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The Impact of Procrastination, Social Media Use and Coping Strategies on the Psychological Well-Being of Young Adults

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Abstract

This paper examines the interrelated influence of procrastination, social media use and coping strategies on the psychological well-being of young adults, a life stage marked by identity formation, academic and career transitions and near-constant digital connectivity. Drawing on secondary data published in peer-reviewed journals, government reports and large-scale surveys between 2018 and 2025, the study synthesizes evidence on how habitual task-postponement and problematic digital engagement jointly erode subjective and psychological well-being, while adaptive coping strategies such as problem-focused coping, mindfulness and structured digital disengagement act as protective buffers.

Reported prevalence figures indicate that a substantial proportion of young adults experience clinically meaningful depressive and anxiety symptoms and problematic social media use shows small-to-moderate but consistent correlations with depression, anxiety and stress across multiple meta-analyses. Procrastination is treated not merely as a time-management failure but as a short-term mood-repair strategy that is reinforced by digital distraction and, in turn, undermines long-term well-being. Four data tables synthesize secondary evidence on symptom prevalence, social-media–mental-health associations, problematic-use correlations and coping and digital-detox intervention outcomes.

The findings point to a cyclical relationship in which stress and diminished well-being drive escalated social media use and procrastination, which are then managed—more or less successfully—through coping mechanisms that shape the ultimate well-being trajectory of young adults. The paper concludes with recommendations for digital literacy programs, structured coping-skills training and campus-based mental health interventions tailored to the developmental stage of emerging adulthood.

Keywords: procrastination, social media use, coping strategies, psychological well-being, young adults, secondary data

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Young adulthood, broadly spanning the late teens through the early thirties, is widely recognized as a developmentally sensitive period in which identity, career and relationship structures are still being consolidated (Buizza et al., 2022). This transitional stage places young people under considerable psychological pressure and two behavioral patterns have emerged

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as central to understanding their well-being in the digital era: procrastination and social media use. Nearly all young adults now own a smartphone and actively use at least one social media platform and daily engagement with these platforms has become normative rather than exceptional (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). At the same time, academic and occupational procrastination — the voluntary and often irrational delay of intended tasks — has been described as a near-universal self-regulatory failure that intensifies during periods of stress and unstructured, technology-saturated time (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016).

The convergence of these two behaviors is not coincidental. Digital platforms are engineered for continuous engagement and young adults frequently turn to social media as a means of short-term mood repair when faced with unpleasant or effortful tasks, a pattern that is functionally indistinguishable from procrastination itself (Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016). How individuals cope with the resulting stress, guilt and diminished performance — whether through adaptive strategies such as planning and cognitive reappraisal, or maladaptive ones such as avoidance and further digital withdrawal — has emerged as a critical determinant of whether these behaviors translate into lasting psychological harm (Sirois & Kitner, 2015).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Procrastination and Psychological Well-Being

Procrastination has moved beyond its earlier characterization as a benign time-management quirk and is now understood, within the self-regulation literature, as a failure of emotion regulation in which individuals prioritize the repair of a negative short-term mood over the pursuit of a long-term goal (Pychyl & Sirois, 2016). Mohammadi Bytamar et al. (2020) found that difficulties in emotion regulation were significantly associated with higher levels of academic procrastination among university students, suggesting that procrastination functions as a maladaptive emotional coping mechanism rather than a simple planning deficit. Consistent with this view, Sirois and Kitner (2015), in a meta-analytic investigation, demonstrated that procrastination is reliably associated with greater use of maladaptive coping strategies — such as avoidance and behavioral disengagement — and with lower use of adaptive, problem-focused coping.

The well-being consequences of chronic procrastination extend beyond academic performance. Sommantico et al. (2024), in a study of 548 Italian young adults aged 18 to 35, found that procrastination interacted with socially prescribed perfectionism and narcissistic vulnerability to erode psychological well-being, particularly among individuals who perceived high parental expectations and criticism. Clinically oriented work has likewise shown that procrastination is treatable: Rozental et al. (2015) demonstrated in a randomized controlled trial that internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy produced significant reductions in procrastination severity, with corresponding improvements in perceived stress and depressive symptoms. Complementing this, Svartdal et al. (2018) argued that structural features of study environments — unclear deadlines, low external monitoring and unstructured free time — foster procrastination across national contexts, pointing to environmental as well as individual-level drivers of the behavior. Taken together, this body of work situates procrastination not as

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a peripheral inconvenience but as a central, modifiable risk factor for diminished psychological well-being in young adulthood.

