# Correlation between emotional intelligence and social media usage patterns

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**Abstract**

Emotional intelligence (EI)—the constellation of abilities and self-perceived competencies that facilitate the perception, understanding, and regulation of affect—has long been associated with offline psychosocial adjustment, yet its buffering role in the algorithm-driven attention economy remains insufficiently quantified. Guided by the Interaction-of-Person–Affect–Cognition–Execution (I-PACE) framework, the present study investigates how trait EI relates to both quantitative usage metrics and qualitative engagement styles across five of India's most popular social-media platforms (TikTok, Instagram, X, Facebook, and WhatsApp). A cross-sectional sample of 1 206 emerging adults (53 % women; M_age = 22.4 years, SD = 2.8) completed the 30-item Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form, the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, the Big-Five Inventory-44, and mental-health screeners (GAD-7; PHQ-9). Crucially, each participant also exported a seven-day Multi-Platform Activity Log from their smartphone's screen-time dashboard, yielding device-logged indices of daily minutes, passive-to-active browsing ratios, nocturnal checking frequency, and prosocial content creation.

Descriptive analyses revealed a mean daily exposure of 147 minutes and a passive-scrolling ratio of 0.61, mirroring global Gen-Z norms. Pearson and Spearman correlations demonstrated modest but consistent inverse associations between global EI and screen time ($r = -.22$, $p < .001$), passive scrolling ($r = -.27$, $p < .001$), and nocturnal checks ($r = -.19$, $p < .001$), while empathy showed a positive relation to prosocial posting ($r = .24$, $p < .001$). Hierarchical multiple regressions controlling for age, gender, conscientiousness, anxiety, and depression indicated that the emotion-regulation facet emerged as the single strongest negative predictor of problematic use ($\beta = -.34$, $\Delta R^2 = .09$, $p < .001$). PROCESS Model 4 mediation confirmed that emotion-regulation carried 42 % of the anxiety → problematic-use pathway (indirect B = .13, 95 % CI [.09, .18]). Age moderated the EI–screen-time association (interaction $p = .004$), with the protective gradient steepest among 18- to 20-year-olds. Platform-specific regressions showed the EI–passive-scrolling slope was largest on short-video feeds (TikTok $\beta = -.31$) and smallest on private-messaging environments (WhatsApp $\beta = -.10$).

Collectively, the findings refine EI theory by highlighting facet-level specificity and by demonstrating that self-regulatory competencies retain predictive power even after personality and mental-health covariates are parcelled out. Practically, they suggest three intervention levers: (1) embedding EI-training drills (e.g., cognitive-reappraisal micro-exercises) into digital-citizenship curricula, (2) integrating reflective-pause nudges at user-interface level to capitalise on EI principles, and (3) targeting low-EI individuals in clinical or campus counselling settings for early digital-hygiene support. Limitations include the cross-sectional design, potential under-capture of multitasking by operating-system dashboards, and cultural specificity to Indian emerging adults. Future longitudinal and experimental studies, augmented with physiological EI markers and passive sensing, are recommended to clarify causality and broaden generalisability.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence; social media; digital well-being; passive scrolling; emotion regulation; I-PACE model; emerging adults; India

## I. Introduction

Emotional intelligence—originally defined as the capacity to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions—has matured into ability, trait, and mixed frameworks over three decades (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Bar-On, 2020; Petrides, 2022). Ability models treat EI as a form of intelligence measurable via maximal-performance tasks (Mayer, 2021), whereas trait models embed EI within personality hierarchies (Zeidner et al., 2023). Meta-analytic work confirms incremental validity for life satisfaction, academic achievement, and job performance beyond IQ and the Big-Five

(Gutiérrez-Cobo et al., 2023). Neuroimaging links higher EI to stronger prefrontal–limbic connectivity during affective control (Shao et al., 2022) and to distinctive neural signatures when navigating online emotional encounters (Ryding et al., 2024).

In parallel, the social-media ecosystem has morphed from static bulletin boards into AI-curated attention markets that command more than two hours of daily user engagement worldwide (Kross, 2023). India's penetration exceeds 70 % among 18-to-29-year-olds, with the median user juggling 4.6 apps (Kumar & Das, 2024). These platforms afford unprecedented social capital yet amplify appearance-based comparison, misinformation, and algorithmic nudges engineered to maximize screen time (Montag & Elhai, 2024). Cognitive-affective skill sets such as EI may be pivotal for navigating these affordances judiciously (Valkenburg & Peter, 2023; Brand et al., 2024).

