

Relationship between Emotional Regulation and Intimate Relationship: Role of Social Media among Couples

Abstract

The widespread integration of social media into daily life has reshaped interpersonal communication and raised concerns about its effects on intimate relationships. This study examined associations among emotion regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality among married adults, focusing on the mediating role of social media addiction. It also explored differences according to gender and age. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 298 married participants through an online Google Forms questionnaire. Standardized measures included the Emotion Regulation Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale, and Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale. All instruments showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .906, .870, \text{ and } .909$, respectively). Data were analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, independent-samples *t* tests, one-way ANOVA, and mediation analysis. Results indicated that emotion regulation was positively associated with intimate relationship quality and negatively associated with social media addiction. In contrast, social media addiction was negatively related to relationship quality. Mediation findings showed that social media addiction partially mediated the association between emotion regulation and intimate relationship quality. Thus, individuals with stronger emotion-regulation capacities were less likely to engage in problematic social media use, which was subsequently associated with better relationship quality. Demographic analyses revealed significant gender and age differences: men reported higher levels of both social media addiction and relationship quality than women, while relationship quality differed across age groups. These findings identify emotion regulation as a protective psychological resource that strengthens intimate relationships directly and indirectly through reduced problematic social media use. The study contributes to scholarship on digital behavior and relationship functioning by clarifying a key psychological mechanism linking emotional competence to marital relationship quality. It also offers practical implications for couple-focused interventions that promote emotion-regulation skills and healthier social media practices within increasingly digital environments.

Keywords

emotion regulation; intimate relationship quality; social media addiction; mediation analysis; married couples; relationship satisfaction

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the ways individuals communicate, establish interpersonal relationships, and regulate their emotional experiences. Among these technological innovations, social media platforms have become integral to daily life, facilitating communication, information exchange, and social interaction across geographical and cultural boundaries (Balick, 2023). Platforms such as Facebook,

Instagram, Twitter (X), Snapchat, and TikTok have revolutionized interpersonal communication by enabling users to create, share, and consume content in real time (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for social connectivity, excessive engagement has raised concerns regarding their psychological and relational consequences, particularly within intimate relationships.

Emotion regulation represents one of the most important psychological processes underlying healthy individual functioning and successful interpersonal relationships. Effective emotion regulation enables individuals to manage emotional responses in adaptive ways that promote psychological well-being, resilience, and constructive social interactions. In contrast, deficits in emotion regulation have been associated with emotional distress, maladaptive coping strategies, anxiety, depression, impulsive behaviors, and impaired interpersonal functioning (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). Closely related is the broader concept of self-regulation, which refers to individuals' capacity to monitor, evaluate, and modify their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses in pursuit of personal goals and adaptive functioning (Yadav et al., 2023).

Intimate relationships constitute one of the most influential social contexts in which emotion regulation skills are continuously exercised. Healthy romantic relationships are characterized by emotional intimacy, trust, mutual support, effective communication, and shared commitment, all of which contribute substantially to psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Kansky, 2018). These relationships provide individuals with emotional security and opportunities to express vulnerability while receiving empathy and validation from their partners. Previous research consistently demonstrates that emotion regulation is a significant predictor of relationship quality and stability. Individuals possessing effective emotion regulation skills are more likely to communicate constructively during disagreements, manage interpersonal conflicts without hostility, and demonstrate empathy toward their partners (Pietrzak et al., 2016).

While emotion regulation contributes positively to relationship functioning, the increasing integration of social media into everyday life has introduced new challenges for intimate relationships. Social media platforms have transformed patterns of communication by enabling continuous interaction and maintaining relationships across geographical distances. However, excessive engagement with social networking platforms has also generated concerns regarding problematic usage patterns, including compulsive checking, excessive dependence, online social comparison, and behavioral addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that excessive social media use may adversely affect intimate relationship quality. Individuals who spend considerable time engaging with social networking platforms may experience reduced face-to-face interaction, increased relationship surveillance, jealousy, social comparison, and unrealistic expectations regarding romantic relationships (Bouffard et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2022).

Recent studies increasingly indicate that emotion regulation may represent a key psychological mechanism underlying problematic social media use. Individuals experiencing difficulties in regulating emotions often rely on social networking platforms as maladaptive coping strategies to alleviate stress, reduce negative affect, or seek social validation (Brown et al., 2025). Such

maladaptive patterns may ultimately undermine interpersonal functioning and relationship quality by reducing emotional availability and increasing conflict between romantic partners.

Despite growing scholarly interest in these constructs, limited research has examined emotion regulation, social media addiction, and relationship functioning within an integrated framework. Specifically, few studies have investigated whether social media addiction functions as a psychological mechanism linking individuals' emotion regulation capacities with the quality of their intimate relationships among married couples. Understanding these relationships is particularly important given the increasing reliance on digital communication technologies within romantic partnerships and the growing prevalence of problematic social media use.

Accordingly, the present study examines the relationships among emotion regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality among married couples. More specifically, it investigates the mediating role of social media addiction in the relationship between emotion regulation and intimate relationship quality while also exploring demographic differences across gender and age groups. By integrating perspectives from emotion regulation theory, relationship science, and digital media research, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms through which digital behaviors influence relationship functioning.

