



# The role of online persona in determining online behavior and psychological well-being

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## Abstract

The objective of this research is to examine the influence of self-presentation (SP) and social media (SM) induced behaviors on the emotional state and psychological well-being of individuals who use social media. The study's hypotheses were fully corroborated, offering significant perspectives into the complex interconnections among self-presentation, social media behavior, emotional states, and psychological well-being. The findings of the study indicate that there exists a negative correlation between self-presentation and social media behavior with positive emotions, whereas a positive correlation was observed for negative emotions. These results were obtained through a thorough analysis of data collected from a diverse cohort of social media users, comprising a sample size of 731 individuals. The findings indicate that overindulgence in social media engagement could potentially lead to adverse impacts on emotional states and the ability to regulate mood. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that emotions play a significant role in regulating the psychological well-being of individuals who use social media, as evidenced by the obtained r-square value of 0.243.

The present study enhances our understanding of the complex relationship among self-presentation, social media conduct, affective experiences, and mental health. The study highlights the significance of fostering positive emotional experiences during social media usage to promote psychological well-being in the digital age, as it reveals the inverse correlation between these variables.

**Keywords:** social media, self-presentation, social media behavior, psychological well-being, online social presence, mental health

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms have rapidly become integrated into our daily routines, fundamentally transforming the manner in which we engage with one another, disseminate information, and establish connections. The emergence of cutting-edge technologies has propelled social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat to the forefront of popular culture, enabling people to express themselves and communicate with others in new and powerful ways. Despite the myriad benefits of social media, growing anxiety has been expressed

about its possible impact on people's emotional states and psychological well-being. Studies conducted by researchers at MIT revealed that there had been an increase in depression by 7% and anxiety by 20% in college-wide Facebook users (Walsh, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on individual's mental health, exacerbating the prevalence of mental health challenges due to the implementation of lockdowns and social isolation measures. The restrictions and isolation imposed during the pandemic have significantly affected the lives of individuals, leading to a deterioration in



mental well-being (Brooks et al., 2020; Loades et al., 2020).

The rising number of mental health patients has been a major concern for the World Health Organization, and they have emphasized curbing and identifying the causes for providing preventive measures (World Health Organization, 2021). The shift of human communication to virtual form has brought new complex equations into consideration for evaluating human psychological well-being. The widespread inclusive use of social media (SM) sites to seek human connection and gain external validation has molded the behavior of SM users (Hynes et al., 2020). Social media platforms give users a unique way to share their ideas, viewpoints, and personal stories, giving them a rare chance to introduce themselves to a large network of contacts and people which otherwise won't be possible. It is possible for people to create their online persona and portray themselves in a way that is consistent with the self-image they want to project (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The capacity to regulate and oversee one's self-representation on social media platforms enhances the perception of control and self-articulation, augmenting the likelihood of social engagement and identity formation in the virtual realm.

The objective of this research was to comprehensively examine the impact of SM-triggered behaviors on the psychological well-being of individuals who engage with social media networks. The impact of social media on human behavior, communication, and interaction has become a noteworthy phenomenon. Individuals who dedicate a significant amount of time to the internet engage in various activities, discussions, and

social engagements on social media platforms. This results in a multifaceted and intricate environment of conduct that warrants research. The present research aims to offer an understanding of the underlying mechanisms through which social media interactions and engagements can influence individuals' emotional and psychological well-being. This will be achieved by examining the association between social media-induced behaviors, self-presentation, and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the objective is to examine the potential positive and negative outcomes that may arise from such behaviors, providing a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between social media usage and psychological well-being.

## 2. Literature Review

We have built the framework of our study on the self-presentation theory. According to Baumeister & Hutton (1987), self-presentation is the act of behavior that is a way that tries to communicate to others something about oneself or an idea of oneself. It designates a group of behavioral incentives for people. Despite the fact that these motivations are mostly stable personality traits, they are only triggered by certain circumstances. These situational factors motivate task performance, ingratiation, emotional shifts, aggressive behavior, self-serving and counter-defensive attributional claims, attitude expression and change, and responses to evaluations (Baumeister, 1982). Based on these factors, we have considered SM behaviors along with self-presentation to establish the relationship with both sets of emotions and the psychological well-being of individuals using social media platforms. Fig.1 represents the conceptual framework of the study.