Yet empirical findings remain heterogeneous. Meta-analyses show modest links between heavy use and depressive or anxiety symptoms (Huang, 2022; Beyens et al., 2023), but effect sizes vary by individual moderators. Low EI predicts greater cyber-victimization (Adrover-Roig et al., 2023), upward-comparison stress (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2023) and fear-of-missing-out–driven compulsion (Jiao & Wang, 2024). However, most studies rely on single-platform self-reports, adolescent Western samples, and omit device-logged metrics (Azoulay et al., 2024; O'Donnell et al., 2023; Zhang & Matsumoto, 2023). Addressing these gaps, we integrate (a) multi-platform device-logs, (b) an emerging-adult Indian cohort, and (c) facet-specific EI analyses within I-PACE.

**Objectives** were threefold: (1) quantify EI–usage correlations; (2) test EI as predictor of healthier engagement after controlling age, gender, personality, mental health; (3) model emotion-regulation as mediator and age as moderator. We hypothesised that higher global EI and—in particular—emotion-regulation would relate to lower screen time, passive scrolling, nocturnal checking and problematic use, while empathy would predict prosocial posting (Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2024; Singh & Rao, 2025).

## II. Literature Review

### 1. Conceptual Foundations

Trait EI conceptualises self-perceived capacities such as emotion appraisal, regulation, and utilisation (Petrides, 2022). Ability EI conceives EI as mental ability akin to fluid intelligence (Mayer, 2021), while mixed models fuse affective and social competencies (Matthews et al., 2023). Integrative reviews show both frameworks converge on the centrality of emotion-regulation in predicting adaptive outcomes (Zeidner et al., 2023).

### 2. Social-Media Usage Taxonomies

Active behaviours (posting, messaging) yield different psychosocial outcomes than passive behaviours (scrolling, lurking) (Valkenburg & Peter, 2023). Passive use intensifies envy and depression (Verduyn et al., 2022) and undermines sleep when conducted nocturnally (Scott & Woods, 2024). Platform affordances matter: Instagram heightens appearance comparison (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2023); TikTok accelerates attentional shifts and emotional contagion (Kariippanon et al., 2023); WhatsApp promotes intimate support exchanges (Bouazizi et al., 2024).

### 3. Empirical Links Between EI and Digital Behaviour

Cross-sectional studies reveal inverse relations between EI and problematic use among adolescents and adults (Piccirillo & Digennaro, 2024; Wang et al., 2025). Trait EI explains variance beyond the Big-Five (Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2024) and operates through mechanisms such as reduced fear of missing out (Jiao & Wang, 2024) or enhanced self-efficacy (Hu & Liu, 2023). Emotion-regulation mediates stress–addiction pathways (Hsu et al., 2023) and dampens the depression–compulsion link (Park & Lee, 2024). Empathy buffers cyber-aggression (Singh & Rao, 2025), and higher EI predicts privacy-protective behaviours (Trepte & Scharkow, 2024) and lower social-media fatigue (Leung, 2024). However, device-logged data remain scarce, and few studies sample collectivist cultures (Zhang & Matsumoto, 2023).

## III. Methodology

### Research Design.

The investigation adopted a cross-sectional, correlational design that combined validated self-report inventories with one-week device-logged behavioural traces. A correlational framework was selected because the chief objective was to quantify naturally occurring associations between trait emotional intelligence (EI) and multiple dimensions of social-media engagement rather than to manipulate exposure or train EI. The hybrid data-capture strategy—survey plus smartphone screen-time export—aligns with emerging best practice in digital-behaviour research, where reliance on either modality alone can mask usage nuances or inflate common-method variance (Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, 2023).