2.2 Social Media Use and Mental Health Outcomes in Young Adults

A substantial and rapidly growing literature links social media use to mental health outcomes in adolescents and young adults, though the strength and direction of the association vary by study design and by how "use" is operationalized. In a scoping review of studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, Corke et al. (2025) reported that the majority of included studies found a positive association between time spent on social media and both depressive and anxiety symptoms, with mediating roles played by loneliness, cyberbullying exposure and social comparison. Quantitatively, Lee et al. (2022), in a meta-analysis of 14 cross-sectional studies, found that greater time spent on social media during the pandemic was associated with significantly higher odds of both anxiety and depressive symptoms among young adults. Shannon et al. (2022), synthesizing 18 studies in a systematic review and meta-analysis, reported small-to-moderate but statistically significant correlations between problematic social media use and depression, anxiety and stress, with no evidence that these associations varied meaningfully by age or gender.

Longitudinal and experimental evidence lends further weight to a causal interpretation. Twenge et al. (2018) documented that declines in adolescent psychological well-being after 2012 in the United States coincided with the rise of smartphone ownership and increased screen time, a pattern replicated across multiple large national datasets. The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023) similarly concluded that excessive social media use poses a meaningful risk to youth and young-adult mental health, citing evidence that reducing use produces measurable improvements in depression severity. More recent reviews (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025; Chhabra et al., 2025; Tang & He, 2025) have extended this picture, showing that social media addiction is linked not only to internalizing symptoms but also to reduced self-control, heightened fear of missing out and academic procrastination, positioning social media use as both a cause and a consequence of broader self-regulatory difficulties.

2.3 Coping Strategies as Moderators of Well-Being

Coping strategies — the cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals use to manage stress — have consistently emerged as key moderators of the relationship between adversity and psychological well-being. Buizza et al. (2022), studying university students accessing a counselling service, found that adaptive coping strategies were associated with lower psychological distress, while avoidant and emotion-focused disengagement strategies predicted poorer outcomes, underscoring the protective role that structured coping-skills support can play on campuses. Pimenta et al. (2024), in a qualitative study of how young people cope with their own and a friend's mental health symptoms, found that help-seeking and social support were frequently used but were often complicated by stigma, uncertainty about how to help and limited trust in available resources.

Digital disengagement itself has increasingly been studied as a coping strategy in its own right. Ansari et al. (2024), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of digital

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detoxification interventions, found small but statistically significant improvements in both subjective and psychological well-being following structured reductions in smartphone and social media use. Earlier experimental work by Tromholt (2016) similarly showed that a one-week period of abstention from Facebook produced measurable increases in self-reported life satisfaction and positive affect relative to a control group. These findings suggest that deliberate, structured coping strategies aimed specifically at digital behavior can meaningfully buffer the negative well-being effects associated with habitual social media use, complementing more general coping approaches such as mindfulness and cognitive reappraisal (Bhardwaj & Imran, 2023).

2.4 The Interconnection Between Procrastination, Social Media Use and Coping

A smaller but growing body of research examines procrastination, social media use and coping as an interconnected system rather than as isolated variables. Reinecke and Hofmann (2016), using experience-sampling methodology, distinguished between media use for genuine psychological recovery and media use as procrastination, finding that the latter — but not the former — was associated with heightened guilt and reduced well-being, indicating that the psychological function of social media use, not merely its duration, determines its impact. Tang and He (2025) found that social media addiction predicted academic procrastination both directly and indirectly through a chain of reduced self-control and heightened fear of missing out, while Taipe et al. (2023) reported a clear positive relationship between entertainment- and community-oriented motivations for Facebook use and elevated levels of academic procrastination among Peruvian university students.

Mojtabai et al. (2016) provide important context by documenting a sustained rise in major depressive episodes among adolescents and young adults in the United States even before the pandemic-era surge in smartphone use, suggesting that digital behavior compounds, rather than solely causes, a pre-existing vulnerability in this age group. Kurth et al. (2024) offer a useful comparative note: their study of coping among older adults during COVID-19 found that more adaptive strategies such as positive reappraisal were used more frequently by older cohorts than by younger adults, hinting that younger adults may be comparatively under-resourced in adaptive coping skills precisely at the point when digital distraction and procrastination pressures are highest. Collectively, this literature supports a cyclical model in which stress and low well-being increase vulnerability to both procrastination and problematic social media use, which further erode well-being unless offset by adaptive and increasingly digitally-aware, coping strategies (Racine et al., 2021; Sirois & Kitner, 2015).

