

Relationship between Prejudice, Social Media Addiction, Empathy and Trust

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between prejudice, social media addiction, empathy and trust among teenage boys and girls. The study also investigated if there were any differences in prejudice, social media addiction, empathy and trust between teenage boys and girls. The sample consisted of 200 students out of which 100 were male students and 100 were female students. The data was collected through online forms as well as physical copies of the questionnaires distributed in schools. The students were administered Social Dominance Orientation Scale by Pratto et al (1994), Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale by Andreassen (2012), Toronto Empathy Questionnaire by Spreng et al (2009) and General Trust Scale by Yamagishi, T. & Yamagishi, M. (1994). Pearson correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationships between prejudice and social media addiction, prejudice and empathy, prejudice and trust, social media addiction and trust, social media addiction and empathy and empathy and trust. Independent samples t-test was used to examine the gender differences in prejudice, social media addiction, empathy and trust. The analysis revealed that there were significant gender differences in prejudice and empathy among teenage boys and girls, with boys having higher prejudice and girls having higher empathy. There were no significant gender differences in social media addiction and trust among teenage boys and girls. There was a significant negative correlation between prejudice and empathy in teenagers, both boys and girls. There were no significant relationships between prejudice and social media addiction, prejudice and trust, social media addiction and trust, social media addiction and empathy and empathy and trust among teenagers, both boys and girls.

Keywords: *prejudice, social dominance orientation, empathy, social media addiction, trust, teenagers*

In one survey, WEF asked respondents to name the three most serious issues affecting the world today. For the second year in a row, millennials reported that they were most

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concerned by climate change, followed by large-scale wars and religious conflicts. (Loudenback, 2016). It can be agreed upon that wars and conflict arise partially on the basis of prejudice. Hence it can be assumed that prejudice is a prevalent problem.

Prejudice can be defined as an unjustified or incorrect (usually negative) attitude towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership of a social group. It arises, in part, due to conformity and stereotyping. People continue to believe in beliefs held about certain groups and continue to do so because most other people do so themselves.

It is no myth that media influences people's attitudes. With the recent rise of social media, it can be said that social media may also play a part in influencing attitudes. In this age of technology, social media has become a necessity, be it WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat or Instagram. Social networking sites have become a source of entertainment, education and news. Through the mode of videos, pictures and articles shared online, people gather plenty of information from the internet.

Although, social media is a virtual part of life, it does not fail to pressure people into posting certain things and believing in certain posts which may be consistent with their beliefs, resulting in conformity. The ever present nature of the social media means users are bombarded with messages about what characteristics and groups should be approved or shunned, what people should think about, how they should behave toward others, and what they might expect from people based on the groups to which they belong. Often these messages may not even be direct; they may be implicated through jokes and memes which can subconsciously affect the attitudes of the users.

It has been found that empathy has an inverse relationship with prejudice (Boag and Carnelley, 2015). The more a person is able to understand the feelings of others, the less likely they are to harbour incorrect or unjustified attitudes towards others on the basis of the latter's membership to a group. The question in focus is whether empathy has any correlation with social media use. It can be argued that with regards to virtual communication, empathy may run low. The anonymity over the internet makes it easier to share one's opinion, even if it's offensive, due to the lack of consequences. It is so much easier to leave a hateful comment online than to say it face to face to a person. People find it easy to forget that the recipients of such comments are actual people with actual feelings and not just some binary code. This has led to the increase of what is known as cyber-racism and the expression of other prejudiced beliefs through the internet.

Although, it hasn't been researched much, it can be assumed that a person's general trust towards others may be related to the prejudices they hold. It can be alleged that a person with highly prejudiced attitudes may discriminate against certain groups, in part, because they are distrustful of individuals of said group. It can also be assumed that social media use may have an association with the degree to which users are generally trusting. The internet is filled with

scammers, who can cheat and defraud users, using great schemes. Hence, while spending time online people tend to be generally more distrustful towards other internet users.

Therefore, these four different factors may have direct or indirect influence over each other.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Krasnova et al (2017) investigated the reasons behind why men and women continue to use social networking sites. The study involved a survey that was conducted on 488 users of social networking sites. Gender differences were found revealing that women are mainly driven by relational uses, such as maintaining relationships and getting social information on friends and family. Whereas, it was found that men continued to use social networking sites to gain information of general nature.

