

THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL CONTAGION FROM SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTH IDENTITY FORMATION, SOCIAL BEHAVIORS, AND MENTAL HEALTH: THE ROLE OF SELF-CONCEPT CLARITY

Jabir Ansari^{*1}, Khush Bakht Aziz², Nimra Farooq³

^{*1}MPhil scholar, department of psychology, Abdul Wali khan university Mardan

^{2,3}BS psychology, department of psychology, Abdul Wali khan university Mardan

^{*1}kjabir909@gmail.com, ²khushbakhtaziz110@gmail.com, ³nimra14farooq@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Jabir Ansari

Abstract

This study evaluates how emotional contagion affects youth identity formation, mental health impacts, and social behaviors, with a special focus on self-concept clarity as a moderating variable. This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design to survey 400 urban youth within the ages of 18-40 through emotional contagion scales, DASS21, a social behavior questionnaire, and self-concept clarity scales. Emotional contagion demonstrated a strong association with youth identity formation based on the research data ($r = 0.55, p < .01$), social withdrawal ($r = 0.42, p < .01$), social comparison ($r = 0.50, p < .01$), and negative mental health outcomes, including depression ($r = 0.46, p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = 0.43, p < .01$). The results of the moderation analysis indicated that diminished self-concept clarity strengthened the emotional contagion effects on youth identity processes, along with social behavior patterns ($B = -0.27, \beta = -0.33, p = 0.011$). Self-concept clarity works as a protective mechanism against negative emotional contagion while enhancing mental health outcomes. The research findings demonstrate how emotional contagion affects adolescents by demonstrating the necessity of building self-concept clarity for mental health defense. Studies on emotional contagion require ongoing research because they require extended longitudinal research and varied participant samples to evaluate long-term emotional contagion effects.

INTRODUCTION

The youth groups experienced the most significant changes in social communication and self-identification patterns because of social media platforms. The three digital platforms, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, operate jointly as essential tools to create social networks; however, they both allow users to self-express themselves, make social comparisons, and enable the self-discovery of identity (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Most young people use modern social media tools to identify themselves and understand their environment. Users experience

social content that modifies their emotional experiences and leads to attitude change and behavioral adjustments that simultaneously influence their social identity and mental health (Fardouly et al., 2015). Emotional contagion is a critical concern in the digital age because emotional messages are spread among social network users (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014). Social media users show emotional reactions because they view emotions and life situations posted by others, leading to intensified extreme emotions ranging from happiness to sadness

and anxiety. People exposed to transmitted emotions may experience mood changes that influence their behavioral responses (Kross et al., 2013). Youths use self-concept clarity to determine their online emotional processing abilities because it defines their perception of themselves and identity consistency levels (Campbell et al., 1996). Social media emotional waves gain entry into the personal world of youth with unclear self-concepts before permeating their identity because of their unstable self-perception. Social media emotions are integrated into one's personal identity for two reasons: people have unstable self-concepts and erratic emotions (Lee et al., 2017). People absorb external influences through their minds, which modifies both their social behavior and mental health outcomes. When coupled with insufficient self-awareness, young people experience worsened emotional transmission, which causes depression, anxiety, and stress because they interact with artificially contrived social media posts (Fardouly et al. 2015).

In contemporary society, the regulation of social media platforms amplifies the impact of emotional contagion on the identity formation of young people. Social media users who spend excessive time online have a negative impact on their emotional state and identity because of emotional contagion (Lup et al., 2015). Psychological distress results from social media users repeatedly comparing their lives, intensifying feelings of inadequacy (Pantic, 2014). Young members of social media-dependent cultures experience increased pressure to depict their lives with flawless images while maintaining an ideal existence along with higher stress levels because social media use results in feelings of isolation and negatively affects self-esteem reports (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). A detailed investigation of emotional contagion processes and self-concept clarity effects should focus on their relationship with youth mental health status. Research teams will examine how social media emotional transfer affects young people's identity development and psychological well-being. Self-concept clarity functions in connection with emotional contagion to investigate how youths experience mental health challenges while using social media and its potential negative effects.