3. Research Methodology and Results

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a secondary data-based, descriptive-analytical research design. Rather than collecting new primary data, it systematically compiles and synthesizes quantitative findings already reported in peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses and official government publications concerning procrastination, social media use, coping strategies and psychological well-being among young adults. This approach is

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appropriate given the objective of the study, which is to identify patterns and convergences across a fragmented body of existing evidence rather than to test a single new hypothesis.

3.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Secondary data were drawn from sources published between 2018 and 2025, including peer-reviewed journals indexed in databases such as PubMed, Scopus and Frontiers; systematic reviews and meta-analyses; and reports issued by government or public health bodies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Sources were selected on the basis of three criteria: (a) direct relevance to procrastination, social media use, coping strategies, or psychological well-being in adolescent or young adult populations; (b) presence of quantifiable outcome data (prevalence rates, correlation or odds-ratio estimates, or standardized effect sizes); and (c) publication in a peer-reviewed or institutionally vetted outlet. A total of 25 sources meeting these criteria were retained for synthesis.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative findings extracted from the selected sources were organized thematically into four categories: (a) prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms among young adults, (b) strength of association between social media use and mental health outcomes, (c) correlational evidence specific to problematic social media use and (d) outcomes associated with coping and digital-detox interventions. Figures were tabulated as originally reported by the source studies, without recalculation, to preserve fidelity to the original secondary data. The resulting tables are presented below, followed by an interpretive discussion of the patterns they reveal.

3.4 Results

Table 1: Reported Prevalence of Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms Among Adolescents and Young Adults

Source / Year	Population	Depressive Symptoms	Anxiety Symptoms
Racine et al. (2021)	Children & adolescents, global, COVID-19 period	25.2% clinically significant	20.5% clinically significant
Corke et al. (2025), citing Islam et al. (2021)	Adolescents & young adults	38%	62% (generalized anxiety)
Corke et al. (2025), citing Yu & Du (2022)	Adolescents & young adults	39.6% (mild–extremely severe)	37.5% (mild–extremely severe)

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Mojtabai et al. (2016)	U.S. adolescents & young adults (2005–2014)	Significant upward trend in major depressive episodes	Not reported
U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services (2023)	U.S. college-aged youth	Increase linked to expansion of a major social media platform	12% increase over baseline

Note. Figures are as reported in the cited secondary sources and reflect differing measurement instruments and sampling frames; they are not directly comparable across rows.

Table 1 presents the reported prevalence and trends of depressive and anxiety symptoms among adolescents and young adults across different studies and settings. Racine et al. (2021) found that during the COVID-19 period, approximately 25.2% of children and adolescents worldwide experienced clinically significant depressive symptoms, while 20.5% reported clinically significant anxiety symptoms. Higher prevalence rates were reported in the studies cited by Corke et al. (2025). Islam et al. (2021) identified depressive symptoms in 38% of adolescents and young adults and generalized anxiety symptoms in 62% of the population, whereas Yu and Du (2022) reported mild to extremely severe depressive and anxiety symptoms among 39.6% and 37.5% of participants, respectively. Mojtabai et al. (2016) also observed a significant upward trend in major depressive episodes among adolescents and young adults in the United States between 2005 and 2014, although anxiety symptoms were not reported. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023) reported a 12% increase in anxiety-related outcomes among college-aged youth following the expansion of a major social media platform. Overall, the findings indicate that depression and anxiety are widespread and increasing mental-health concerns among adolescents and young adults, although the reported prevalence varies according to population, measurement criteria and study context.

Table 2: Association Between Time Spent on Social Media and Mental Health Outcomes

Source / Year	**Outcome Measured**	**Effect Estimate**	**Direction**
Lee et al. (2022)	Anxiety symptoms (14 cross-sectional studies)	Pooled OR = 1.55 (95% CI: 1.30–1.85)	Positive
Lee et al. (2022)	Depressive symptoms (14 cross-sectional studies)	Pooled OR = 1.43 (95% CI: 1.30–1.85)	Positive

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U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services (2023)	Depression severity after use reduction (30 min/day, 3 weeks)	Significant improvement	Negative (protective)
Twenge et al. (2018)	Adolescent psychological well-being post-2012	Marked decline coinciding with rising screen time	Negative

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. Higher OR values indicate greater odds of the mental health symptom with increased social media use time.

