

Authoritative Parenting Moderates the Association Between Social Media Use and Self-Esteem in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT. Research has suggested that social media use has psychological risks and benefits in adolescents and young adults (see Reid & Weigle, 2014, for an overview). The contradictory results suggest that the link between social media use and psychological outcomes could depend on moderating variables. This study examined whether self-perceived parenting style could be one of these moderators. As part of a more extensive study, young adult college students ($N = 338$, $M_{age} = 19.21$ years, $SD = 1.72$ years) completed questionnaires assessing perceived parenting styles, social media intensity (e.g., felt need to check social media), and self-esteem. The study found that authoritative parenting (i.e., warm parents who set reasonable demands on their children) predicts increased self-esteem for college students who report feeling immersed in Instagram ($\beta = .13, p = .013$) and X ($\beta = .17, p = .002$) but not Facebook ($\beta = .03, p = .529$). Surprisingly, permissive and authoritarian parenting did not moderate any association between social media immersion and self-esteem. The study was limited by using only three primary social media platforms and potential bias as a result of using self-reported surveys. Future directions are discussed.

Keywords: self-esteem, parenting styles, social media, authoritative parenting

For many adolescents and young adults, social media use has become second nature in daily life. A plethora of research has examined the psychological effects that social media has on individuals, and much of it focuses on the dark side of excessive use: poor self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Coyne et al., 2020; Faraon & Kaipainen, 2014; Woods & Scott, 2016), especially for image-based platforms (Wright et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2021). Other research has shown that social media use can have positive effects, such as positive identity development and peer interaction (Syed et al., 2020; Uhls et al., 2017). These mixed findings suggest that the relationship between social media use and psychological outcomes may be influenced by moderating factors. Parenting style, a significant socialization influence throughout childhood and adolescence (Baumrind, 1971), may play a critical role in shaping how young adults interact with social media and experience its effects.

Building on the work of Faraon and Kaipainen (2014) and Woods and Scott (2016), this study focused on college-aged young adults to examine how different

parenting styles moderate the relationship between social media intensity and self-esteem. For instance, a healthy parent-child relationship reduces adolescent motivation to use social media excessively, reducing the risk of low self-esteem and other negative outcomes (Chou & Lee, 2017; Floros & Siomos, 2013). Conversely, children of neglectful or authoritarian parents are more likely to exhibit addictive internet use (Tur-Porcar, 2017). By exploring how different parenting styles moderate the relationship between social media use and adolescent self-esteem, results can reveal potential pathways through which parenting influences the social-emotional outcomes associated with social media behaviors.

Social Media Use in Adolescents and Young Adults

Approximately 95% of students have access to the internet (Tur-Porcar, 2017), and 92% of adolescents report using social media daily (Richter, 2018). Furthermore, during the onset and progression of the COVID-19 pandemic, screen time was up as much as 30% (Wright et al., 2023). It is difficult to pinpoint the mechanism behind what makes

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social media use “problematic.” As of the writing of this article, there is no proper diagnosis through the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) for problematic social media use. However, an official diagnosis of Gaming Disorder (IGD) could reasonably explain some problematic social media behaviors (see Richter 2018). To be diagnosed with IGD, an individual must exhibit symptoms such as preoccupied behavior, unsuccessful attempts to stop the behavior, and deception of others.

Because many adolescents and young adults have access to and use the internet and social media, excessive social media use could pose a severe risk for these young people. Researchers generally agree that social media use has many negative outcomes, including depressive symptoms (Twenge et al., 2018), decreased happiness or life satisfaction (Kross et al., 2013), and sleeplessness (Woods & Scott, 2016). Excessive social media use is also associated with decreased self-control, increased sensation-seeking, and increased anger or frustration (Zhang et al., 2015). This aligns with the fact that the prefrontal cortex, essential in executive functioning (e.g., planning and emotional regulation), has not fully developed until the mid-to-late-20s (Arain et al., 2013). There are social-cognitive consequences to excessive social media use as well. Many young adults suffer from fear of missing out (FOMO; Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Some research has suggested that social media abuse, and more broadly, internet addiction, is associated with lower self-esteem in adolescent girls but not boys (Richter, 2018). By the time these adolescents reached adulthood, all participants who exhibited social media abuse had lower self-esteem.

Overall, the research on gender differences in social media use has revealed varying patterns influenced by unique motivations and platform choices. Women often use social media for relationship-building and social interactions, whereas men predominantly use it for information gathering (Krasnova et al., 2017). Moreover, susceptibility to internet addiction differs by gender; men are more prone to gaming addiction, and women are more likely to develop social media addiction (Su et al., 2020). These findings highlight the complexity of gender dynamics in digital behaviors, which are further complicated by factors such as platform choice, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and age. The current study elected to control for gender in analyses rather than examine it as a moderator. This decision reflects the primary focus on social media intensity and parenting styles, allowing for a more parsimonious exploration of these relationships.

