

The role of social media in toxic relationships: A cross-sectional study

Dr. Sharmila Gunpal

Associate Professor of Psychology, D.N.COLLEGE, HISAR

Abstract

Social networking is becoming an increasingly important aspect of modern relationships. It serves as a platform for communication, connection, and social interactions. It can, however, be a source of toxicity in relationships, leading to mistrust, insecurity, and manipulation. This study paper investigates the impact of social media on toxic relationships, focusing on how it might foster unhealthy comparisons and exaggerated expectations of what relationships should be like. The more time someone spent on social media, the more likely it was that their mental health and well-being would decline, and the quality of their relationships would suffer. According to the findings, social media has the ability to establish an unhealthy power dynamic, encourage cyberbullying, and raise the risk of betrayal. Aside from that, the research article seeks to recommend techniques for couples to utilize social media in a constructive way, fostering healthy communication and relationships.

Keywords: *toxic relationships, social media, insecurity, emotional well-being, communication*

Introduction

Social media is a platform that facilitates global communication, collaboration, and sharing. It consists of websites and applications that allow users to create and share text, images, and videos. Users can also connect with others via social media, both individually and in groups. It has evolved into one of the most popular and effective platforms for connecting with others and building connections. Social media has drastically altered how people interact and communicate with one another. It has created a completely new universe of possibilities for corporations, entrepreneurs, and individuals alike.

It has had a significant impact on how people connect and communicate. Technology has made it easier to maintain ties with people, exchange ideas, and form relationships with others. It has also helped firms to reach out to their target markets more efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, social media has aided the expansion of the digital economy by offering forums

for entrepreneurs to launch and advertise their products and services. As a result, social media has emerged as a vital part which is shaping today's life.

It has impacted the life in both positive as well as in negative manner. It has facilitated global communication and enhanced accessibility. On the other hand, it has boosted cyberbullying and other sorts of internet criminality. Social media usage should be done with prudence, and users should be made aware of any potential issues. Social media has also had an impact on our interpersonal interactions. If not used properly, it can lead to disconnection and a lack of communication between people. It's crucial to remember that meaningful relationships can only be formed and maintained through face-to-face engagement and conversation.

Rationale

The reason for conducting this research on "The role of social media in toxic relationships" is because social media has been seen to cause people to disconnect from real-life relationships. In recent years, social media has changed how we live and interact with the outside world. Sadly, in most situations, this has led to a disconnection from interpersonal relationships in the real world. Individuals are spending more time on their phones and laptops than they are with their families and friends. This has caused a dearth of deep connections and a sense of loneliness.

Social media has also become a breeding ground for envy and comparison. People are constantly bombarded with pictures and messages of what other people are accomplishing, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and a lack of confidence in their talents. The top three explanations provided for social media's negative impact on emotions are frustration, despair, and social comparison. Couples spend less time together in real life as a result, and they are more easily distracted.

As a result, our research will shed insight into how social media can feed toxic relationships, as well as solutions for managing these connections.

Literature Review

Many articles are available that demonstrate how social media addiction affects people and has a detrimental impact on their personalities and interpersonal relationships. Some of them are illustrated below:

According to (Christensen, 2018), social media is widely accessible to most individuals worldwide. People throughout the world are more linked than ever before, thanks to social media's pervasiveness in daily life. This could lead to the misconception that people are happy as a result of their increased social connections. But the social connections that we have in the

virtual world, offer a different narrative, especially when these connections affect our offline interpersonal relationships.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the correlation between extreme social media use on person's emotional quality of social associations and health. Using theory “The Uses & Gratification Theory”, the secondary objective is to examine whether the user's emotional health, such as fear of missing out (FOMO), melancholy, depression, and anxiety, loneliness, mediates the association between social media use and the quality of social relationships.

- **Theory**

Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) is the most popular idea employed to comprehend why individuals interact on social media. *Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch* developed this theory in 1973 and utilized it to investigate why people interact with the media and how that interaction satisfies their needs. In conclusion, U&G focuses on consumers' reasons for adopting particular media kinds and the enjoyment they derive from using them.

