



## Social Media Addiction, Social Media Use and Aggression in Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Social media provides valuable opportunities to share content and engage online; however, problematic use, specifically in young adults, leads to serious psychological issues. This study examines the connections between social media addiction, usage, and aggression in young adults, employing a correlational research design and purposive sampling with 122 participants (all smartphone users who had engaged with social media for at least six months), aged 18 to 25 (63 men and 59 women). The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale was used to evaluate social media addiction and usage, while aggression was assessed using the Puss-Berry Aggression Questionnaire. Results revealed a significant negative correlation between social media addiction and usage and a significant positive correlation between social media addiction and aggression. No significant correlation was identified between social media usage and aggression. Gender differences emerged, with women exhibiting higher levels of social media usage and men displaying greater addiction. No significant difference was noted in aggression despite men scoring higher than women. Implications for youth welfare were discussed, and recommendations and limitations were also addressed at the end of the study.

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## 1. Introduction

The world is advancing day by day, and technology is modernizing communication, marketing, and business, making them more convenient than ever. The noticeable shift from the physical world to the online realm is a precious gift of technological advancement, as it reduces costs, energy, and time (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017). However, problematic use of social media can lead not only to distress and impairment in routine but also to mental health problems such as aggression and depression in young adults, as reported by recent studies (Shahid, Yousaf, & Munir, 2024). A reduction in productivity and lower life satisfaction is also associated with behavioral addiction, i.e., social media addiction (Sun & Zhang, 2021). This highlights the pervasive nature of internet addiction, which remains a pressing concern (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021).

The term "problematic social media use" refers to maladaptive behaviors associated with social media, characterized by reduced self-regulation or symptoms resembling addiction. Some researchers assess problematic use by examining the context (such as using social media while driving or during classes) or the purpose of use (such as engaging in social comparison or managing one's impression) (Güler, Öztay, & Özkoçak, 2022).

The digital environment allows individuals to display behaviors like rudeness and aggression that they might not show in face-to-face interactions. There is a strong link between aggression and social media addiction, affecting both personal and global contexts. Social media

addiction is frequently associated with depression, which can be viewed as a sign of mental distress. Excessive use of social media can unintentionally lead to depressive symptoms (Amedie, 2015).

With 1.4 billion users worldwide—almost a fifth of the global population—Facebook stands out as one of the most widely used social media platforms, enabling instant information sharing and fostering a sense of global connectedness. However, excessive reliance on social media can also contribute to depressive symptoms (Amedie, 2015). Social media companies should acknowledge social media addiction as a serious ethical concern, especially since many platforms are designed with features that promote addictive behavior (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021). Research indicates that social media use can negatively impact mental health, increasing the risks of suicidality, loneliness, and reduced empathy, with suicidal thoughts linked to social media usage potentially reflecting deeper, more serious issues (Berryman, Ferguson, & Negy, 2018).

Social media encompasses a number of activities, including chatting, sharing information, entertainment, education, and shopping. In contrast, social media addiction is characterized by compulsive use that significantly disrupts daily academic, social, occupational, and practical aspects of life, often accompanied by withdrawal symptoms (Simsek, Elciyar, & Kizilhan, 2019). A recent study in Pakistan involving young adults aged 18 to 25 found a positive relationship between social media addiction, depression, and aggression. It was observed that social media's influence on aggression is notably positive when mediated by depression (Shahid et al., 2024). Additionally, research indicated that social media use and aggression are positively related (Güler et al., 2022), and this connection extends to online aggression among adolescents (Young, Len-Ríos, & Young, 2017). Another study highlighted that increased social media involvement not only correlates with online aggression but also with both instrumental and overt aggressive behaviors (Martínez-Ferrer, Moreno, & Musitu, 2018).

Although there is substantial literature on social media addiction, usage, and aggression, there is a paucity of studies comparing these factors specifically among young adults in Pakistan. This study aims to address this gap by comparing social media addiction, usage, and aggression specifically in young adults to provide insights for societal welfare.

### **1.1. Hypothesis**

1. A positive and significant relationship is expected between social media addiction and aggression in young adults.
2. No significant association is anticipated between social media use and aggression in young adults.
3. A negative and significant relationship is expected to exist between social media addiction and social media use in young adults.
4. Gender differences are expected to emerge concerning social media addiction, usage, and aggression among young adults.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Design**

Co-relational research design was performed to assess the connection between the social media addiction, social media use and aggression in young adults.

