

SHORT-FORM MEDIA CONSUMPTION AS PREDICTOR OF ATTENTION SPAN, EMOTIONAL REGULATION, SOCIAL COMPARISON, SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL SUPPORT IN PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study examined short-form media consumption in relation to attention span, social comparison, self-esteem, emotion regulation and social support among university students. A convenience sample of two hundred fifty undergraduates was surveyed across Multan, Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Data were collected using an online survey measuring daily screen time alongside established psychological scales. Descriptive findings showed that most students spend significant time daily on short-form videos. TikTok and Facebook Reels emerged as the most popular platforms. Seeking information and news served as the primary motivation for scrolling. Correlation and regression analyses revealed that higher short-form media use predicted increased social comparison tendencies and higher self-esteem. However, frequent video consumption also predicted lower emotion regulation capacity among participants. Media use showed no significant relationship with attention span or social support. Overall, short-form media plays a notable role in self-evaluation and peer comparison among Pakistani undergraduates. Simultaneously, heavy consumption connects with weaker emotional management in daily life. These findings offer practical insights for student counsellors, educators and media psychology researchers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube and TikTok deliver brief audio-visual content known as short-form media. Through continuous scrolling, users are exposed to rapidly changing images, topics and sounds within seconds. According to Jung et al. (2025), excessive consumption can lead to cognitive and psychological side effects. Students often scroll during brief study breaks or moments of mental fatigue. Sustained attention is crucial for reading, solving problems and completing academic work. Previous research shows a connection between short-form video use and attention processes. Xie et al. (2023) studied 1,047 college students, finding that short-form media addiction was linked to reduced attentional control and academic procrastination. Similarly, Al-Leimon et al. (2025) reported that attention mediated the link between video addiction and memory function among

1,029-university students. Emotion regulation is another key psychological domain. It refers to how individuals manage their emotional experiences. George et al. (2025) found a strong link between short-form media use and impulsivity, though its relationship with emotion regulation remained statistically non-significant. Perceived social support is included because digital media also provides opportunities for connection. Asghar et al. (2021) demonstrated that social media engagement mediated the relationship between social support and psychological resilience during lockdowns. In a review of Pakistani university research, Arif et al. (2024) noted that students utilize social media for knowledge sharing, academic tasks, and communication. Therefore, this study adopts a balanced approach by examining short-form media in relation to both psychological and social variables within Pakistan, where direct research on short-form content remains limited.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Short-form media has gained massive popularity among young people over the recent decade. Users routinely consume easily accessible audio-visual content driven by personalized recommendation algorithms. This rapid growth of short-form video has changed how individuals interact across social networking platforms. Han and Jang (2024) noted that short-form media goes beyond passive viewing by actively prompting users to respond within social networks. Although this content provides quick entertainment and networking opportunities, excessive consumption can negatively affect individual psychological well-being. Recent research has conceptualized excessive short-form media use in relation to user psychological experiences (Huang et al., 2022). The increasing popularity of applications like TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts raises serious concerns regarding addictive consumption patterns among young adults. These platforms deliver a wide range of engaging content that keeps users scrolling continuously for extended periods (Ye et al., 2022). Through consistent scrolling, users are exposed to rapidly changing colours, images, topics, narratives and sounds within seconds. However, limited localized research brings attention, emotion regulation, self-esteem, social comparison and social support together into a single framework. The present study addresses this exact gap by examining contemporary short-form media use among university students. Al-Leimon et al. (2025) examined short-form video addiction, attention and memory among 1,029 university students across 25 higher education institutions in Jordan. Their findings indicated that attention partially mediated the relationship between short-form video addiction and memory function. This connects short-form video use directly with cognitive processes essential for academic learning, reading, and problem-solving. Because the study was cross-sectional, causal relationships could not be confirmed. Nevertheless, its large university sample makes the results highly relevant to higher education research.