Specific Social Media Platforms: Different Purposes, Different Effects

As of 2024, the average internet user has seven different

social media accounts, and Facebook was approaching three billion unique users, two billion Instagram users, and 611 million X users (Kepios, 2024). Users are attracted to various social media platforms for their distinct social opportunities, suggesting that the effects of social media use are not uniformly negative, as different platforms offer unique outcomes (Wright et al., 2020). As seen in platforms such as LinkedIn, motivation to engage with others for professional reasons might lead to higher positive affect, subjective social status, peer support, and lower loneliness. There might be a few social benefits, such as feeling more peer support or social integration for image-based platforms like Snapchat and Instagram. However, there are also documented negative effects of these image-based platforms (Wright et al., 2020). The critical component here is that platform and purpose matters. The platform sets the basis for how users interact with each other and, ultimately, how they are affected by social media use.

Facebook. It is no surprise that Facebook is the most researched social media platform, as it is one of the world's oldest and still most widely used platforms (Kepios, 2024; Sidoti, 2024). Excessive Facebook use is associated with an increased risk of depression in adolescents, mostly because of increased opportunities for social comparison, leading to envy, depression, and low self-esteem (Appel et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2016; Vogel, et al., 2014). However, Jaidka (2022) argued that Facebook's more accessible access to self-disclosure when signing on, as exemplified by the “What is on your mind?” prompt in the top center of the page, encourages self-disclosure instead of social comparison. This is not a feature on image-based platforms, whose purpose is to document experiences through pictures and text communication, which is limited and hidden away.

With the affordances to contact friends being hidden away, Instagram makes the user's experience more isolated and passive—an indicator of harmful social media use predictive of lower well-being. (Jaidka, 2022, p. 7).

Consequently, in a geospatial analysis of social media use from 2016–2018, Jaidka (2022) found that Facebook use positively impacts well-being, especially in higher income populations. In contrast, Instagram and X had a negative impact. Furthermore, these effects are seen in specific groups, with lower income and often Black communities at greater risk for the adverse effects of Instagram use.

Instagram. Instagram and other image-based platforms provide an ideal medium for social comparison, which can lead to fluctuations in self-worth through constant reappraisals of the self as compared to

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others (Festinger, 1954). Many users are drawn to the fact that Instagram is an image-based platform well-suited for quick access to many photos and photo-based stories. Therefore, users are less likely to use the platform for social interaction (Alhabash et al., 2017) than for social comparison.

The research on the well-being effects of Instagram use is mixed. Using Instagram for surveillance of others, social comparison, or “coolness” is associated with increased narcissism, whereas this might not be the case for individuals who use it for creativity or documentation purposes (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Additionally, when self-worth is contingent on gaining approval from others, excessive Instagram use is associated with lower self-esteem. This effect is not seen when users develop a sense of self-worth from other means (Stapleton et al., 2016). Conversely, compared to nonusers, Instagram users report higher social integration and peer support, especially for college students. Wright et al. (2020) argued that, because college students tend to use the internet extensively, using many social media platforms, including Instagram, may “increase perceptions of peer acceptance and provide them with topics to discuss with peers during in-person interactions” (p. 19). Therefore, because of the mixed well-being effects of Instagram use, it is necessary to examine potential interactive factors that contribute to users’ well-being.

X. Formerly known as Twitter, X provides users with quick connections through short communications, often text-based, but also through link-sharing, pictures, and videos. As a means of quick exchange of information, many individuals use X for information-gathering and dispersing purposes, as well as social interaction (Johnson & Yang, 2009). Through the use of hashtags, X is a medium well-suited to share ideas regarding virtually any topic. In discussing mental health, Berry et al. (2017) found that the most common reason people tweet was to build a sense of community through raising awareness about mental health disorders. However, because of increased public discourse, some researchers found that X use is associated with increased negative outcomes such as political polarization, outrage, and decreased overall self-perceived well-being (de Mello et al., 2022). X use is also associated with increased depression (Zhang et al., 2021) and loneliness (Ye et al., 2021) in adults, especially when users tweeted more or combined use with other platforms.

Summary. Although people use different social media platforms for varying purposes—whether maintaining relationships on Facebook or engaging in image-based social comparison on Instagram and X—the effects of these platforms on self-esteem remain inconsistent. Research indicates that, although

some users experience positive outcomes such as social support and community engagement, others report lower self-esteem and increased social comparison. This disparity suggests that the relationship between social media intensity and well-being is not straightforward and may vary across platforms. Thus, this study sought to explore the direct associations between Facebook, Instagram, and X intensity and self-esteem, with a focus on understanding how these platforms may differentially impact users’ self-perceptions.

Parenting Styles and Well-Being

Baumrind (1971) suggested that parenting style varies on two dimensions: the degree of warmth and the degree of control exerted on a child. Authoritative parents provide both warmth and reasonable control of their children. Through consistent discipline and a warm approach, these parents provide a foundation for healthy relationships for their children (Kurdek & Fine, 1994; Morris et al., 2021). Children of authoritative parents develop a sense of trust and are more likely to listen and internalize their parents’ demands. Because of this, these children often do better in school (Steinberg et al., 1992) and in coping with stress (Floros & Siomos, 2013; Silva et al., 2007). Children also reap the benefits of authoritative parenting as they reach adolescence and early adulthood, as their peers become significant socialization agents. For adolescents, authoritative parenting behaviors such as parental monitoring (Brown & Bakken, 2011) and emotional support (Morris et al., 2017) are associated with higher academic achievement and better social relationships with peers (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1992).

