

BEYOND SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION: PLATFORM-SPECIFIC ASSOCIATIONS WITH SINCERITY, SELF-ESTEEM, AND ACADEMIC FUNCTIONING

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Abstract

This study extends previously published analyses of the same cross-sectional dataset by examining whether psychological and academic correlates of social media engagement vary across social networking platforms. Whereas Seceleanu, Șunda, and Garabet (2026) focused on a general mechanism linking social media addiction to affect, authenticity, self-image, academic performance, and flourishing, the present secondary analysis focuses on platform-specific heterogeneity and on sincerity and self-esteem as distinct self-evaluative variables. The analytic sample comprised 940 participants aged 18–72 years ($M = 31.00$, $SD = 11.35$). Measures included the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), PAS subscales for sincerity, self-esteem, and gratitude, the Academic Performance Scale, and the Flourishing Scale. Platform use was examined for Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Discord, Twitch, and Reddit. Higher BSMAS scores were associated with use of Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X/Twitter, while platform-specific patterns also emerged for sincerity and self-esteem. Indirect association models suggested that affect and sincerity were related to self-esteem and that self-esteem, in turn, was associated with academic functioning and flourishing. Because the design is cross-sectional and the platform analyses are exploratory, the findings should not be interpreted causally. The results extend the earlier mechanism-based study by showing that the psychological correlates of social media engagement may differ according to platform context and self-presentational dynamics.

Keywords: problematic social media use, social network sites, affect, sincerity, self-esteem, academic performance, flourishing

1. Introduction

Social network sites (SNS) have become integral to everyday communication, social interaction, and identity expression. Their affordances enable users to maintain relationships and explore aspects of the self, but they also create environments characterized by continuous social comparison, selective self-presentation, rapid feedback, and exposure to idealized representations of others. Consequently, the psychological implications of SNS use cannot be understood solely in terms of time spent online; the quality of online experiences and the ways users engage with platform-specific environments are also relevant.

Existing research links problematic or intensive SNS use with affective states, self-evaluative processes, self-presentation, and well-being. However, these constructs are often examined separately, leaving less clarity about how affective experience and sincerity in self-presentation may jointly relate to self-esteem and, subsequently, to academic and well-being outcomes. The present study addresses this gap by examining a set of theoretically related indirect associations among problematic SNS involvement, positive and negative affect, sincerity, self-esteem, perceived academic performance, and flourishing. In addition, exploratory analyses examine whether these associations vary according to the SNS platforms used. Because the data are cross-sectional, the proposed pathways are treated as theoretically informed statistical models rather than demonstrated temporal or causal sequences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The ambivalence of online communication and the impact on self-image

Online communication involves both positive connectivity and potential negative impacts on self-perception. Bryant et al. (2006) note that users' experiences fall between these extremes, shaped by selective positive self-presentation, which can gradually distort self-image. This selectivity leads to unfavorable upward comparisons that negatively affect self-esteem and satisfaction (Fardouly, 2015).

People often create idealized self-images online. Research indicates that curating profiles by selectively presenting positive information may appear advantageous initially, but this practice can increase psychological pressure and negatively affect self-esteem over time. Chou and Edge (2012) found that active Facebook users

tend to believe others lead greater lives, which increases envy and feelings of inadequacy. (Chou et al., 2012) Meier and Schafer (2018) demonstrated that excessive SNS use and exclusive posting of positive content are associated with reduced well-being and authenticity. (Meier et al., 2018) According to Festinger (1954) and later Vogel et al. (2014), viewing idealized content on SNS leads users to compare themselves upward, often resulting in a reduction in self-esteem. Upward (bottom-up) comparisons increase the desire for external validation, seen in behaviors such as seeking more likes and comments. While positive feedback can boost self-esteem in the short term (Burrow and Rainone, 2017), it may lead to psychological dependence (Liu & Ma, 2020), making self-worth reliant on online reactions. Conversely, negative feedback can lower self-esteem and disrupt psychological balance, especially in adolescents (Valkenburg, 2006; Frison & Eggermont, 2016). (Frison et al., 2016, pp. 139-146)

Compulsive checking of messages and notifications increases anxiety and disrupts authentic identity development. Andreassen et al. (2013) found that higher SNS addiction strongly correlates with lower self-esteem, and Elhai et al. (2017) found that frequent compulsive behaviors are linked to greater anxiety and depression.