Literature Review

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is a multidimensional psychological construct that refers to the processes through which individuals monitor, evaluate, and modify their emotional experiences and expressions to achieve personal goals and adapt effectively to environmental demands (Koole, 2009). Rather than suppressing emotions, effective emotion regulation involves recognizing emotional experiences, understanding their underlying causes, and employing adaptive cognitive and behavioral strategies to manage emotional responses appropriately. Consequently, emotion regulation has become a central construct in psychology because of its significant influence on mental health, social functioning, and interpersonal relationships.

Gross (1998) proposed the Process Model of Emotion Regulation (PMER), which distinguishes between antecedent-focused strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, and response-focused strategies, such as expressive suppression. Cognitive reappraisal involves modifying one's interpretation of emotionally salient situations before emotional responses are fully generated, whereas expressive suppression involves inhibiting emotional expression after emotions have been activated. Research consistently demonstrates that cognitive reappraisal is associated with greater psychological well-being, stronger interpersonal relationships, and enhanced emotional resilience, whereas habitual suppression is linked to reduced life satisfaction, poorer relationship quality, and increased psychological distress (Riepenhausen et al., 2022).

Building upon Gross's (1998) theoretical framework, Gratz and Roemer (2004) conceptualized emotion regulation as a multidimensional process involving emotional awareness, emotional

acceptance, behavioral control, goal-directed behavior, and access to effective emotion regulation strategies. To operationalize this construct, they developed the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), one of the most widely used and psychometrically validated instruments for assessing emotion regulation difficulties. The DERS has enabled researchers to investigate how specific dimensions of emotional dysregulation contribute to psychological disorders, maladaptive behaviors, and interpersonal difficulties across diverse populations.

Closely related to emotion regulation is the concept of self-regulation, which encompasses individuals' ability to monitor, evaluate, and control their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to achieve desired outcomes (Chou et al., 2024). Self-regulation incorporates self-awareness, impulse control, emotional monitoring, and behavioral adjustment, allowing individuals to respond adaptively to changing environmental demands. Deficits in self-regulation have been associated with impulsivity, addictive behaviors, emotional instability, and relationship conflict, highlighting its importance in maintaining psychological and social well-being.

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that effective emotion regulation promotes psychological resilience, reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, enhances coping strategies, and improves interpersonal functioning (Marroquín et al., 2017). Conversely, emotion regulation difficulties increase vulnerability to emotional distress, maladaptive coping, interpersonal conflict, and behavioral addictions (Orsolini, 2020). These findings suggest that emotion regulation serves as a foundational psychological resource that supports adaptive functioning across multiple life domains, including intimate relationships.

Intimate Relationship Quality

Intimate relationships represent one of the most influential contexts for psychological development, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction. High-quality intimate relationships are characterized by trust, emotional intimacy, effective communication, mutual respect, commitment, and reciprocal emotional support (Rokach, 2024). These relationships provide individuals with a secure environment in which emotional needs are met through empathy, validation, and shared experiences, thereby contributing significantly to psychological adjustment and overall quality of life (Gilbert, 2020).

Relationship quality has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing relationship satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, communication, conflict resolution, and emotional closeness (Karantzas et al., 2014). Previous studies consistently indicate that individuals who report higher levels of relationship quality also experience greater psychological well-being, lower levels of stress, improved physical health, and increased life satisfaction (Adamczyk et al., 2021). Conversely, poor relationship quality has been associated with emotional distress, depression, chronic stress, and relationship instability.

Emotion regulation has emerged as one of the strongest psychological predictors of relationship quality. According to John and Gross (2004), individuals capable of recognizing, understanding, and regulating their emotions are more likely to respond empathically to their partners, communicate effectively, and resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively. Calkins

and Hill (2007) similarly reported that adaptive emotion regulation enhances conflict management and reduces destructive communication patterns, thereby strengthening relationship satisfaction and stability.

Research further suggests that emotionally regulated couples demonstrate greater emotional synchrony, empathy, cooperation, and collaborative problem-solving during stressful situations (Pietrzak et al., 2016). In contrast, emotional dysregulation frequently manifests through impulsive reactions, hostility, emotional withdrawal, or avoidance, all of which undermine relationship functioning (Holley et al., 2018). Persistent difficulties in emotion regulation have been associated with increased interpersonal conflict, diminished emotional intimacy, lower relationship satisfaction, and greater risk of relationship dissolution (Cameron & Overall, 2018).

Gottman and DeClaire (2017) further emphasized that successful intimate relationships depend upon partners' abilities to manage emotional experiences constructively during disagreements. Couples who regulate emotions effectively are better able to maintain positive communication, express affection, and recover from conflict, whereas emotional dysregulation often contributes to escalating disputes and reduced relational stability. Collectively, these findings underscore the critical role of emotion regulation in fostering healthy, resilient, and satisfying intimate relationships.

Social Media Addiction

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has transformed patterns of communication, information sharing, and interpersonal interaction. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), Snapchat, and TikTok have enabled individuals to establish and maintain social relationships regardless of geographical distance while simultaneously creating new opportunities for social participation and self-expression (Meikle, 2024). Despite these benefits, excessive engagement with social networking platforms has raised growing concerns regarding problematic social media use and behavioral addiction.