### **2.2. Sampling Strategy**

Purposive sampling technique was employed for this study as almost everyone use social media and possess smartphone.

### **2.3. Sample**

A sample of 122 participants both men (N=63) and women (N=49) were selected for the study.

### **2.4. Inclusion criteria**

Participants were chosen based on their ownership of a personal smartphone and their engagement with social media for at least the past six months, as this criterion aligns with broader measures of internet addiction (Sharma, Sahu, Kasar, & Sharma, 2014). The age range of the participants was 18 to 25 years. According to the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, a

score of 24 or higher indicates social media addiction, while a score below 24 is classified as general social media use.

## 2.5. Assessment Measures

### 2.5.1. Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, a six-item Likert scale developed by Andreassen and colleagues in 2016, was used to assess social media addiction and usage. A score of 24 or higher on this scale indicates social media addiction, while scores below 24 are classified as social media use. In this study, the scale demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.82.

### 2.5.2. Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire

BPAQ was developed in 1992 by Buss and Peery which consists of 29 items ranging from extremely uncharacteristic (1) to extremely characteristic (5). The higher score shows higher level of aggression. The scale Cronbach's alpha is 0.82 which is consistent with reliability of this scale in this study.

## 2.6. Ethical Consideration

The study followed APA 7 ethical code of conduct as permission was taken from scales' authors to measure variables. Permission of data collection was taken from relevant department. Informed consent was taken from participants before administration of study measures. The participants were acknowledged regarding withdrawal at any juncture of the study. No psychological and physical harm was caused to participants.

## 3. Results

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants (N= 122)**

Sample Characteristics	F	%	M	SD
Do you have smartphone?	122	100		
Using social media for the last six months	122	100		
Age			22.53	2.25
Gender				
Men	63	52		
Women	59	48		
Qualification			2.06	.71
Intermediate	27	22		
Bachelor	61	50		
Masters	34	28		
Employment Status				
Employed	35	29		
Unemployed	87	71		

Note: *f*=frequency, *%*=Percentage, *M*=Mean, *SD*=Standard deviation

The above table demonstrate that 122 participants who possesses smartphone and using social media for last six months. The number of men is 63(52%), while women are 59(48%) with mean age of 22.53 and standard deviation of 2.25. Most with Bachelor qualification (61, 50%), followed by master qualified 34(28%), and lastly matric qualified 27 (22%) took part in the study. Moreover, employment status shows mostly participant are unemployed 87 (71%), followed by small number of employed participants 35(29%).

**Table 2: Correlation among study variables (N=122).**

Variables	1	2	3	M	SD
1. Social Media Addiction	-	-.87**	.46**	11.68	13.45
2. Social Media Use		-	.00	8.59	8.59
3. Aggression			-	24.16	6.29

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

The table illustrates the relationships between the study variables. Social media addiction is significantly and negatively related to social media use. Aggression is positively as well as significantly related to social media addiction. Additionally, no relationship was found between social media use and aggression.

### 3.1. Independent Sample T-Test

*Independent Sample t-test was conducted in order to find out the mean differences in gender among the variables*

**Table 3**

Variables	Men(n=63)		Women(n=59)		t(248)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Social Media Addiction	16.36	13.46	6.69	11.61	4.25	<.001	0.76
Social Media Use	6.22	8.41	11.12	8.12	-3.26	.001	0.59
Aggression	24.96	6.41	23.31	6.11	1.46	.14	0.26

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

According to the table above men scored significantly higher on social media addiction ( $M=16.36$ ,  $SD=13.46$ ,  $p < .001$ \*\*), while women score significantly higher on social media use ( $M=6.22$ ,  $SD=8.41$ ,  $P < .001$ \*\*). No significant difference was noted between gender in aggression however men scored more on aggression ( $M=24.96$ ,  $SD=6.41$ ,  $P > .05$ ) than women.

## 4. Discussion

As technology advances, society increasingly relies on it for daily activities. Social media is widely used for sharing information, shopping, chatting, entertainment, and communication. However, excessive use can disrupt daily functioning and lead to maladaptive behaviors. Recent research shows a significant link between problematic social media use and aggression (Shahid et al., 2024). There is still limitation in understanding of how social media use and addiction relate to aggression among young adults in Pakistan. This research aims to address this gap and develop intervention strategies.