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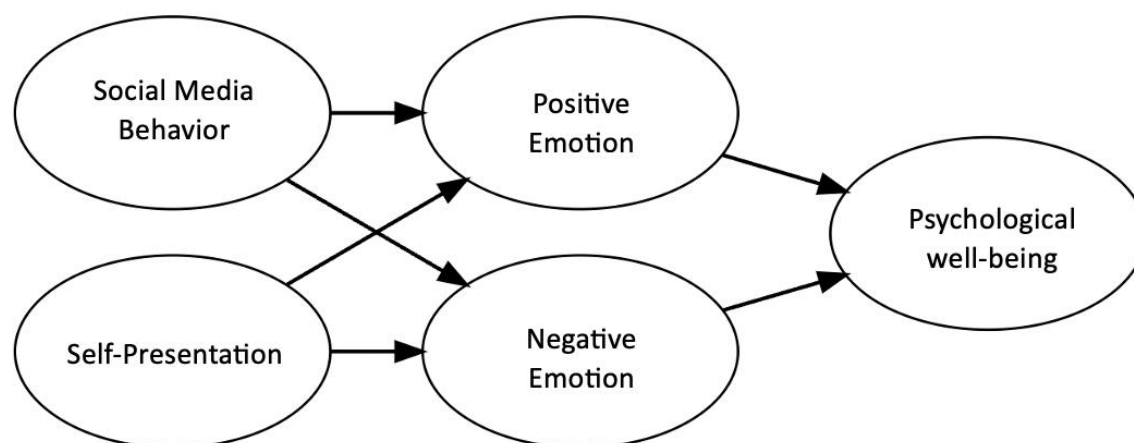


Fig.1: Conceptual framework built on self-presentation theory and literature

### Social Media Behavior

The term "social media behavior" refers to the various actions, interactions, and engagements exhibited by individuals on social media platforms. The range of activities encompassed in this context comprises posting, sharing, commenting, liking, and messaging. As users interact with social media platforms, they generate a digital footprint that mirrors their inclinations, viewpoints, and dispositions. This conduct is frequently motivated by a desire for social validation, self-representation, and a desire for a sense of belonging.

The concept of social media behavior has been derived from the social comparison theory, proposed by(Festinger, 1954), which helps us understand how social media behavior influences individuals' emotions. As per this theoretical framework, individuals possess an inherent inclination to engage in social comparison as a means of assessing their personal competencies, accomplishments, and general self-esteem. Social media offers a convenient platform for conducting such comparisons, as users are able to readily observe and contrast their personal lives, achievements, and physical attributes with those of others.(Barnhart et al., 2022; Chae, 2022). This constant exposure to selectively curated content can evoke positive and negative emotions.

H1: SM behavior has an influence on the emotions

### Social Media Presentation of Self

The capacity to construct and exhibit an idealized version of oneself to an online audience is one of the defining characteristics of social media. This phenomenon, known as the social media presentation of self, entails meticulously curating and managing one's online persona by selecting and sharing content that highlights one's best qualities. The self-presentation on social media is frequently influenced by social norms, societal expectations, and a desire for social acceptance and approbation(Chou & Lu, 2022; Krämer& Winter, 2008).

The dramaturgy theory by Erving Goffman provides a framework for comprehending how individuals engage in impression management on social media(Pribadi et al., 2018). Individuals, according to Goffman, are like actors on a stage, performing strategically to produce the desired impression on their audience. On social media, users select and filter content to create a favorable self-image, which may include showcasing accomplishments, emphasizing thrilling experiences, and portraying an appealing lifestyle. The act of presenting oneself in an idealized manner can have both favorable and unfavorable impacts on an individual's emotional and psychological state of being.

H2: SM self-presentation has an influence on the emotions

### The Impact of Emotions on Psychological Well-being

The interplay between social media behavior and social media self-presentation has a significant impact on the positive and negative emotions and overall psychological well-being of individuals. Positive experiences on social media, such as receiving social support, positive feedback, or engaging in meaningful interactions, can boost an individual's positive emotions and psychological well-being, according to the findings of a body of research. In contrast, negative experiences, such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and exposure to distressing content, can provoke negative emotions and have a negative impact on psychological health (Shi et al., 2018).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the negative effects of excessive social media use on mental health, including elevated levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Individuals may develop a sense of inadequacy and a fear of missing out (FOMO) as a result of constant exposure to idealized self-presentation and exaggerated depictions of others' lives. Furthermore, incessant comparison with others can have negative effects on self-perception, social relationships, and psychological well-being as a whole.