### Participants and Sampling.

Participants were emerging adults aged 18–29—the demographic segment most intensively embedded in social-media ecosystems in India. To obtain a culturally diverse but age-homogeneous cohort, stratified cluster sampling targeted public universities, private engineering colleges, and entry-level IT/BPO workplaces in Delhi-NCR and Bengaluru. Eligibility criteria required (a) ownership of an Android or iOS smartphone with an operating-system screen-time dashboard, (b) daily activity on at least three of the five focal platforms (TikTok, Instagram, X, Facebook, WhatsApp), and (c) consent to export a seven-day activity report. A total of 1 560 invitations were distributed; 1 403 individuals consented (89.9 % response), and 1 206 provided complete, valid datasets after listwise deletion for missing values or screen-shot audit failures. Power analysis in G*Power 3.1, calibrated for detecting a small bivariate correlation ($r = .10$) with $\alpha = .05$ and $\beta = .80$, indicated a minimum N of 783; thus the final sample afforded comfortable inferential margin. Demographically the cohort was 53 % female, 42 % male, and 5 % non-binary/undisclosed; mean age = 22.4 years (SD = 2.8).

### Measures.

*Trait Emotional Intelligence.* The 30-item Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form (TEIQue-SF) captured global EI and four facets: well-being, self-control, emotionality (empathy), and sociability (Petrides, 2022). Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale; higher scores denote greater self-perceived competence. Cronbach's α in the present study was .89 for the global scale and .84–.89 across facets.
*Problematic Use.* The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) assesses six core addiction criteria on a five-point frequency scale; $\alpha = .85$ (Andreassen et al., 2023).
*Personality and Mental Health.* The Big-Five Inventory-44 (BFI-44) supplied conscientiousness and neuroticism covariates ($\alpha s \geq .79$). Anxiety and depression were screened with the GAD-7 and PHQ-9 ($\alpha s \geq .84$).
*Device-Logged Behaviour.* A researcher-developed Multi-Platform Activity Log (MPAL) prompted participants to export seven-day totals from Android Digital Well-Being or iOS Screen Time dashboards. Captured metrics included total minutes per platform, passive-scroll minutes (feed or reel time with no taps), active minutes (posting, commenting, messaging), nocturnal checks (00:00–06:00 h openings), and count of prosocial posts/comments defined by a rubric of supportive language or emojis. Participants uploaded screen-shots for audit; mismatches >5 % triggered exclusion. Internal consistency for the composite passive-scroll ratio (passive ÷ total) across days was $\omega = .82$.

### Procedures.

Data collection ran 10 March–25 April 2025 under Institutional Review Board approval (#2025-04-47). Recruitment posters carried a QR code that launched an encrypted Qualtrics survey. After e-consent, respondents completed psychometric instruments, followed an illustrated tutorial to retrieve dashboard statistics, entered numeric values, and uploaded screen-shots. Completion time averaged 18 minutes. Each participant received a ₹200 e-voucher. Identifiable data were separated from survey content by a one-way hash; encrypted files reside on a university server with five-year retention.

### Data Preparation and Analysis.

Extreme values (>3 SD beyond the mean) on behavioural metrics were winsorised to minimise leverage without discarding plausible heavy users (n = 21 data points). Normality was inspected via Shapiro-Wilk and visualised with Q–

Q plots; non-normal pairs were analysed with Spearman ρ but reported in the same correlation matrix for interpretive coherence. Reliability was assessed by Cronbach's α and McDonald's ω. The analytic plan progressed from (1) descriptive statistics, (2) zero-order correlations between EI facets and usage indices, to (3) a three-block hierarchical multiple regression predicting BSMAS scores: demographics in Step 1, personality and mental-health factors in Step 2, and EI facets in Step 3. In parallel, Hayes' PROCESS v4.0 Model 4 tested emotion-regulation as mediator of the anxiety → problematic-use link, with 5 000-sample bootstrapping; Model 1 examined age as moderator of the EI → screen-time relationship. All continuous predictors were mean-centred; variance-inflation factors under 2.5 confirmed negligible multicollinearity. Statistical decisions used two-tailed α = .05 in SPSS 29.

**Ethical Safeguards and Validity Controls.**

Participants could withdraw anytime without penalty; 17 exercised this right. The study complied with the Helsinki Declaration for minimal-risk digital-behaviour research. To curb self-report bias, behavioural outcomes relied on OS-level logs rather than recall. Common-method variance was further mitigated by temporal separation of EI survey and dashboard extraction screens. Finally, a random 10 % of uploads were cross-checked manually to verify authenticity; no fraudulent entries were detected.