Sidanius et al (2013) examined the potential reciprocal relationship between empathy and social dominance orientation (SDO). To explore this relationship, the authors conducted two studies using large samples from different parts of the world. Study 1 consisted of 389 (83% female) Belgian university students from whom data was collected in two waves with each wave separated by 6 months. Study 2 consisted of two waves of data from a sample of 4,466 New Zealand adults (63% female), with each wave separated by a 1-year interval. The findings of the study revealed a negative longitudinal relationship between empathy and SDO. Moreover, the results also revealed that SDO's effect on empathy over time tended to be stronger than empathy's effect on SDO over time.

Barker (2012) assessed the role of vicarious intergroup contact via social networking sites on attitudes to and expectancies about interactions with racial out group members. The study was built on the idea that intergroup contact can be beneficial with regard to reducing prejudice and facilitating positive interactions and that social networking sites have the potential to provide such in group contact. An online survey was conducted on 210 participants as a method of collecting data. The results revealed a direct relationship between vicarious racial group contact via social networking sites and positive expectancies about future interactions with members of racial out groups.

Maddux and Brewer (2005) examined gender differences in the relational and collective bases for trust. The study sought to investigate differences in interdependence within the domain of trust. It was hypothesized that men were more likely to trust individuals based on whether or not they shared group memberships. On the other hand, women were predicted to trust those who shared direct or indirect relationship connections. These predictions were supported by results from an online trust-dilemma game.

Toussaint and Webb (2005) conducted a study to investigate the gender differences in the relationship between empathy and forgiveness. The purpose of the study was to examine gender differences in levels of empathy and forgiveness as well as the extent to which men and women differ in the association of empathy and forgiveness. Data was collected through

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self report measures of empathy and forgiveness completed by 127 participants. The results indicated that women were more empathic than men, but there were no gender differences for forgiveness. However, the association between empathy and forgiveness did differ by gender in which empathy was associated with forgiveness in men, but not in women.

Ekehammer et al (2003) investigated gender differences in implicit prejudice. Three experiments were conducted on a sample of 131 participants to examine gender differences in implicit (and explicit) racial prejudice. The experiments used priming techniques including immigrant and Swedish facial photographs. Implicit prejudice was defined as the degree of negativity expressed toward a person described in a subsequent ambiguous story in an impression formation task. The results found contradicted the hypothesis stating that women displayed higher implicit prejudice than men in all three experiments. However, men scored higher on explicit prejudice than women.

Objectives

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To assess potential prejudice among adolescents,
2. To determine the relationship between prejudice, social media addiction, trust, and empathy in adolescents ,
3. To examine difference in prejudice, social media use, trust, and empathy among teenage boys and girls.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. There will be no significant relationship between prejudice and social media addiction among teenagers,
2. There will be no significant relationship between prejudice and trust among teenagers,
3. There will be no significant relationship between prejudice and empathy among teenagers,
4. There will be no significant relationship between social media addiction and trust among teenagers,
5. There will be no significant relationship between social media addiction and empathy among teenagers,
6. There will be no significant relationship between trust and empathy among teenagers,
7. There will be no significant difference in prejudice among teenage boys and girls,
8. There will be no significant difference in social media addiction among teenage boys and girls,
9. There will be no significant difference in trust among teenage boys and girls,
10. There will be no significant difference in empathy among teenage boys and girls,

Description of Tools

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) by Pratto et al (1994). It assesses social dominance as opposed to individual dominance or self esteem. The 16 item scale elicits agreement-

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disagreement with statements on a 7 point scale ranging from “very positive” to “very negative”. The questionnaire is highly reliable and valid. Two- test reliability studies over three months exhibited significant correlations of .81 and .84.

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire by Spreng et al (2009) assess an individual’s empathy. This questionnaire consists of 16 questions, each rated on a five point scale from 'never' to 'often'. In three studies, the TEQ demonstrated strong convergent validity, correlating positively with behavioural measures of social decoding, self-report measures of empathy, and negatively with a measure of Autism symptomatology. Moreover, it exhibited good internal consistency and high test-retest reliability.

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is an adaptation of the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS) developed by Andreassen (2012). The scale contains 6 items reflecting core addiction elements that are applicable to social media addiction. The factor structure of the scale was good and coefficient alpha was .83. The 3-week test-retest reliability coefficient was .82.

General Trust Scale by Yamagishi, T. & Yamagishi, M. (1994) is a 6-item questionnaire that uses general statements to measure participants’ beliefs about honesty and trustworthiness of others, in general. Each item is rated on a 5 point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. The General Trust Scale is a reliable and valid one.

Research Design

The research design was an ex-post facto research.

Sample

The sample consisted of 200 high school and college students within Chennai city in the age range 13-19 years. Of the 200 students, 100 were males and 100 were females.