Social media addiction is generally conceptualized as excessive and compulsive engagement with social networking platforms that interferes with individuals' psychological well-being, occupational functioning, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Individuals experiencing social media addiction typically exhibit compulsive checking behaviors, excessive preoccupation with online activities, diminished self-control, withdrawal symptoms when unable to access social media, and continued use despite experiencing negative consequences.

The American Society of Addiction Medicine (2011) defines addiction as a chronic condition characterized by impaired behavioral control, compulsive engagement, craving, and continued involvement despite harmful consequences. Although social media addiction differs from substance dependence, researchers have argued that excessive social media use shares similar psychological and neurobehavioral mechanisms, particularly concerning reward processing, emotional regulation, and compulsive behavioral patterns (Morris et al., 2023).

Andreassen et al. (2012) developed the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale, which was subsequently adapted into the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) to assess problematic social media use across multiple platforms. The instrument measures six core components of behavioral addiction: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. The BSMAS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across diverse cultural contexts and has become one of the most frequently used instruments for measuring social media addiction.

Growing evidence indicates that problematic social media use is associated with numerous adverse psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, poor sleep quality, diminished psychological well-being, and impaired social functioning (Burke & Kraut, 2016). Excessive social media use also encourages upward social comparison, unrealistic expectations, envy, and jealousy, thereby contributing to emotional distress and reduced life satisfaction (Krasnova et al., 2013). These findings suggest that while social media provides valuable opportunities for communication, excessive use may negatively affect psychological adjustment and interpersonal relationships.

Integrated Framework: Emotion Regulation, Social Media Addiction, and Relationship Quality

Recent research has increasingly recognized emotion regulation as one of the primary psychological mechanisms underlying problematic social media use. Individuals who experience difficulties regulating emotions frequently use social networking platforms as maladaptive coping strategies to escape negative emotions, alleviate loneliness, seek social validation, or distract themselves from stressful life events (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Consequently, social media becomes an external mechanism for managing emotional discomfort rather than an instrument for healthy social interaction.

From a theoretical perspective, deficient emotion regulation reduces individuals' ability to tolerate emotional distress, increasing their reliance on immediate sources of emotional gratification. Social media platforms provide rapid access to positive reinforcement through likes, comments, notifications, and online social approval, temporarily reducing negative emotional states while reinforcing repetitive usage patterns. Over time, this reinforcement cycle may contribute to compulsive engagement and behavioral addiction.

Andreassen et al. (2012) demonstrated that excessive Facebook use intensifies negative emotional experiences, including envy, jealousy, fear of missing out, and social comparison, all of which interfere with adaptive emotion regulation processes. Similarly, Seo et al. (2016) reported that problematic smartphone use is associated with impaired emotion regulation and poorer emotional well-being, suggesting that excessive digital engagement both reflects and exacerbates emotional regulation difficulties.

The relationship between emotion regulation and social media addiction has important implications for intimate relationships. Individuals who rely excessively on social media to regulate emotions may devote less attention to face-to-face communication, emotional intimacy, and relationship maintenance. Excessive online engagement may also increase relationship surveillance, jealousy, conflict, and dissatisfaction while reducing opportunities

for constructive interpersonal interaction. Consequently, social media addiction may function as an important psychological mechanism linking emotion regulation with intimate relationship quality.

Research Gap and Significance

The rapid growth of social media has transformed interpersonal communication and relationship dynamics, prompting considerable scholarly interest in the psychological factors associated with relationship functioning. Existing research has independently demonstrated that emotion regulation is positively associated with psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Williams et al., 2018), while problematic social media use has been linked to emotional distress, social comparison, interpersonal conflict, and poorer relationship outcomes (Andreassen et al., 2012; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Despite these advances, several important gaps remain in the literature.

First, previous studies have primarily examined emotion regulation and social media addiction as separate predictors of relationship outcomes (Mónaco et al., 2021). Although both constructs have been extensively investigated, relatively few studies have integrated them into a comprehensive theoretical model that explains how they jointly influence intimate relationship quality. Consequently, the psychological mechanisms through which emotion regulation contributes to healthier romantic relationships remain insufficiently understood.

Second, while increasing evidence suggests that individuals with poor emotion regulation are more vulnerable to problematic social media use (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Seo et al., 2016), limited empirical research has examined social media addiction as a mediating mechanism linking emotion regulation with intimate relationship quality. Understanding this mediating pathway is important because it may explain why emotionally dysregulated individuals experience greater relationship difficulties in an increasingly digital environment.

Third, much of the existing literature has focused on adolescents, university students, or general adult populations. Comparatively fewer studies have investigated these relationships among married couples, whose relational experiences differ substantially due to greater commitment, shared responsibilities, and long-term emotional interdependence. As digital technologies become increasingly integrated into family life, examining these associations within married populations has become particularly relevant. Finally, demographic variations remain underexplored. Although previous studies have reported differences in emotion regulation and social media use across age and gender groups, findings remain inconsistent (Tuck & Thompson, 2025). A more comprehensive examination of demographic differences may improve understanding of vulnerable groups and support the development of targeted interventions.