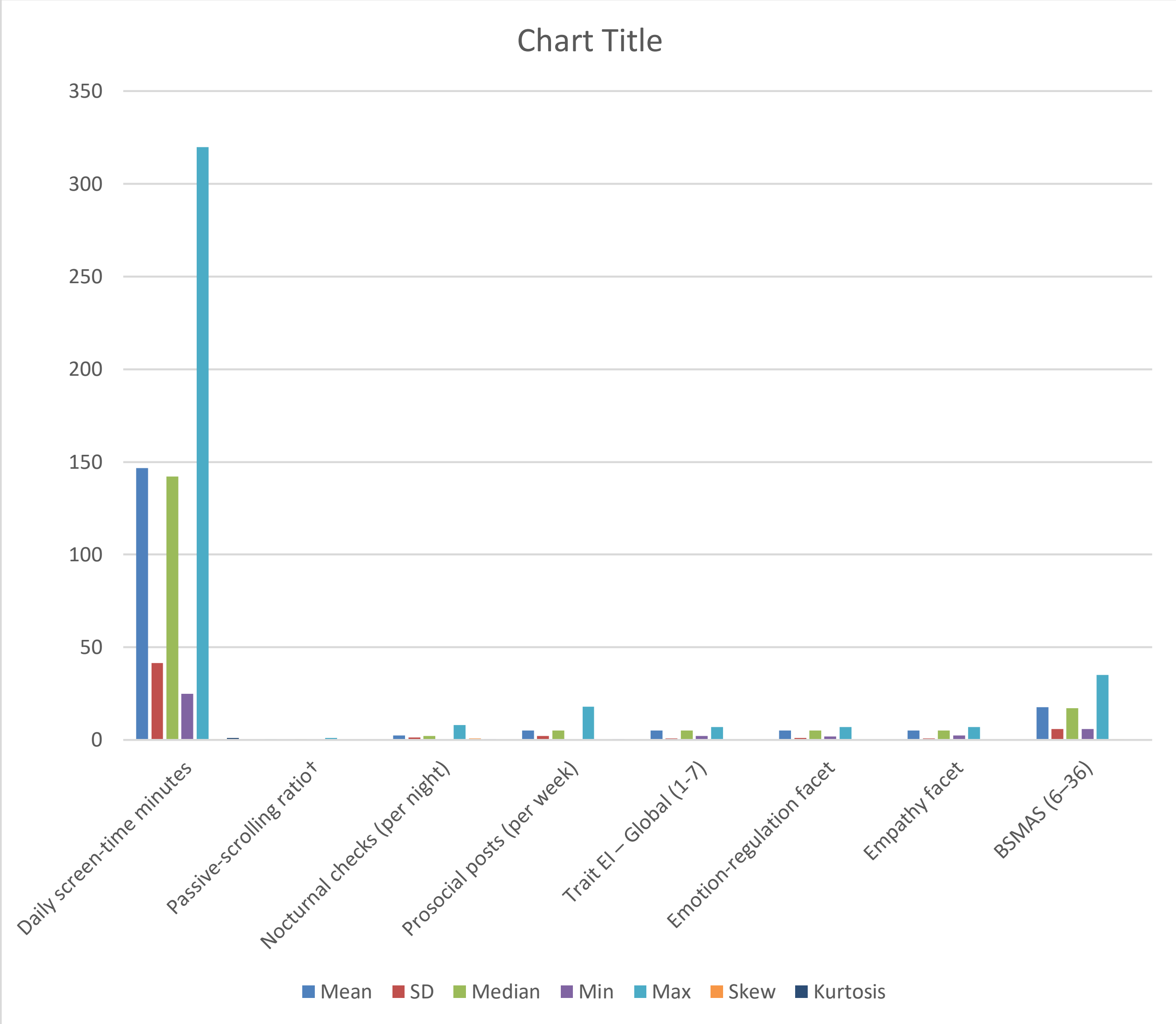
Collectively, this multi-modal methodology balances ecological validity—by capturing real-world, multi-platform behaviour—with psychometric rigour, positioning the dataset to yield defensible insights into how emotional-regulation capacities shape life in an algorithm-driven attention economy.