Table 2 illustrates the association between time spent on social media and selected mental health outcomes among adolescents and young adults. Lee et al. (2022), based on a pooled analysis of 14 cross-sectional studies, reported that greater social media use was positively associated with anxiety symptoms, with a pooled odds ratio of 1.55, indicating approximately 55% higher odds of anxiety among individuals with greater social media exposure. The same study also found a positive association with depressive symptoms, reflected by a pooled odds ratio of 1.43. In contrast, evidence presented by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023) showed that restricting social media use to approximately 30 minutes per day for three weeks resulted in a significant reduction in the severity of depressive symptoms, suggesting a protective effect of reduced usage. Similarly, Twenge et al. (2018) observed a marked decline in adolescent psychological well-being after 2012, which coincided with a substantial increase in screen time and digital media use. Collectively, these findings indicate that prolonged social media exposure is associated with poorer psychological well-being, whereas controlled or reduced use may contribute to improvements in mental health outcomes.

Table 3: Correlational Evidence on Problematic Social Media Use and Psychological Distress

Source / Year	**Outcome**	**Correlation (r)**	**Sample**
Shannon et al. (2022)	Depression	r = .273, p < .001	18 studies, N = 9,269
Shannon et al. (2022)	Anxiety	r = .348, p < .001	18 studies, N = 9,269
Shannon et al. (2022)	Stress	r = .313, p < .001	18 studies, N = 9,269
Tang & He (2025)	Academic procrastination (via self-control & FoMO)	Significant positive chain-mediation	825 college students, China

Note. FoMO = fear of missing out. Correlation coefficients reflect meta-regression estimates as originally reported; heterogeneity by age, gender and publication year was not statistically significant in the source study.

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Table 3 presents correlational evidence regarding the relationship between problematic social media use and different forms of psychological distress. Based on a meta-analysis of 18 studies involving 9,269 participants, Shannon et al. (2022) reported statistically significant positive correlations between problematic social media use and depression ($r = .273$, $p < .001$), anxiety ($r = .348$, $p < .001$) and stress ($r = .313$, $p < .001$). Among these outcomes, anxiety demonstrated the strongest association, followed by stress and depression. These findings suggest that higher levels of problematic social media engagement are generally linked with greater psychological distress, although the moderate correlation coefficients do not establish a direct causal relationship. Tang and He (2025), in a study of 825 Chinese college students, further found that problematic social media use was significantly and positively associated with academic procrastination through a chain-mediation mechanism involving reduced self-control and fear of missing out. Collectively, the evidence indicates that problematic social media use may affect young adults not only through emotional difficulties such as depression, anxiety and stress, but also through behavioural and academic consequences.

Table 4: Outcomes of Coping and Digital-Detox Interventions on Well-Being

Source / Year	Intervention / Strategy	Outcome	Effect Size
Ansari et al. (2024)	Digital detoxification (meta-analysis, 18 studies, n = 8,147)	Improved subjective well-being	SMD = 0.21
Ansari et al. (2024)	Digital detoxification (meta-analysis)	Improved psychological well-being	SMD = 0.27
Tromholt (2016)	One-week Facebook abstention (experimental)	Increased life satisfaction & positive affect	Significant vs. control
Rozental et al. (2015)	Internet-based CBT for procrastination (RCT)	Reduced procrastination; lower stress/depression	Significant vs. control
Buizza et al. (2022)	Adaptive coping strategy use (counselling-service sample)	Lower psychological distress	Significant association

Note. SMD = standardized mean difference; RCT = randomized controlled trial; CBT = cognitive behavioral therapy.