The present study addresses these gaps by proposing and empirically testing a mediation model in which social media addiction explains the relationship between emotion regulation and intimate relationship quality among married couples. By integrating emotion regulation theory with behavioral addiction and relationship research, this study contributes to the growing literature on digital behavior and interpersonal functioning. The findings are expected to advance theoretical understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying relationship

quality while providing practical implications for clinicians, marriage counselors, psychologists, and policymakers seeking to promote healthy digital behaviors and strengthen intimate relationships.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in Gross's (1998) Process Model of Emotion Regulation, which proposes that individuals' capacity to regulate emotions influences their psychological adjustment and interpersonal functioning. Individuals with effective emotion regulation skills are expected to experience greater relationship satisfaction because they communicate more effectively, manage interpersonal conflict constructively, and demonstrate greater empathy toward their partners (Tuck & Thompson, 2025).

The framework also incorporates perspectives from behavioral addiction theory, which suggest that individuals experiencing emotional difficulties may increasingly rely on social networking platforms as maladaptive coping mechanisms (Andreassen et al., 2012; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Excessive dependence on social media may gradually develop into addictive behaviors characterized by compulsive use, emotional dependence, and diminished self-regulation. Such behaviors reduce face-to-face interaction, increase interpersonal conflict, promote social comparison, and ultimately undermine intimate relationship quality.

Accordingly, the proposed conceptual model positions emotion regulation as the independent variable, social media addiction as the mediating variable, and intimate relationship quality as the dependent variable. The model assumes that individuals with stronger emotion regulation abilities are less likely to develop problematic social media use, which, in turn, contributes to healthier and more satisfying intimate relationships.

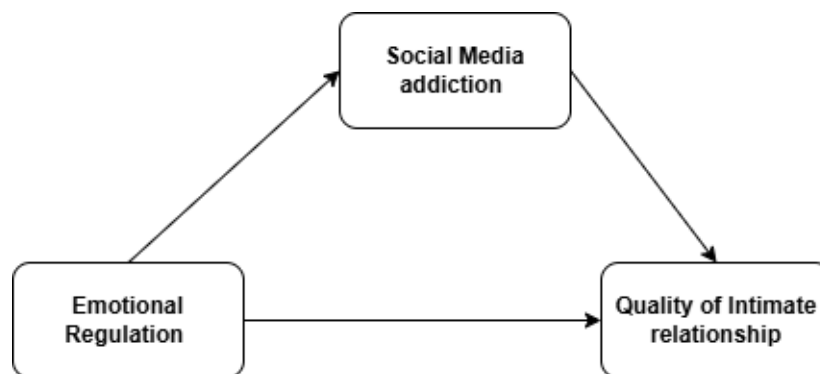


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of this study.

The conceptual framework proposes that effective emotion regulation enhances relationship quality directly while also reducing the likelihood of social media addiction, thereby indirectly promoting healthier and more satisfying intimate relationships.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the psychological mechanisms linking emotion regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality among married couples. Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To examine the relationship between emotion regulation and intimate relationship quality among married couples.
2. To investigate the relationship between emotion regulation and social media addiction.
3. To examine the effect of emotion regulation on intimate relationship quality.
4. To determine whether social media addiction mediates the relationship between emotion regulation and intimate relationship quality.
5. To examine demographic differences in emotion regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality across age and gender groups.

Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical evidence presented in the literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: Emotion regulation is positively associated with intimate relationship quality among married couples.

H₂: Emotion regulation is negatively associated with social media addiction among married couples.

H₃: Emotion regulation positively predicts intimate relationship quality.

H₄: Social media addiction negatively predicts intimate relationship quality.

H₅: Social media addiction mediates the relationship between emotion regulation and intimate relationship quality.

H₆: Significant differences exist in emotion regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality across gender groups.

H₇: Significant differences exist in emotion regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality across age groups.

Method

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the associations among emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality among adults currently involved in romantic relationships. Data were collected using self-report questionnaires administered online.

Participants

The target population comprised adults aged 18 years and older who were currently involved in a romantic relationship. A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants through online platforms and social media groups. Individuals who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate voluntarily completed the survey. A total of 344 participants participated in the study. The sample consisted of 174 males and 170 females, ranging in age from 18 to 50 years. Participants represented different relationship statuses, including dating and married individuals, and varied in the duration of their romantic relationships. The diversity of the sample enhanced the representation of individuals with different relationship experiences.

Convenience sampling was selected because it enabled efficient access to individuals who met the study's inclusion criteria. Online recruitment through social media platforms facilitated the collection of data from participants with diverse demographic backgrounds while reducing the time and resources required for data collection. This sampling approach is commonly used in psychological and social science research involving online surveys.

Procedure

Data were collected using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. Before accessing the survey, participants were presented with an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and that no personally identifying information would be collected. After providing informed consent, participants completed the questionnaire, which began with demographic questions assessing age, gender, relationship status, and relationship duration. Participants then completed standardized measures assessing emotional regulation, social media addiction, relationship satisfaction, and perceived relationship closeness. The questionnaire required approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

Instruments

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

Emotional regulation was measured using the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross and John (2003). The ERQ consists of 10 items measuring two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The ERQ has demonstrated good reliability and validity across diverse populations.