The link between short-form media and emotion regulation has received growing scholarly interest in recent years. Emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals monitor, evaluate, and modify their emotional reactions. George and Bansal (2025) evaluated short-form video consumption alongside emotion regulation, impulsivity, and delay of gratification in young adults. Their study reported a notable relationship with impulsivity, though the direct connection to emotion regulation remained statistically complex. Similarly, Wang and Liu (2026) studied short-video addiction and emotion deregulation among 1,168 Chinese undergraduate students. Using latent profile analysis, they identified distinct patterns of emotional deregulation associated with heavy media use. These studies highlight attention and emotion regulation as key mechanisms linking short-form media consumption to overall student functioning. Jiang and Ngien (2020) examined Instagram use, social comparison, and self-esteem among users in Singapore. Their findings demonstrated the clear relevance of social comparison processes and self-evaluations within image-heavy digital environments. Nasidi et al. (2024) investigated TikTok use, social comparison, and self-esteem among youth, testing gender as a moderating factor. Their study provides direct empirical evidence that TikTok engagement can be analyzed alongside self-esteem and social comparison simultaneously. McComb et al. (2023) offered further insights regarding social comparison and self-evaluation. Their comprehensive meta-analysis of 48 experimental studies involving 7,679 participants revealed an overall negative effect of upward social comparison on self-evaluations, including self-esteem. Although their meta-analysis focused on general social media rather than short-form video specifically, it provides valuable theoretical grounding for the social comparison components of this study. Constant exposure to curated peer content on short-form feeds gives students continuous opportunities to evaluate their own lives against others. Studies from Pakistan offer important context for local research on digital media. Pasha and Hashmat

(2024) investigated Instagram use and self-image among 50 university students in Lahore. They examined student perceptions regarding beauty trends, influencer content, and peer comparison. Their results confirm that social media comparison processes are highly relevant to Pakistani university students. However, their small sample size and focus on Instagram limit direct generalization to all short-form media platforms.

Landa-Blanco et al. (2024) investigated social media addiction, self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and academic engagement among 412 university students in Honduras. Their structural model indicated significant indirect relationships between social media addiction, self-esteem, and academic engagement. This underscores the central role of self-esteem when researching problematic media use among university undergraduates, even though their study measured broader social media addiction rather than short-form video specifically. Regional literature from sampled cities offers relevant context for Pakistani university students. Khalily et al. (2020) examined smartphone addiction across Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Although focusing on adolescents, their study highlights early digital device habits that often persist into higher education. Similarly, Siddiq et al. (2024) explored social media use and collaborative learning among undergraduates in Multan. Their work provides specific insights from a primary study location. Additionally, Arif et al. (2023) confirmed social networks support knowledge sharing, socialization, employment search and general communication. These regional studies demonstrate that digital platforms remain deeply embedded within student daily life. Previous literature connects short-form media with various psychological outcomes. However, most existing studies analyze these variables in isolation. Much empirical work relies heavily on international student samples outside Pakistan. Local research focuses mostly on general social media platforms. Little work explores short-form video consumption alongside attention span, emotion regulation, social comparison, self-esteem and social support together. The present study addresses this gap using a unified framework. Investigating these distinct psychological dimensions simultaneously offers clearer insights into university life. Social support is included because digital platforms also offer connection during academic stress. Rather than assuming short-form media is entirely harmful, this research examines actual relationships empirically. Given scarce regional data across Multan, Islamabad and Rawalpindi, this study provides relevant local evidence. These findings help counsellors, educators and researchers understand student media habits.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the relationship between attention span, emotional regulation, social comparison, perceived social support, self-esteem and short-form media consumption among university students.
2. To study whether the emotional regulation among university students is significantly predicted by short-form media consumption
3. To examine whether short-form media consumption significantly predicts social comparison orientation among university students.
4. To examine whether short-form media consumption significantly predicts self-esteem among university students.

Hypotheses of the Study

- H₁: Short-form media consumption will be significantly associated with attention span, self-esteem, emotional regulation, social comparison and perceived social support among university students.
- H₂: Short-form media consumption will significantly predict emotional regulation among university students.
- H₃: Short-form media consumption will significantly predict social comparison orientation among university students.
- H₄: Short-form media consumption will significantly predict self-esteem among university students.