H3: Emotions have an influence on the psychological well-being of SM users

### 3. Methodology

#### Method

The analysis of the data consisted of three basic stages. To begin, there was an effort made to eliminate common technique bias and any systematic bias that may have been present in the study. Second, we investigated the reliability of the scale by using Cronbach's alpha and the Composite Reliability (CR) of internal consistency. Third, we investigated the content validity of the scale by using factor loading and AVE (average variance explained). Finally, we investigated the discriminant validity of the scale by using HTMT (heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations). In the third phase, the use of structural equation modeling was utilized to investigate whether

or not the proposed hypotheses were applicable. Using the "semr" package in R, we conducted descriptive and correlational analyses, as well as assessments of common method bias (Ray et al., 2022).

#### Participants and procedure

Volunteers were recruited for this investigation during the spring of 2022 from a variety of organizations located in India. Students with technical (including engineering, management, and scientific) and non-technical (including social science) backgrounds were invited to participate in the study, and for this purpose, a variety of engineering and non-engineering institutions were chosen to participate in the study. In order to reduce the impact of the common method bias on our investigation, the dissemination of our survey instrument (an electronic link) was split into two parts, with a gap of two weeks in between each phase. During the first part of the study, information on demographics as well as items comprising the dependent variable was shared. After a period of 14 days, the items pertaining to the dependent variable with anchor points ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree on a 7-point Likert-type scale were disseminated. After all of the replies had been compiled, the questionnaires were integrated using the code that had been provided to each participant.

In addition to this, the researcher randomized the questionnaire, and each student received an email cover letter from the researcher outlining the study, assuring them that their responses would be kept anonymous, and providing more information about the study. For power analysis, the 'pwr' package in R was utilized in order to determine the required minimum number of samples. According to the findings, a total of 110 samples were necessary in order to reach a power of 0.95 while conducting multiple regression. In this study, there were 980 students that took part in the survey. Of those 980 students, 731 (or 74.6% of the total) were considered for inclusion in the study since they answered the questionnaire in its entirety during both stages.

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The mean age of the students was 19.46 years old, and the standard deviation was 1.15 years old. The age range of the students was from 18 to 23 years old. When we looked at the gender distribution of the students in our sample, we found that there were considerably more male students than female students (60.6 percent vs 39.4 percent). The participants' technical backgrounds made up 57.3% of the total, while non-technical backgrounds made up 42.7% of the total. The average number of active SM accounts that participants utilized was 2.64, while the standard deviation for active SM accounts was 1.22. The student's time spent on social media sites ranged from less than an hour to more than five hours in six intervals, with the mean time spent being 3.35 hours and the standard deviation time spent being 1.45 hours.

#### 4. Measurements

##### Demographics and social media usage

The participants were polled on a variety of topics, including their ages, genders, majors (technical or non-technical), locations geographically and socioeconomically, the social media site they used the most frequently, and how long they had been using various SM platforms. They were also asked to report the amount of time that they spend using SM on a daily basis (the average weekly amount of time that they spent using SM platforms was reported by utilizing Google's Digital Wellbeing or Apple's Screen Time data).

##### Measurement Instruments

###### Self-Presentation

The study evaluated self-presentation (SP) through a novel index comprising four items, which aimed to gauge the degree to which individuals exhibit their favorable and knowledgeable attributes on social media platforms (for example, "I always put up posts on Social Media to show that I am knowledgeable"; "I offer explanations or justify my behavior for negative events in Social Media, so as to reduce the negative impression that others have of me on Social Media"; "I always put up posts on Social Media to demonstrate my intelligence"; "I always show off the difficult tasks that I have achieved on

Social Media"). The mean value of self-presentation was 2.26, and the standard deviation was 1.5. The participants were requested to evaluate their level of agreement with the given statements using a seven-point scale, where one indicated "strongly disagree" and seven indicated "strongly agree.". Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.895, indicating that this indicator was trustworthy.

