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VOLITIONAL SELF-REGULATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS: THE ROLES OF IMPULSIVITY AND EMOTION REGULATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a psychological analysis of volitional self-regulation as a determinant of adolescents' social media use, with impulsivity and emotion regulation considered as the key mechanisms through which this influence is realized. Drawing on Kuhl's theory of action control, the process model of emotion regulation and the I-PACE model of specific Internet-use disorders, problematic social media use is interpreted not as a property of the technology itself but as a breakdown of the adolescent's capacity to maintain an intention in the face of competing impulses and negative affect. The structural components of volitional self-regulation, the dimensions of impulsivity and the strategies of emotion regulation are compared with their behavioural manifestations in the digital environment, and a set of diagnostic instruments is substantiated. As a result of the study, a model of direct, impulsive and emotional pathways linking volitional self-regulation with social media use is proposed, together with a typology of risk profiles and the corresponding directions of psychological support. The findings serve to improve the prevention of problematic social media use in general secondary schools and to foster adolescents' digital well-being.

Keywords: adolescence, volitional self-regulation, action control, action orientation, impulsivity, negative urgency, emotion regulation, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, problematic social media use, digital well-being.

Social networks have become one of the main spaces in which modern

adolescents communicate, learn about the world and construct their identity. Messaging applications, short-video platforms and photo-sharing services accompany the adolescent from waking until late at night, and the boundary between online and offline life is increasingly blurred. At the same time, adolescence is a period of uneven brain maturation: subcortical systems sensitive to reward and social evaluation develop earlier than the prefrontal mechanisms of cognitive control, which makes adolescents particularly vulnerable to immediate stimuli [1].

Modern platforms are designed precisely around such stimuli: notifications, likes, endless feeds and unpredictable rewards constantly invite the user to return. It is therefore not surprising that a considerable proportion of adolescents report difficulty in limiting their time online, and that problematic use is associated with anxiety, depressive symptoms, sleep disturbances and lower academic performance [2]. Uzbek researchers likewise note that adolescents are especially prone to social media addiction because of their need for peer approval and their susceptibility to social comparison, which in turn is accompanied by anxiety and low self-esteem [3].

Yet adolescents placed in the same digital environment use it in strikingly different ways: some use social networks purposefully and stop when they intend to, whereas others lose control over their own behaviour. This difference points to the role of internal regulatory resources of personality, first of all volitional self-regulation, and to the mechanisms through which it operates. Contemporary models of Internet-use disorders emphasize that such behaviour develops through the interaction of personal predispositions, affective and cognitive responses and reduced executive control [4].

The purpose of the study is to substantiate theoretically the relationship between volitional self-regulation and social media use among adolescents, to determine the roles of impulsivity and emotion regulation in this relationship and to propose a model and directions of psychological support.



Volitional Self-Regulation as a Psychological Mechanism of Adolescent Behaviour. In the psychological tradition, volition is understood as the conscious regulation of behaviour that ensures the performance of an action when its motivation is insufficient or when it conflicts with other motives; according to V.A. Ivannikov, the essence of volitional regulation lies in the arbitrary change of the motivation of an action by attaching additional meaning to it [5]. Volitional self-regulation is thus not merely the suppression of desires but the ability to sustain one's own goals and to restructure the motivational situation in their favour.

J. Kuhl's theory of action control develops this idea and distinguishes action orientation from state orientation [6]. An action-oriented person quickly moves from intention to action, keeps the goal active despite distractions and disengages from failures; a state-oriented person becomes stuck in rumination, hesitates and has difficulty in returning to the planned activity. Within volitional self-regulation the following components are distinguished: self-motivation (the ability to make an action attractive to oneself), attention control (protection of the intention from distractors), emotion control (the regulation of mood that interferes with action) and decision-related control (timely initiation and completion of an action). The degree of action orientation is reliably measured with the Action Control Scale ACS-90 [7]. In Uzbek psychology, E.G'. G'oziyev regards adolescence as the period in which the arbitrary, volitional regulation of behaviour is intensively formed against the background of the adolescent's growing striving for independence [8], and recent studies show that the formation of adolescents' volitional qualities depends substantially on the conditions of education and upbringing [9].

In the context of social media use, volitional self-regulation is manifested in specific everyday situations: putting the phone aside when it is time to do homework, not opening an application after a notification arrives, and stopping scrolling at the planned time. Each of these situations is a conflict between a long-term intention and

an immediate stimulus, and the outcome of this conflict is determined by two further mechanisms – impulsivity and emotion regulation.

Impulsivity and Emotion Regulation in the Structure of Social Media Use. Impulsivity is a tendency to act rapidly and without sufficient consideration of consequences. In the three-factor structure of the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale, attentional, motor and non-planning impulsivity are distinguished [10], while the UPPS model identifies urgency, lack of premeditation, lack of perseverance and sensation seeking [11]. Of particular importance for the digital environment is urgency – the tendency to act rashly under strong emotion: it is in moments of boredom, irritation or anxiety that the adolescent automatically reaches for the phone.

Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which a person influences which emotions they experience, when and how they experience and express them. J. Gross and O. John showed that the habitual use of cognitive reappraisal is associated with better well-being, whereas habitual expressive suppression is associated with poorer emotional and social functioning [12]. Difficulties in emotion regulation – non-acceptance of one's emotions, limited access to regulation strategies and difficulty in goal-directed behaviour when upset – are assessed multidimensionally with the DERS scale [13].

For an adolescent with insufficient regulatory skills, social media becomes a ready external means of changing mood: a feed quickly distracts from unpleasant experiences, and approval from peers temporarily raises self-esteem. D. Kardefelt-Winther describes this as compensatory Internet use, in which online activity serves as a way of coping with negative emotions and unmet needs [14]. The short-term relief reinforces the behaviour, while the underlying problem remains unresolved. The constructs under consideration and their manifestations are compared in Table 1.

Table 1.

Psychological constructs and their manifestations in adolescents' social media use

Construct	Key components	Manifestation in social media use	Diagnostic instrument
Volitional self-regulation	Action vs state orientation; self-motivation; attention and decision-related control	Stopping use at the planned time; returning to learning tasks after a distraction	ACS-90 [7]
Impulsivity	Attentional, motor and non-planning impulsivity; urgency; lack of perseverance	Automatic checking of notifications; unplanned "one more video"; switching between applications	BIS-11 [10], UPPS [11]
Emotion regulation	Cognitive reappraisal; expressive suppression; regulation difficulties	Using social media to escape negative emotions; night-time use after conflicts	ERQ [12], DERS [13]
Problematic social media use	Salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, relapse	Loss of control over time online; conflicts with study and family	BSMAS [15]

As the table shows, each construct has observable behavioural indicators in the digital environment and a standardized means of assessment, which makes it possible to verify the proposed relationships empirically.

A Model of the Relationship Between Volitional Self-Regulation and Social Media Use. On the basis of the analysis above, a model is proposed in which volitional self-regulation influences social media use through the following pathways:

1) the direct pathway – an action-oriented adolescent forms clear intentions regarding the time and purpose of use and maintains them, so that use remains instrumental;

2) the impulsive pathway – a high level of volitional self-regulation weakens the transformation of momentary urges (a notification, boredom) into action, whereas with

low self-regulation impulsivity becomes the leading determinant of behaviour;

3) the emotional pathway – volitional self-regulation includes emotion control, which supports adaptive strategies such as reappraisal; when these are lacking, social media takes over the function of mood regulation;

4) the interaction effect – the greatest risk is expected when state orientation, high negative urgency and a predominance of expressive suppression occur together, since in this case both the internal brake and the internal means of coping with negative emotions are weakened.

For empirical verification of the model it is advisable to conduct a study among adolescents aged 13–17 using the instruments listed in Table 1, with correlation and regression analysis, testing of mediation effects with the bootstrap method and structural equation modelling. On the basis of the combination of indicators, the following risk profiles can be distinguished (Table 2).

Table 2.

Risk profiles of adolescents and directions of psychological support

Profile	**Psychological characteristics**	**Pattern of social media use**	**Focus of psychological support**
Adaptive	Action orientation, low impulsivity, predominance of reappraisal	Purposeful, time-limited use	Prevention; development of digital literacy
Impulsive	High urgency and attentional impulsivity with adequate emotion regulation	Frequent checking, constant distraction during study	Stimulus control, notification management, implementation intentions
Emotionally dysregulated	Predominance of suppression, high regulation difficulties	Compensatory and escape use, night-time use	Training in emotion regulation and reappraisal; psychological counselling

Combined risk	State orientation, high impulsivity, maladaptive emotion regulation	Loss of control, conflicts with study and family	Individual counselling, involvement of parents, referral to a specialist if necessary

The following psychological and pedagogical recommendations are proposed for working with adolescents:

1. Diagnostics instead of prohibition. The school psychologist identifies the adolescent's profile and builds support on its basis, since a total ban on devices does not develop internal regulation.

2. Implementation intentions. Adolescents are taught to formulate plans of the type "if… then…" (for example, "if I sit down to do homework, then I put the phone in another room"), which transfer control from willpower to the situation [16].

3. Emotional literacy. Exercises in recognizing and naming emotions and in cognitive reappraisal reduce the need to use social media as a means of escape.

4. Stimulus control. Together with the adolescent, notifications are switched off, screen-time limits are set and the phone is excluded from the bedroom at night.

5. Cooperation with the family. Parents are informed about the regulatory functions of social media and serve as models of conscious device use.

In conclusion, adolescents' social media use is determined not only by the properties of the digital environment but also, to a large extent, by the development of their volitional self-regulation. Impulsivity and emotion regulation act as the key mechanisms of this relationship: impulsivity determines how easily a momentary urge turns into action, and emotion regulation determines whether social media becomes a means of escaping negative experiences. The proposed model of direct, impulsive and emotional pathways, together with the typology of risk profiles, enables the psychologist to move from general restrictions to differentiated support. Its practical application serves to prevent problematic social media use and to form a culture of

conscious, self-regulated behaviour in the digital environment among adolescents.

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