The first hypothesis of the study states that there would likely be positive as well as significant relationship between social media addiction and aggression in young adults. The correlation analysis proved our assumption perfectly. The finding is congruent with a recent study conducted by Shahid et al. (2024) which states that aggression is associated to social media addiction aggression positively as well as significantly. One more similar study depicts that aggression and social media problematic use is positively related with each other (Güler et al., 2022).

The second hypothesis of the study states that social media use would not be related to aggression in young adults. The correlation analysis perfectly proved our assumption. Recent study depicts that social media problematic use not just use is related to aggressive behaviour and results in interpersonal distressing relationship by inducing negative energy and due to withdrawal symptoms (Bouffard, Giglio, & Zheng, 2022). Therefore, avoiding the problematic use of social media and get addicted to it can refrain young adults from becoming aggressive and violent.

The third expectation of this study posited a negative and significant association between social media addiction and social media use among young adults. This expectation was confirmed by the correlational analysis, which demonstrated a significant negative relationship between social media use and addiction. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that while social media addiction is associated with reduced subjective well-being, general social media use correlates with healthier subjective well-being (Zhao, 2021).

The fourth expectation examined gender differences in social media addiction, usage, and aggression among young adults. Analysis using an independent samples t-test revealed that men exhibit significantly higher levels of social media addiction, while women demonstrate greater social media usage. Although there are no significant overall gender differences in aggression, men have a higher mean aggression score compared to women. These findings align with research indicating that men are generally more aggressive and more susceptible to social media addiction than women (Shahid et al., 2024). Additionally, our results support previous studies suggesting that female users are more likely to use Facebook for information-seeking, research, learning, product discussions, and convenience (Noguti, Singh, & Waller, 2018). Given that this study was conducted in Pakistan, the higher scores in social media addiction and aggression among men may reflect cultural norms, as Pakistan is a male-dominated society where men are expected to be more aggressive and assertive than women (Aslam, 2014; Naseem & Munaf, 2020; Tabassum, 2016). A study in Sharjah similarly found that men are more likely to be social media addicts than women, contributing to the observation that women often perform better academically (Alnjadat, Hmaid, Samha, Kilani, & Hasswan, 2019).

#### **4.1. Limitations and Recommendations**

The first shortcoming of this study is its small sample size of just 122 individuals, which restricts the generalizability of the findings therefore it is recommended to include larger sample in future studies. Additionally, the purposive sampling strategy may not significantly reflect accurate data and limit generalizability; employing stratified sampling could improve diversity and increase generalizability. There were imbalances within educational subgroups and between employment statuses, hindering accurate measurement of the study variables. While ethical approval and informed consent were mentioned, the study does not address how potential emotional distress from discussing aggression or addiction was managed, highlighting the need for strategies to mitigate such distress in future research. Finally, the lack of examination of time spent on social media or specific platforms, both of which could influence addiction and aggression levels, is another notable limitation that should be addressed in subsequent studies.

#### **4.2. Implications**

This study addresses a significant gap in existing research, as few investigations have compared social media addiction and social media use in relation to aggression among young adults, particularly in Pakistan. In light of these findings, mental health professionals are encouraged to raise awareness about social media addiction, its correlation with aggression, and safe usage practices while also emphasizing its positive aspects. This awareness could include educating individuals on the signs and symptoms of addiction, such as withdrawal symptoms (irritability or agitation when unable to use social media), cravings, dysfunction, and clinical impairment in daily routines. By recognizing these signs and adopting healthier daily habits, individuals can work to overcome their social media addiction. Parents should prioritize quality time with their children to prevent the development of problematic social media habits. Additionally, social media platforms can be utilized to promote societal awareness about addiction and aggression. Government officials and policymakers should implement strategies to prevent youth from becoming addicted to social media through widespread awareness campaigns. Apps could be developed for phones and laptops to help users track excessive time spent on social media. Encouraging practices such as yoga, meditation, and physical exercise can enhance both mental and physical well-being. Individuals struggling with social media addiction are advised to seek help from mental health professionals for psychotherapy and counseling to foster a healthier lifestyle.

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