

**“Impact of Social Media on Intra-Personal Relationships”**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper reviews the social media effects on relational dynamics particularly, self-perception, identity formation, emotional regulation, and mental health. Social media platforms, on the other hand, expanded their social communication functions and began operating as psychological environments that influence internal dialogue, self-esteem, and identity construction. Social media has the potential to support self-expression, provide emotional support, empower identity, and encourage self-fragmentation. This paper integrates the legal and psychological literature from empirical research and considers the psychosocial implications of social media on relational dynamics to argue that the psychosocial implications of social media on relational dynamics have an impact on constitutional interests of dignity, autonomy, and mental health. The closing emphasis on the need for digital emotional engagement and emotional dignity policies, as framework rights within the emergent digital constitution.

**Keywords** - Social Media, Micro-Psychological Effects, Self-Perception, Emotional Regulation, Digital Self

**INTRODUCTION**

Today, social media is a vital part of one's personal identity, emotional health, and self-esteem, all of which impact how intra-personal relationships function. Intra-personal relationships include self-talk, self-identity, self-concept, self-esteem, emotional regulation, and personal identity. These relationships contrast with interpersonal relationships, which are connections and exchanges between people. Instead, intra-personal relationships deal with how a person thinks, evaluates, and talks to themselves. With billions of people on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), self-understanding and cognitive frameworks are shaped and even distorted by digital self-interactions. Adolescents and young adults are especially vulnerable to this phenomenon, which is even more pronounced within online environments where people seek social validation, self-expression, and engage in social comparisons. In this regard, social media is more than a

means of communication; it is a psychological setting that influences beliefs, feelings, and self-concept.<sup>1</sup>

This paper investigates the multiple ways social media affects personal relationships, social comparisons, self-presentation, identity formation, echo chambers, and emotional dependency. It looks at the intersection of law and judicial analyses regarding social media, the impact of social media on psychological research and social media statistics, and the social media paradox of being a source of empowerment and emotional distress. Social media gives people the opportunity to self-express, build communities, and provide emotional support to one another; but at the same time, it may trigger anxiety, loneliness, narcissism, and escapism. Given the interface between technology and the human psyche, social media requires a more thorough understanding of the ways in which it digitally organizes and restructures inner life narratives.

### **FRAMEWORK OF INTRA-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND DIGITAL SELF**

An intra-personal relationship consists of the cognitive and emotional interactions people have with themselves, which certainly include self-talk, identity, self-assessment, emotional internal dialogue, and beliefs regarding self-efficacy. In the psychology of self, self-concept and self-esteem serve as structural foundational pillars through which personal meaning is formed. Social media, through constant visual stimuli, validation, and the comparison of curated lifestyles, affect self-talk. Users begin to tell themselves, and judge, their standards of evaluations with the perceived standards that the digital public audience presents. The thirst for digital validation produced the “digital self,” a self that is shaped and sometimes distorted to meet the standards of the digital.

In *Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union*,<sup>2</sup> the US Supreme Court heard the matter involving the Internet and ruled that the Internet is a forum for free speech and for the formation of one's identity. Subsequent to the case, the Court identified the importance of cyberspace for identity formation. While the case along the internet dealt primarily with free speech, the case laid the groundwork for identity development. Closely tracking this development, the Indian judiciary, too, identified the importance of the internet in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*<sup>3</sup> being a case on the freedom of expression. Here, too, the focus is on the internet in the context of personal expression.

### **SELF-PRESENTATION, PERFECTIONISM, AND EMOTIONAL FRAGMENTATION**

Self-presentation techniques that prioritize the idealized version of one's life possibly affect intra-personal relationships most intensely. Social media platforms promote visual perfection, aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Chambers, *Technologically Mediated Personal Relationships*, in *Social Media and Personal Relationships* 21, (2013), [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137314444\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137314444_2).

<sup>2</sup> 521 U.S. 844.