While social networks facilitate the expression of identity, they also promote the presentation of distorted self-images. Upward social comparisons, the pursuit of validation, and pressures to maintain an idealized appearance contribute to this dynamic. Users are required to continuously balance authentic identity with online self-presentation. This phenomenon can be better understood through the lens of the online disinhibition effect, which posits that reduced social cues or anonymity in digital environments may license the idealization of self-presentation. Consequently, certain platforms can encourage less authentic self-presentation as users might feel a sense of freedom to project idealized versions of themselves.

2.2 Self-disclosure and self-esteem online

Self-disclosure refers to the act of sharing personal information, thoughts, or feelings with others. On SNS, this occurs through status updates, photo sharing, and comments. Social media and messaging apps let users shape a preferred self-image. Platform design and audience shape the intensity and content of disclosures.

Empirical studies suggest that online self-disclosure is especially advantageous for individuals experiencing social anxiety. The online environment is less intimidating than face-to-face interactions, which can reduce loneliness and facilitate the formation of social connections. Campbell (2012) emphasized that online contexts decrease isolation and support the development of authentic, reciprocal relationships. Individuals with social anxiety are more likely to disclose personal information gradually and comfortably online, fostering self-confidence and a sense of belonging.

The relationship between self-esteem and self-disclosure is bidirectional and influenced by both personal and contextual factors. Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to engage in frequent and natural self-disclosure, expressing their opinions with confidence (Nowell et al., 2022) and using self-disclosure to cultivate genuine, trust-based relationships. Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem often hesitate to share personal information due to concerns about negative feedback or rejection, perceiving self-disclosure as risky and thereby limiting authentic social interaction.

Burrow and Rainone (2017) found that positive online feedback, such as likes and comments, can give a brief boost to self-esteem. Positive responses encourage a favorable self-view, allowing external validation to influence self-image. Digital social ties can strengthen self-esteem, while a lack of feedback can prompt self-criticism or withdrawal. An early lack of validation makes self-disclosure riskier, which can harm self-esteem and emotional stability.

The literature indicates that users carefully manage their online self-presentation (Tran et al., 2025). Online, individuals control what, when, and with whom to share information. Users pick details to disclose, adjust message tone, choose photos, and build profiles, often to influence others (Grieve, March, & Watkinson, 2020; Okdie et al., 2011; Tosun, 2012). This management demonstrates a desire to appear favorable, follow social norms, and maintain popularity.

Self-disclosure is thus a deliberate process, involving the selective presentation of traits, values, and aspects of identity that users choose to reveal. Research by Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) demonstrates that emerging adults (aged 18–25) frequently engage in idealized self-presentation on social media, selecting and modifying content to reflect an idealized version of themselves. However, Fullwood et al. (2016) report that many users maintain consistency between their digital and real identities, despite tendencies toward self-image enhancement. The degree of authenticity in self-presentation varies and can be influenced by age, social context, self-esteem level, and the intended purpose of platform use.

Interestingly, the literature suggests a tendency towards authentic self-disclosure among adults, compared to adolescents. In the online environment, adults exhibit a smaller discrepancy between their projected self-image and their actual identity, unlike teenagers, who use social networks to explore their identity and seek social validation. Studies by Twomey and O'Reilly (2017) confirm that adults express their identity in a more realistic way online, avoiding excessive idealization or manipulation of self-presentation. This orientation towards authenticity can be explained by a series of processes that develop with aging and psychosocial maturation, such as identity integration, establishing personal values, and strengthening self-esteem. As people age, the need for superficial external validation decreases, being replaced by the desire to form authentic connections based on identity congruence. Social comparison and self-disclosure are salient phenomena in communication mediated by social networking sites. These processes encourage users to share personal experiences and continuously relate to others' experiences, creating an ongoing cycle of self-presentation and comparative social evaluation. The bidirectional relationship between social comparison and self-disclosure has a significant influence on and shapes self-esteem.