###### Social Media Behavior

The study employed a novel index comprising of nine items to evaluate the degree to which individuals engage in social media (SM) behavior on various platforms such as posting messages, updates, posts, and factors that tempt them for such behaviors (for example, "I frequently tend to post updates on Social Media"; "When I have a good time, it is important for me to share the details online (e.g., updating status/stories)"; "Sometimes, I cannot resist posting an update on Social Media"; "When I am feeling lonely, I frequently tend to post updates on Social Media"). The mean value of SM behavior was 2.49, and the standard deviation was 1.32. On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 7 representing "strongly agree," participants were asked to assess the degree to which they agreed with the statements in question. Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.91, indicating that this indicator was trustworthy.

###### Emotions

Emotions were measured with the use of SPANE (Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences) scale, we are able to determine how the individual rates the balance of their affections as well as the frequency with which they experience both pleasant and negative sentiments. In order to achieve this goal, we utilize a total of 12 adjectives, each of which is arranged into one of two subscales consisting of a set of six items: the first subscale measures positive experiences (SPANE-P), while the second subscale measures negative experiences (SPANE-N). The tool makes use of a Likert scale with five points, with 1 representing extremely rarely or never and 5 representing often or always. The total score

can vary anywhere from six to thirty, and high numbers indicate either a strong positive or strong negative influence. By subtracting SPANE-P and SPANE-N, one may create a balanced measure denoted by the notation SPANE-B, which has a value that can fall anywhere between -24 and 24. The modified version was utilized in this research project as a representative sample for the overall investigation. The SPANE-P (Positive Emotion) measure has an internal consistency of 0.904, whereas the SPANE-N (Negative Emotion) measure had an internal consistency of 0.871. The mean value of positive emotion was 3.28 and standard deviation of 0.82 whereas, for negative emotion, mean was 2.63, and the standard deviation of 0.85.

### Psychological well-being

The condensed version of Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale was utilized for this study (Ryff, 1989). This scale is an eight-item Likert scale with a seven-point scale that measures the six aspects of well-being. These aspects include autonomy, positive interactions with others, personal progress, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and purpose in life. Some items from the scale were: "My social relationships are supportive and rewarding"; "I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others". Scores higher on the scale reflect a higher level of psychological wellness. The value of this indicator's Cronbach's alpha was estimated to be 0.896, suggesting that it provided reliable data. The mean value of psychological well-being was 5.45 and the standard deviation of 1.06.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, as well as the correlations between the various dimensions of psychological well-being, components of social media behavior, self-presentation and emotions. The SP behavior and the SM behavior were shown to have a substantial and positive correlation ( $r = 0.638$ ). Both aspects of the emotional experience were shown to have strong relationships with each and every component of well-being. The range of these correlations was from a low of 0.358 (representing a negative feeling) to a high of 0.436 (representing a pleasant mood). The correlation between SP and positive emotion was found to be considerably negative ( $r = -0.123$ ) whereas the correlation between SP and negative emotion was found to be significantly positive ( $r = 0.096$ ). There was a substantial inverse association between SM behavior and positive emotion ( $r = -0.106$ ), while there was a significant positive association between SM behavior and negative emotion ( $r = 0.073$ ). In terms of the correlations between emotions and psychological well-being, a positive emotion was found to be substantially and positively connected with one's psychological well-being ( $r = 0.436$ ), whilst a negative emotion was found to be considerably and adversely associated with one's psychological well-being ( $r = -0.358$ ). These patterns of association were not influenced by the recipient's gender or level of education.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations and the square root of AVE in diagonal

		Pearson correlation				
	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1.	SM Behavior	<b>0.727</b>				
2.	Self Presentation	0.638*	<b>0.826</b>			
3.	Positive Emotion	-0.106*	-0.123*	<b>0.783</b>		
4.	Negative Emotion	0.073*	0.096*	-0.346*	<b>0.731</b>	
5.	Psychological Well-being	0.106*	-0.02*	0.436*	-0.358*	<b>0.731</b>
	Mean	2.49	2.26	3.28	2.63	5.45
	Standard Deviation	1.32	1.5	0.82	0.85	1.06