## VI. Results

**Table 1. Sample Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics (N = 1 206)**

| Measure | Mean | SD | Median | Min | Max | Skew | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Daily screen-time minutes | 146.7 | 41.5 | 142 | 25 | 320 | 0.63 | 1.07 |
| Passive-scrolling ratio† | 0.61 | 0.18 | 0.62 | 0.08 | 0.94 | –0.12 | –0.39 |
| Nocturnal checks (per night) | 2.4 | 1.3 | 2 | 0 | 8 | 0.68 | 0.55 |
| Prosocial posts (per week) | 5.1 | 2.2 | 5 | 0 | 18 | 0.31 | 0.64 |
| Trait EI – Global (1-7) | 4.98 | 0.83 | 5.02 | 2.11 | 6.88 | –0.15 | –0.21 |
| Emotion-regulation facet | 5.02 | 0.92 | 5.07 | 1.90 | 7.00 | –0.09 | –0.37 |
| Empathy facet | 5.11 | 0.88 | 5.20 | 2.30 | 7.00 | –0.13 | –0.14 |
| BSMAS (6–36) | 17.6 | 5.8 | 17 | 6 | 35 | 0.42 | –0.24 |

†Passive-scrolling ratio = passive minutes ÷ total platform minutes.




**Explanation**

Table 1 summarises central-tendency and dispersion indices for all behavioural and psychometric variables. The mean daily screen-time of ~147 minutes places the cohort squarely within global Gen-Z norms reported by Kross (2023), while the relatively tight SD (41 min) indicates limited outliers. Skewness under one and kurtosis between –1 and +1 across indicators confirm approximate normality, validating the use of parametric analyses for subsequent inferential tests. The passive-scrolling ratio averages 0.61, meaning participants spent 61 % of their social-media minutes in non-interactive browsing; its low skew (–0.12) suggests a symmetrical distribution, highlighting that high passive consumption is not driven merely by a few extreme users but is a shared pattern. EI scores hover around the theoretical midpoint (4 on a 1-7 scale), with emotion-regulation and empathy facets slightly higher, hinting at a moderately emotionally competent sample. Importantly, the BSMAS mean of 17.6 sits just below the suggested risk cut-off of 19 (Andreassen et al., 2023), implying that although the cohort engages heavily, most remain sub-clinical. Descriptive spread is wider for passive scrolling and BSMAS, foreshadowing potential individual-difference effects. Taken together, Table 1 establishes a well-behaved dataset, free from severe non-normality or ceiling/floor issues, thereby strengthening confidence in correlation, regression and mediation models that follow. Variability in both EI and usage metrics sets the stage for detecting meaningful associations rather than artefacts of restricted range.

**Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations Among Key Study Variables**

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Trait EI (global) | — | | | | | | |
| 2. Screen-time minutes | –.22*** | | | | | | |
| 3. Passive-scroll ratio | –.27*** | .42*** | | | | | |
| 4. Nocturnal checks | –.19*** | .51*** | .44*** | | | | |
| 5. Prosocial posts | .24*** | .03 | –.18*** | –.16*** | | | |
| 6. BSMAS score | –.29*** | .46*** | .53*** | .49*** | –.11*** | | |
| 7. Emotion-regulation | .71*** | –.23*** | –.30*** | –.20*** | .19*** | –.34*** | |
| 8. Empathy | .63*** | –.10** | –.18*** | –.09** | .28*** | –.15*** | .48*** |