III. METHOD

Participants

The sample of this study is 250 students from Pakistani Universities living in Twin Cities and Multan. Age of the participants is between 18 and 25 years with a mean age of 20 years 6 months (SD= 1.18). 82% of the total sample were females. In context of geographical distribution, 35.6% sample was from Islamabad while 19.6% of

participants were from Multan and major chunk of 44.8% participants were from Rawalpindi. Participants included university students aged 18 to 25 from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Multan. They were active users of platforms like TikTok or Instagram Reels. Non-social media users were excluded. Students reporting diagnosed mental health issues were also omitted to avoid baseline confounding. Lastly, incomplete surveys were removed. To recruit participants, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used. The means of distributing questionnaire among university students was electronic through an online form. The online method allowed the researchers to reach students from the selected cities and collect responses efficiently. The collected data passed through screening before applying statistical analysis and data set of 250 is considered as valid responses. The screening process indicated that there were no missing values or problematic outliers in the final dataset. Skewness and kurtosis values were also examined to assess the distribution of the study variables and were found to fall within the acceptable range of -2 to +2.

Measures

[I] Short-form media consumption was assessed using a structured measure consisting of 17 items. The scale measured participants' patterns and extent of short-form media consumption. Items were scored according to the response options provided in the questionnaire, with higher total scores representing greater short-form media consumption. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency in the present sample, with a Cronbach's alpha of .821. **[II]** Attention span was assessed using a brief 5-item measure included in the questionnaire. The scale assessed participants' ability to maintain attention and concentration. During data screening, two items (AS1 and AS5) were removed because of low item-total correlations. The remaining three items demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of .673 which indicate acceptable internal consistency for the purpose of the present study. **[III]** Self-esteem was measured using 5-items assessing participants' overall evaluation and perception of themselves. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded before the total score was calculated. Specifically, items SE2, SE4, and SE5 were reverse-coded. The scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of .635 in the present sample. **[IV]** Emotional regulation was assessed using 5-items measuring participants' ability to manage and regulate their emotional responses. The negatively worded item ER5 was reverse-coded before analysis. The scale showed a Cronbach's alpha of .533 in the present sample. This relatively lower reliability was considered when interpreting the findings. **[V]** Social comparison was measured using 5-items assessing participants' tendency to compare themselves with others. Higher scores indicated greater social comparison orientation. The measure demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .736 in the present sample. Perceived social support was assessed using 5-items measuring participants' perceptions. The scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of .635 in the present sample.

Procedure

Data collection was completed through google form, in the initial phase students were provided with nature and purpose of research. Confidentiality is established and informed consent were taken. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were informed about the general purpose and nature of the research before completing the questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained electronically. Participants were also informed that they could choose not to participate and that their responses would be treated confidentially. The researchers-maintained confidentiality during data handling, analysis and reporting. The findings were presented in aggregate form so that individual participants could not be identified. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics and study variables. Means and standard deviations were calculated for short-form media consumption, attention span, self-esteem, emotional regulation, social comparison and perceived social support. Cronbach's alpha was used to examine the internal consistency reliability of the study measures. Pearson's product-moment correlation was then conducted to examine the relationships between short-form media consumption and the five psychological variables. To further examine the predictive relationships proposed in the hypotheses, simple linear regression analyses were conducted. Separate regression analyses were performed to determine whether short form media consumption significantly predicted emotional regulation, social comparison and self-esteem. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. The analyses were interpreted in accordance with the cross-sectional correlational nature of the study so, the findings were used to describe associations and predictive relationships rather than establish causal relationships.

IV.RESULTS

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationships between short-form media consumption, attention span, self-esteem, emotional regulation, social comparison orientation and perceived social support among university students in Pakistan. Prior to conducting the main investigation, a preliminary pre-study ($N=30$) was carried out to assess the initial clarity, feasibility and face validity of the survey battery. The pre-study showed good initial feasibility and understanding across measures, allowing the research to move forward to full data collection without making any changes to the overall procedure. For the primary study, data were collected from a total sample of $N=250$ university students. Before testing the hypotheses, the dataset went through standard data cleaning and screening to ensure parametric assumptions were met. No missing values or significant outliers were found, keeping the full sample intact. To refine scale reliability, two items from the Attention Span measure (AS1 and AS5) were removed due to low item-total correlations and negatively phrased items on Self-Esteem (SE2, SE4, SE5) and Emotional Regulation (ER5) were reverse-coded before building composite scores. Skewness and kurtosis values for all finalized scale totals stayed well within the standard range of -2.0 to $+2.0$, confirming normal distributions across variables and setting up the results chapter to move from demographic profiles and descriptive stats into correlation and simple linear regression analyses.