Procedure of Data Collection

Data was collected through two methods- an online form which was shared to the target population and physical copies distributed in schools. The purpose of the study was explained through the description of the online form and a brief verbal explanation was given to the school students. The subjects were encouraged to participate of their free will. Informed consent was taken and confidentiality of the responses was guaranteed.

Statistics

Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between prejudice, social media addiction, empathy and trust. Independent samples t-test was used to investigate if there exist any gender differences between prejudice, social media addiction, empathy and trust.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Table 1 Pearson's Product Moment correlation between prejudice and social media addiction among teenagers**

Variable	N	Correlation Coefficient
Prejudice	200	-.073 NS
Social Media Addiction	200	

NS Not Significant

The correlation co-efficient between prejudice and social media addiction is $r(198) = -.073$. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between prejudice and social media addiction among teenagers. The results state that there is no relationship between these two variables. Thus, it can be inferred that the amount of time spend on social media has no relation with how much prejudice one harbours. Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no relationship between prejudice and social media addiction among teenagers.

Barker (2012) assessed the role of vicarious intergroup contact via social networking sites on attitudes to and expectancies about interactions with racial out group members. The results revealed a direct relationship between vicarious racial group contact via social networking sites and positive expectancies about future interactions with members of racial out groups. In another study, Faulkner and Bliuc (2016) examined how and why individuals express support or opposition to racist behaviour in a prominent online medium through moral disengagement which allows individuals to avoid distress and self-condemnation when supporting or engaging in harmful behaviour by making that behaviour appear moral and acceptable. The results showed that supporters, but not opponents, of racist behaviour consistently use moral disengagement strategies in their rhetoric.

Table 2 Pearson's Product Moment correlation between prejudice and trust among teenagers

Variable	N	Correlation Coefficient
Prejudice	200	-.025 NS
Trust	200	

NS Not Significant

The correlation co-efficient between prejudice and trust is $r(198) = -.025$. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between prejudice and trust among teenagers. The results state that there is no relationship between these two variables. Thus, it can be inferred that the degree to which teenagers hold prejudiced attitudes has no relation to their general trust towards others. Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no relationship between prejudice and trust among teenagers.

In a similar study, Stolle, Soroka and Johnston (2008) explored the association between neighbourhood diversity, interpersonal trust and the mediating effect of social interactions.

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The results found, challenged claims about the negative effects of diversity on trust. Individuals who regularly talked with their neighbours were less influenced by the racial and ethnic character of their surroundings than people who lacked such social interaction. In another study, Gervais, Shariff & Norenzayan (2011) investigated the role of distrust in anti-atheist prejudice. It was found that a broad sample of American adults revealed that distrust characterized anti-atheist prejudice but not anti-gay prejudice.

Table 3 Pearson's Product Moment correlation between prejudice and empathy among teenagers

Variable	N	Correlation Coefficient
Prejudice	200	-.535**
Empathy	200	

**p<0.01

The correlation co-efficient between prejudice and empathy is $r(198) = -.535$, $p < 0.01$. This indicates that there is a significant negative relationship between prejudice and empathy. Thus, it can be inferred that teenagers who have less empathy are more likely to be prejudiced. The findings seem to suggest that teenagers who are able to understand or feel what another person is feeling are less likely to accept the stereotypes associated with certain groups. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no relationship between prejudice and empathy among teenagers is rejected.

Similar results were reported by Boag and Carnelley (2016) who conducted two studies to examine the novel hypothesis that empathy is a mechanism through which the relationship between attachment patterns and prejudice can be explained. Across both studies, empathy mediated the relationship between primed attachment security and low prejudice levels. The findings suggest that enhancing felt security and empathic skills in individuals high in attachment-avoidance may lead to reduced prejudice. In another study, Sidanius et al (2013) examined the potential reciprocal relationship between empathy and social dominance orientation (SDO). Results suggested a reciprocal longitudinal relationship between empathy and SDO. Moreover, the results also revealed that SDO's effect on empathy over time tended to be stronger than empathy's effect on SDO over time.

Table 4 Pearson's Product Moment correlation between social media addiction and trust among teenagers

Variable	N	Correlation Coefficient
Social Media Addiction	200	-.055 NS
Trust	200	

NS Not Significant

The correlation co-efficient between social media addiction and trust is $r(198) = -.055$. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between social media addiction and trust

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among teenagers. The results state that there is no relationship between these two variables. Thus, it can be inferred that there the amount of time spent on social media has no relation to general trust towards others. Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no relationship between social media addiction and trust among teenagers.