\* $p < 0.001$  significance level



### 5.2. Path Analysis

The path analysis of the model was determined by structural equation modeling (SEM). Prior to that, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out on the measurement model in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the measurement model by making use of the *sempr* package. This was done in order to establish reliability, construct validity, and discriminant validity before testing hypotheses. According to the results presented in Table 2, the reliability score of each reflective construct's Cronbach's alpha (C.A) was greater than the suggested value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019, p. 776). Table 2 shows that the average variance extracted (AVE) for each reflective construct was greater than

0.50, and the item loadings for each latent variable were all greater than 0.50, with the majority above 0.7, suggesting strong convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019, p. 663). For each reflective construct, we compared the square root of the AVE (diagonal entries in Table 1) with the absolute value of the relevant correlation coefficients (non-diagonal items in Table 1). This was done so that we could determine which of these two values was more significant. According to the findings, all of the AVEs possessed sufficient discriminant validity, as shown by square roots that were higher than correlations with other variables (Hair et al., 2019, p. 663).

Table 2: Construct loadings and reliability and AVE scores

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CA	AVE
SM Behavior	SMB1	0.791	0.909	0.529
	SMB2	0.607		
	SMB3	0.716		
	SMB4	0.755		
	SMB5	0.72		
	SMB6	0.7		
	SMB7	0.735		
	SMB8	0.776		
	SMB9	0.728		
Self Presentation	SP1	0.859	0.895	0.682
	SP2	0.736		
	SP3	0.879		
	SP4	0.822		
Positive Emotion	EM1	0.788	0.904	0.613
	EM2	0.818		
	EM3	0.808		
	EM4	0.865		
	EM5	0.803		
	EM6	0.584		
Negative Emotion	EM7	0.791	0.871	0.535
	EM8	0.826		
	EM9	0.785		
	EM10	0.793		
	EM11	0.575		
	EM12	0.574		

Psychological well-being	PWB1	0.797	0.896	0.520
	PWB2	0.662		
	PWB3	0.768		
	PWB4	0.676		
	PWB5	0.717		
	PWB6	0.759		
	PWB7	0.699		
	PWB8	0.676		

Using the *semnr* package in R, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether or not SP and SM behavior had an effect on the variables that comprise psychological well-being. In the course of the analysis, we employed gender and age as covariates. The study employed a multiple regression model to assess the independent variables (X) of SP and SM behaviors, the potential mediators (M) of positive and negative emotion components, and the dependent variable (Y) of psychological well-being. The integration of these mediators in a concurrent model facilitated a systematic assessment of the extent of the indirect impacts that SP and SM behavior exert on them. The study employed a bias-corrected (BC) bootstrapping approach, with a total of 10,000 bootstrapped samples, to achieve confidence intervals (CI) for the hypothesis being examined. The present analysis employed a conservative level of significance set at 0.001.

were determined. Fig.2 depicts the multiple regression model. All of the pathways within the model exhibited statistical significance and ranged from -0.235 to 0.362. The 99% CI of SP ( $\beta = -0.064$ , CI = -0.187 to -0.006), SM behavior ( $\beta = -0.089$ , CI = -0.282 to -0.029) with positive emotion did not contain zero with r-square of 0.019. These results indicated that self-presentation and social media behavior are significantly and inversely related to positive emotions. In contrast, the negative emotions is significantly and positively related to the social media behavior and self-presentation. The BC 99% CI of SP ( $\beta = 0.061$ , CI = 0.035 to 0.157), SM behavior ( $\beta = 0.084$ , CI = 0.067 to 0.326) with negative emotion did not contain zero with r-square of 0.017. The bias corrected 99% confidence intervals of the pairwise dissimilarities between emotions was a stronger connection with psychological well-being than SP and SM behavior ( $\beta = 0.362$ , CI = 0.283 to 0.438) for positive emotion, and for negative emotion ( $\beta = -0.235$ , CI = -0.333 to -0.14). This path had the r-square of 0.243.