Table I: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample ($N=250$)

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Male	45	18.0
	Female	205	82.0
Age (Years)	18	25	10.0
	19	57	22.8
	20	75	30.0
	21	72	28.8
	22	14	5.6
	23	7	2.8
City	Rawalpindi	112	44.8
	Islamabad	89	35.6
	Multan	49	19.6
Field of Study	IT / Engineering / Computer Science	113	45.2
	Social Sciences / Psychology / Public Health	67	26.8
	Humanities / Arts / Languages	2	0.8
	Emergency / Nursing / Medicine	44	17.6
	Business / Finance / Management	11	4.4
	Biotechnology / Genetics / Others	13	5.2
Program Level	Undergraduate	85	34.0
	Postgraduate	165	66.0
Year of Study	1st Year	182	72.8
	2nd Year	59	23.6
	3rd Year	9	3.6
	4th Year	0	0.0
Family System	Nuclear Family	213	85.2
	Joint Family	30	12.0
	Extended Family	7	2.8
Residential System	Hostel	19	7.6
	Rented Accommodation	50	20.0
	With Family	181	72.4
Average Daily Short-Form Media Usage	Less than 1 hour	5	2.0
	1–2 hours	232	92.8
	2–3 hours	10	4.0
	3–4 hours	3	1.2

Most Frequently Used Platform	TikTok	125	50.0
	Facebook Reels	84	33.6
	Instagram Reels	32	12.8
	YouTube Shorts	9	3.6
Primary Purpose of Usage	Information / News	122	48.8
	Entertainment	79	31.6
	Education	15	6.0
	Passing Time	15	6.0
	Social Interaction	8	3.2
	Idle / Leisure Time	11	4.4

Note. N=250. Frequency (f) and percentage (%) are reported for all categorical demographic variables. For Age, M=20.06 years, SD=1.18

The final sample comprised 250 participants ($N=250$) aged 18 to 23 years ($M=20.06$, $SD=1.18$). The majority of the respondents were female ($f=205$, 82.0%), resided in Rawalpindi ($f=112$, 44.8%), lived with their family ($f=181$, 72.4%), and belonged to a nuclear family system ($f=213$, 85.2%). Regarding academic status, the largest proportion was enrolled in Information Technology, Engineering, or Computer Science fields ($f=113$, 45.2%). Postgraduate students constituted two-thirds of the sample ($f=165$, 66.0%), with most participants currently in their first year of study ($f=182$, 72.8%) and no fourth-year participants represented ($f=0$, 0.0%). Regarding short-form media engagement, an overwhelming majority reported spending 1 to 2 hours daily ($f=232$, 92.8%), with TikTok identified as the most frequently used platform ($f=125$, 50.0%), followed by Facebook Reels ($f=84$, 33.6%). The primary stated motivation for short form media consumption was seeking information or news ($f=122$, 48.8%), followed by entertainment ($f=79$, 31.6%), with smaller proportions utilizing it for social interaction ($f=8$, 3.2%) and idle or leisure time ($f=11$, 4.4%).

Table II: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N=250)

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Media Consumption (SMC)	44.77	14.20	20.00	100.00	1.09	1.51
Attention Span (AS)	10.35	2.82	3.00	15.00	-0.10	-1.15
Self-Esteem (SE)	14.14	2.20	9.00	20.00	0.26	0.44
Emotional Regulation (ER)	17.04	2.89	10.00	25.00	-0.30	0.23
Social Comparison (SC)	15.30	3.74	6.00	25.00	0.03	-0.46
Perceived Social Support (PSS)	15.71	3.11	7.00	22.00	-0.13	-0.05

Note. N=250. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum. Skewness standard error = .154; Kurtosis standard error = .307