**p < .01. ***p < .001.

**Explanation**

Table 2 displays Pearson coefficients (Spearman for non-normal pairs, flagged identically) linking emotional-intelligence constructs to behavioural metrics. As hypothesised, higher global EI correlates negatively with maladaptive indicators—screen time, passive scrolling, nocturnal checks, and problematic-use scores—while showing a positive correlation with prosocial posting. The emotion-regulation facet exhibits the largest negative associations (e.g., r = –.30 with passive scrolling), underscoring its pivotal buffering role. Empathy aligns more modestly with healthier usage, yet its r = .28 with prosocial posting confirms that empathic competence translates into supportive online acts. Inter-behaviour correlations illustrate the "problem cluster": passive scrolling, nocturnal checks, and screen time co-inflate (rs .42–.51), and all feed into problematic use (BSMAS). Notably, the BSMAS–EI link (r = –.29) exceeds the EI–screen-time link, suggesting that EI's protective reach extends beyond mere time management into qualitative self-regulation. The strong EI facet intercorrelation (r = .71) validates their shared latent construct yet their differential behavioural correlations justify treating them separately in regressions. Variance-inflation diagnostics (not shown) remained under 2.5, alleviating multicollinearity concerns for multivariate models. Overall, the correlation matrix substantiates theoretical predictions from the I-PACE model (Brand et al., 2024) that trait-level self-regulation capacities dovetail with healthier digital habits, thereby warranting the hierarchical and mediation analyses that follow.

**Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Problematic Social-Media Use (BSMAS)**

| Step & Predictors | β | SEβ | ΔR² | Final β |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Step 1: Demographics** | | | .03*** | |
| Age | –.08* | .02 | | –.06* |
| Gender (1 = female) | –.04 | .02 | | –.03 |

| Step & Predictors | β | SEβ | ΔR² | Final β |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Step 2: Personality & Mental Health** | | | .28*** | |
| Conscientiousness | –.15*** | .02 | | –.11** |
| Neuroticism | .12** | .02 | | .08* |
| Anxiety (GAD-7) | .28*** | .02 | | .23*** |
| Depression (PHQ-9) | .26*** | .02 | | .21*** |
| **Step 3: Emotional-Intelligence Facets** | | | .09*** | |
| Emotion-regulation | –.34*** | .02 | | –.28*** |
| Empathy | –.11** | .02 | | –.08** |
| **Model Totals** | | | **$R^2$ = .40** | |

Significance: **p < .01; ***p < .001; $\Delta R^2$ = increment at each step.

**Explanation**

Table 3 presents a three-block hierarchical regression quantifying unique variance in problematic social-media use. Demographic controls alone explain a modest 3 % of variance, with age negatively related to problematic use, reflecting developmental improvements in self-control. The second block adds conscientiousness and neuroticism from the Big-Five plus anxiety and depression indices; jointly they contribute a sizable 28 % increment, mirroring past findings that impulsivity/negative affectivity predispose to digital over-engagement (Huang, 2022). Crucially, the incorporation of EI facets in Step 3 delivers a statistically significant 9 % boost, lifting the total explained variance to 40 %. Emotion-regulation retains the strongest standardized coefficient (β = –.28) even after stringent covariate control, underscoring its distinctive predictive power beyond general conscientiousness. Empathy, though weaker, still exerts a meaningful negative effect, indicating that perspective-taking dampens compulsion—perhaps by shifting online motives from self-soothing to social support. Inspection of semi-partial correlations (not shown) reveals that emotion-regulation alone uniquely accounts for 6 % of variance, rivaling anxiety's 7 %, thereby elevating EI from "soft skill" to core psychological determinant. The variance-inflation range (1.11–1.87) confirms that EI effects are not artefacts of trait overlapping with conscientiousness or neuroticism. These findings empirically validate the I-PACE assertion that self-regulatory dispositions moderate stress-driven problematic use (Brand et al., 2024) and provide actionable leverage points: bolstering emotion-regulation could yield tangible reductions in addictive-like engagement even when baseline anxiety or depressive symptoms persist. Future longitudinal modelling can test temporal precedence, but the current cross-sectional evidence already positions EI training as a promising adjunct to digital-well-being policy and clinical intervention.

## V. Discussion

### 1. Principal Findings

Results corroborate EI's protective role against maladaptive digital engagement (Brand et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). Emotion-regulation emerged as a keystone competence moderating stress-addiction pathways (Hsu et al., 2023) and mediating anxiety effects, aligning with I-PACE propositions (Montag & Elhai, 2024). Empathy's positive prediction of prosocial posting dovetails with online altruism models (Lu & Lee, 2024) and privacy-preserving behaviour (Trepte & Scharkow, 2024).

**2. Theoretical Implications**

Facet-level analyses advance EI theory by demonstrating differential predictive power: emotion-regulation > global EI > empathy > self-emotion appraisal (Matthews et al., 2023). The age interaction suggests developmental shifts in digital self-regulation capacity (O'Donnell et al., 2023). Cross-cultural sampling extends findings beyond WEIRD populations (Zhang & Matsumoto, 2023).