In the online environment, users often selectively present personal information to create a favorable image to others, building idealized narratives of their lives and highlighting successes, happy moments, and personality traits considered desirable (Gonzales et al., 2011). This strategic exposure fosters upward social comparisons, leading to feelings of inadequacy or envy. The effects are often transient, and constant exposure to the idealized versions of others' reality perpetuates bottom-up, unfavorable comparisons, negatively impacting self-esteem (Liu et al., 2016).

An interdependence exists between self-esteem, self-evaluation, self-disclosure, and social comparison in online environments. Bottom-up comparison, which involves comparing oneself to individuals perceived as more accomplished or superior, is associated with decreased self-esteem. Conversely, self-disclosure accompanied by positive social feedback contributes to the development and shaping of self-perception. This interaction, intensified by social networks, creates a communication environment in which individuals are both actors and observers, continually exposed to social judgments, with significant implications for emotional balance, self-image, and well-being.

Self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, and social anxiety may influence the degree and nature of self-disclosure. Disinhibition can shape this process by facilitating personal disclosure online while also interacting with concerns about evaluation and rejection (Karna & Ediat, 2023). Self-disclosure may support social connectedness, but it can also expose users to criticism and unfavorable social comparison. Accordingly, the consequences of disclosure depend on the social context, audience, and form of online interaction (Pellegrino, 2024; Zhang, 2024; Karna & Ediat, 2023; Desjarlais, 2022; Desjarlais, 2024).

3. METHOD

3.1 Design and participants

The present study is a secondary analysis of the cross-sectional, correlational dataset reported by Seceleanu, Sunda, and Garabet (2026). A total of 941 individuals accessed the online survey; one case with substantial missing data was excluded, yielding a final analytic sample of 940 participants aged 18–72 years ($M = 31.00$, $SD = 11.35$). The sample included 694 women, 235 men, and 11 participants who identified as another gender or preferred not to disclose gender. Participants were recruited predominantly through snowball sampling using institutional and academic networks. The study protocol was approved by the Ethics and Integrity Commission of Andrei Șaguna University, Constanța, Romania (Approval No. 26/2025). Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent information was provided on the first page of the questionnaire. The present analyses focus on variables and platform-specific comparisons that were not the primary focus of the earlier publication.

3.2 Tools used and scoring

- BSMAS (6 items, Likert 1–5; total 6–30) quantifies problematic social media use. It is a short instrument, derived from the BFAS, with solid evidence of psychometric validity and invariance in multiple languages and samples. (Lin et al., 2017)
- PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) comprises 10 Positive Affect (PA) items and 10 Negative Affect (NA) items. Mean scores for PA and NA were used in the analyses.
- PAS inventory (84 items) – we used the following subscales: Self-esteem (items 3, 15, 27*, 39, 51*, 63*, 75*; * = invert), Sincerity (8*, 20, 32, 44*, 56, 68*, 80*), Gratitude (12*, 24*, 36*, 48, 60, 72, 84). Scoring was averaged on each subscale after recoding the inverted items (1–5 → 6 – score).

- Perceived academic performance was measured using the Academic Performance Scale (APS; York et al., 2015), which assesses perceived academic progress, learning-related task efficiency, and overall academic functioning. The instrument comprises six items rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher perceived academic competence.
- Psychological flourishing was assessed using the eight-item Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener et al., 2010), which captures key aspects of positive psychological functioning, including meaning and purpose, supportive relationships, competence, and contribution to others. Items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale, and the mean item score was used as the overall indicator of psychological flourishing
- Types of platforms (binary predictors): Facebook, X (ex Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Discord, Twitch, Reddit. Binary coding of platform use was chosen due to preliminary analyses indicating categorical differences across platforms, as well as constraints on data collection that did not allow for more granular frequency or engagement type analyses.

Methodological note. Sincerity and authenticity are treated as related but non-equivalent constructs. The previously published analysis of this dataset used the Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008), whereas the present secondary analysis uses the PAS Sincerity subscale to capture congruence and honesty in self-expression. PAS Sincerity should therefore not be interpreted as a direct substitute for the multidimensional authenticity construct examined by Seceleanu et al. (2026).