Literature Review

Extensive research on youth mental health, social tendencies, and identity development is needed because documented emotional contagion demands strategic investigation. Through social media, people spread emotions more easily because contemporary interaction methods intensify emotional expressions (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014). Youths who experience both positive and negative emotions in social media settings make noticeable changes in their self-identity representation and interactions with others, which affects their mental health (Kross et al., 2013). The large number of emotional social media posts that young people encounter has transformed platforms into core territories for emotional contagion, which modifies identity perception as well as social behavior by absorbing emotions (Lee et al., 2017). Self-concept clarity determines how youth respond to emotional contagion through social media because it creates the stability and definition of their personal identity. Social media elicits emotional impacts on youth with unresolved self-concept clarity because their identity stability is unstable (Campbell et al., 1996). Because of this pattern, younger users rapidly take on emotional expressions from others they encounter on social media sites. Unstable self-concept youths experience emotional changes and personal identity shifts when they encounter social media emotions from others (Fardouly et al., 2015). Youths who experience emotional resonance from others develop severe mental health problems that lead to elevated depression, anxiety, and stress, especially when comparing themselves socially online (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Research shows that social media networks cause negative mental health consequences that heavily affect young people through emotional response propagation mechanisms. Engaging in self-comparison through social media platforms prompts individuals to experience dissatisfaction with their bodies, while also heightening symptoms of anxiety and depression (Fardouly et al., 2015). The dissemination of negative emotions through emotional contagion exacerbates psychological distress. Preferences for visuals and social feedback on Instagram contribute to poorer body image perceptions (Lup et al., 2015), which subsequently have harmful effects on mental health.

Adolescent participants develop both social conduct patterns and mental health during online interactions on social media because they acquire emotional states from their online social contacts.

The effects of emotional contagion became apparent across all social practices of adolescents. Emotional exchanges initiated through social media connections either lead to improved positive interactions between users or result in negative emotional experiences that generate social anxiety and separation (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Users gain emotional advantages along with enhanced social connections through work-based social media interactions that spread positive emotions. Social withdrawal and pressure, along with social anxiety, are three distinct ways in which people exhibit negative emotional responses when exposed to sad or angry feelings on social media (Lee et al., 2017). Individuals who possess a strong awareness of their self-concept develop strategies to shield themselves from the adverse effects of emotional contagion on social media platforms. Comprehensive self-understanding among young adults equips them to handle emotional content on these platforms effectively, using methods that promote both mental well-being and social connections (Lee et al., 2017). Social media content significantly influences those who struggle with self-concept comprehension, as these platforms shape their identity development through negative emotions and challenges in social relationships.

Individuals who are heavily dependent on social media platforms often feel compelled to portray seemingly perfect lives online, which subjects them to considerable pressure to uphold these appearances. Young people who do not have a well-defined sense of self are prone to experiencing notable shifts in how they view themselves. It is essential for research on youth cultural identity and mental health to investigate the emotional contagion effects of social media, as these platforms currently shape youth culture. The study explored how emotional contagion and self-concept clarity together influence the mental health of contemporary social media users, aiming to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework in psychiatry concerning the effects of media platforms.

Research Gap and Objectives

The research investigates the way online emotional contagion affects adolescent mental health status alongside their identity development. Current studies investigate emotional contagion impact on individual emotions and behaviors but fail to establish its complete role in youth identity development or its mental health effects on Instagram Facebook and TikTok platforms. This investigation shows how self-concept clarity helps people control their emotional reactions but fails to show how this mechanism controls social media impacts on young adults. The study investigates social media emotional contagion effects on teenage behavior while discussing the requirement of a complete theoretical model to resolve behavioral issues linked to excessive social media engagement. This study has several specific aims.

- This study examines social media-based emotional contagion on young people's development of identity during their creation of social practices.
- Self-concept clarity serves as a mediating process that connects emotional contagion to anxiety and depression symptoms according to research.
- This study examines how youth self-concept clarity changes because of their social media exposure, especially through its impact on their mental health.
- This analysis investigates the effects of emotional contagion on various cultural groups, primarily among young people who intensely utilize social media to develop their culture.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach, performing a cross-sectional analysis to explore the impact of emotional transmission via social media on adolescents' identity formation, societal behaviors, and psychological well-being, with a focus on self-concept clarity. By collecting data at a single point in time through a cross-sectional method, the research aims to reveal how social media influences youth identity through emotional contagion, social

behaviors, and mental health conditions, with self-concept clarity acting as mediator.

Sample Size and Participant Selection

A total of 400 youth between 18 and 40 years of age from highly interactive urban areas will make up the research sample. Ready social media users between 18 and 40 years of age who actively engage through Instagram Facebook and TikTok platforms will participate in this study because these platforms strongly influence youth identity and social conduct together with their mental health development.

Different backgrounds, professions, and socioeconomic statuses of the participants were used to capture diverse social media usage patterns. The research design incorporated multiple social demographics to offer a complete understanding of the emotional contagion effects of social media on young people across boards.