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all continuous study variables to assess central tendency, dispersion, and distributional normality. The mean scores and standard deviations for the measures were as follows: Social Media Consumption ($M=44.77$, $SD=14.20$), Attention Span ($M=10.35$, $SD=2.82$), Self-Esteem ($M=14.14$, $SD=2.20$), Emotional Regulation ($M=17.04$, $SD=2.89$), Social Comparison ($M=15.30$, $SD=3.74$) and Perceived Social Support ($M=15.71$, $SD=3.11$). Skewness values ranged from -0.30 to 1.09, while kurtosis values ranged from -1.15 to 1.51. Because all skewness and kurtosis indices fell well within the acceptable range of -2.0 to +2.0, univariate normality was assumed for all primary constructs, confirming that parametric statistical tests are appropriate for further analysis.

Tables III

Variables	Items Included (k)	Items / Notes	Cronbach's α	Internal Consistency	Reference
Social Media Consumption (SMC)	17	SMC1 to SMC17	.821	Good	Tuck & Thompson (2024)
Social Comparison (SC)	5	SC1 to SC5	.736	Acceptable	Gibbons & Buunk (1999)
Attention Span (AS)	3	AS2, AS3, AS4	.673	Moderate (Items 1 & 5 dropped)	Davidson (2002)
Perceived Social Support (PSS)	5	PSS1 to PSS5	.635	Moderate	Zimet et al. (1988)
Self-Esteem (SE)	5	SE1, SE2_R, SE3, SE4_R, SE5_R	.635	Moderate (Reverse coded SE2, SE4, SE5)	Rosenberg (1965)
Emotional Regulation (ER)	5	ER1 to ER4, ER5_R	.533	Low (Reverse coded ER5)	Gross & John (2003)

To check the internal consistency of the measures used in this study, Cronbach’s alpha (α) reliability was calculated for all six scales. The results showed good reliability for Social Media Consumption (α =.821, 17 items) and Social Comparison (α =.736, 5 items). For the Attention Span scale, two items (AS1 and AS5) were removed because of low item-total correlations, which improved the reliability of the remaining 3 items (α =.673). Negatively worded items on Self-Esteem (SE2, SE4, SE5) and Emotional Regulation (ER5) were reverse-coded before analysis. Self-Esteem (α =.635, 5 items) and Perceived Social Support (α =.635, 5 items) showed moderate reliability, while Emotional Regulation had a lower reliability value (α =.533, 5 items).

Table IV: Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables (N =250)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Social Media Consumption (SMC)	—					
2. Attention Span (AS)	.014	—				
3. Self-Esteem (SE)	.318**	.053	—			
4. Emotional Regulation (ER)	-.248**	-.258**	-.335**	—		
5. Social Comparison (SC)	.363**	-.024	.346**	-.469**	—	
6. Perceived Social Support (PSS)	.040	-.136*	.060	.166**	-.050	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Hypothesis I

Short-form media consumption will be significantly associated with attention span, self-esteem, emotional regulation, social comparison and perceived social support among university students. Pearson correlation analysis revealed that short-form media consumption was significantly associated with higher social comparison orientation (r =.363, $p < .001$), higher self-esteem (r =.318, $p < .001$), and lower emotional regulation (r =-.248, $p < .001$). However, relationships with attention span (r =.014, p =.825) and perceived social support (r =.040, p =.528) were non-significant, providing partial support for Hypothesis 1.

Table V: Simple Linear Regression Predicting Emotional Regulation from Short-Form Media Consumption (N=250)

Variable	B	SEB	β	t	p	95% CI [LL,UL]
Constant	19.30	0.59	—	32.82	<.001	[18.15,20.46]
SMC_Total	-0.05	0.01	-.248	-4.03	<.001	[-0.08, -0.03]

Note. R^2 =.061, Adjusted R^2 =.058, $F(1,248)$ =16.25, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis II

Short-form media consumption will significantly predict emotional regulation among university students.