Table 4 summarises the effects of coping-based and digital-detox interventions on psychological well-being. Ansari et al. (2024), in a meta-analysis of 18 studies involving 8,147 participants, found that digital detoxification produced

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improvements in both subjective well-being (SMD = 0.21) and psychological well-being (SMD = 0.27). Although these effect sizes were relatively small, they indicate that reducing or temporarily discontinuing digital-media use may contribute positively to individuals' emotional and psychological functioning. Similarly, Tromholt (2016) reported that participants who abstained from Facebook for one week experienced significantly greater life satisfaction and positive affect than those in the control group. Rozental et al. (2015) further demonstrated that internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy significantly reduced procrastination and was accompanied by lower levels of stress and depressive symptoms. In addition, Buizza et al. (2022) found that greater use of adaptive coping strategies was significantly associated with lower psychological distress among individuals attending counselling services. Overall, the findings suggest that digital-use reduction, cognitive behavioural interventions and adaptive coping strategies can support psychological well-being and help reduce procrastination-related and emotional difficulties.

3.5 Discussion of Findings

The secondary data synthesized in Tables 1 through 4 converge on a consistent picture. First, depressive and anxiety symptoms are common among contemporary young adults, with prevalence estimates ranging from roughly one-fifth to nearly two-thirds of sampled populations depending on the measurement tool, context and time period and with a clear upward trajectory since the mid-2010s (Table 1). Second, the amount of time spent on social media is positively and significantly associated with both anxiety and depression, with pooled odds ratios exceeding 1.4 across multiple cross-sectional studies, while structured reductions in use produce measurable symptom improvement (Table 2). Third, when social media use is specifically operationalized as "problematic" — characterized by loss of control and functional impairment — its correlation with psychological distress strengthens further and extends into academic procrastination through mechanisms such as diminished self-control and fear of missing out (Table 3). Fourth and most encouragingly, both general adaptive coping strategies and digital-specific coping interventions, including structured detoxification and internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy for procrastination, show measurable, if modest, positive effects on well-being (Table 4).

Read together, these findings support the paper's central proposition: procrastination and social media use are not independent risk factors but interacting behaviors, often functioning as maladaptive attempts at short-term emotion regulation, whose ultimate impact on psychological well-being is substantially shaped by the coping resources and strategies available to the individual. This has direct implications for intervention design, discussed further in the conclusion.

Conclusion

This paper set out to synthesize secondary evidence, published between 2018 and 2025, on how procrastination, social media use and coping strategies jointly shape the psychological well-being of young adults. The evidence reviewed indicates that procrastination functions less

as a benign scheduling problem and more as an emotion-regulation failure, frequently intertwined with — and reinforced by — problematic social media use, which itself carries small-to-moderate but robust associations with depression, anxiety and stress across numerous meta-analyses and reviews. Prevalence data drawn from multiple secondary sources confirm that a substantial share of young adults experience clinically meaningful psychological distress, a pattern that intensified during and after the COVID-19 pandemic alongside rising screen time and academic procrastination.

At the same time, the literature offers grounds for cautious optimism. Adaptive coping strategies — including problem-focused coping, mindfulness, structured digital detoxification and clinically supported interventions such as internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy for procrastination — are consistently associated with improved well-being outcomes, even when their individual effect sizes are modest. This suggests that psychological well-being in young adulthood is not simply a passive casualty of digital-age pressures but a trajectory that can be meaningfully altered through targeted, evidence-based coping support.

Several practical implications follow. Educational institutions should consider embedding coping-skills training and time-management support directly into student services rather than treating procrastination as a disciplinary or purely academic issue. Public health messaging and digital literacy programs should move beyond blanket warnings about screen time toward more nuanced guidance that distinguishes recovery-oriented media use from avoidance-driven, procrastination-linked use. Clinicians working with young adults presenting with anxiety or depressive symptoms may benefit from routinely assessing both procrastination patterns and social media habits as potential maintaining factors, rather than treating mood symptoms in isolation.

This study is not without limitations. Because it relies entirely on secondary data drawn from heterogeneous study designs, populations and measurement instruments, the figures presented in Tables 1 through 4 are not strictly comparable and causal inferences remain constrained by the largely cross-sectional nature of the underlying primary studies. Future research would benefit from longitudinal and experimental designs that track procrastination, social media use and coping strategies concurrently within the same young-adult cohorts, allowing for a more precise mapping of the causal pathways this paper has outlined descriptively. Nonetheless, the convergence of findings across 25 independent secondary sources lends reasonable confidence to the conclusion that procrastination, social media use and coping strategies are best understood not as isolated variables but as an interacting system with direct and substantial consequences for the psychological well-being of today's young adults.

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