Instruments

1. **Emotional Contagion:** The Emotional Contagion Scale (Doherty, 1997) serves as a measure of the extent to which participants experience emotional contagion effects in their exposure to social media content. Social media users with higher scores on this scale tended to adopt the emotions seen on social networking platforms. This scale evaluates emotional receptiveness and emotional state adoption by others to explain how social media affects young people.
2. **Mental Health (Depression and Anxiety):** The DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was used to measure depression, anxiety, and stress levels. The DASS-21 is comprised of 21 items with separate subscales for depression, anxiety, and stress. The DASS-21 is appropriate for examining youth mental health from emotional contagion because it serves as a rapid diagnostic tool for psychological distress. Depression and anxiety subscale scores measure extreme mental health levels.
3. **Social Behavior:** The Social Behavior Questionnaire serves as an assessment tool to measure social behaviors that arise from

social media exposure. The designed questionnaire reviewed the emotional spread from social media websites regarding participant behavior during social encounters, their levels of social involvement, and their total social conduct. This assessment will determine if social media emotional content exposure causes variations in social conduct, which might result in greater empathy but simultaneously produce social distancing and increased social competitiveness (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014, Feinberg & Willer, 2013).

4. **Self-Concept Clarity:** The Self-Concept Clarity Scale developed by Campbell et al. (1996) measures the extent of participants' self-concept stability alongside its clarity. Understanding the effects of emotional contagion on youth identity formation depends greatly on this scale's analysis. Results from the Self-Concept Clarity Scale revealed better self-concept clarity through stable perceptions of the self, but unclear self-concepts produced lower scores in the assessment. The research instrument allows researchers to examine how clear self-concepts protect young people from unfavorable social media impacts.

Procedure

All participants received information regarding the consent terms, combined with measures to maintain confidentiality. An online survey distributed through social media and email platforms enabled the collection of the study data. Survey participants required 30-40 minutes to complete the evaluation, which assessed emotional contagion, social behaviors, mental health, and self-concept clarity. Each participant was given the option to stop participating at any moment without facing any negative effects.

Data Analysis

Multiple statistical models determine the connections between essential study variables. The research will start by utilizing descriptive statistics to display demographic information alongside the main research variables about the participants. Pearson's r

analysis will be implemented to determine the relationships between emotional contagion and self-concept clarity, and social behaviors and mental health outcomes of depression and anxiety. Mediation analysis will assess whether self-concept clarity acts as

a mediator that connects emotional contagion to mental health outcomes. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the predictive power of emotional contagion and self-concept clarity in assessing depression and anxiety levels.

Results

Table 1 shows the Demographic Data Report

Age Group	Female	Male	Total
18-25 years	80	77	157
26-35 years	87	64	151
36-40 years	51	41	92
Total	218	182	400

In Table 1, 218 women provided survey responses, which equaled 54.5 percent of the research group, and 182 men comprised 45.5 percent. A higher number of women participated in the age groups between 18-25 and 26-35. The 18-25 age cohort represents the largest participant segment in this research sample since many youths took part in the study. Participant gender distribution showed equivalence based on the 54.5% female population exceeding the 45.5% male

population. These ratios are common in social science research.

All participants of this study submitted their demographic information, which was used as the baseline for research. The survey included participants from different age groups to ensure broad-minded examinations of research variables while distributing an equivalent number of participants between male and female sections.

Table 2 shows Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Emotional Contagion	3.45	1.20
Youth Identity Formation	3.75	0.95
Social Withdrawal	2.60	1.15
Social Comparison	2.85	1.05
Depression (DASS-21)	14.30	7.80
Anxiety (DASS-21)	12.75	6.40
Self-concept Clarity	3.55	0.80

The participants exhibited a moderate degree of emotional contagion based on their mean emotional contagion score which reached 3.45 (SD = 1.20). Based on the mean scale of 3.75 (SD = 0.95), the study participants exhibited a moderate level of stability in youth identity development. The depression score

measured through mean DASS-21 ratings reached 14.30 (SD = 7.80) while participants scored 12.75 (SD = 6.40) on anxiety scores (DASS-21). The participants displayed average levels of self-concept clarity based on their measured result of 3.55 (SD = 0.80).

Table 3: Correlations Between Emotional Contagion, Youth Identity Formation, Social Behaviors, and Mental Health Outcomes (DASS-21)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Emotional Contagion	1.00						
2. Youth Identity Formation	0.55**	1.00					
3. Social Withdrawal	0.42**	0.35*	1.00				
4. Social Comparison	0.50**	0.48**	0.45**	1.00			
5. Depression (DASS-21)	0.46**	0.40*	0.48**	0.52**	1.00		
6. Anxiety (DASS-21)	0.43**	0.38*	0.50**	0.54**	0.62**	1.00	
7. Self-concept Clarity	-0.38**	-0.35*	-0.25	-0.30*	-0.42**	-0.40**	1.00

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01 (indicates a significant correlation at the 1% or 5% level).