In contrast, authoritarian parents exhibit strict control and show little warmth. Permissive parents exhibit low control and high warmth. Neglectful parents offer low control and low warmth. On average, children who experience authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful parenting are at risk for maladjustment (Pinquart, 2017; Silva et al., 2007), but it is important to note that many of these effects are dependent on both cultural differences and socioeconomic status (SES; Sorkhabi & Mandara, 2013). For example, children in low-SES communities are more likely to benefit from authoritarian parenting, though not as much as they would benefit from authoritative parenting (Dearing, 2004). Furthermore, because permissive parenting provides a sense of warmth and authoritarian parenting provides a sense of control, some children might see some positive effects on their well-being. Therefore, it is debated how nonauthoritative parenting styles directly affect adjustment because of these other factors.

Summary. Research on parenting styles consistently

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shows that the way parents balance warmth and control significantly influences the well-being of their children. Authoritative parenting, characterized by high levels of warmth combined with clear structure and guidance, is strongly associated with higher self-esteem and better emotional outcomes in children and young adults (Steinberg et al., 1992). In contrast, authoritarian parenting, which emphasizes control but lacks warmth, often leads to lower self-esteem and negative emotional development (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019). Permissive parenting, which provides warmth but lacks structure, presents more mixed outcomes: While the emotional support permissive parents provide could foster self-esteem, the lack of clear boundaries and guidance may also hinder emotional regulation and personal growth. As such, this study examined how these different parenting styles directly associate with self-esteem in a college-aged population.

Study Rationale

This study replicated key findings from previous work (Faraon & Kaipainen, 2014; Vogel et al., 2014; Woods & Scott, 2016) while also extending the literature by exploring how parenting styles moderate the relationship between social media use and self-esteem in a college-aged sample. Although earlier studies focused on different age groups or outcomes such as well-being, our research applied these findings to a new demographic and psychological variable, thus broadening the understanding of this relationship.

Knowing that both parents and social media can impact social-emotional development (e.g., self-esteem), it is reasonable to believe that the quality of the parent–child relationship could buffer or exacerbate the effects of social media use. Of particular interest, a high-quality parent–child relationship may boost positive social media use and reduce the risk of developing low self-esteem and other maladaptive outcomes (Chou & Lee, 2017; Floros & Siomos, 2014; Hwang et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2022; Ren & Zhu, 2022). Furthermore, authoritative parenting helps children develop healthy emotional responses to stress and creates a template for developing healthy peer relationships, something that social media may or may not provide (Steinberg, et al. 1992). Therefore, there are several mechanisms through which parenting styles may exhibit moderating effects.

Authoritative parenting, characterized by warm and responsive interactions, enhances adolescents' abilities to effectively regulate their emotions. This skill is helpful in helping adolescents navigate the emotional challenges that arise from social media use, such as dealing with negative feedback and social comparison (Eastin et al., 2006). Additionally, parental monitoring

strategies are crucial, including setting boundaries around social media use, engaging in discussions about online content, and sharing media experiences. These practices help in shaping healthier social media habits and attitudes, mitigating risks such as cyberbullying or excessive use. Moreover, authoritative parents model effective communication and provide emotional support, equipping their children with the social skills necessary to navigate both online and offline relationships positively. Adolescents who develop such social competence are better prepared to form meaningful connections and are less likely to be negatively impacted by social media. Conversely, children of nonauthoritative parents are more likely to exhibit problematic social media use (Tur-Porcar, 2017). This contrast underscores the potential for authoritative parenting to buffer and poor parenting to exacerbate the challenging aspects of social media engagement. Specifically, nonauthoritative parenting styles often fail to support the development of emotional regulation, offer ineffective parental monitoring, and do not effectively foster social competence. Without these critical skills, adolescents may struggle to manage the emotional and social challenges presented by social media, potentially leading to heightened stress and lower self-esteem. These parenting styles, characterized by less communication and emotional support, leave adolescents ill-equipped to navigate the complex social dynamics of online interactions and more vulnerable to the negative effects of social media exposure.

Current Study

This study examined how social media intensity on three platforms—Facebook, Instagram, and X—relates to self-esteem in college-aged young adults, while also investigating how these relationships may be moderated by different parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive). Previous research has suggested that increased social media intensity, regardless of the platform, is often associated with lower self-esteem due to the role of social comparison (Faraon & Kaipainen, 2014; Woods & Scott, 2016). In particular, Facebook intensity has been linked to lower self-esteem through increased social comparison (Vogel et al., 2014), and similar effects have been observed for Instagram and X. We hypothesized (H1) that higher intensity of use on all three platforms—Facebook, Instagram, and X—would be negatively associated with self-esteem.

Beyond social media use, this study also investigated how parenting styles influence self-esteem. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and structure, is consistently associated with higher self-esteem (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019; Steinberg, 1992). In contrast, authoritarian parenting, which emphasizes control and

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lacks warmth, tends to lower self-esteem, while the effects of permissive parenting are less clear due to the combination of warmth without sufficient structure. We hypothesized (H2) that authoritative parenting would be positively associated with self-esteem, authoritarian parenting would be negatively associated with self-esteem, and permissive parenting would show a weaker or mixed association with self-esteem.