<sup>3</sup> AIR 2015 SC 1523.

curation, and the projection of a glamorized lifestyle. This, in turn, fosters perfectionism and creates a state of cognitive dissonance, where the individual feels a disconnection between their real self and their online self. From a psychological standpoint, the disconnection tends to cause a problem with self-confidence, dissatisfaction with real-life circumstances, and emotional disinvestment. This feeling of emotional dissatisfaction stems from the pursuit of the “perfect” online image, which creates obsessive self-monitoring, self-objectification, and hypercriticality of the self.

Social and Clinical Psychology shows that the use of social platforms like Instagram or Facebook, particularly by younger users, correlates with a negative self-image, depression, anxiety, and disordered body image. This social comparison theory, while existing long before social media, has been exponentially intensified since the birth of these platforms. The comparison stems from highly curated content, which sets unattainable benchmarks and spirals the individual into a cycle of self-doubt. Measurement of self-worth has been externalized to these platforms, with digital engagement metrics standing in for intrinsic values.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the cases involving the Blue Whale Challenge in India, the courts noted the potential psychological harm related to social media abuse, especially the manipulation of the young, the distortion of the self-image, and self-harm. In one case, Hon’ble Madras High Court in *S. V. Vijay Prakash v. Union of India*<sup>5</sup> made it a point to highlight young people's emotional fragility while asking the authorities concerned to control online harmful content. While the cases in question deal with the extremes, they tell a story of how poor internalization of online content can destroy someone’s self-identity and self-worth.

## **DATA-DRIVEN PLATFORMS AND IDENTITY SHAPING**

The primary aim of social media platforms is to keep their users engaged. They use algorithms to create and deliver personalised content streams. Platforms create feedback loops by showing someone content that aligns with their interests, fears, insecurities, and behaviours. This can reinforce self-beliefs and biases related to one’s identity. Users exposed to content that highlights specific insecurities, such as rigid beauty ideals or success-obsessed narratives, are likely to internalise those messages. In that sense, algorithms can serve as external architects of internal dialogues while self-talk is accompanied by strong and negative narratives.

The digital environment, therefore, functions as a mirror that not only reflects but also reformulates the contours of the self. Concerning mental health laws, the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India in

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<sup>4</sup> James E. Maddux & Cal D. Stoltenberg, *Clinical Social Psychology and Social Clinical Psychology: A Proposal for Peaceful Coexistence*, 1 J. Soc. & Clinical Psych. 289, (1983), <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.1983.1.4.289>.

<sup>5</sup> LNIND 2009 DEL 8654.

*Re: Prajwala Letter*<sup>6</sup> recognised the need for the regulation of online harm while also calling for the sustaining of mental health as an area requiring the focus of institutions. This judgment illustrates a social media comprehension that seamlessly connects civil discourse with the emotional and mental domains.

Based on the World Health Organization's mental health data and the Pew Research Center's global social media data, around 72% of the global audience aged 15-24 spends 3+ hours a day on social media. In 2023, the American Psychological Association (APA) published results from studies where 46% of adolescents reported feeling worse about their lives as a result of seeing other people's social media posts, with 32% reporting symptoms of anxiety related to pressure online to manage their appearances. Engagement with social media content further fuels this cycle. Data on Instagram shows that posts that include a face get 38% more engagement than posts that do not, further incentivizing the use of social media for close-up face photos. In a 2024, UNICEF digital behavior study, 58% of respondents aged 16-24 from India reported that online validation of their peers affects their confidence and mood. This evidence reflects the extent and magnitude of social media use and digital exposure on emotions. This psychological effect of social media use and digital exposure is a public health issue.<sup>7</sup>

### **SELF-COMPARISON, EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY, AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media platforms trigger self-comparison as users benchmark themselves against others and ignore the natural observation part of self-comparison. Unachievable standards are set when people see curated versions of others. People are drawn to upward self-comparison, looking at others' successful relationships, physical bodies, and lifestyles, and determining the worth of their own life based on those. Internally, the self-critic begins to ask questions based on the standards that are set; Why am not as successful? Why do not look like that? Why is my life not as exciting? This self-critique becomes emotionally exhausting and creates performance anxiety. Social media creates a climate of constant evaluation. People learn to assess their worth based on external indicators like the number of likes a post gets. This coin is complete with authentic self-expression. As a result, the intra-personal dialogue becomes centered on external validation.

