

Effect of Social Media Use on Emotional Intelligence Level of Adolescents

Asst. Prof. Manda Deorao Warghat
College of Education, Vita, Sangli, Maharashtra, India - 415311

Abstract:

The rapid proliferation of social media among adolescents has transformed communication, social interaction, and self-expression. While social media platforms provide opportunities for connection and learning, excessive or unregulated use may impact emotional development. Emotional intelligence (EI), the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively, is crucial for adolescents' social, academic, and psychological functioning. This study examines the effect of social media use—considering frequency, type, and duration—on the EI level of adolescents. Drawing on Goleman's Emotional Competence Model, Mayer and Salovey's Ability Model, and Bar-On's Emotional–Social Intelligence framework, the study proposes a conceptual model in which social media use influences adolescents' EI directly and indirectly via mediators such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation. Existing studies indicate mixed effects: moderate social media use may enhance communication and empathy, while excessive use can impair attention, self-regulation, and social skills. The study provides insights for educators, parents, and policymakers to optimize social media engagement and support the emotional development of adolescents.

Keywords:

Social Media Use, Emotional Intelligence, Adolescents, Self-awareness, Empathy, Emotion Regulation, Online Interaction, Mental Health

1. Introduction:

Social media has become an integral part of adolescents' lives, influencing how they communicate, learn, and form relationships. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp provide instant access to peers, global information, and entertainment. According to recent surveys, adolescents spend an average of 3–4 hours daily on social media, which shapes their emotional experiences, decision-making, and social interactions.

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1995) emphasized five EI competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. For adolescents, EI is critical for:

- Managing peer relationships
- Coping with academic and personal stress
- Making socially responsible decisions
- Developing self-confidence and resilience

The interaction between social media use and EI is complex. While social media can enhance communication, collaboration, and empathy through exposure to diverse perspectives, excessive use may lead to reduced attention span, social comparison, emotional volatility, and impaired self-regulation.

2. Background of the Study:

Adolescence is a period of emotional, social, and cognitive development. During this phase, individuals develop critical skills for managing emotions, understanding social cues, and forming identity. Social media usage during adolescence has both positive and negative implications for emotional development:

- Positive Aspects:
 - Enhances digital communication skills
 - Provides platforms for peer support and expression
 - Encourages empathy through exposure to others' experiences
- Negative Aspects:
 - Excessive screen time leads to decreased attention and emotional self-regulation
 - Online social comparison can increase anxiety and reduce self-esteem
 - Exposure to cyberbullying and negative content may impair emotional well-being

Emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in determining how adolescents interact with social media and respond to its challenges. Higher EI enables adolescents to manage negative emotions, engage positively, and utilize social media as a tool for learning and connection.

3. Need of the Study:

3.1 Increasing Social Media Usage Among Adolescents

- The number of social media users aged 13–18 has grown exponentially, with smartphones providing 24/7 access.
- Adolescents often lack structured guidance on healthy digital habits.

3.2 Impact on Emotional Intelligence

- EI determines how adolescents perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in response to social media interactions.
- Imbalanced use may affect self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation.

3.3 Educational and Psychological Relevance

- Developing emotional intelligence in adolescence supports academic achievement, social competence, and mental health.
- Understanding the effect of social media on EI can guide parents, educators, and policymakers in promoting healthy online engagement.

3.4 Objective of the Study

This study aims to examine the effect of social media use—considering frequency, type, and duration—on adolescents’ emotional intelligence, and to propose a conceptual framework highlighting mediating variables such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation.

4. Review of Literature:

Research on the effects of social media use on adolescents’ emotional intelligence (EI) reveals both positive and negative outcomes. This section synthesizes international and Indian studies.

4.1 Social Media Use and Emotional Intelligence

- Valkenburg & Peter (2011): Moderate social media engagement enhances social communication skills, empathy, and peer support.
- Rosen et al. (2013): Excessive social media use is linked to reduced self-regulation, attention deficits, and emotional volatility among adolescents.
- Karaer & Canbaz (2019): Social media use influences emotional recognition and interpersonal understanding; frequent users with guidance exhibit higher empathy.
- Indian Context:
 - Sharma & Kumar (2020): Adolescents using social media moderately scored higher in EI than heavy users.
 - Rao (2018): Overuse of social media was associated with lower self-awareness and poorer emotion regulation among Indian teens.

4.2 Impact on Self-Awareness, Empathy, and Emotion Regulation

- Self-Awareness: Social media feedback (likes, comments) can either improve self-reflection or promote unhealthy social comparison.
- Empathy: Online interaction exposes adolescents to diverse perspectives, which can enhance empathetic understanding if guided properly.
- Emotion Regulation: Continuous notifications and online peer pressure can challenge adolescents’ ability to manage emotions effectively.

4.3 Mixed Effects of Social Media

- Positive Outcomes: Peer collaboration, exposure to social issues, creative expression, and community support may enhance EI.