Finally, we explored how parenting styles may moderate the relationship between social media intensity and self-esteem. We hypothesized (H3) that authoritative parenting would buffer the negative effects of high social media intensity on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X, as such parenting provides emotional support and structure that helps individuals navigate the challenges of social comparison and online feedback (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019; Steinberg, 1992). In contrast, we expected that neither authoritarian nor permissive parenting would significantly moderate the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, as these parenting styles do not provide the necessary emotional regulation and support to mitigate the negative effects of social media (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019).

Method

Participants

College students were recruited from two southeastern United States universities, either directly in public campus areas or via trained research assistants who administered the survey in classrooms. Of the 374 individuals who took the survey, 338 met the manipulation check criteria and were included in the final analysis. The participant pool consisted of 219 women and 118 men, with an average age of 19.21 years ($SD = 1.72$). It is important to note that 57 participants did not report their age. Ethnic breakdown was as follows: 14.83% Black/African American, 5.04% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 51.03% White/European American, 19.88% Hispanic/Latino, and 9.19% did not respond. There was no other missing data for the variables in this study. All participants were entered into a raffle for one of ten \$50 gift cards for their participation. Ethical approval was secured from the institutional review boards (IRB) at both institutions to ensure adherence to ethical standards. All participants provided informed consent before participating.

Materials

Parenting Styles

Participants completed three questionnaires as part of a larger study. The first was the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991), a 30-item measure designed to assess self-perceived parenting styles. Specifically, participants were

asked to respond about their “parents” as a whole, as opposed to their mother or father specifically. Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The PAQ includes three 10-item subscales that measure authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, but it does not assess neglectful parenting. Composite scores were computed by averaging the scores for all 10-items of each subscale. This omission aligns with Baumrind’s (1971) original classification of parenting styles, with the neglectful style later introduced by Maccoby and Martin (1983). The PAQ was chosen due to its frequent citation and use in assessing parenting styles. Reliability for all subscales was acceptable: authoritative parenting ($\alpha = .83$), authoritarian parenting ($\alpha = .82$), and permissive parenting ($\alpha = .72$).

Social Media Intensity

The second measure was an adapted 18-item version of the Social Media Intensity Scale (Ellison et al., 2007), applied to three platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). Each platform was assessed using six items, with example items including, “Facebook is part of my daily routine” and “I feel out of touch when I have not logged onto Instagram for a while.” Responses were provided on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Composite scores were computed by averaging the scores for all six items. Reliability was also acceptable for all subscales: Facebook intensity ($\alpha = .89$), Instagram intensity ($\alpha = .91$), and X intensity ($\alpha = .96$).

Self-Esteem

The third measure was the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), which consists of 10 items assessing global self-esteem. Responses were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I feel that I have a number of good qualities.” This scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .79$).

Procedure

Participants were recruited as part of a larger study and were asked to complete the questionnaire at a time convenient to them. After providing informed consent, participants were presented with the three questionnaires described in the Materials section. The study was conducted online, allowing participants to complete the survey in a comfortable environment of their choosing. Each questionnaire was administered sequentially, starting with the Parental Authority Questionnaire, followed by the Social Media Intensity

Scales, and concluding with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. On average, participants took 15–20 minutes to complete the entire set of measures. Data collection was anonymous, and no identifying information was linked to participants' responses.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlations, and multiple regression, were conducted using SPSS version 21. All variables were standardized prior to analysis to ensure comparability and interpretability of the results. Interaction effects were probed using procedures prescribed by Aiken and West (1991). Additionally, graphical representations were created using Microsoft Excel, as outlined by Dawson (2014). Because men and women exhibit different motivations for using social media (Krasnova et al., 2017), and the primary aim of this study was to examine how parenting styles moderate the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, gender—which could act as a confounding variable—was controlled for in all analyses.

Results

The means and standard deviations of all measures can be seen in Table 1. Note that there was a gender difference in several measures. Women were coded as “0,” and men were coded as “1.” Specifically, women scored higher in X intensity, $t(335) = 2.13, p = .03, d = 0.24$, and Instagram intensity, $t(335) = 2.17, p = .03, d = 0.25$, whereas men reported higher self-esteem, $t(335) = -4.53, p < .001, d = -0.58$. There were no gender differences in Facebook intensity or any of the parenting variables.

H1

To examine H1, which stated that Facebook intensity, Instagram intensity, and X intensity would be negatively associated with self-esteem, three separate multiple

regression models were computed. After standardization and in Step 1, age and gender were entered as controls. In Step 2, one social media intensity variable was entered. The dependent variable was self-esteem. For the model that included Facebook intensity, results indicated that the predictors accounted for 3.8% of the variance, $R^2 = .04, F(3, 270) = 3.54, p = .015$. Facebook intensity was negatively associated with self-esteem ($\beta = -.16, p = .008$). For the model that included Instagram intensity, results indicated that the predictors accounted for 4.1 % of the variance, $R^2 = .041, F(3, 271) = 3.86, p = .010$. Instagram intensity was also negatively associated with self-esteem ($\beta = -.17, p = .005$). For the model that included Instagram intensity, results indicated that the predictors accounted for 2.6 % of the variance, $R^2 = .03, F(3, 271) = 2.42, p = .07$. X intensity was not associated with self-esteem ($\beta = .12, p = .055$), however this effect is trending.