This table demonstrates the significant relationships between emotional contagion and youth identity growth, social behaviors, mental health outcomes (DASS-21 for depression and anxiety), and self-concept clarity. The results showed a significant positive connection between youth identity formation and emotional contagion ($r = 0.55, p < .01$) along with social withdrawal ($r = 0.42, p < .01$), social comparison ($r = 0.50, p < .01$), depression ($r = 0.46, p < .01$), and anxiety ($r = 0.43, p < .01$), indicating that higher

emotional contagion produces adverse mental health outcomes and complicated social interactions. Self-concept clarity showed negative associations, which were statistically significant with emotional contagion scores ($r = -0.38, p < .01$), depression ($r = -0.42, p < .01$), and anxiety ($r = -0.40, p < .01$). This indicates that elevated self-concept clarity reduces people's exposure to emotional contagion and improves their mental health.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis: Predicting Youth Identity Formation from Emotional Contagion

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t-value	p-value
Emotional Contagion	0.80	0.20	0.55	4.00	< .001
R ²	0.52				

Results from multiple regression analysis verify that emotional contagion positively affects youth identity formation ($B = 0.80, \beta = 0.55, p < .001$). Emotional contagion leads to considerable changes in personal

identity. The explained variance in youth identity formation amounted to 52% according to the model ($R^2 = 0.52$).

Table 5: Moderation Analysis: Self-concept Clarity as a Moderator in the Relationship Between Emotional Contagion and Youth Identity Formation

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t-value	p-value
Emotional Contagion	0.95	0.22	0.60	4.32	< .001
Self-concept Clarity	0.30	0.26	0.15	1.15	0.251
Interaction (Emotional Contagion × Self-concept Clarity)	-0.30	0.12	-0.35	-2.50	0.014
R ²	0.54				

Self-concept clarity acts as a modifying factor between emotional contagion and youth identity development, according to the moderation analysis results. The effect of emotional contagion on youth identity formation was higher among those with lower self-concept clarity ($B = -0.30$, $\beta = -0.35$, $p = 0.014$).

Individuals with lower self-concept clarity create conditions that allow emotional contagion to strongly influence the development of their identity. The model successfully explained 54% ($R^2 = 0.54$) of the transformation in youth identity formation.

Table 6: Moderation Analysis: Self-concept Clarity as a Moderator in the Relationship Between Emotional Contagion and Social Behaviors

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t-value	p-value
Emotional Contagion	0.88	0.23	0.62	3.83	< .001
Self-concept Clarity	0.28	0.30	0.13	0.93	0.356
Interaction (Emotional Contagion \times Self-concept Clarity)	-0.32	0.14	-0.38	-2.29	0.025
R^2	0.50				

Self-concept clarity regulates the extent to which emotional contagion influences people to exhibit different social behaviors (such as social withdrawal or social comparison). Social behavioral responses through emotional contagion proved stronger among

participants with lower self-concept clarity according to the interaction term data ($B = -0.32$, $\beta = -0.38$, $p = 0.025$). The model showed that emotional contagion and social behaviors had a relationship linked to 50% of the explained variance ($R^2 = 0.50$).

Table 7: Moderation Analysis: Self-concept Clarity as a Moderator in the Relationship Between Emotional Contagion and Mental Health Outcomes (Depression and Anxiety)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t-value	p-value
Emotional Contagion	0.82	0.21	0.58	3.90	< .001
Self-concept Clarity	0.25	0.29	0.14	0.86	0.389
Interaction (Emotional Contagion \times Self-concept Clarity)	-0.27	0.10	-0.33	-2.56	0.011
R^2	0.52				

Self-concept clarity operates as an essential moderating factor that influences how emotional contagion affects someone's mental health, involving depression and anxiety. Lower levels of self-concept clarity enhanced the impact of emotional contagion on mental health outcomes, according to the interaction results ($B = -0.27$, $\beta = -0.33$, $p = 0.011$). Mental health outcome data revealed that the explained variance reached 52% ($R^2 = 0.52$).

Multiple aspects of complex relationships emerge between emotional contagion and individual self-concept and psychological and social impacts. The following section presents the essential study results as well as a comparison of the obtained findings with previous relevant research.

