part-time employed	12 (5.0)
	Unemployed	19 (8.0)
Income	< RM1200	83 (34.9)
	RM1202-RM10970	95 (39.9)
	RM4851-RM10970	42 (17.6)
	>RM10971	18 (7.6)

SNS used by respondents

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of social networking site (SNS) usage among the study's respondents. The results show that Facebook is the most used platform with 73 respondents (30.7%), closely followed by YouTube with 63 respondents (26.5%). Twitter is utilized by 66 individuals (27.7%), making it the third most popular choice. Instagram is preferred by 26 participants (10.9%), while TikTok is the least used, with only 10 respondents (4.2%) engaging with this platform. The data indicate a predominant preference for Facebook and YouTube among the participants, suggesting that these platforms may play a more significant role in the social networking experiences of the study's young adult demographic.

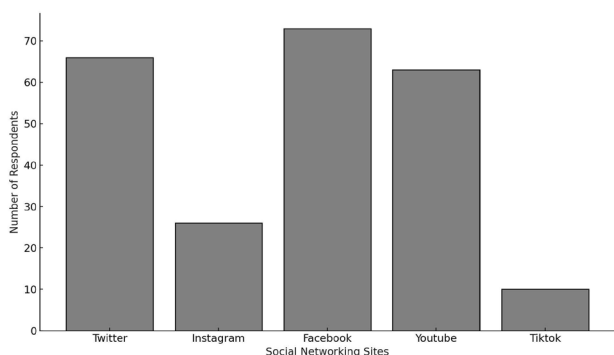


Figure 1: Distribution SNS usage among the study's respondents (n=238)

Self-Esteem among young adults who are using SNS

Table II shows the frequency of self-esteem levels among respondents in relation to their most utilized SNS. For Twitter users, the majority reported low self-esteem, with 42 respondents (57.5%). Medium self-esteem was reported by 16 users (21.9%), and high self-esteem by 15 users (20.5%). Instagram users displayed a similar trend, with 30 respondents (47.6%) indicating low self-esteem, 16 (25.4%) with medium self-esteem, and 17 (14.6%) reporting high self-esteem. On Facebook, out of the respondents, an equal number (4 respondents or 40.0% for each category) reported low and high self-esteem, while only 2 respondents (20.0%) indicated they have medium self-esteem. YouTube users had 11 respondents (42.3%) with low self-esteem, 9 (34.6%) with medium self-esteem, and 6 (23.1%) with high self-esteem. Finally, TikTok users showed the highest percentage of low self-esteem with 34 respondents (51.5%), 19 (28.8%) with medium self-esteem, and 13 (19.7%) with high self-esteem.

The χ^2 (Chi-square) statistics with degrees of freedom (df) equal to 8 yielded a value of 5.116, with a corresponding p-value of 0.745, indicating no statistically significant association between the levels of self-esteem and the type of SNS used by the respondents in this sample.

Table II: Level of Self-Esteem and SNS Usage (n= 238)

	Twitter n(%)	Instagram n (%)	Facebook n (%)	YouTube n (%)	TikTok n (%)	X ² Statistics (df)	P-value
Low	42 (57.5)	30 (47.6)	4 (40.0)	11 (42.3)	34 (51.5)	5.116 (8)	0.745
Medium	16 (21.9)	16 (25.4)	2 (20.0)	9 (34.6)	19 (28.8)		
High	15 (20.5)	17 (14.6)	4 (40.0)	6 (23.1)	13 (19.7)		

Social Anxiety among young adults who are using SNS

Table III indicates the frequency of social anxiety levels among the respondents in relation to their most frequently used social networking site (SNS). For Twitter users, a majority reported experiencing social anxiety, with 42 individuals (57.5%), while 16 respondents (21.9%) were categorized as normal. Among Instagram users, 30 individuals (47.6%) were identified with social anxiety, and 16 respondents (25.4%) fell into the normal category. Facebook users exhibited a distribution where 4 respondents (40.0%) experienced social anxiety and 2 respondents (20.0%) were considered normal. For YouTube, 11 respondents (42.3%) experienced social anxiety, while 9 respondents (34.6%) were categorized as normal. TikTok users showed the highest percentage of social anxiety with 34 individuals (51.5%), and 19 respondents (28.8%) were reported as normal.

The χ^2 (Chi-square) statistics with 4 degrees of freedom

(df) resulted in a value of 4.457, with a p-value of 0.348, indicating that there is no statistically significant

association between the levels of social anxiety and the type of SNS used by the respondents in this sample.

