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## Scrolling Through the Years: Social Media's Effects of Self-Esteem in Younger and Older Adults

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Scrolling Through the Years: Social Media's Effects on Self-Esteem in Younger  
and Older Adults

Ryan Brown

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**Honors Research Project**

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# Scrolling Through the Years: Social Media's Effects on Self-Esteem in Younger and Older Adults

Ryan Brown  
The University of Akron

## Background

Social media offers many benefits, but it can also have negative impacts on mental health (Karim et al., 2020). There is still a gap in the literature examining whether all age groups experience these negative relationships and on which social media platforms. More specifically, older adults have been ignored in research that aims to assess the relationship between different types of social media and self-esteem.

Past research has shown:

- ❖ As of 2019, one out of three people in the world had a Facebook account alone (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019)
- ❖ 67% of American adults reported getting at least some of their news from social media, whereas 20% reported often getting their news from social media (Shearer et al., 2020).
- ❖ Adolescent research participants with higher levels of emotional problems reported more social media addiction, which resulted in lower self-esteem (Acar et al., 2020).
- ❖ Men and women were observed to have different relationships with social media use, such that recent social media use was linked to lower self-esteem in women, but not men (Miljeteig & Von Soest, 2022).
- ❖ Researchers found a reciprocal relationship between self-esteem and social media use, such that those with lower self-esteem used social media more (Miljeteig & Von Soest, 2022).

## Hypotheses

1. Younger adults who predominantly use image and video social media sites will have the lowest ratings of self-esteem.
2. Older adults who predominantly use interactive social media sites will have the highest ratings of self-esteem.
3. Age will mediate the relationship between social media and self-esteem such that age will determine the preferred social media type, and thus the impact on self-esteem.

## Participants & Materials

We will recruit 100 participants per age group (older and younger), matching on gender.

Younger adult participants (18-30) will be recruited in psychology courses at the University of Akron using the psychology department's research tool, SONA.

Older adult participants (60+) will be recruited by using the older adult research database that Dr. Bisconti uses in her TRI-Lab Research lab, as well as by snowballing through social media.

Participants will complete the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** (see appendix) to evaluate self-esteem levels.

Participants will rate how often they check each social media platform per day on a scale from none/no account to multiple times per day (see appendix). The social media platform type they use the most will determine which social media category they will be placed into for analysis.

Social Media categories will include:

1. Interactive Social Network sites (Facebook and Twitter)
2. Image and Video sites (Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok)
3. Informational exchange sites (Reddit and YouTube)

## Procedures

Potential participants will be provided a link to a Qualtrics survey that will include an informed consent and demographic questionnaire. Following, participants will complete a social media platform and frequency of usage assessment (see appendix), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (see appendix).

## Proposed Analysis

A 2x3 factorial analysis will be used in which there are 2 levels of IV1: Age

1. Younger adults
2. Older adults

and 3 categories of IV2: Social media platform

1. Interactive
2. Image/Video
3. Informational

A 2X3 ANOVA will be run to determine whether there are any main effects (Hypotheses 1 & 2) or interaction effects (Hypothesis 3).

## Discussion

This study will help bridge a gap in existing research regarding social media's impact on self-esteem that has previously focused on adolescents and younger adults, ignoring older adults. This study will also help differentiate the impacts that varying types of social media platforms may have, specifically between younger and older populations. Both mental health counselors and individuals themselves can use what is learned from this study to help reshape their social media use in their journey for better mental health.

## References

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## Appendix Informed Consent Form

**Title of the Study:** Scrolling Through the Years: Social Media's Effects on Self-Esteem in Younger and Older Adults

**Introduction:** Researchers in the Psychology department at the University of Akron invite you to participate in a research project.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to determine the impact that different types of social media platforms have on self-esteem across older and younger adults. Data will be from 100 participants per age group (older and younger).

**Procedures:** For this study you will be asked to complete a survey about your social media use, then a survey assessing your feelings about yourself.

**Risks and Discomforts:** There are no direct risks to participating in this study.

**Benefits:** There is no direct benefit to participating in this study, but your participation may help us see which types of social media platforms younger and older adults predominately use, and how that may impact self-esteem levels.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary. If there are any questions that you choose not to answer, you may skip them and continue with the study. You may withdraw your consent to participate and discontinue participation at any time during the study.

**Who to Contact with Questions:** For questions regarding the study, you may contact Dr. Toni Bisconti at [tb33@uakron.edu](mailto:tb33@uakron.edu) or (330) 972-5852.

**Confidentiality of Records:** The data from this study will be collected anonymously. Your responses will not be able to be linked to you by researchers of anyone else.

**Acceptance:** I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

- I give my consent.
- I do not give my consent.

## Demographic Questions

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

1. What is your age? (18-100+)
2. With which gender do you most identify? (Male, Female, Gender Non-Conforming, Transgender, Prefer to self-describe (Please Specify), Prefer not to answer)
3. Which racial/ethnic group best describes you? (Black, Asian, White, Indigenous Americans, Latinx or Hispanic, Biracial or Multiracial, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern or North African, Prefer to self-describe (Please Specify), prefer not to answer)
4. What is your sexual orientation? (Straight, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Prefer to self-describe (Please Specify), Prefer not to answer)
5. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? (Some high school, high school, Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, Ph. D. or higher, trade school, prefer not to answer)
6. Are you married? (Yes, No, Prefer not to answer)
7. What is your current employment status? (Full-time, Part-time, Seeking opportunities, Unemployed, Retired, Prefer not to answer)
8. How many children do you have? (None, 1, 2-4, 4+, Prefer not to answer)
9. Which of the following best describes your living status? (Homeowner, Renter, Lessee, Houseless, Other, Prefer not to answer)
10. Where were you born? (North America, Central America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, Pacific Islands, Caribbean Islands, Other, Prefer not to answer)

## Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Please record the appropriate answer for each item, depending on whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

1 = Strongly Agree

2 = Agree

3 = Disagree

4 = Strongly disagree

- |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. At times I think I am no good at all.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I certainly feel useless at times.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

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## Social Media Use Assessment

Please select the answer that best describes how often you check each social media platform per day.

1. Facebook	None/No account	Once	2-4	5+
2. Twitter	None/No account	Once	2-4	5+
3. Instagram	None/No account	Once	2-4	5+
4. Snapchat	None/No account	Once	2-4	5+
5. TikTok	None/No account	Once	2-4	5+
6. YouTube	None/No account	Once	2-4	5+
7. Reddit	None/No account	Once	2-4	5+

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