The implications of psychological pressures of digital scrutiny on one's dignity is acknowledged in some of the Indian judiciary's decisions involving defamation. In *Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India*,<sup>8</sup> while upholding criminal defamation, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India noted the impact of reputational damage on a person's dignity, even closing in on the psychological aspects of the case. Although the case relates to the regulation of speech, the Court's focus on inner dignity

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<sup>6</sup> Suo Moto Writ Petition (Crl.) No. 3 of 2015.

<sup>7</sup> *Teens and Social Media Fact Sheet*, Pew Research Center, [https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/teens-and-social-media-fact-sheet/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/teens-and-social-media-fact-sheet/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) (last visited Nov. 4, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> (2016) 7 SCC 221.

and psychological aspects correlates with the prevailing position on online evaluative scrutiny. The ruling reflects the understanding that psychological dignity is a constituent of personal liberty, which suggests an appreciation of the emotional and legal implications of the digital world on one's self-image. In the same vein, in *Faheema Shirin R.K. v. State of Kerala*,<sup>9</sup> the Hon'ble Kerala High Court described the right to Internet access as part of personal liberty and educational autonomy, while also pointing to the problem of mental overstimulation as a consequence of unrestricted access.

Psychological studies show that users who seek online validation as part of their identity have reduced emotional resilience. This opens the door to emotional pain from criticism, cyberbullying, and algorithmic neglect. When engagement with their posts suddenly drops, they feel rejected and inadequate. This negatively impacts adolescents, who have yet to fully form their self-identity, triggering stress disorders, mood swings, and self-confidence issues. Many research articles, including those from *Nature Human Behaviour*, associate routine use of social media with social and emotional dysfunction and unstable emotional control. Increasing dependence on digital validation weakens intra-personal stability, and digital mirrors replace genuine self-reflection.

### **IDENTITY FLUIDITY AND SELF-FRAGMENTATION**

Social media allows users to develop different personas to interact with different people. These can be professional, social, familial, and anonymous. While this multiplicity can provide some form of expressive freedom, it may also pose risks to the coherence of one's personality. Emotional distress, confusion, and discontinuity can arise from the schism between the private self and the public self. Self-representation online may provide exploration and destabilize one's inner narratives. For socially vulnerable individuals, the internet provides safe spaces to perform identity exploration, yet over-reliance on digital identities can distort the boundary between the actual self and the digital self.

In *Packingham v. North Carolina*,<sup>10</sup> the US Supreme Court described social media as “the modern public square” and noted the importance of social media in identity construction and public discourse participation. That affirmation of access, however, does not ameliorate the psychological toll such spaces impose, including the incessant comparison, performance, and expectation, and the constant “audience” of social media. In the Indian context, the growing focus of the courts on the rights of the digitally connected and on judicial autonomy indicates an understanding of the cyber life's emotional and psychological burdens, even if the inter-personal psychological aspects of life are not yet unified in constitutional law.

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<sup>9</sup> 2019 SCC OnLine Ker 1732.

<sup>10</sup> 582 U.S. 98 (2017).

The problem with social media is that, while it is designed to promote interaction, it also causes internal solitude. This paradox stems from the illusion of emotional fulfilment, as the digital exchanges that take place in conjunction with an individual are not premised on emotional ties. This “connected loneliness” syndrome describes those individuals who have little emotional sustenance but a lot of social media interaction. This digital interaction causes emotional dependence and rationalizes boredom, solitude, and self-immolation. Reliance on the digital space not only weakens self-control but also self-autonomy, emotional maturity, and emotional dependence.