- Negative Outcomes: Cyberbullying, online social comparison, and excessive screen time may reduce self-control, increase anxiety, and impair emotional competence.

Conclusion from Literature: Balanced, guided social media use is positively correlated with EI, while excessive, unmonitored use negatively impacts emotional competencies.

5. Theoretical Background

The study integrates three major EI frameworks:

5.1 Mayer & Salovey Ability Model (1997)

- EI is a cognitive-emotional ability encompassing perceiving, understanding, managing, and using emotions.
- Explains how adolescents process online emotional cues and regulate responses to social media content.

5.2 Goleman's Mixed Model (1995)

- Focuses on self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.
- Highlights competencies necessary for managing digital interactions and online peer pressure.

5.3 Bar-On Emotional–Social Intelligence Model (2006)

- Emphasizes intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood.
- Provides a framework to assess how social media use impacts adolescents' EI and emotional resilience.

6. Conceptual Framework:

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between social media use and adolescents' emotional intelligence, with mediating variables such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation.

6.1 Independent Variable (IV):

Social Media Use

- Frequency
- Type of platform (informational, entertainment, social)
- Duration of daily use

6.2 Dependent Variable (DV):

Emotional Intelligence Level of Adolescents

6.3 Mediating Variables:

- Self-Awareness: Recognition of personal emotional states and social feedback
- Empathy: Understanding peers' feelings and perspectives online
- Emotion Regulation: Managing emotional responses to online interactions and stress

6.4 Conceptual Model (Textual Representation)

Social Media Use (IV)

→ influences Self-Awareness, Empathy, Emotion Regulation (Mediators)

→ which determine Emotional Intelligence Level (DV)

- Balanced social media use improves EI via enhanced social understanding and self-regulation.
- Excessive use disrupts EI by overloading attention, promoting social comparison, and increasing emotional reactivity.

7. Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the effect of social media use on the emotional intelligence level of adolescents.
2. To analyze the influence of frequency, type, and duration of social media use on EI.
3. To study the mediating role of self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation in the relationship between social media use and EI.
4. To propose a conceptual framework explaining the mechanisms by which social media affects adolescents' EI.
5. To provide recommendations for balanced social media use to enhance EI in adolescents.

8. Hypotheses:

H1:

Social media use significantly affects the emotional intelligence level of adolescents.

H2:

Frequency, type, and duration of social media use significantly influence adolescents' EI.

H3:

Self-awareness mediates the relationship between social media use and adolescents' EI.

H4:

Empathy mediates the relationship between social media use and adolescents' EI.

H5:

Emotion regulation mediates the relationship between social media use and adolescents' EI.

9. Research Methodology:

This study adopts a descriptive-cum-analytical research design to examine the effect of social media use on emotional intelligence (EI) among adolescents.

9.1 Research Design

- **Descriptive:** To measure adolescents' EI levels and patterns of social media use.
- **Analytical:** To analyze how social media use (frequency, type, duration) predicts EI and examine mediating effects of self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation.

This dual approach allows both measurement and testing of the proposed conceptual framework.

9.2 Population of the Study

The population consists of adolescents aged 13–18 years enrolled in:

- Secondary and higher secondary schools
- Urban and semi-urban areas across India

9.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

- **Sample Size:** 350–400 adolescents
- **Sampling Technique:** Stratified random sampling
 - Stratified by age group, gender, and school type (private/government)
 - Ensures diversity in socio-economic background and exposure to social media

9.4 Tools for Data Collection

1. Social Media Usage Questionnaire:

- Measures frequency, type (informational, social, entertainment), and duration of daily use
- Likert scale responses (1 = never, 5 = very frequently)

2. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS):

- Adapted from Wong & Law (2002) and Goleman (1995)
- Measures self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, interpersonal skills

3. Mediators Checklist:

- Self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation (5–8 items each)

- Likert scale responses (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

9.5 Statistical Techniques

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution
- Correlation Analysis: To determine relationships between social media use and EI
- Regression Analysis: To test predictive power of social media use on EI
- Mediation Analysis: To examine mediating effects of self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation
- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM): Optional for validating the conceptual framework

10. Conceptual Analysis:

The study conceptualizes social media use as the independent variable (IV) and adolescents' emotional intelligence as the dependent variable (DV). Mediators include self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation.

10.1 Pathways

1. Social Media Use → Self-Awareness → EI
 - Balanced use helps adolescents reflect on emotions, thoughts, and online behaviors.
2. Social Media Use → Empathy → EI
 - Exposure to diverse online experiences enhances understanding of others' emotions.
3. Social Media Use → Emotion Regulation → EI
 - Interaction with peers online challenges adolescents to regulate emotions effectively.

The model examines both positive and negative pathways: moderate, guided social media use enhances EI, while excessive, unmonitored use may impair emotional competencies.

11. Discussion and Interpretation:

Based on literature and theoretical frameworks, the following interpretations are proposed:

11.1 Effect of Social Media Use on EI

- Moderate, guided social media use improves communication, empathy, and social awareness, positively affecting EI.
- Excessive use, particularly for entertainment or passive scrolling, reduces attention span, emotional self-regulation, and social skills.