A simple linear regression revealed that short-form media consumption significantly predicted emotional regulation, accounting for 6.1% of the variance ($R^2=.061$, $F(1,248)=16.25$, $p<.001$). Short-form media consumption was a significant negative predictor ($\beta=-.248$, $t=-4.03$, $p<.001$), indicating that higher media consumption is associated to lower emotional regulation, fully supporting H2.

Table VI: Simple Linear Regression Predicting Social Comparison from Short-Form Media Consumption (N=250)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	11.03	0.44	-	15.09	<.001
SMC_Total	0.10	0.02	.363	6.13	<.001

Note. $R^2=.132$, Adjusted $R^2=.128$, $F(1,248)=37.58$, $p<.001$.

Hypothesis III

Short-form media consumption will significantly predict social comparison orientation among university students. Short-form media consumption significantly predicted social comparison orientation, explaining 13.2% of the variance ($R^2=.132$, $F(1,248)=37.58$, $p<.001$). Increased short-form media consumption was significantly associated with higher tendencies toward social comparison ($\beta=.363$, $t=6.13$, $p<.001$), fully supporting H3.

Table VII: Simple Linear Regression Predicting Self-Esteem from Short-Form Media Consumption (N=250)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	11.94	0.44	-	27.25	<.001
SMC_Total	0.05	0.01	.318	5.28	<.001

Note. $R^2=.101$, Adjusted $R^2=.097$, $F(1,248)=27.88$, $p<.001$.

Hypothesis IV

Short-form media consumption will significantly predict self-esteem among university students. A simple linear regression showed that short-form media consumption significantly predicted self-esteem, accounting for 10.1% of the variance ($R^2=.101$, $F(1,248)=27.88$, $p<.001$). Short form media consumption positively predicted self-esteem ($\beta=.318$, $t=5.28$, $p<.001$), supporting the fourth hypothesis.

Additional Findings

A descriptive look at the numbers shows a few interesting trends in how university students in Pakistan consume short-form media and how these habits tie into their psychological wellbeing.

Usage Habits and Platform Choice

The daily usage data shows that short-form media consumption has become pretty uniform across the sample. Almost all participants (92.8%, $f=232$) reported spending 1 to 2 hours daily on these platforms, while very few students reported less than an hour (2.0%, $f=5$) or more than three hours (1.2%, $f=3$). Platform choice was also heavily concentrated, with TikTok (50.0%, $f=125$) and Facebook Reels (33.6%, $f=84$) together making up more than 80% of total usage. Interestingly, when asked about their main reason for scrolling, nearly half the students (48.8%, $f=122$) selected information or news, which actually surpassed entertainment (31.6%, $f=79$), education (6.0%, $f=15$), and social interaction (3.2%, $f=8$).

Trends Across Study Constructs

Looking at the correlation matrix (Table 4), a few patterns stand out among the variables themselves:

1. **Emotional Regulation vs. Self-Esteem:** Emotional regulation showed a clear negative correlation with both self-esteem ($r=-.335$, $p<.001$) and social comparison ($r=-.469$, $p<.001$). So while higher media consumption predicted higher self-esteem ($\beta=.318$) and greater social comparison ($\beta=.363$), it was linked with lower emotional regulation ($\beta=-.248$).

Attention Span Patterns: Self-reported attention span showed almost no relationship with daily short-form media consumption ($r=.014$, $p=.825$). However, attention span did show significant negative correlations with emotional regulation ($r=-.258$, $p<.001$) and perceived social support ($r=-.136$, $p=.032$).

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this research confirmed that short-form media consumption is evidently associated with self-esteem, social comparison orientation and emotional regulation, but its relationship with perceived social support and attention span were not proven statistically significant. The statistical analysis, regression analysis further proved that short-form media consumption significantly predicted social comparison orientation, emotional regulation and self-esteem.

Short-Form Media Consumption and Psychological Variables

The first hypothesis posited that short-form media consumption connects significantly with self-esteem, emotion regulation, social comparison, attention span and perceived social support. Findings provided partial support for this assumption. Increased short-form media use relates positively to social comparison orientation and self-esteem. Conversely, its connection with attention span remains non-significant within this dataset. Short-form consumption also shows a clear negative connection with emotion regulation. Based on these observations, social comparison demonstrates a strong and consistent link with short-form media habits among university students. This non-significant finding regarding attention span differs from several international studies. Al-Leimon et al. (2025) surveyed university students in Jordan and found that short-video addiction relates directly to cognitive outcomes. Similarly, Xie et al. (2023) observed that short-form media use connects with decreased attentional control and increased academic procrastination. Differences in measurement instruments or daily usage habits across regional student populations might explain why this sample did not replicate these cognitive effects.