3.3 Analytical plan

Mediation analyses were estimated using OLS-based PROCESS Model 4, with bootstrap confidence intervals for indirect effects ($a \times b$). The direction of the statistical paths was specified on theoretical grounds; however, because all variables were measured cross-sectionally, these models do not establish temporal precedence or causality. Indirect effects are therefore interpreted as statistical indirect associations. The confirmatory models examined the following hypotheses:

- H1: Higher problematic SNS involvement (BSMAS) is associated with lower self-esteem.
- H2: The association between BSMAS and self-esteem is statistically mediated by positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA); affect was also examined in relation to gratitude.
- H3: The association between BSMAS and self-esteem is statistically mediated by sincerity.
- H4: Self-esteem statistically mediates the association between BSMAS and perceived academic performance (APS).
- H5: Self-esteem statistically mediates the association between BSMAS and flourishing (FS). Age and gender were included as covariates in the mediator, outcome, and total-effect equations.

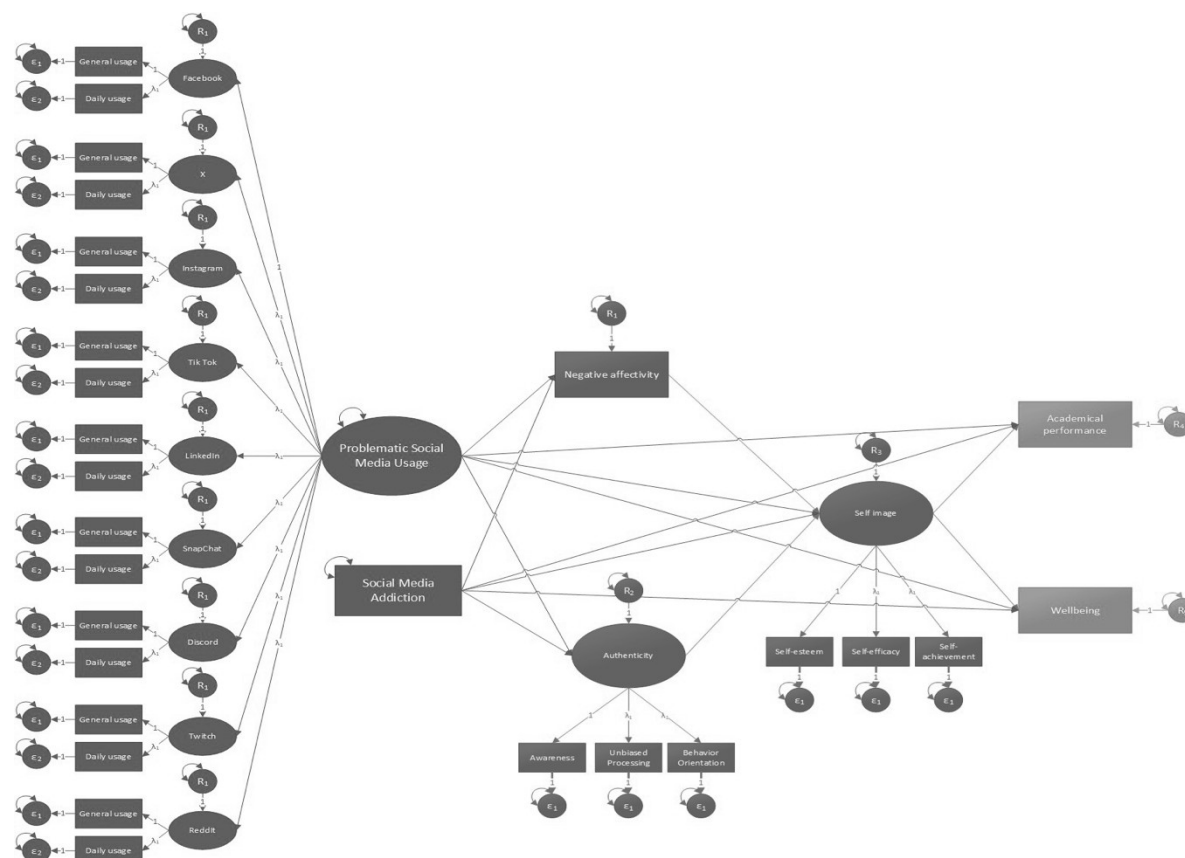
Platform-specific analyses were exploratory. BSMAS was replaced by each binary platform-use indicator (0/1) as predictor in corresponding models, with age and gender retained as covariates, to examine heterogeneity across platforms. These analyses should not be interpreted as causal comparisons between platforms.