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For each of the possible outcomes of this model, standardized regression coefficients

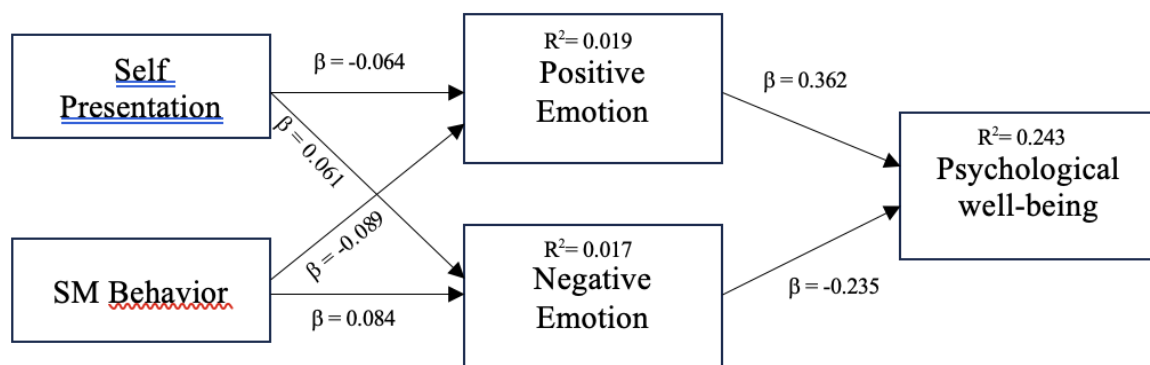


Fig.2: Path model for multiple regression with \* $p < 0.001$





## 5. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of self-presentation and behavior induced by social media on individuals' emotions and, consequently, their psychological well-being. Our research hypotheses were fully supported by the findings. The results revealed a negative association between self-presentation (SP) and social media (SM) behavior with positive emotions, while the opposite was observed for negative emotions. These outcomes suggest that excessive engagement in social media activities inversely regulates our emotions and mood (Richmond et al., 2022; Singh & Hamid, 2022).

This study provides empirical evidence of the negative effects of excessive self-presentation and participation in social networking behavior on the regulation of emotions and, consequently, on psychological well-being. As a result of the study's limitations, caution should be exercised when interpreting these findings. Firstly, the measurements employed in this study relied exclusively on self-reported questionnaire, where response bias (e.g., social desirability bias, the tendency to respond arbitrarily to questions) has potential become problematic. To minimize the potential for response bias, we implemented an entirely voluntary study design and obtained prior consent from participants, ensuring that their responses would remain anonymous. Secondly, the cross-sectional design of this study precluded the establishment of a definitive causal relationship. To evaluate the efficacy of regression analyses in the future, longitudinal designs will be required. Thirdly, one of the study's strengths was the size of our sample considered in the study. Given that the sample consisted of university students, it is necessary for subsequent research to investigate the applicability of the proposed model to generalized demographics. Fourthly, the potential influence of additional variables on psychological well-being cannot be disregarded. Consequently, incorporating

additional potential mediators could be a potential future research direction.

## 6. Conclusion

This cross-sectional study contributed to the understanding of the relationship between SP, SM behaviors, and psychological well-being. This study contributed to prior research by employing multiple regression modeling to investigate the potential internal mechanisms by which emotions affect psychological well-being. The results of a multiple regression analysis indicated that there exists an inverse association between self-presentation and social media-influenced behavior, and the psychological well-being of individuals. There was evidence of a significant relationship between SP, SM behavior, emotions, and psychological well-being. In particular, the intensity of positive emotion contributes to the enhancement of psychological well-being (i.e., experiencing more pleasurable than negative emotions). Regardless of these mechanisms, however, excessive usage of social media platforms has a detrimental impact on positive emotions (increase in negative emotions). Notably, positive emotions emerged as a more influential predictor of psychological well-being compared to negative emotions. These findings highlight the crucial role of positive emotions in determining individuals' overall psychological well-being.

To conclude, it can be asserted that the aforementioned results have substantiated the importance of emotions as a regulator of mental health in response to behaviors exhibited on social media platforms. The present study offers supplementary support for the importance of augmenting an individual's emotional well-being as a strategy for fostering optimal psychological health and averting mental illnesses. Limiting the duration of self-promotion activities on social media platforms may lead to a decrease in negative affect by primarily augmenting one's psychological welfare. The aforementioned results may be employed to construct and amplify explanatory frameworks pertaining to

the correlation between self-presentation, social media conduct, and overall welfare. Moreover, familiarity with this evidence may facilitate the creation and implementation of efficacious interventions aimed at improving mental health across diverse contexts, beyond clinical settings, leveraging the normative utilization of social media. The implementation of positive interventions aimed at reducing social media usage may lead to a reduction in psychological distress and the attainment of a state of complete well-being.

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