

The Double-Edged Sword of Social Platforms: A Multi-Wave Cross Cultural Analysis of Active vs. Passive SNS Usage, Envy, and Adolescent Mental Health

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Abstract

While digital connectivity is ubiquitous among modern youth, its impact on subjective well being (SWB) and depression remains inconclusive. Addressing critical omissions of longitudinal mechanisms and cultural variations, this study establishes an integrated framework separating behavioral patterns into active social network usage (ASNU) and passive social network usage (PSNU). Utilizing a three-wave longitudinal design spanning five months, data was collected from high school student cohorts across Taiwan, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Cross-sectional path analysis confirmed a multi mediated structural pathway across all nations: PSNU consistently triggered upward social comparisons, driving an amplification of envious feelings and an erosion of self esteem, which systematically decreased SWB and exacerbated depression trajectories. Conversely, ASNU enhanced self-esteem and decreased depression. Crucially, three wave cross-lagged panel models demonstrated that baseline mental health states function as a highly stable, unidirectional anchor over time: structural deficits in SWB and advanced baseline depression consistently predicted subsequent escalations in passive browsing behaviors at later waves (e.g., Taiwanese depression at T1 predicted T2 PSNU), rather than digital usage dictating long-term clinical traits.