Missing-data handling. Models were estimated using complete cases for the variables included in each analysis. Bootstrap confidence intervals were used for indirect effects, reducing reliance on normality assumptions for the sampling distribution of the indirect effect.

4. RESULTS

The analyses indicated that problematic SNS involvement was associated with psychological and educational indicators through several statistically significant indirect pathways. In the platform-level exploratory regressions, the model predicting BSMAS was significant ($R^2 \approx .187$): Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X/Twitter use showed positive coefficients, while Reddit showed a marginal association. The model predicting self-esteem was also significant ($R^2 \approx .116$); Facebook use was positively associated with self-esteem, whereas X/Twitter, Snapchat, Discord, and Reddit use showed negative associations. The self-presentation model was not significant ($R^2 \approx .01$), whereas the model predicting sincerity was significant ($R^2 \approx .162$), with Facebook positively and X/Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, and Discord negatively associated with sincerity. Because platform use was coded as a binary indicator, these results describe between-user associations and do not capture frequency, intensity, content, or mode of use.

Figure 1 - Conceptual model of the relationships between problematic use of social networks, affectivity, authenticity, self-esteem, academic performance, and well-being.



The mediation analyses identified affect as a statistically significant indirect pathway linking problematic SNS involvement with self-esteem.

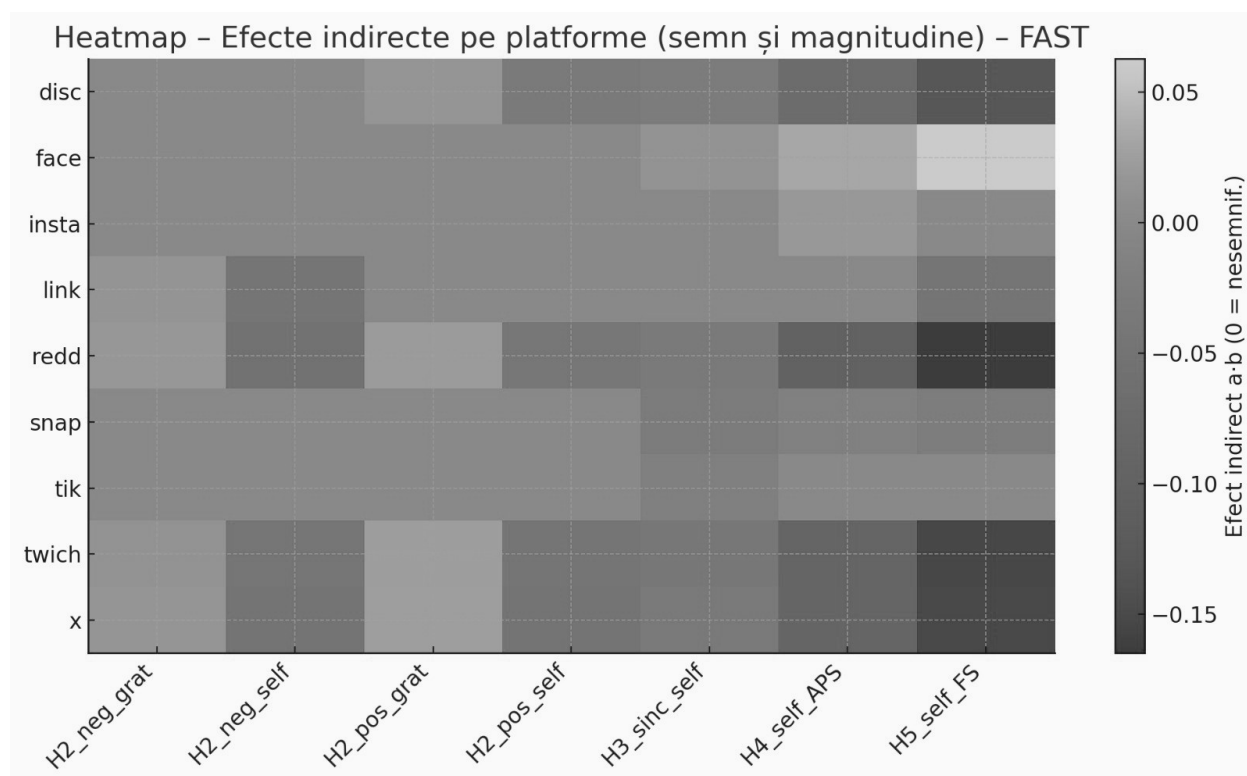
For H2, BSMAS showed significant indirect associations with self-esteem through both positive affect (PA; $a \times b \approx -0.006$, 95% CI $[-0.011, -0.001]$) and negative affect (NA; $a \times b \approx -0.019$, 95% CI $[-0.025, -0.013]$). The larger absolute indirect estimate was observed for NA. Affect also statistically mediated associations between BSMAS and gratitude (PA: $a \times b \approx +0.003$; NA: $a \times b \approx +0.005$). These estimates indicate indirect statistical associations within the cross-sectional model and should not be interpreted as evidence that SNS involvement causes subsequent affective change.