Table III: Level of Social Anxiety and SNS Usage (n=238)

	Twitter n(%)	Instagram n (%)	Facebook n (%)	YouTube n (%)	TikTok n (%)	X ² Statistics (df)	P-value
Normal	16 (21.9)	16 (25.4)	2(20.0)	9 (34.6)	19 (28.8)	4.457 (4)	0.348
Social Anxiety	42 (57.5)	30 (47.6)	4 (40.0)	11 (42.3)	34 (51.5)		

The relationships between demographic variables, self-esteem and social anxiety among young adults who are using SNS

Table IV shows the results of the RSES and the SIAS in relation to demographic variables. Regarding gender differences in self-esteem, female participants (n = 219) reported a significantly lower mean RSES score (M = 25.12, SD = 5.75) compared to male participants (n = 19; M = 28.32, SD = 5.64), $t(236) = -2.32, p = 0.021$, indicating higher self-esteem among males. In contrast, the mean SIAS scores between females (M = 43.73, SD = 15.54) and males (M = 35.74, SD = 15.17) did not show a significant difference, $t(236) = 1.88, p = 0.061$, although males tended to report lower social anxiety. Age did not appear to be a significant factor in self-esteem or social anxiety among the three age groups examined, with no significant differences reported in the RSES or SIAS scores across the age ranges of 18-19, 20-22, and 23-25 years. Marital status was associated with differences in social anxiety but not self-esteem. Single respondents (n = 229) had significantly higher SIAS scores (M = 42.67, SD = 15.48) compared to married

respondents (n = 9; M = 29.33, SD = 13.68), $t(236) = 2.54, p = 0.012$. No such relationship was observed for the RSES scores. Employment status was a significant factor in social anxiety but not self-esteem. Full-time employed individuals (n = 38) reported lower social anxiety (M = 35.89, SD = 14.58) compared to those who were unemployed (n = 19; M = 52.16, SD = 12.94), $t(234) = 4.90, p = 0.003$.

The non-significant findings on age and SNS usage suggest that these factors may not be primary determinants of self-esteem and social anxiety among young adults in Klang Valley. This challenges assumptions that younger individuals are more vulnerable to SNS-related psychological effects and indicates that other factors, such as personality traits, online interaction quality, or offline social support, may play a more significant role. Overall, the results suggest that gender and employment status are significantly associated with self-esteem and social anxiety levels, respectively, whereas age and marital status showed a significant relationship only with social anxiety.

Table IV: Relationship between demographic data with Total RSES and Total SIAS (n=238)

	n	Total RSES					Total SIAS				
		Mean (SD)	Mean Diff (95% CI)	t-stats	F-stats ^a (df)	P- value	Mean (SD)	Mean diff (95% CI)	t-stats	F-stats ^a (df)	P-value
Gender											
Female	219	25.12 (5.75)	-3.18 (-5.8, -0.4)	-2.32 (236)	-	0.021	43.73 (15.54)	6.98 (0.3,14.3)	1.88 (236)	-	0.061
Male	19	28.32 (5.64)					35.74 (15.17)				
Age											
18-19	52	26.04 (6.71)	-	-	1.112(2;235)	0.331	41.67 (15.5)	-	-	0.688 (2;235)	0.503
20-22	56	24.45 (5.24)					44.3 (13.95)				
23-25	130	25.54 (5.62)					41.45 (16.32)				
Marital Status											
Single	229	25.28 (5.82)	2.07 (-6.6,1.0)	-1.44 (236)	-	0.151	42.67 (15.48)	13.34 (3.02,23.66)	2.54 (236)	-	0.012
Married	9	28.11 (4.37)					29.33 (13.68)				
Employment Status											
Student	169	25.23(5.69)	-	-	1.984 (3;234)	0.117	42.47 (15.34)	-	-	4.90 (3;234)	0.003b
Full Time employed	38	27.16 (6.40)					35.89 (14.58)				
Part Time employed	12	25.17 (6.34)					41.92 (18.72)				
Unemployed	19	23.42 (4.48)					52.16 (12.94)				

^a One Way ANOVA

^b Only "full time employed" and "unemployed" are significantly different by the post-hoc test Scheffe's procedures

DISCUSSION

Investigations into the intersection of self-esteem and gender have revealed noteworthy disparities. Self-esteem levels among Asian men were generally higher than those of women (19). This aligns with the broader trend which observed that women tend to assign themselves lower self-esteem ratings than men, leading to a significant gender gap in self-esteem scores (20). Social media usage exerts a considerable impact on women's self-esteem, with men reporting higher levels of self-esteem than women (21). This gender-based difference may be exacerbated by the tendency of women to engage in self-comparison and to place a greater emphasis on physical appearance when navigating social media platforms.