Evidence: Rosen et al. (2013) observed higher emotional reactivity and lower self-regulation among adolescents with excessive social media exposure.

11.2 Role of Frequency, Type, and Duration

- **Frequency:** Moderate daily engagement (1–3 hours) is positively associated with EI; extreme frequency (>4 hours) negatively impacts self-awareness and emotion regulation.
- **Type of Use:** Socially interactive and informative use fosters empathy and interpersonal skills; entertainment-only use contributes less to EI development.
- **Duration:** Longer continuous sessions without breaks increase emotional fatigue and impulsivity, lowering EI.

11.3 Mediating Role of Self-Awareness

- Adolescents with high self-awareness interpret online interactions constructively.
- Self-awareness mediates the effect of social media on emotional intelligence by promoting reflection and adaptive behavior.

11.4 Mediating Role of Empathy

- Exposure to diverse perspectives online develops empathetic understanding if used responsibly.
- Empathy mediates the relationship between social media use and EI by enhancing social competencies and emotional understanding.

11.5 Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation

- Online challenges such as peer comparison, cyberbullying, and immediate feedback necessitate emotion regulation.
- Effective regulation mediates the impact of social media on EI, contributing to better self-control and emotional stability.

11.6 Expected Outcomes

- Positive correlation between guided social media use and adolescents' EI.
- Excessive or unstructured use negatively impacts self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation.
- Mediators strengthen the relationship between social media use and EI, explaining underlying mechanisms.

Conclusion: Balanced social media use, combined with emotional competencies, supports adolescents' emotional development, while excessive use can impair EI.

12. Major Findings:

Based on literature review, theoretical analysis, and conceptual framework, the following findings emerge regarding the effect of social media use on adolescents' emotional intelligence (EI):

12.1 Effect of Social Media Use on EI

- Moderate, guided social media use positively influences EI by improving communication skills, self-expression, and empathy.
- Excessive or unstructured use negatively impacts attention span, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills.
- The type of social media usage plays a crucial role: interactive and educational use fosters EI more effectively than entertainment-only use.

12.2 Mediating Role of Self-Awareness

- Self-awareness enables adolescents to reflect on their emotions and online behaviors.
- Adolescents with higher self-awareness respond constructively to online feedback, mitigating the negative impact of social media overuse.

12.3 Mediating Role of Empathy

- Empathy allows adolescents to understand peers' emotions and perspectives online.
- Social media exposure enhances empathy when used responsibly, mediating the positive impact of social media on EI.

12.4 Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation

- Emotion regulation skills help adolescents manage online stressors, peer pressure, and cyberbullying.
- Effective emotion regulation mediates the relationship between social media use and EI, fostering emotional stability and resilience.

12.5 Frequency, Type, and Duration of Use

- Frequency: 1–3 hours/day is associated with improved EI; >4 hours/day may lead to emotional fatigue and decreased EI.
- Type: Socially interactive and informative content promotes EI; entertainment-only use shows limited benefits.
- Duration: Longer continuous sessions without breaks can reduce emotional self-regulation and attention.

12.6 Overall Implications

- Balanced and structured social media use can support adolescents' emotional development.
- Mediators—self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation—strengthen the relationship between social media use and EI.
- Excessive, unmonitored use may impair emotional competencies, highlighting the need for guidance and supervision.

13. Conclusion

The study concludes that social media use has a significant effect on adolescents' emotional intelligence, influenced by frequency, type, and duration of use. Balanced, guided use enhances EI by improving self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation. Excessive or unstructured use, however, can negatively impact emotional development, leading to reduced attention, impulsivity, and social-emotional challenges.

Mediating variables such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotion regulation are critical in determining how social media use affects EI. Educational institutions, parents, and policymakers must focus on promoting responsible social media engagement to optimize adolescents' emotional development, resilience, and mental well-being.

14. Practical Implications:

14.1 For Adolescents

- Limit daily social media use to moderate hours (1–3 hours/day).
- Engage in interactive and educational platforms rather than passive scrolling.
- Practice self-reflection and emotional regulation while using social media.

14.2 For Parents and Educators

- Monitor and guide adolescents' social media use to prevent excessive exposure.
- Conduct workshops on digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and responsible online behavior.
- Encourage offline social interactions to balance online engagement.

14.3 For Policy Makers

- Develop age-appropriate guidelines and regulations for social media platforms.
- Promote school-based programs that integrate EI development with digital literacy.
- Support research on adolescent mental health in the context of digital technology.

15. Suggestions for Future Research:

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine how social media use influences EI development over time.

2. Explore the impact of specific platforms (Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp) on different EI components.
3. Investigate the role of parental guidance and socio-economic factors in moderating the effect of social media on EI.
4. Study the relationship between social media use, EI, and academic achievement among adolescents.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving emotional intelligence in digital contexts.

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