For H3, the indirect association between BSMAS and self-esteem through sincerity was significant ($a \times b \approx -0.006$; 95% CI $[-0.009, -0.003]$). For H4 and H5, self-esteem showed significant indirect associations linking BSMAS with perceived academic performance (APS; $a \times b \approx -0.0186$; 95% CI $[-0.0238, -0.0138]$) and flourishing (FS; $a \times b \approx -0.0347$; 95% CI $[-0.0439, -0.0251]$).

The residual direct effects were small in the reported models. The direction and statistical significance of the indirect associations were retained after age and gender were included as covariates, and selected larger effects produced comparable confidence intervals when re-estimated with 1,000 bootstrap replications.

Exploratory platform analyses further suggested heterogeneity in indirect associations. Discord use showed negative indirect associations with self-esteem through lower PA and lower sincerity, while a positive indirect association with gratitude through PA was also observed. Facebook use showed a positive indirect association with self-esteem through sincerity. These platform-specific patterns should be interpreted cautiously because platform membership was binary and the analyses did not distinguish frequency, content, active versus passive use, or other user characteristics that may account for between-platform differences.

Figure 2. Heatmap of indirect associations with platforms (sign and magnitude)



4.1 Platform-specific associations

Regression analyses revealed substantial heterogeneity across social networking platforms. Platform use accounted for approximately 18.7% of the variance in problematic social media involvement (BSMAS). Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X/Twitter use were positively associated with BSMAS scores ($p < .05$), whereas Reddit showed a marginal positive association.

Platform-specific differences were also observed for self-esteem and sincerity. The model predicting self-esteem explained approximately 11.6% of the variance. Facebook use was positively associated with self-esteem, whereas X/Twitter, Snapchat, Discord, and Reddit use showed negative associations ($p < .05$). The model for sincerity explained approximately 16.2% of the variance, with Facebook use positively associated with sincerity and X/Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, and Discord use negatively associated with sincerity; the association for Reddit was marginally negative. By contrast, the model predicting self-presentation was not statistically significant ($R^2 \approx .01$, $p \approx .39$), providing little evidence of systematic platform-related variation in this outcome.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the psychological correlates of social networking site use were not uniform across platforms, particularly for problematic involvement, sincerity, and self-esteem.

4.2 Indirect associations involving problematic social media involvement

Indirect association analyses were subsequently conducted with BSMAS as the predictor, controlling for age and gender. Affect and sincerity were examined as potential intermediate variables in the association between problematic social media involvement and self-esteem, while self-esteem was examined in relation to academic performance and flourishing.