The Hon’ble Supreme Court recognizes mental health as part of Article 21 rights, as in *X v. Principal Secretary, Health & Family Welfare Dept., Govt. of NCT of Delhi*,<sup>11</sup> which acknowledged one of the first parts of mental health being “well-being” of a person as a constitutional right. Even though the case was predominantly focused on reproductive rights, the court acknowledged the social circumstances, social norms, and the judgments people face including the pressure of a social and legal framework at the time, and the pressure of social media.

### **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF CYBERBULLYING**

Being attacked over the internet exposes a person to strong self-criticism and fear. Harassment and thorough psychological violence penetrating the core of a person creating self-doubt and/or self-hatred. They often take the hostile external comments and beliefs and make them the core of their self-beliefs. Most of the vulnerable people from cyberbullying take extreme self-harm. The internet and social media are hostile places. In cyberbullying, the aggressor has increased emotional violence. Western world has recognized cyberbullying as a major violence. In the case of cyberbullying and harassment, Indian Supreme Court has emphasized the violence to dignity, and psychological harassment in *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*,<sup>12</sup> even if it was focused on workplace harassment. This has focused the rest of the world on the psychological, and emotional violence of cyberbullying.

Digital character attacks and humiliation erode one's internal belief system. Research by the American Psychological Association indicates that the adolescents who face cyberbullying are at a greater risk of depression, self-harm, and deep identity conflicts. The weakening of self-belief directly impacts one's academic performance, professional outlook, and the overall satisfaction in life. Even adults facing unrelenting attacks of negativity on the internet tend to withdraw and develop self-esteem issues. This demonstrates that psychological resilience should not be expected because of maturity as the internet has the potential to disrupt one's psychological stability at any age.

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<sup>11</sup> (2022) 10 SCC 1.

<sup>12</sup> (1997) 6 SCC 241.

## **SELF-EXPRESSION, EMPOWERMENT, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POSITIVE IDENTITY**

Social media, despite its shortcomings, has a positive part to play in the development of the self. It provides a means of self-expression and the development of creativity, and identity, as well as the articulation of feelings, ideas, and goals. Support groups provide affirmation and a sense of belonging to those dealing with personal issues and trauma, identity changes, and rough transitions. Online communities provide acceptance, emotional support, and affirmation to those who face discrimination and social isolation. Online activism, including the #MeToo movement and LGBTQ+ social networks, is a clear example of how digital activism can facilitate the internal healing of self-empowerment.

Globally, courts have begun to appreciate the value of social forums. In *National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India*,<sup>13</sup> the Hon'ble Supreme Court highlighted the psychological dignity, personal identity, and the right to self-identification of transgender persons. The judgment did not have social media's overwhelming influence but demonstrates an early legal confirmation of self-determination that social media, in its supportive role, can strengthen. When used deliberately, social media enhances intra-personal relations providing emotional support, fostering innovative expression, and reinforcing personal autonomy. The main problem is the positive exploration of one's identity and the need to disregard external validation.

## **DIGITAL WELL-BEING, PSYCHOLOGICAL AUTONOMY, AND INTERNAL FREEDOM**

Interactions between digital spaces and the mind most closely define personal autonomy as autonomy in cyberspace. Autonomy is not just the absence of external control. Automation actually means the absence of internal control, the kind control that digital silos exercise over a mind and consciousness. Escaping control of automated systems is the dominant challenge of contemporary emotional exploitation. Automated systems of social engagement usually designed to reinforce psychological dependence expose control of external silos. Constantly checking social engagement balances and domination with silo control. Balancing emotional engagement with social approval automated systems takes control of personal silos. Encapsulation of emotional turbulence is control of personal silos. An expanded understanding of the legal principles involved is beginning to be revealed in judicial pronouncements.

In *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*,<sup>14</sup> the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India described privacy as involving dignity, autonomy, and self-development. Despite the focus on data privacy, its description of the right to be left alone and the invocations of mental tranquility and dignity-

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<sup>13</sup> (2014) 5 SCC 438.