An additional hierarchical multiple regression model was computed to examine the effects of all three social media intensity variables together. In Step 1, age and gender were entered as controls. In Step 2, Facebook intensity, Instagram intensity, and X intensity were entered. The results indicated that the three predictors accounted for 9.7% of the variance, $R^2 = .10; F(5, 268) = 5.78, p < .001$. Of the three independent variables, only Facebook intensity predicted self-esteem, $\beta = -.30, p < .001$, however X intensity was trending, $\beta = .22, p = .05$.

H2

To examine H2, which stated that authoritative parenting would be positively associated with self-esteem, authoritarian parenting would be negatively associated with self-esteem, and permissive parenting would show a weaker or mixed association with self-esteem, three separate multiple regression models were computed. In Step 1, age and gender were entered as controls. In Step 2, one parenting variable was entered. The dependent variable was self-esteem.

TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between All Measures

Variables	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Authoritative Parenting	3.63	0.67	—					
2. Authoritarian Parenting	3.24	0.72	-.16** [-.31, -.01]	—				
3. Permissive Parenting	2.56	0.60	.18** [.04, .31]	-.36*** [-.47, -.23]	—			
4. Facebook Intensity	2.60	1.02	.07 [-.06, .19]	-.02 [-.14, .10]	.01 [-.12, .12]	—		
5. X Intensity	2.35	1.41	.11 [-.01, .22]	.12* [.01, .23]	.06 [-.07, .19]	.03 [-.10, .15]	—	
6. Instagram Intensity	3.47	1.08	.14* [.02, .26]	.13* [.01, .23]	.03 [-.13, .13]	.24*** [.11, .38]	.40*** [.29, .50]	—
7. Self-Esteem	3.68	0.62	.12* [-.01, .26]	.05 [-.07, .17]	-.02 [-.14, .10]	.10 [-.02, .21]	.10 [-.03, .21]	.21*** [.09, .32]

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. All correlations are controlling for age and gender (Women = 0, Men = 1). Values in brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals for each correlation coefficient. Confidence intervals for partial correlations were estimated using bootstrapping with 1000 samples.

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For the model that included authoritative parenting, results indicated that the predictors accounted for 32.6% of the variance, $R^2 = .33$; $F(3, 271) = 43.60$, $p < .001$. Authoritative parenting was positively associated with self-esteem ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$). For the model that included authoritarian parenting, results indicated that the predictors accounted for 4.8% of the variance, $R^2 = .05$; $F(3, 271) = 4.57$, $p = .004$. Authoritarian parenting was positively associated with self-esteem ($\beta = .19$, $p = .002$). For the model that included permissive parenting, results indicated that the predictors accounted for 6.7% of the

variance, $R^2 = .07$; $F(3, 271) = 6.44$, $p < .001$. Permissive parenting was positively associated with self-esteem ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$).

An additional hierarchical multiple regression model was computed to examine the effects of all three parenting variables together. In Step 1, age and gender were entered as controls. In Step 2, authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting, and permissive parenting were entered. The results indicated that the three predictors accounted for 34% of the variance, $R^2 = .03$; $F(5, 269) = 27.72$, $p < .001$. Of the three independent variables, only authoritative parenting ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$) and permissive parenting ($\beta = .13$, $p = .016$) predicted self-esteem.

H3

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore the moderating effects of three self-perceived parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) on the relationship between social media usage intensity across three platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and X) and self-esteem. The analysis proceeded in three steps: Step 1 included gender as a control variable; Step 2 assessed the main effects of social media intensity and parenting styles; and Step 3 investigated the interactions between each parenting style and social media intensity.

There were nine potential interactive effects, three of which were our focal hypothesis in H3. In short, we hypothesized that authoritative parenting would boost the self-esteem of those who score high on social media intensity. H3 was partially supported. Authoritative parenting moderated the association between Instagram intensity and self-esteem, $R^2 = .12$, $F(4, 326) = 11.22$, $p < .001$, with a significant interaction term ($\beta = .13$, $p = .013$). Follow-up simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that high Instagram intensity is associated with high self-esteem, but only for participants who reported high authoritative parenting ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$). See Figure 1 for a plot of the interactive effect.

Authoritative parenting also moderated the association between X intensity and self-esteem, $R^2 = .10$, $F(4, 309) = 8.62$, $p < .001$, with a significant interaction term ($\beta = .17$, $p = .002$). The results of follow-up simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that high X intensity is associated with high self-esteem, but only for participants who reported high authoritative parenting ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$). See Figure 2 for a plot of the interactive effect.

Although the overall model was significant for Facebook, $R^2 = .10$, $F(4, 309) = 8.62$, $p < .001$, the interaction term was not ($\beta = .03$, $p = .53$). In other words, authoritative parenting did not moderate the

FIGURE 1

Instagram Intensity Was Associated With High Self-Esteem for Those With Authoritative Parents.