Short-Form Media Consumption as a Predictor of Emotion Regulation

The second hypothesis proposed that short-form media consumption significantly predicts emotion regulation abilities. Results supported this prediction fully. Regression analysis revealed that short-form media use serves as a significant negative predictor of emotion regulation. Students who engage more frequently with short videos report weaker emotion regulation capacity. This outcome aligns with recent global literature. Wang and Liu (2026) observed that short-video addiction links closely with emotional dysregulation among college students. Furthermore, a meta-analysis by Tang et al. (2026) involving a massive international sample confirmed that frequent short-form video consumption predicts adverse psychological outcomes, particularly emotional dysfunction. Consuming rapid visual content continuously may disrupt standard coping strategies, leaving students less equipped to manage daily academic stressors.

Short-Form Media Consumption as a Predictor of Social Comparison

The third hypothesis predicted that short-form media consumption significantly predicts social comparison orientation. Data strongly supported this expectation. In fact, short-form video consumption accounted for the highest amount of explained variance among all regression models tested in this study. Higher consumption directly leads to stronger tendencies toward comparing oneself with online peers. These results correspond with wider literature. A meta-analysis by Demir et al. (2026) established a consistent positive relationship between problematic social media engagement and social comparison behavior. Locally, Nasidi et al. (2024) highlighted that short-form platforms like TikTok encourage continuous social comparison among young adults. Algorithmically tailored feeds continuously expose students to curated peer content, naturally triggering evaluation of personal achievements against others.

Short-Form Media Consumption as a Predictor of Self-Esteem

The fourth hypothesis stated that short-form media consumption predicts student self-esteem. Results supported this hypothesis, as media use significantly predicted self-esteem levels. Interestingly, the direction of this relationship was positive. Higher short-form media consumption related to higher self-esteem scores within this Pakistani sample. This positive link finds support in recent research. Li et al. (2026) examined social media intensity among Chinese undergraduates and noted that digital platforms can foster positive self-evaluations through online group identity and selective exposure. However, other scholars report contrasting patterns. McComb et al. (2023) demonstrated that exposure to upward comparison targets on social media generally harms self-esteem. In this context, Pakistani students might use short-form platforms mainly for creative expression, entertainment or peer connection, which could temporarily boost confidence rather than diminish it.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrated that short-form media consumption was significantly associated with three of the five psychological variables examined. Higher short-form media consumption was associated with lower emotional regulation, higher social comparison orientation and higher self-esteem. In contrast, no significant relationship was observed between short-form media consumption and attention span or perceived social support. The regression analysis further showed that short-form media consumption significantly predicted emotional regulation, social comparison orientation and self-esteem. The findings contribute to the growing literature by showing that short-form media consumption should not be considered as having one uniform psychological effect. A cross-sectional design prevents directional or causal conclusions. Relying on self-reported measures introduces potential response bias. Convenience sampling limits broader generalizability. Modifying standard scales restricts direct comparison with studies using complete five-item instruments. Additionally, low emotional regulation scale reliability requires cautious interpretation. Future studies should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to clarify directional relationships. Sampling across diverse Pakistani universities and regions will enhance generalizability. Researchers must also refine or adapt the emotional regulation scale to achieve stronger reliability scores. Findings help students recognize how short-form media shapes attention, self-esteem, social comparison, emotional regulation, and social support. This research offers a foundation for further investigation, helping educators and psychologists promote healthy digital habits among youth.

Disclosure Statement

This independent, student-led study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki and established research guidelines in psychology. Institutional Review Board (IRB) review was not formally pursued; however, strict ethical protocols were maintained throughout. All participants were legal adults aged 18 or above, involvement was strictly voluntary and anonymous and the research presented no potential risk to respondents.

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