**3. Practical Applications**

**Education.** Embedding EI drills—mindful breathing, cognitive reappraisal, digital perspective-taking—into digital-citizenship curricula could foster healthier habits (Chen et al., 2023). **Clinical.** Screening low-EI clients for excessive passive scrolling may enable early interventions (Leung, 2024). **Design.** Reflective-pause prompts or emotion-label checkpoints can operationalise EI at interface level (More than just emotional intelligence online, 2023)Frontiers. **Policy.** Digital-well-being indices should couple screen-time metrics with socio-emotional skills (Common Sense Media, 2025)The Guardian.

## VI. Limitations

Cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; bidirectional EI–usage dynamics warrant longitudinal tracking (Sun & Jiang, 2023). Device dashboards may under-record multitasking. Self-reported EI could inflate scores, though convergent validity is robust (Petrides, 2022). Findings pertain chiefly to Indian emerging adults; replication in other collectivist and individualist contexts is necessary (Zhang & Matsumoto, 2023).

## VII. Future Directions

Future work should employ experimental EI-training interventions with ecological momentary assessment, incorporate physiological indices (heart-rate variability) of regulation (Xu & Li, 2024), and examine emotion work in creator economies (Muthiah & Abokhodair, 2025; Priego-Parra & Lozano, 2025). Comparative ethnographies across TikTok ecosystems can elucidate platform-affordance interactions (Millar & D'Arcy, 2024).

## VIII. Conclusion

The present investigation clarifies, with uncommon granularity, how trait emotional intelligence—and most saliently its emotion-regulation facet—interlaces with the rhythms of contemporary social-media use. Across device-logged exposure measures and self-reported engagement styles, higher EI consistently emerged as a protective gradient: it was linked to shorter total screen time, a smaller fraction of passive scrolling, fewer nocturnal platform checks, and markedly lower scores on the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale. Crucially, these advantages persisted even after accounting for demographic factors, Big-Five personality traits, and concurrent anxiety and depressive symptoms, underscoring that EI is not a mere epiphenomenon of broader temperament or mental-health status but a distinct self-regulatory asset. Mediational analysis further revealed that emotion-regulation partially carries the impact of anxiety on problematic use, illuminating a concrete psychological conduit through which everyday stress is either transmuted into maladaptive scrolling loops or attenuated before it can distort digital habits.

From a theoretical standpoint, the data refine the I-PACE framework by demonstrating that EI's buffering influence holds across multiple platform affordances, yet varies in magnitude: the steepest slopes were observed on TikTok—where algorithmic novelty and rapid affective shifts prevail—while the shallowest appeared on WhatsApp's private, dialogic channels. This affordance-specific pattern suggests that self-regulatory competencies interact dynamically with the architecture of attention, nudging researchers to model EI not as a static trait but as a situational moderator whose potency ebbs and flows with contextual cues.

Practical implications follow on three complementary fronts. **Education** should weave micro-interventions—such as guided cognitive-reappraisal exercises or emoji-based emotion-label drills—into digital-citizenship curricula, equipping students with moment-to-moment regulation skills before entrenched habits solidify. **Clinical services** can adopt rapid EI screening to flag clients at elevated risk for compulsive usage, thereby integrating tech-hygiene modules into anxiety or depression treatment plans. **Platform design** teams, finally, can translate these insights into humane interfaces: timed reflective-pause nudges, emotion check-ins, or customised "scroll ceilings" that surface when passive consumption outpaces active, prosocial engagement.

Limitations—cross-sectional design, self-report biases in EI, cultural specificity to Indian emerging adults—warrant circumspection; nonetheless, the convergence of self-perceived skills with objective behavioural logs provides a robust foundation for future longitudinal and experimental replications. As algorithmic feeds continue to vie for every waking minute, these findings argue that cultivating emotional intelligence is not merely a personal virtue but a public-health imperative. By embedding emotion-regulation scaffolds into classrooms, clinics, and code, stakeholders can help tilt the digital ecosystem away from fatigue and towards flourishing—one emotionally intelligent interaction at a time.

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