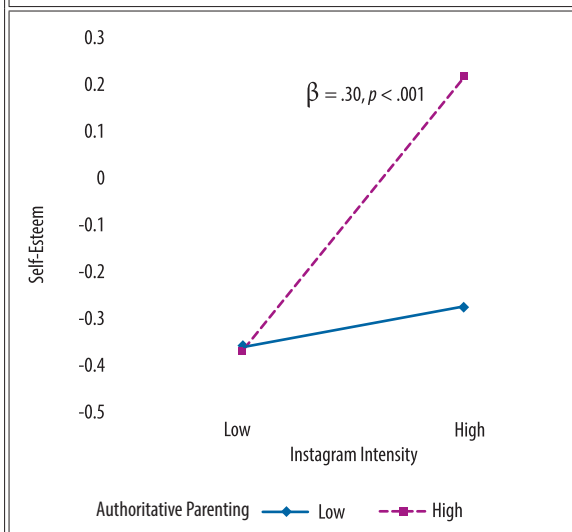
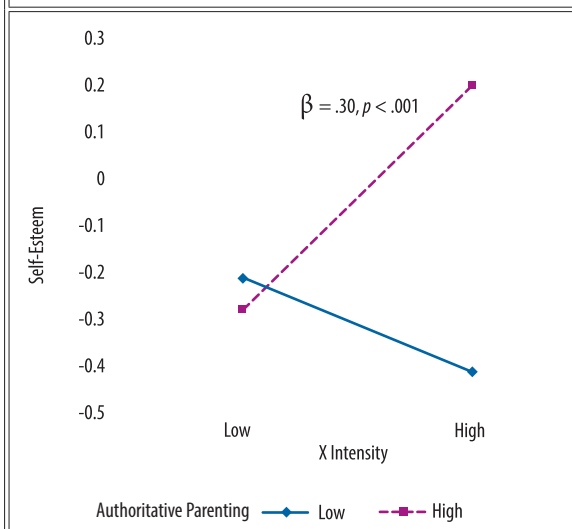


FIGURE 2

X Intensity Was Associated With High Self-Esteem for Those With Authoritative Parents.



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association between Facebook intensity and self-esteem. See Figure 3 for a plot of the (lack of) interactive effect. Furthermore, we found no significant effects in our analysis examining whether authoritarian and permissive parenting moderated the social media self-esteem link. See Tables 2–4 for a summary of the analyses.

Discussion

Previous research has suggested that there are psychological risks and benefits of social media use in young adults. The mixed results indicate that there are potential moderators affecting the link between social media use and a healthy sense of self. The primary purpose of this study was to examine whether self-perceived parenting style moderated the association between social media intensity and self-esteem. We found that young adults can develop a high sense of self-esteem when they feel an intense desire to stay connected to Instagram and X, especially when they have authoritative parents. This effect was not seen for Facebook, nor was it seen for participants who perceive their parents as authoritarian or permissive. Here, we discuss the results for each hypothesis in turn.

H1 Was Partially Supported

Our hypothesis (H1) that Facebook, Instagram, and X intensity would be negatively associated with self-esteem received partial support. The results indicated that Facebook and Instagram intensity were significantly associated with lower self-esteem, consistent with prior research that links excessive social media use to negative self-perceptions through mechanisms such as social comparison (Vogel et al., 2014). Specifically, higher Facebook intensity was associated with lower self-esteem, and higher Instagram intensity also predicted lower self-esteem.

However, X intensity did not show a significant relationship with self-esteem, though the result trended toward significance. This finding suggests that the nature of engagement with X may not provoke the same degree of social comparison or affect self-perception as strongly as platforms like Facebook and Instagram, which are more image-driven. These results echo earlier studies suggesting that platforms designed for visual self-presentation, like Instagram, might intensify social comparison and lower self-esteem, whereas platforms like X may serve more informational or social interaction functions without directly affecting self-worth (Johnson & Yang, 2009; Zhang et al., 2021).

It is important to note that, when all three social media platforms were examined together in a combined model, only Facebook intensity remained a significant predictor of lower self-esteem, suggesting that the negative effects of Facebook use may overshadow the impacts of other platforms. These findings support

the idea that social media effects on self-esteem vary depending on the platform and the type of interaction it encourages. Future research should continue to explore the platform-specific nuances of social media use and self-esteem, especially for platforms that emphasize different forms of content sharing and engagement.

FIGURE 3

Facebook Intensity Was Associated With High Self-Esteem for Those With Authoritative Parents.

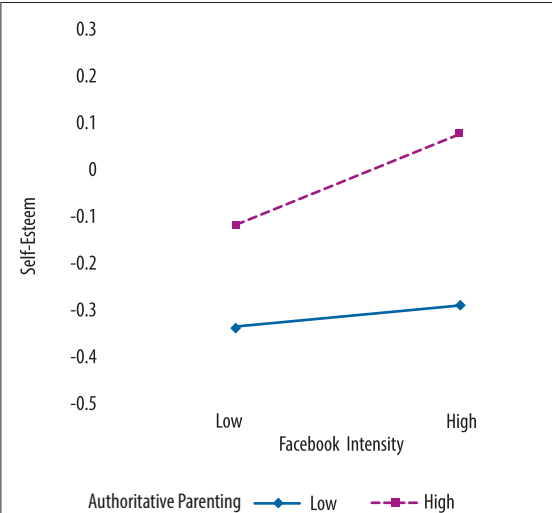


TABLE 2

Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem From Interactions of Facebook Intensity and Parenting Styles