Table 1. Indirect associations between problematic social media involvement and psychological and academic outcomes

Indirect pathway	Indirect effect ($a \times b$)	95% CI
BSMAS $\rightarrow$ PA $\rightarrow$ Self-esteem	-.006	[-.011, -.001]
BSMAS $\rightarrow$ NA $\rightarrow$ Self-esteem	-.019	[-.025, -.013]
BSMAS $\rightarrow$ PA $\rightarrow$ Gratitude	+.003	[.001, .006]
BSMAS $\rightarrow$ NA $\rightarrow$ Gratitude	+.005	[.003, .009]
BSMAS $\rightarrow$ Sincerity $\rightarrow$ Self-esteem	-.006	[-.009, -.003]
BSMAS $\rightarrow$ Self-esteem $\rightarrow$ APS	-.0186	[-.0238, -.0138]
BSMAS $\rightarrow$ Self-esteem $\rightarrow$ Flourishing	-.0347	[-.0439, -.0251]

All reported confidence intervals excluded zero. Among the affective pathways, the indirect association involving negative affect was larger than that involving positive affect in relation to self-esteem. Sincerity also showed a negative indirect association between BSMAS and self-esteem. Finally, self-esteem was implicated in the indirect associations between problematic social media involvement and both academic performance and psychological flourishing.

Including age and gender as covariates did not alter the direction or statistical significance of these associations. Analyses using 1,000 bootstrap replications for selected larger indirect associations yielded comparable confidence intervals.

4.3 Exploratory platform-specific indirect associations

Exploratory analyses were conducted to determine whether the indirect association patterns varied according to platform use. Discord use was associated with lower positive affect and lower sincerity, which were in turn associated with lower self-esteem. At the same time, a positive indirect association between Discord use and gratitude through positive affect was observed. Facebook showed a different pattern: its use was positively associated with sincerity, which in turn was positively associated with self-esteem.

These findings provide preliminary evidence of platform-related heterogeneity in the affective and self-evaluative correlates of social media use. Importantly, the analyses do not demonstrate that specific platforms produce these psychological outcomes. The observed differences may also reflect variation in user characteristics, intensity and type of use, content exposure, or other unmeasured factors. Accordingly, the platform-specific indirect associations should be interpreted as exploratory.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary and contributions

The present secondary analysis extends Seceleanu et al. (2026) by shifting attention from a general mechanism-based model of social media addiction to heterogeneity across specific platforms and to sincerity and self-esteem as distinct self-related variables. The findings suggest that aggregate measures of social media engagement may obscure meaningful platform-specific patterns. Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X/Twitter were associated with higher BSMAS scores, while sincerity and self-esteem showed different patterns across platforms. These findings are exploratory and should be interpreted as cross-sectional associations rather than evidence that particular platforms cause psychological harm or protection.

The distinction between trait and state self-esteem may be useful for interpreting future research, but the present study does not separately measure these constructs. Accordingly, the current findings should be understood as associations involving the self-esteem measure used here, without inferring whether problematic SNS involvement changes enduring or momentary self-evaluations. Platform-specific results also require caution: although visually intensive or rapidly updating platforms were associated with higher BSMAS scores in this sample, and Facebook use was positively associated with sincerity and self-esteem, these differences may also reflect user characteristics, age, motivations, content, or patterns of use that were not measured.

5.2 Relation to previous research

The negative association between problematic SNS involvement and self-esteem is broadly consistent with prior research linking social comparison and particular forms of SNS use with lower self-evaluation (e.g., Faelens et al., 2021; Cingel et al., 2022). The present results add to this literature by identifying affect and sincerity as statistically significant indirect correlates within the same dataset.

The affect findings are consistent with evidence connecting social media experiences with variation in positive and negative affect. In the present data, negative affect showed the larger indirect association between BSMAS and self-esteem. Because affect and BSMAS were measured concurrently, however, reciprocal or alternative directional relationships remain plausible.

The sincerity findings are also compatible with research on idealized or inauthentic self-presentation and self-esteem. The present study should not be taken as a direct test of the full multidimensional construct of authenticity; rather, PAS Sincerity functions as a conceptually related indicator of sincere self-presentation.