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) developed by Hendrick (1988). The scale consists of 7 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. Previous studies have reported satisfactory reliability and construct validity for the RAS.

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)

Social media addiction was measured using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) developed by Andreassen et al. (2012). The BSMAS consists of 6 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very rarely) to 5 (very often). The scale assesses symptoms of problematic social media use, including salience, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, relapse, and mood modification. The BSMAS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 23. Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were screened for completeness, missing values, and outliers. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and the study variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to examine the internal consistency of the study instruments. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality. Simple regression and mediation analyses were performed to determine the predictive relationships among the study variables and to examine the mediating role of social media addiction. Independent-samples *t* tests were conducted to investigate gender differences, whereas one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine age-group differences. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 alpha level.

The internal consistency of the study instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .906$). The Relationship Assessment Scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .870$). The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale also demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .909$). The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .913$). These findings indicate that the instruments were reliable measures of the constructs examined in this study.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Sample

The demographic characteristics indicate that the majority of participants (42.2%) were between 26 and 35 years of age, whereas 30.4% were between 18 and 25 years and 27.4% were older than 35 years. Females represented 60.1% of the sample and males represented 39.9%. Most participants had completed graduate (28.0%) or undergraduate (27.0%) education. More than half of the participants (58.8%) were married, whereas 41.2% were dating. Nearly half of the respondents (45.3%) had been in their current relationship for less than one year.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 296).

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18–25 years	90	30.4
	26–35 years	125	42.2
	Above 35 years	81	27.4
Gender	Male	118	39.9
	Female	178	60.1
Education	Matric	25	8.4
	Intermediate	46	15.5
	Undergraduate	80	27.0
	Graduate	83	28.0
	Postgraduate	62	20.9
Family Type	Extended	129	43.6
	Nuclear	167	56.4
Relationship Status	Dating	122	41.2

	Married	174	58.8
Relationship Duration	Less than 1 year	134	45.3
	More than 1 year	27	9.1
	2–3 years	26	8.8
	4–6 years	49	16.6
	7–10 years	60	20.3

Reliability and Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, and Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients for the study variables. The reliability analysis demonstrated satisfactory to excellent internal consistency for all study measures, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .87 to .91. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality, $r(294) = .59, p < .001$, indicating that participants with higher levels of emotional regulation tended to report better intimate relationship quality. In addition, emotional regulation was significantly and negatively correlated with social media addiction, $r(294) = -.28, p < .001$, suggesting that individuals with stronger emotional regulation experienced lower levels of social media addiction. Furthermore, social media addiction was significantly and negatively associated with intimate relationship quality, $r(294) = -.21, p < .001$, indicating that higher levels of social media addiction were associated with lower relationship quality.

The first hypothesis proposed that emotional regulation would be positively associated with intimate relationship quality among married couples. Pearson product–moment correlation analysis demonstrated a significant positive association between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality, $r(294) = .59, p < .001$. Therefore, H_1 was supported. The second hypothesis proposed that emotional regulation would be negatively associated with social media addiction among married couples. The results indicated a statistically significant negative relationship between emotional regulation and social media addiction, $r(294) = -.28, p < .001$. These findings suggest that participants with higher emotional regulation reported lower levels of social media addiction. Therefore, H_2 was supported.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability, and Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 296).

No.	Variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3
1	ER	50.16	6.08	.91	—		
2	IRQ	26.15	3.36	.87	.59**	—	
3	SMA	17.06	3.61	.91	-.28**	-.21**	—

Note. ER=Emotional Regulation, IRQ = Intimate Relationship Quality, SMA = Social Media Addiction, $p < .01$.

Regression Analysis

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the predictive effects of emotional regulation and social media addiction on intimate relationship quality. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 293) = 93.81, p < .001$, explaining 39% of the variance in intimate relationship quality ($R^2 = .39$). The findings indicate that emotional regulation was a significant positive predictor of intimate relationship quality ($B = 0.32, SE = 0.03, \beta = .58, t = 12.47, p < .001$), suggesting that individuals with higher levels of emotional regulation were more likely to report better relationship quality. In contrast, social media

addiction emerged as a significant negative predictor of intimate relationship quality ($B = -0.18$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = -.19$, $t = -3.82$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of social media addiction were associated with lower levels of intimate relationship quality.

The third hypothesis proposed that emotional regulation would positively predict intimate relationship quality among married couples. The regression analysis revealed that emotional regulation significantly and positively predicted intimate relationship quality ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H_3 was supported. The fourth hypothesis proposed that social media addiction would negatively predict intimate relationship quality among married couples. The results demonstrated that social media addiction significantly and negatively predicted intimate relationship quality ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that greater social media addiction was associated with poorer intimate relationship quality. Therefore, H_4 was supported.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Predicting Intimate Relationship Quality.

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
ER	0.32	0.03	.58	12.47	<.001
SMA	-0.18	0.05	-.19	-3.82	<.001

Note. ER = Emotional Regulation, SMA = Social Media Addiction, $R^2 = .39$, $F(2,293) = 93.81$, $p < .001$.