Within the context of mental well-being, research investigating the self-esteem of single individuals and those in relationships during young adulthood indicates no significant disparity in self-esteem levels. This lack of difference can be attributed to the social acceptance of being single during this life stage. Self-esteem is closely tied to an individual's perception of their self-worth. Consequently, unemployment can engender feelings of diminished worth or inferiority, as being without work may invoke a sense of shame and contribute to lower self-esteem (22). An individual's self-esteem is potentially influenced by the degree of social support they receive from their peers and their proficiency in managing stress. These factors collectively underscore the complex nature of self-esteem as it is influenced by both social norms and personal circumstances (23).

The relationship between social media usage and social anxiety is an area that has garnered substantial attention in academic research. In an investigation focusing on Facebook, it was found that increased usage time was correlated with heightened social anxiety. Individuals who frequently use Facebook, particularly in a passive manner, may experience social anxiety in direct, face-to-face interactions (24). Similarly, Silmi, Rachmawati, Sugiarto, and Hastuti (25) reported findings that suggest a direct correlation between the extent of social media use and the level of social anxiety experienced by individuals. The implications of such findings indicate that the more accustomed individuals are to digital communication, the more challenging they may find in-person social engagements, potentially leading to a decline in real-life interpersonal relationships. This increased reliance on online interaction may subsequently contribute to avoidance behaviors in social settings, as individuals may feel heightened anxiety when faced with the prospect of face-to-face conversations (14).

The hypothesis positing an inverse relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety among young adult users of SNS in the Klang Valley has been corroborated by the outcomes of this research. The influence of social media on self-esteem is well-documented in contemporary

scholarship, with studies indicating that social media usage significantly impacts an individual's self-regard (26,27,28). Investigations into the behaviors of Instagram users have revealed that increased time on the platform correlates with diminished self-esteem, potentially due to the propensity for upward social comparison. This type of comparison, where individuals measure their own lives against those perceived as more successful or fulfilling, can lead to a decrease in self-esteem (7,27). Further expanding on this, Vogel (7) identified that such comparisons on Facebook specifically have a detrimental effect on self-esteem. Hong (29) contributed to the discourse by highlighting that self-esteem is partially contingent upon external validation, which can be influenced by the frequency and nature of social media use. Individuals may rely on social media interactions to alleviate feelings of low self-worth, thereby creating a dependent relationship with these platforms.

Within the scope of this study, the data disclosed that a majority of the respondents were categorized with low self-esteem, particularly amongst Twitter users, where $N = 42$ (57.5%) were found to have the lowest self-esteem scores. These results are consistent with the findings of previous study who reported a direct correlation between intensive Twitter use and lower self-esteem, thus substantiating the initial hypothesis and contributing to the broader understanding of the psychosocial implications of SNS usage (30).

These findings underscore the need for targeted mental health interventions, such as counseling programs that address the impact of social media on self-esteem and social anxiety, as well as digital literacy initiatives aimed at promoting healthy social media usage and reducing the risks associated with excessive upward social comparisons and dependency on online interactions.

CONCLUSION

The present study embarked on an exploration of the interplay between self-esteem, social anxiety, and the use of social networking sites (SNS) among young adults in the Klang Valley. The findings corroborated the initial hypothesis, revealing a prevalent trend of low self-esteem and high social anxiety among the participants, which aligns with existing literature on the psychological impacts of social media usage. Gender differences emerged as a significant factor, with male participants exhibiting higher self-esteem than their female counterparts. However, A notable limitation of this study is the gender imbalance in the sample, with 92% of participants being female. This imbalance may limit the generalizability of the findings to male populations and calls for future research to ensure a more balanced gender representation. The data also suggested that employment status influences social anxiety, with unemployed individuals reporting higher levels of anxiety compared to those who are employed. This

underscores the broader implications of employment on mental health, beyond financial stability. While age and marital status did not significantly affect self-esteem and social anxiety, the overwhelming presence of single and student participants indicates that this demographic may be particularly susceptible to the influences of SNS usage on their psychological well-being.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence that suggests a nuanced relationship between SNS usage and the mental health of young adults. It highlights the importance of considering demographic variables when assessing the psychosocial effects of social media and underscores the need for awareness and potential strategies to mitigate the negative psychological impacts associated with SNS usage. Moving forward, the findings advocate for a balanced approach to social media engagement and a greater emphasis on digital literacy and mental health support for young adults.

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