Finally, the significant indirect associations through self-esteem suggest that self-evaluation is relevant to understanding how problematic SNS involvement covaries with perceived academic performance and flourishing. The contribution of the present study lies primarily in integrating these affective, self-presentational, and self-evaluative correlates, while the proposed temporal ordering requires longitudinal confirmation.

From an applied perspective, the findings suggest that educational interventions may benefit from addressing emotional regulation, social comparison, digital literacy, and reflective online self-presentation rather than focusing exclusively on screen time. These implications should be regarded as hypotheses for intervention development rather than as effects demonstrated by the present observational study. Platform-design implications likewise require experimental evidence before specific design changes can be recommended.

5.3 Strengths and limitations

The study has several strengths, including the integration of affective and self-presentational variables, the use of bootstrap confidence intervals for indirect effects, adjustment for age and gender, and exploratory consideration of platform-specific heterogeneity.

Several limitations should be emphasized. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference and does not establish temporal ordering among BSMAS, affect, sincerity, self-esteem, academic functioning, and flourishing. Second, this article is a secondary analysis of a dataset used in Seceleanu et al. (2026); its contribution therefore rests on a distinct research question and on platform-specific analyses rather than on an independent replication. Third, all measures are self-reported. Fourth, platform use is represented by binary indicators, which do not capture frequency, duration, active versus passive use, content type, or simultaneous use of multiple platforms. Platform associations may also be confounded by demographic and user-profile differences. Finally, PAS Sincerity is not equivalent to the multidimensional authenticity construct used in the earlier publication, and the two should not be interpreted interchangeably.

5.4 Future directions

A natural next step is to test longitudinal serial mediation models in which problematic SNS involvement, affect, sincerity, self-esteem, academic functioning, and flourishing are assessed repeatedly over time. Cross-lagged or related longitudinal models could help distinguish competing directional explanations. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies could also test whether changes in social comparison cues, feed characteristics, or self-presentation practices are followed by changes in affect or self-evaluation. Potential moderators include age, gender, active versus passive use, social-comparison orientation, motivations for use, and the type of content encountered.

Future measurement work should supplement self-reports with objective or behavioral indicators, such as digital logs or privacy-preserving measures of time and interaction type. More comprehensive measures of authenticity would help distinguish sincerity in self-presentation from broader authenticity constructs. Where sample size and measurement properties permit, latent-variable models could separate measurement error from structural associations. Preregistration, standardized reporting, and sharing of analysis code and materials would further improve reproducibility and facilitate comparison across samples and cultural contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

This study identifies a coherent pattern of associations linking problematic SNS involvement with affect, sincerity, self-esteem, perceived academic performance, and flourishing. Significant indirect associations were observed between BSMAS and self-esteem through positive and negative affect and through sincerity, while self-esteem statistically mediated the associations of BSMAS with APS and flourishing. These findings support the relevance of affective experience and self-related processes for understanding problematic SNS involvement, but they do not establish causal mechanisms.

Exploratory analyses further indicated that associations differed across platforms: Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X/Twitter use was associated with higher BSMAS scores, while Facebook use was positively associated with sincerity and self-esteem in this sample. These findings should not be interpreted as evidence that specific platforms are intrinsically harmful or protective, because the analyses did not account for detailed patterns of use, content, motivations, or all potential user-level confounders.

At the applied level, the results suggest potential value in examining interventions that address negative affect, social comparison, digital literacy, and sincere self-presentation. Whether such approaches improve self-esteem, academic functioning, or flourishing remains an empirical question for longitudinal and experimental research.

Overall, the findings provide a basis for more rigorous temporal tests of the proposed relationships. Future research combining repeated measurement, more granular indicators of SNS engagement, validated multidimensional measures of authenticity, and behavioral data could clarify when and for whom problematic SNS involvement is associated with poorer or more adaptive outcomes.

The principal contribution of the study is therefore not the demonstration of a causal chain, but the identification of a theoretically coherent set of indirect cross-sectional associations in which affect, sincerity, and self-esteem emerge as relevant explanatory correlates of problematic SNS involvement and adaptive functioning.

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