Mediation Analysis

Table 4 presents the results of the mediation analysis examining the mediating role of social media addiction in the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality. The total effect of emotional regulation on intimate relationship quality was statistically significant ($B = 0.32$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.38], $p < .001$). After including social media addiction as the mediator, the direct effect of emotional regulation on intimate relationship quality remained statistically significant ($B = 0.28$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.34], $p < .001$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of emotional regulation on intimate relationship quality through social media addiction was statistically significant ($B = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.07], $p < .001$). Because the 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero, the mediation effect was considered statistically significant, indicating that social media addiction partially mediated the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality. The mediation model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Table 4. Mediating Role of Social Media Addiction.

Effect	B	Boot 95% CI	p
Total Effect	0.32	[0.27, 0.38]	<.001
Direct Effect	0.28	[0.23, 0.34]	<.001
Indirect Effect	0.04	[0.02, 0.07]	<.001

The mediation analysis demonstrated that emotional regulation significantly reduced social media addiction, which in turn significantly predicted intimate relationship quality. The indirect effect was statistically significant because the bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero, indicating partial mediation.

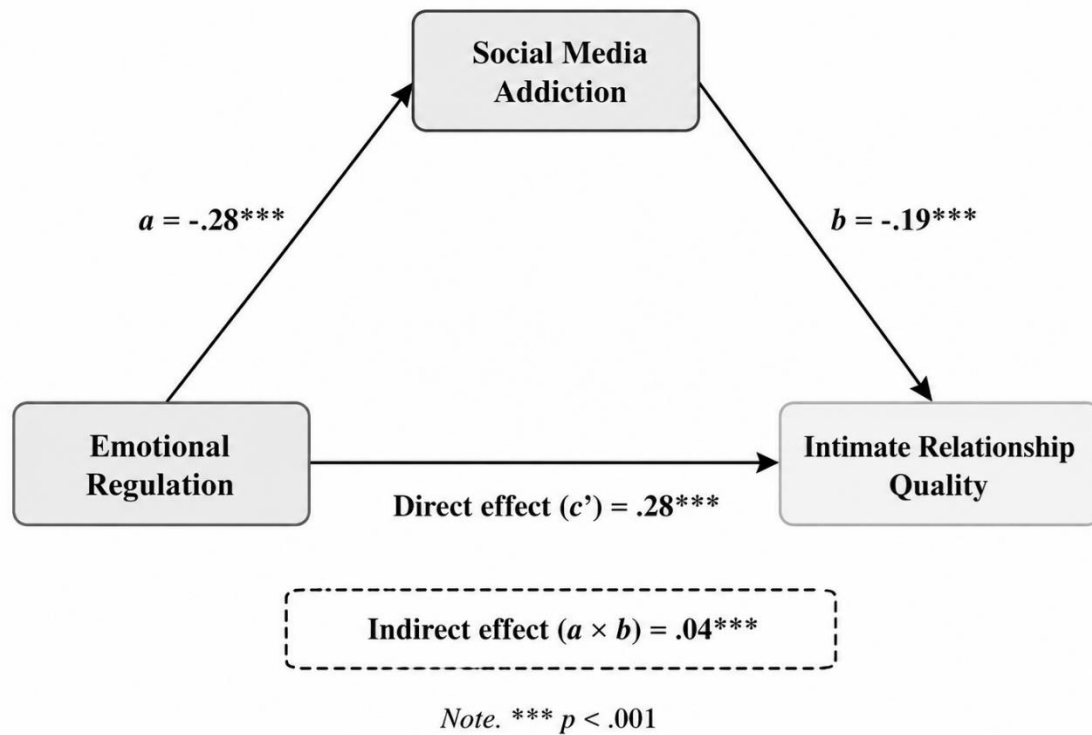


Figure 2. Mediation model.

The fifth hypothesis proposed that social media addiction mediates the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality among married couples. The mediation analysis demonstrated a statistically significant indirect effect of emotional regulation on intimate relationship quality through social media addiction. Therefore, H_5 was supported.

Gender Differences

Table 5 presents the results of the independent-samples t tests examining gender differences in emotional regulation, intimate relationship quality, and social media addiction. Significant gender differences were observed across all three study variables. Female participants reported significantly higher emotional regulation scores ($M = 51.24$, $SD = 4.92$) than male participants ($M = 49.41$, $SD = 6.68$), $t(294) = -2.58$, $p = .010$. Similarly, females reported significantly higher intimate relationship quality ($M = 26.51$, $SD = 2.42$) than males ($M = 25.63$, $SD = 3.42$), $t(294) = -2.24$, $p = .026$. Conversely, male participants reported significantly higher social media addiction scores ($M = 18.10$, $SD = 3.73$) than female participants ($M = 16.37$, $SD = 2.94$), $t(294) = 3.69$, $p < .001$. The sixth hypothesis proposed that significant differences would exist in emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality across gender groups. The independent-samples t test results revealed statistically significant gender differences for all three study variables. Therefore, H_6 was supported.

Table 5. Independent-Samples t Tests by Gender.

Variable	Male M(SD)	Female M(SD)	t	p
ER	49.41 (6.68)	51.24 (4.92)	-2.58	.010

IRQ	25.63 (3.42)	26.51 (2.42)	-2.24	.026
SMA	18.10 (3.73)	16.37 (2.94)	3.69	<.001

ER=Emotional Regulation, IRQ = Intimate Relationship Quality, SMA = Social Media Addiction.