Uses & Gratifications Social Media Model

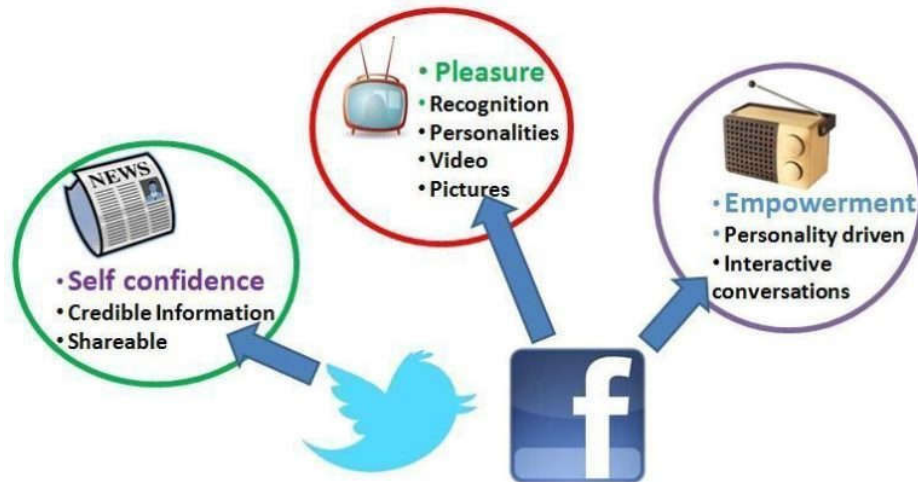


Fig 1.: Uses & Gratification Social Media Model

Source: (Velardo, 2014)

Hertlein (2012) has shown that adhering to the rules of connection with online peers has many negative effects on daily functioning, including lowering work efficiency, decreasing the value of offline relationships, and increasing the likelihood of Internet addiction. *Abbasi and Alghamdi* (2017) found that incorrect usage of social media can have negative impacts on society, such as social isolation, mistrust in personal relationships, betrayal, a lack of community closeness, addiction to social networks, breakups, and even divorce.

According to a report by (Emily A. Vogles, 2020), in the U.S., for some couples, social media is the source of irritation and dispute.

- **Statistics**

23% of those whose partners use social media report feeling envious or uncertain about their relationship as a result of how their partners interact with others on these platforms, while 34% of those aged 18 to 29 report the same. Additionally, some social media users now discuss and research past relationships on these platforms. 53% of social media users say they have checked up on an ex-lover or intimate partner, while 28% say they have shared or discussed information about their relationships or dating lives on these platforms. Even more adult users under 30 have admitted to looking in on a former relationship via social media (70%) or posting about their own romantic life (48%). This has affected their current relationship, resulting in frustration and instability in their private lives.

People may be tempted to examine their partner's phone because phones are so distracting. Nonetheless, the majority of the public agrees that digital surveillance in relationships is inappropriate. 7 out of 10 Americans, regardless of their relationship status, believe that snooping through their partner's phone without permission is either uncommon or never acceptable. 34% of adult partners confess to having secretly accessed their partner's phone, with women more likely than men to admit to doing so (42% vs. 25%), causing significant problems in their lives and in some cases leading to divorce.

According to (Fazida Karim, 2020), social media has indisputably occupied on significant status in the lives of numerous individuals. Social networking has a lot of fun and pleasant for time giving, but mental health is highly impacted by it. According to various surveys females

are more likely to be impacted from this. The impact of social media on mental health is becoming ice breaking topic in today's world.

Social networking is an important aspect of mental health protection. Social ties influence mortality risk, health behaviors, physical health, mental and behavioral health, and physical health. The 'Displaced Behavior Theory' could explain the connection between social media and mental health.

- **Theory**

According to the 'Displaced Behavior Theory,' a person who spends more time on leisure activities such as spent less time on face-to-face social linking compare to social media. Both are beneficial for the prevention of mental illnesses.

Yet, 'Sociological theories' have revealed that utilizing social media has a damaging influence on intellectual strength by varying how users perceive, accomplish, and participate in their social network.

Numerous studies on the stated that there is negative impact of frequent use of social media which includes anxiety, stress and depression. In addition, social media can exert a great deal of pressure on users to project the stereotype that others want to see and to achieve the greatest possible popularity.

According to (Skye Bouffard, 2021), people can use social media to share information, form networks, and interact with one another. Building relationships on social media is easy, but it can be challenging for individuals in romantic relationships. An increasing corpus of investigation suggests that social media also impact the relationships as it requires less time and attention as compare to any relation

- **Model**

Using structural equation modeling, researchers discovered that increased social media usage reduces relationship satisfaction, leading to an increase in both conflicts and unfavorable outcomes. Reduced relationship satisfaction and greater disagreements were followed by addicted use of social media.