Moderator	Self-Esteem					
	Authoritative Parenting		Authoritarian Parenting		Permissive Parenting	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.06***		.06***		.06***	
Gender		.24***		.24***		.24***
Step 2	.02*		.01		.01	
Gender		.24***		.24***		.24***
Facebook Intensity		.06		.07		.06
Moderator		.14*		.06		-.07
Step 3	.01		.00		.01	
Gender		.25***		.24***		.24***
Facebook Intensity		.06		.07		.06
Moderator		.14*		.06		-.07
Facebook Intensity x Moderator		-.03		-.04		-.10
Total R^2	.08		.07		.08	

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

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H2 Was Partially Supported

Our hypothesis (H2) that authoritative parenting would be positively associated with self-esteem, authoritarian parenting would be negatively associated with self-esteem, and permissive parenting would show a weaker or mixed association with self-esteem was partially supported.

As anticipated, authoritative parenting was strongly linked to higher self-esteem. This finding aligns with a large body of research indicating that the combination of warmth and reasonable control helps foster self-worth and autonomy in young adults. Authoritative parents provide emotional support and consistent guidance, which create an environment conducive to building positive self-esteem.

Contrary to expectations, authoritarian parenting was also associated with higher self-esteem, which challenges the typical understanding that strict control without warmth is detrimental to emotional development. It is possible that, in certain contexts, the structure and discipline provided by authoritarian parents offer a sense of security and stability that can boost self-esteem. This suggests that the relationship between authoritarian parenting and self-esteem may vary depending on cultural, social, or familial factors.

Permissive parenting, characterized by high warmth

but low control, was also positively associated with self-esteem, though to a lesser degree than authoritative parenting. The emotional support offered by permissive parents likely contributes to a positive sense of self-worth. However, the lack of clear boundaries and structure may limit the development of emotional regulation and personal responsibility, which could explain why the impact of permissive parenting on self-esteem is not as strong as that of authoritative parenting.

When all three parenting styles were considered together, authoritative parenting remained the most influential factor in predicting self-esteem, while permissive parenting also continued to have a smaller but meaningful positive effect. This reinforces the importance of warmth and emotional support across parenting styles, while also highlighting the critical role that authoritative parenting plays in fostering higher self-esteem in young adults.

H3 Was Partially Supported

Our hypothesis (H3) that authoritative parenting would moderate the relationship between social media intensity and self-esteem was partially supported. Specifically, we found that authoritative parenting enhanced the positive effects of Instagram and X use on self-esteem, but this effect was not observed

TABLE 3

Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem From Interactions of Instagram Intensity and Parenting Styles

Moderator	Authoritative Parenting		Self-Esteem Authoritarian Parenting		Permissive Parenting	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.06***		.06***		.06***	
Gender		.23***		.23***		.23***
Step 2	.05***		.04		.04**	
Gender		.26***		.26***		.26***
Instagram Intensity		.18**		.19***		.19***
Moderator		.11*		-.04		-.07
Step 3	.02*		.00		.01	
Gender		.27***		.26***		.26***
Instagram Intensity		.17**		.19***		.19***
Moderator		.12*		.06		-.07
Instagram Intensity x Moderator		.13*		-.10		-.06
Total R^2	.12		.10		.10	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 4

Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem From Interactions of X Intensity and Parenting Styles

Moderator	Authoritative Parenting		Self-Esteem Authoritarian Parenting		Permissive Parenting	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.05***		.05***		.05***	
Gender		.21***		.21***		.21***
Step 2	.03*		.01		.02	
Gender		.23***		.23***		.23***
X Intensity		.09		.09		.10
Moderator		.13*		.06		-.08
Step 3	.03**		.01		.00	
Gender		.23***		.23***		.22***
X Intensity		.07		.09		.10
Moderator		.14*		.06		-.08
X Intensity x Moderator		.17**		-.01		-.06
Total R^2	.10		.06		.06	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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for Facebook. These results suggest that authoritative parenting, which combines warmth with reasonable guidance, helps young adults navigate the potential challenges of social media and leverage these platforms for positive self-perceptions.

For Instagram and X, young adults who reported high levels of authoritative parenting experienced higher self-esteem when they were heavily immersed in these platforms. This may be because authoritative parents foster emotional regulation and provide a supportive framework that helps their children manage the risks associated with social comparison and online feedback, particularly on platforms like Instagram and X where self-presentation and social interaction are central. The positive influence of authoritative parenting likely buffers young adults from the potential negative effects of social media use, allowing them to feel more confident and secure in their online interactions.

However, no significant moderating effect was found for Facebook. This could be due to the nature of Facebook as a platform that is more focused on maintaining connections with familiar people, rather than creating new relationships or engaging in social comparison to the same extent as Instagram or X. As a result, the benefits of authoritative parenting may be less relevant when it comes to Facebook use, as reconnecting with known individuals may not present the same social and emotional challenges.

In addition, we found no evidence that authoritarian or permissive parenting styles moderated the relationship between social media intensity and self-esteem. This suggests that the structure and warmth provided by authoritative parenting are unique in fostering resilience to the pressures of social media, whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting styles do not seem to provide the necessary emotional tools to mitigate the risks associated with high social media use.