Age Differences

Table 4.6 presents the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) examining differences across age groups in emotional regulation, intimate relationship quality, and social media addiction. The ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences in emotional regulation, $F(2, 293) = 9.63, p < .001$, intimate relationship quality, $F(2, 293) = 3.09, p = .047$, and social media addiction, $F(2, 293) = 19.42, p < .001$. These findings suggest that participants from different age groups differed significantly in their levels of emotional regulation, relationship quality, and social media addiction. Overall, older participants tended to report higher emotional regulation and relationship quality, whereas younger participants reported higher levels of social media addiction.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA Across Age Groups.

Variable	F	p
ER	9.63	<.001
IRQ	3.09	.047
SMA	19.42	<.001

ER=Emotional Regulation,
IRQ = Intimate Relationship
Quality, SMA = Social Media
Addiction.

The seventh hypothesis proposed that significant differences would exist in emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality across age groups. The one-way ANOVA results indicated statistically significant differences among the age groups for all study variables. Therefore, H_7 was supported.

Table 7 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing for the present study. All seven hypotheses were supported by the statistical analyses. Emotional regulation was positively associated with and significantly predicted intimate relationship quality, while it was negatively associated with social media addiction. Social media addiction significantly and negatively predicted intimate relationship quality and partially mediated the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality. Furthermore, significant differences in emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality were observed across both gender and age groups.

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing.

Hypothesis	Result
H ₁ : Emotion regulation is positively associated with intimate relationship quality.	Supported
H ₂ : Emotion regulation is negatively associated with social media addiction.	Supported
H ₃ : Emotion regulation positively predicts intimate relationship quality.	Supported
H ₄ : Social media addiction negatively predicts intimate relationship quality.	Supported
H ₅ : Social media addiction mediates the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality.	Supported

H6: Significant gender differences exist in emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality.	Supported
H7: Significant age-group differences exist in emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality.	Supported

Overall, the findings indicate that emotional regulation plays a significant role in promoting healthier intimate relationships while reducing problematic social media use. Moreover, social media addiction partially explained the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality. The observed gender and age differences further suggest that demographic characteristics contribute to variations in emotional regulation, social media addiction, and relationship quality among individuals involved in romantic relationships.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationships among emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality among individuals involved in romantic relationships. Specifically, the study investigated whether emotional regulation was associated with intimate relationship quality and social media addiction, whether emotional regulation and social media addiction predicted intimate relationship quality, whether social media addiction mediated the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality, and whether these variables differed across gender and age groups. Overall, the findings supported all seven hypotheses and provide empirical evidence for the importance of emotional regulation in maintaining healthy romantic relationships while highlighting the influence of social media addiction.

The first hypothesis proposed that emotional regulation would be positively associated with intimate relationship quality. The findings supported this hypothesis, demonstrating that individuals with higher levels of emotional regulation reported greater relationship quality. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that effective emotional regulation facilitates constructive communication, conflict resolution, empathy, and relationship satisfaction (Aldao et al., 2016; Niven et al., 2012). Individuals who effectively regulate their emotions are better able to manage interpersonal conflicts and express their emotions appropriately, which contributes to healthier and more satisfying romantic relationships. These findings are also consistent with Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), which suggests that securely attached individuals develop adaptive emotion regulation strategies that foster trust, intimacy, and relationship stability.

The second hypothesis predicted a negative association between emotional regulation and social media addiction. The results supported this hypothesis, indicating that individuals with stronger emotional regulation skills were less likely to exhibit symptoms of social media addiction. This finding is consistent with Emotion Regulation Theory (Gross, 1998), which proposes that individuals who experience difficulties regulating emotions may rely on maladaptive coping strategies, including excessive social media use, to manage stress, loneliness, or negative emotional experiences. Previous studies have similarly reported that poor emotional regulation is associated with problematic social media use and addictive online behaviors (Beyens et al., 2016; Elhai et al., 2016). The present findings therefore suggest that emotional regulation functions as a protective factor against excessive engagement with social networking platforms.

The third hypothesis proposed that emotional regulation would positively predict intimate relationship quality. Regression analysis supported this hypothesis, demonstrating that emotional regulation significantly predicted relationship quality. This finding extends previous correlational research by showing that emotional regulation is not only associated with relationship quality but also serves as a significant predictor of healthier intimate relationships. Individuals who possess adaptive emotion regulation strategies are more likely to demonstrate patience, empathy, effective communication, and constructive conflict-management skills, thereby enhancing relationship satisfaction and stability. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of emotional competencies in promoting successful romantic relationships (Aldao et al., 2016; Niven et al., 2012).

The fourth hypothesis predicted that social media addiction would negatively predict intimate relationship quality. The findings supported this hypothesis, indicating that greater levels of social media addiction were associated with lower relationship quality. Excessive social media use may reduce face-to-face interaction, increase relationship conflict, promote jealousy, and decrease emotional intimacy between partners. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that problematic social media use is associated with lower relationship satisfaction and increased interpersonal conflict (Clayton et al., 2013; Elphinston & Noller, 2011). Similarly, Yang et al. (2016) reported that excessive Facebook use contributed to jealousy and reduced relationship satisfaction among romantic partners. The present findings reinforce the view that problematic social media use may interfere with healthy relationship functioning.