<sup>14</sup> (2017) 10 SCC 1.

grounded self-realization, provide constitutional scaffolding for the recognition of psychological intrusions in the digital sphere. Other judicial fora have shown similar concern. The Hon'ble Delhi High Court in *Kuklinski v. State*<sup>15</sup> talked about the need to determine the psychological consequences of social media harassment. This shows the beginning of a recognition in law that digital spaces alter the inner sanctum of personality.

One can safely assume the antagonistic characteristics of technology and the societal movements for an extreme limitation of technology, i.e., the use of community guidelines socials, and for emotional stoppage over use of social media. If social media is guided much closer to the unrestricted use of community publicism, the emotional distension of its cessation is rather extreme to analyze the emotional gains. Emotion to social media ease over use. Emotional gains and losses relative to disadvantage. Digital boundaries in the legal and administrative realms of the state are also being recognized. Educational institutions have started to adopt mindful technology policies and incorporate device breaks. The rest of the world places mental health protections under the "right to disconnect" policies, particularly within the European Union, to provide a psychological health safeguard. All of these adaptations confirm the presence of some degree of mental sovereignty in the digital world, which most likely describes the need for the social, institutional, and personal systems to provide some order.

## **POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY, EMPOWERING NARRATIVES, AND HEALING COMMUNITIES**

Mindfully approaching social media, in spite of each of the risks, remains a beneficial and invaluable asset for self-discovery, empowerment, and even healing. Platforms interconnect people to mental health professionals, social activists, and peer support communities advocates to overcome social anxiety, trauma, disability, gender identity, and other communities like healing trauma. Some catharsis and affirmation in these social environments may be absent. Digital art and other substances like Instagram, YouTube, and even cooperative spaces also provide a means to some people to tell their stories in a powerful narrative form and articulate their struggles and identity in a form of coherent art.

Numerous people thank online platforms for helping them recover from depression, loneliness, and identity crises. For instance, mental health non-profits in India conduct live therapeutic sessions on support pages and offer coping strategies. They also validate people's emotional struggles. The social media landscape includes and amplifies voices of survivors of abuse, people from the LGBTQ+ community, and people who are struggling with body image issues. It includes voices of those dealing with academic or professional pressure, offering a sense of community and support where internal isolation is replaced with a shared strength.

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<sup>15</sup> 2022 SCC OnLine Del.

The unique and profound ways social media affects mental health requires regulation through legal, educational, and ethical means. These means should safeguard social and psychological dignity. Countries across the globe, India included, are working on policies aimed at online harm, digital well-being and designing technology responsibly. The Indian government's digital literacy initiatives and cyberpsychology initiatives are a testament to this. The integration of well-being tools like screen-time dashboards, content filters and emotional health advisories shows that tech companies are recognizing this need as well. Although, ethical responsibility is not complete, as it requires technology to safeguard cognitive capital and mental health exposure.

Incorporating psychological literacy should be a primary focus of public policy when it comes to digital education. This will ensure citizens learn how to bypass external spins on self-worth and unhealthy online comparisons. Schools and universities should focus on the training of cyberpsychology and emotional intelligence. Clinical psychologists, as well as counselling professionals, should also be training on the digital aspects of self-conflict and addiction to validation.

### **CONCLUSION & A WAY FORWARD**

The worst psychological impacts of the digital world relate to the impact of social media on self-relationships. The digital world impacts self-narratives, self-worth, and emotions. It also opens the world to self-expression, self-connection, and healing, and allows for greater self-comparison, emotional dependence, and fragmentation. The self and the digital world are intertwined to a degree never witnessed before. Improving the self-relationship requires a paradoxical approach of using discipline and self-reliance to counter the emotional and digital opportunities that are offered.

To protect internal dignity and mental autonomy, law, psychology, and society have to develop together. The first and foremost challenge is to not turn away from social media, but construct an alert and mentally strong digital self who can use technology while maintaining inner freedom. In this, the greatest asset is self-awareness, which the modern individual must cultivate in order establish emotional self-sufficiency in a hyperconnected world.