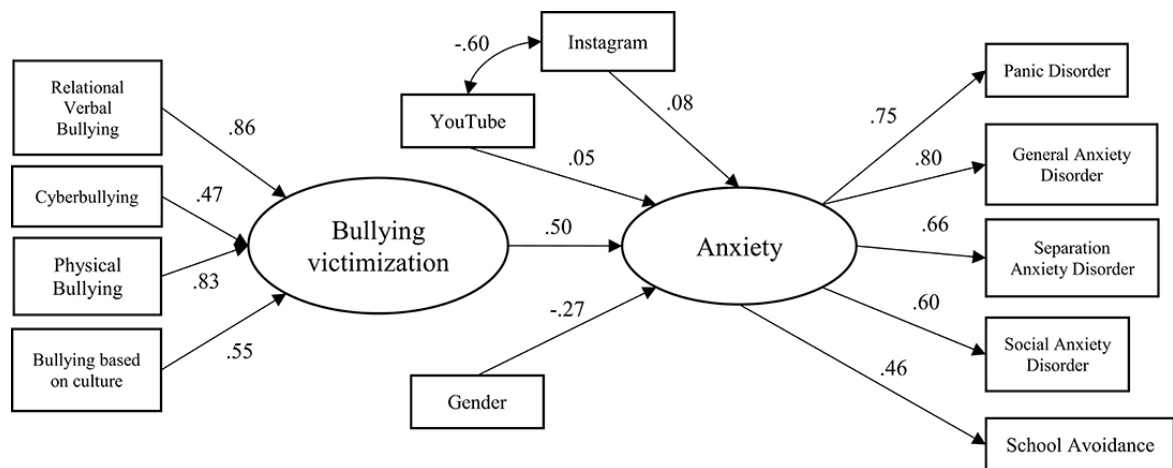


Fig 2: Structural equation model between variables.

Source: (Kaloeti et al., 2021)

In contrast, the willingness to make ordinary sacrifices for the relationship partner had a beneficial on relationship in long term, which lowered the chance of fights. Taken together, the research has discovered routes through which excessive social media use can harm both relationships and personal well-being, as well as a sacrifice as a possible psychological element to minimize the negative impacts. These results are believed to contribute to our comprehension of how social media influences romantic relationships and to emphasize the interacting effects of social media and relationships on creating unforeseen, negative significances.

Problems

According to research (Moore, 2022), the extensive use of social media has damaging effects on relationship. Couples spend a hug amount of time cultivating an "image" of theirs than on the relationship itself as a result of social media.

1. Unrealistic expectations can be cultivated by social media

You may become envy of how many posts other people make about their partners and resentful that your partner does not do the same. Your relationship satisfaction may change if the lives you are scrolling through appear to be more desirable than the ones you have.

2. It may result in concerns with body image

You may develop insecurities about your own body as a consequence of the altered and filtered images you see on social media. According to a different study, both the wife's and the husband's marital quality are significantly impacted by the wives' perceptions of their erotic attractiveness in light of their negative body image. In other words, these fears caused by social

media can impact the degree of emotional and physical closeness as well as the overall quality of a relationship.

3. It may have an impact on our mental health

Numerous studies have found that the social media as the prime reason for isolation, mental illnesses, and low self-esteem, despite the fact that it is meant to cultivate connection. Cognitive bias may make individuals with existing mental illnesses issues more prone to social assessments, according to one study. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that reducing social media use reduces loneliness and depression.

Despite the fact that these subjects are more individual than interpersonal, they can still affect relationships. When a partner has mental health issues, he or she may develop codependence or withdraw from intimacy.

4. Reduces quality time and satisfaction in relationships

Whether or not a relationship is romantic, extreme social media use can destructively impact diminish relationship satisfaction, cause conflict, and quality time. In a investigation conducted in 2021 (Jarai, 2022), investigators examined the relationship between social media and relationship satisfaction utilizing social networking and the time-tracking feature of the app. They discovered that increased use of social media was associated with decreased relationship satisfaction, increased conflict, and negative outcomes. In addition, the conflict, negative outcomes, and social media usage became addictive.

5. Resulting In Oversharing

Couples enjoy notifying their social media followers of their location and marital status (Natarajan, 2022). People who are prone to discussing the intimate details of their relationships overlook the fact that certain moments are best savored alone. Several couples frequently disclose depressing information about their relationships through cryptic posts and narratives. Instead, a heart-to-heart conversation can aid in bringing people to the table.

6. Offers a place for actions associated with infidelity

One of the "infidelity-related behaviors" that can lead to poor relationships, breakups, and divorce is communication with other companions. The social media provide a channel for these activities. A small number of participants confessed to engaging in social media behaviors related to infidelity. However, researchers discovered that increased participation in these behaviors is significantly associated with decreased relationship satisfaction, increased relationship uncertainty, and other relationship-related issues (Jarai, 2022).