The fifth hypothesis proposed that social media addiction would mediate the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality. The mediation analysis supported this hypothesis by demonstrating that emotional regulation indirectly influenced relationship quality through social media addiction. Individuals with stronger emotional regulation reported lower levels of social media addiction, which in turn was associated with better intimate relationship quality. This finding suggests that emotional regulation contributes to healthier relationships both directly and indirectly by reducing problematic social media use. The results highlight the complex psychological mechanisms through which emotional competencies influence interpersonal functioning and provide additional evidence supporting theoretical models that identify emotion regulation as a key determinant of adaptive behavioral outcomes.

The sixth hypothesis predicted significant gender differences in emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality. The findings supported this hypothesis. Female participants reported significantly higher emotional regulation and relationship quality than male participants, whereas male participants reported significantly higher levels of social media addiction. These findings are consistent with social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2013), which suggests that men and women develop different emotional and interpersonal competencies through socialization. Women are generally encouraged to express emotions, communicate openly, and maintain interpersonal relationships, whereas men may be encouraged to display greater independence and emotional restraint. These differences may explain the observed gender variations in emotional regulation and relationship quality.

The seventh hypothesis proposed significant age-group differences in emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality. The findings supported this hypothesis, indicating that older participants reported better emotional regulation, higher relationship quality, and lower levels of social media addiction than younger participants.

These findings are consistent with developmental perspectives suggesting that emotional maturity and interpersonal competence increase with age as individuals accumulate greater life and relationship experience. Younger adults may rely more heavily on social networking platforms for communication and social interaction, increasing their vulnerability to problematic social media use.

Overall, the findings support the theoretical assumptions of Attachment Theory and Emotion Regulation Theory by demonstrating that emotional regulation is a central psychological resource for maintaining healthy romantic relationships and reducing problematic social media behaviors. The results further indicate that social media addiction partially explains how emotional regulation influences relationship quality, emphasizing the importance of considering both psychological and behavioral factors when examining relationship functioning.

Implications

The findings of the present study have several practical implications for researchers, mental health professionals, relationship counselors, and educators. First, interventions designed to improve emotional regulation skills may strengthen relationship quality and reduce interpersonal conflict among romantic partners. Couples counseling and relationship education programs should incorporate evidence-based emotion regulation strategies, including cognitive reappraisal, emotional awareness, and adaptive communication skills. Second, the negative association between emotional regulation and social media addiction suggests that interventions targeting emotional regulation may also reduce problematic social media use. Mental health practitioners may consider integrating emotional regulation training into treatment programs for individuals experiencing excessive social media use or technology-related behavioral problems. Third, the mediating role of social media addiction highlights the importance of promoting healthy digital habits among couples. Relationship counselors should encourage partners to establish clear boundaries regarding social media use, increase face-to-face communication, and engage in shared activities that strengthen emotional intimacy. Finally, the observed gender and age differences suggest that prevention and intervention programs should be tailored to the specific needs of different demographic groups. Younger adults may particularly benefit from educational programs that promote responsible social media use and healthy emotional coping strategies, whereas relationship education for adults should emphasize emotional intelligence, communication skills, and relationship maintenance.

Overall, the findings contribute to the growing literature on emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality by demonstrating that emotional regulation serves as an important protective factor that enhances relationship functioning both directly and indirectly through reduced social media addiction.

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationships among emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality among individuals involved in romantic relationships. The findings demonstrated that emotional regulation is a significant factor associated with healthier and more satisfying intimate relationships. Individuals with higher levels of emotional regulation reported greater relationship quality and lower levels of social media addiction. Furthermore, emotional regulation emerged as a significant positive predictor

of intimate relationship quality, whereas social media addiction significantly and negatively predicted relationship quality.

The study also demonstrated that social media addiction partially mediated the relationship between emotional regulation and intimate relationship quality. These findings suggest that individuals who effectively regulate their emotions are less likely to develop problematic social media use, which, in turn, contributes to healthier romantic relationships. In addition, significant differences were found across gender and age groups, indicating that demographic characteristics influence emotional regulation, social media addiction, and relationship quality.

Overall, the findings support the theoretical assumptions of Attachment Theory and Emotion Regulation Theory by emphasizing the importance of emotional regulation as a protective factor for relationship functioning. The study contributes to the growing literature by providing empirical evidence that emotional regulation and responsible social media use play essential roles in promoting healthy and satisfying intimate relationships in the digital era.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional correlational design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among emotional regulation, social media addiction, and intimate relationship quality. Second, the use of self-report questionnaires may have introduced response biases, including social desirability and recall bias, which could have influenced participants' responses. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling through online platforms may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population. The study also focused on a limited number of psychological and demographic variables, while other factors such as attachment style, personality traits, communication patterns, and mental health may also influence intimate relationship quality. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal relationships, recruit larger and more diverse samples using probability sampling techniques, and incorporate objective or multi-method assessments to improve the validity of the findings. Furthermore, future studies should investigate additional mediating and moderating variables, such as emotional intelligence, attachment style, relationship commitment, and communication quality, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional regulation and social media use influence intimate relationships.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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