Research has shown that emotional contagiousness is a substantial indicator of youth identity development. An increase in emotional contagion levels resulted in better youth identity formation, according to the positive value of the regression coefficient ($B = 0.80$, $\beta = 0.55$, $p < .001$). Previous studies have confirmed that emotional experiences profoundly shape young people's identity development during adolescence and early adulthood (Barrett & Salovey, 2002). Young

Discussion

Research has investigated how emotional contagion affects youth identity development alongside social behaviors and their relationship with mental health symptoms, which modifies self-concept clarity.

individuals tend to develop their identity through the infectious nature of emotions, as others around them share emotional responses during this developmental stage (Pennebaker & Chung, 2007). Emotional contagion serves as a substantial predictor of identity formation, but self-concept clarity failed to show significance at $p = 0.05$, which suggests that additional variables beyond self-concept clarity determine this aspect of identity development.

The study findings highlight the substantial correlations between emotional contagion and the two social behaviors of social withdrawal and social comparison. The correlation matrix proved that emotional contagion had moderate to strong positive associations with social withdrawal ($r = 0.42, p < .01$) and social comparison ($r = 0.50, p < .01$). Higher emotional contagion leads to negative social behaviors that create feelings of isolation and insecurity, which subsequently lead to social withdrawal along with social comparison behaviors (Vogel et al., 2014). Social behaviors displayed by individuals with lower self-concept clarity demonstrated a stronger effect of emotional contagion according to the results of the moderation analysis ($B = -0.32, \beta = -0.38, p = 0.025$). The research results support previous studies on self-concept clarity, which demonstrate that those with less defined self-perceptions easily fall victim to emotional contagion, which produces heightened negative social actions (Campbell et al., 1996).

Emotional contagion produced substantial associations with depression and anxiety, which were both found to be statistically significant at $p < .01$ ($r = 0.46$) and ($r = 0.43$), respectively. Studies have confirmed that emotional distress develops from emotional contagion in people who easily mirror others' emotional states (Niven et al., 2009). The mental health outcomes of emotional contagion and individuals were influenced by the self-concept clarity measurement. People who demonstrated weak self-concept clarity drifted toward worse mental health status after being affected by emotional contagion ($B = -0.27, \beta = -0.33, p = 0.011$). People with dim self-concept clarity remain particularly susceptible to emotional contagion effects, which adversely affect their mental health (Neff and Germer, 2009).

This study contributes practical knowledge to mental health intervention strategies, particularly those

designed for young individuals. Mental health practitioners should teach emotional regulation techniques because emotional contagion strongly predicts mental health outcomes, so educators' counsellors and clinicians can assist people in managing external emotional states. The establishment of educational programs to boost emotional self-knowledge and personal strength could diminish the negative effects of emotional social influence. Developing self-concept clarity represents a central approach to minimizing emotional contagion responses alongside people who demonstrate weak self-esteem or fluid self-concept systems.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides important knowledge about emotional contagion, but researchers should analyze its findings while acknowledging three key limitations. The study has a cross-sectional research design, so cause-effect relationships cannot be established. Research should use longitudinal methods to explore how emotional contagion, together with self-concept clarity, affects youth progress in developing their identity and mental health over time. The research design utilized self-report instruments, but these tools might have produced biased responses because participants tried to appear favorably. Future research should employ behavioral observation methods together with physiological indicators to measure the direct effects of emotional contagion between people. The predominantly female sample used in this study reduces the potential scope of the generalizability of the obtained results. Additional research should target diverse participant groups to determine how emotional contagion occurs among various population types.

Conclusion


The study reinforces how emotional contagion determines the development of youth identity and social conduct, along with their mental health status. The study shows that self-concept clarity controls the influence of emotional contagion on identity development and mental health through an examination of their connections. Research shows that youth with unclear self-perceptions influence social media emotions, leading to modifications in

their social actions through increased social isolation and unfavorable social measurement activities. A negative change in mental health emerges as people face a higher chance of developing anxiety and depression. Strong self-concept clarity in youth enables them to control networked emotional content on social media platforms, thus protecting their mental wellness despite emotional contagion risks.

The study demonstrates that developing a clear self-concept act as a shield against emotional contagion harm. Robust self-concept clarity enables young people to establish durable personal identities, which makes them less sensitive to erratic emotions appearing on social media platforms. Creative mental health interventions require this discovery to develop effective self-awareness and emotional regulation training methods for young people. Academic and mental health practices can use these discoveries to develop better methods that assist young people in effectively managing digital-age emotional dynamics. The research adds both theoretical understanding about emotional contagion and identity formation while providing useful strategies to deal with negative impacts that benefit youth mental health aspects during social media utilization.

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