Potential Limitations and Future Research

Dimensions of Social Media Use

This study examined whether parenting impacts the link between self-reported intensity of social media use and self-esteem. Intensity was measured using a social media intensity scale, which allows researchers to tap into self-perceptions of how social media is integrated into one's day-to-day life. Overall social media use (e.g., time spent on social media) was not measured. The benefit of using the social media intensity scales is that it still captures self-perceptions of use even if a platform is used rarely or never. The primary drawback is that measuring self-perceptions will not capture how much time users actually spend on a platform, which could have negative effects not captured there. Future

research should examine how time spent on social media impacts the effects seen here, as one could still feel immersed in social media but not spend a lot of time on it, and vice-versa.

Furthermore, future researchers could focus on the motivation for social media use and self-esteem. For instance, if a person wants to feel connected to a community on a social media platform, do they reap the benefits of social support regardless of the platform itself? Various motivations for using any platform often overlap, so perhaps the incentive to use a platform is more important than the platform itself. Furthermore, social media is evolving rapidly. The nuanced differences in interacting with platforms might impact the relationships found in this study. For instance, TikTok and Snapchat were the fastest-growing social media platforms from 2020 through 2022 (Statista, 2023). To further investigate the implications of components of these platforms' attention, if different motivators would be seen for TikTok, and what of these implications would be seen interacting with new platforms, another study would need to be conducted.

Measuring Direct Parenting Behaviors

Pinquart and Gerke (2019) suggested that permissive parenting is associated with higher self-esteem when it directly measures parenting warmth, suggesting that any level of warmth would contribute to better outcomes for children. Because there are mixed results for researchers who try to establish whether there is a link between parenting style and self-esteem, researchers should ensure that parental warmth and parental control are measured in a way that parcels out their individual effects. Further, researchers should account for cultural and SES-dependent differences in responses to parental warmth and control, as this could add to the nuanced picture of how parenting and social media use interactively contribute to self-esteem.

One limitation of the current study is the omission of neglectful parenting, one of the four parenting styles commonly examined today. Although the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) captured authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive styles, it did not explicitly assess neglectful parenting, which is characterized by low warmth and low control. Neglectful parenting is known to be associated with adverse outcomes, such as low self-esteem and problematic social media use (Tur-Porcar, 2017). Including this style could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of how various parenting approaches influence the relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Future researchers should consider including neglectful parenting in their assessments to explore its potential

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moderating effects on social media use and psychological outcomes, as it may offer additional insights into maladaptive behaviors in digital contexts.

Beyond Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is only one component of personal development. Future researchers should ask how parenting styles and social media use impact other elements of socioemotional development, notably academic achievement and friendship quality (Morris et al., 2021; Steinberg et al., 1992). There seems to be an established relationship between parenting, social media, and academic achievement. For example, in a sample of 1,459 younger adolescents, high-quality mother-child communication moderated the negative association between Facebook, X, Instagram, and Snapchat use and academic achievement (Gordon & McCauley-Ohannessian, 2023). These effects have been corroborated by other studies as well (Hassan et al., 2022; Prabandari & Yuliati, 2016).

Because social media promotes connectedness, parenting styles ostensibly should moderate the association between social media use and friendship quality. Luijten et al. (2022) found that friendship quality moderates the link between social media use and well-being, primarily for women. Could it be that social media use boosts the quality of friendships for young adults who experience authoritative parenting? Perhaps authoritative parenting provides a template for online and offline friendships. Furthermore, although these social media platforms connect individuals, the types of connections are not clearly defined. For instance, do frequent interactions between friends or followers enhance friendship quality? Or, perhaps providing a medium for social support enhances the quality? Angelini et al. (2022) suggested that, because social media platforms offer more availability to friends, these users are more likely to report a sense of instrumental support and companionship. Also, because social media interactions can be asynchronous, meaning that many reactions are not immediate, conflict resolution is fundamentally changed, and perhaps for the better, as temporal distance can diminish potential negative emotional reactions to conflict (Nesi et al., 2018)

Bidirectional Effects and Self-Report Biases

Although self-report surveying is probably the most common way to measure self-perceptions of parenting and social media use, the relationships found here could be further validated through more objective measures. For instance, some research protocols have independent raters rate situational characteristics of social media posts and photos. This would increase interrater reliability and provide some objectivity

to the intensity of social media use. Furthermore, parenting can be measured through direct observation or parent reports of parenting style. This method has challenges as many older adolescents and young adults live outside the home (e.g., college or military). Experimental methods could be employed as well. For instance, researchers could develop and utilize “media-specific” parenting programs to examine specific parenting practices employed while children are on social media. It is unclear whether the effects of media-specific authoritative parenting styles benefit children more than a general pattern of authoritative parenting. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of this study limits causal conclusions. It might be that those with high self-esteem already seek out Instagram and X to maintain their sense of self-worth, especially when they feel supported by their authoritative parents. Longitudinal analyses can control for these effects to help establish at least some causal inferences.

Conclusions

Social media is omnipresent, and there are risks and benefits to youth immersed in it. Authoritative parenting, characterized by a high degree of warmth and control, buffers the risk of low self-esteem for those fully immersed in Instagram and X. These findings are essential for parents facing the inevitable challenge of managing their children’s social media use. Furthermore, researchers and practitioners can use this information to inform best practices for parenting in the ever-changing online community.

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