Solution

Social media might help to build romantic connections but it can also break them. Our interactions with real-world partners may change as a result of the time we spend in front of screens. Even while social media has its advantages, staying online might have an impact on our offline realities. (Savoie, 2021) Because of this, it's crucial to understand when the internet is interfering with our lives and how to maintain healthy relationships in the era of social media:

- **Put your loved ones first at all times.**

There are solutions to make sure that your communication remains strong despite the hazards that come with using social media. To build a strong basis for your relationships, it's crucial to concentrate on your actual life rather than interacting mostly online. Keep in touch with the people who matter. "Call your family or go visit them in person instead of wishing them a happy birthday on social media.

- **Consider Your Comments and Posts Before Making Them**

While sharing online jokes or postings might deepen your friendship, you can start to worry about what your partner publishes on social media. Do they share an aspect of their personality online that you don't agree with, or have they posted something that you disagree with? Consider the conversation you would have with them in person before facing them; it could be advisable to save any awkward topics until a subsequent encounter.

- **Take Additional Care Through the Early Stages of Relationships**

Even though excessive usage of social media can be harmful at any stage of a relationship, it's worst in the beginning. We pay attention to the other person at the beginning of a relationship because we want to get to know them. We pay attention to their preferences, background, family composition, dreams, and anxieties. No detail is too small, and no story is too long as we spend hours getting to know one another in conversation. The development of the connection is novel and unexpected. Phones must be put away at this time so that all attention can be placed on each other.

Conclusion

This study has examined how using social media affects a user's emotional health and offline interpersonal relationships. As social organisms, it is only natural that we want to interact with those around us, and social media has unquestionably facilitated this. However, as demonstrated by this study, social networking does have disadvantages.

Social media has become the talk of the town. Consequently, it has numerous unexplored and unexpectedly constructive answers. At its core, social media is an effective communication instrument that has altered how people interrelate with each other. It expedites the spreading of information, thoughts, and ideas across virtual networks. However, there are disadvantages associated with social media use. Some research indicates that its use, particularly excessive use, can be detrimental to mental health in numerous ways.

Recent investigation has demonstrated that the usage of social media can be detrimental to users' mental well-being. Nevertheless, the impact of social media on human's mind is still unknown. This article demonstrated that social media envy can impact a person's levels of anxiety and depression. Additionally, potential causes of uneasiness, hopelessness and anxiety have been recognized and future study.

Social media is still in its infancy, and as this phenomenon evolves, only additional research and the passage of time will reveal what will occur to humanity in the coming decades. This brings us to the conclusion of the present investigation.

References

1. Kaloeti, D. V. S., Manalu, R., Kristiana, I. F., & Bidzan, M. (2021). The Role of Social Media Use in Peer Bullying Victimization and Onset of Anxiety Among Indonesian Elementary School Children. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.635725>
2. Velardo, A. (2014, December 3). *Gratification Theory*. Antonio Velardo Blog.com ::
<https://www.antoniovelardoblog.com/gratification-theory/>
3. Christensen, S. (2018). *Social Media Use and Its Impact on Relationships and Emotions*. Brigham Young University.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7927&context=etd>
4. Ferguson, S. (2022, August 8). *How Social Media Affects Relationships*. PsychCentral. <https://psychcentral.com/relationships/social-medias-impact-on-relationships>
5. Instagram, A., Facebook, A., Pinterest, A., Twitter, A., & LinkedIn, A. (2021, May 9). *A Relationship Expert Explains How Social Media Affects Your Love Life*. Brides.
<https://www.brides.com/how-social-media-affects-relationships-5105350>
6. Johnson, J. (2022, April 28). *How does social media affect relationships?* Wwww.medicalnewstoday.com. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/social-media-and-relationships>
7. Karim, F., Oyewande, A., & Abdalla, L. (2020). Social Media Use and Its Connection to Mental Health: A Systematic Review. *Cureus, 12*(6).
<https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.8627>
8. Moore, A. (2020, September 21). *12 Ways Social Media Affects Relationships, From Research & Experts*. Mindbodygreen.
<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/social-media-and-relationships>
9. Natarajan, H. (2021, August 16). *Social Media And Relationships: Negative & Positive Effects*. STYLECRAZE. <https://www.stylecraze.com/articles/social-media-and-relationships/>
10. Vogels, E., & Anderson, M. (2020, May 8). *Dating and Relationships in the Digital Age*. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/05/08/dating-and-relationships-in-the-digital-age/>

11. Bouffard, S., Giglio, D., & Zheng, Z. (2021). Social Media and Romantic Relationship: Excessive Social Media Use Leads to Relationship Conflicts, Negative Outcomes, and Addiction via Mediated Pathways. *Social Science Computer Review*, 40(6), 089443932110135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089443932110135668>