Table 5 Pearson's Product Moment correlation between social media addiction and empathy among teenagers

Variable	N	Correlation Coefficient
Social Media Addiction	200	-.011NS
Empathy	200	

NS Not Significant

The correlation co-efficient between social media addiction and empathy is $r(198) = -.011$. This indicates that there no significant relationship between social media addiction and empathy among teenagers. The results state that there is no relationship between these two variables Thus, it can be inferred that the amount of time spent on social media has no relation to one's empathy level. Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no relationship between social media addiction and empathy among teenagers.

Vossen and Valkenburg (2016) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate whether social media fosters or curtails adolescents' empathy. It was found that social media use resulted in an increase in cognitive and affective empathy over time. Specifically, adolescents' social media use improved both their ability to understand (cognitive empathy) and share the feelings of their peers (affective empathy). Another study was conducted by Kholmogorova and Klimenkova (2016) who investigated the relationship between internet communication and empathy in adolescence and early adulthood. The study examined the difference in empathy among those who prefer face-to-face communication and those who prefer online communication. The results revealed that most adolescents and university students from all channels of communication prefer face-to-face communication and have higher rates of empathic abilities compared to those who prefer to communicate in social networks.

Table 6 Pearson's Product Moment correlation between trust and empathy among teenagers

Variable	N	Correlation Coefficient
Trust	200	.037NS
Empathy	200	

NS Not Significant

The correlation co-efficient between trust and empathy is $r(198) = .037$. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between trust and empathy among teenagers. The results state that there is no relationship between these two variables. Thus, it can be inferred that an increase in empathy has no relation to one's general trust towards others. Hence, we fail to

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reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no relationship between trust and empathy among teenagers.

Nadler and Livitan (2006) examined the effects of expressions of empathy for the ingroup's conflict-related suffering and assumed responsibility for causing it by a representative of the rival outgroup on recipient's willingness for reconciliation suggesting that positive expressions by an adversary will have positive effects on reconciliation only in the presence of a basic level of trust in the outgroup. Results showed that whereas expression of empathy led to more positive attitudes when trust was high, it tended to have adverse effects when trust was low.

Table 7 Showing the Mean, Standard Deviation, 'CR' value of prejudice between teenage boys and girls

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	C.R. value
Prejudice	Teenage Boys	100	53.07	14.44	6.284**
	Teenage Girls	100	41.04	12.57	

**p<0.01

The results indicate that there are significant gender differences in prejudice. There was a significant effect for gender $t(198) = 6.284$, $p < 0.01$, with males obtaining higher prejudice scores than females. Teenage boys ($M=53.07$, $SD=14.44$) obtained higher scores than teenage girls ($M=41.04$, $SD=12.57$) which indicates that boys are more likely to have the attitude that certain groups are dominant and superior over other groups when compared to girls. This difference may be in part of the societal beliefs that consider men as superior over women. Being brought up in such a society may have affected the way both males and females feel and think. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in prejudice between teenage boys and girls is rejected.

Similar results were reported by Hoxter and Lester (1994) who investigated gender differences in prejudice among college students. They found that the women showed less ethnic prejudice than men on a social-distance measure for greater social distance (friendship) and living in the neighbourhood but not for less social distance (marriage).

Table 8 Showing the Mean, Standard Deviation, 'CR' value of social media addiction between teenage boys and girls

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	C.R. value
Social Media Addiction	Teenage Boys	100	17.16	3.19	0.517NS
	Teenage Girls	100	16.86	4.84	

Not Significant

The results indicate that there are no significant gender differences in social media addiction among teenage boys and girls $t(198) = 0.517$. The mean and standard deviation for social

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media addiction in teenage boys are 17.16 and 3.16 respectively. The mean and standard deviation for social media addiction in teenage girls are 16.86 and 4.84 respectively. The minimum difference between the two means indicates that there is a barely any difference in the time spent on social media sites between teenage boys and girls. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in social media addiction between teenage boys and girls.

Although it did not assess the gender differences for the amount of time spent on social networking sites, a study by Krasnova (2017), focused on investigating the reasons behind why men and women continue to use social networking sites. They found that, while women are mainly driven by relational uses, such as maintaining close ties and getting access to social information on close and distant networks, men base their continuance intentions on their ability to gain information of a general nature.

Table 9 Showing the Mean, Standard Deviation, 'CR' value of trust between teenage boys and girls

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	C.R. value
Trust	Teenage Boys	100	3.29	0.58	0.504NS
	Teenage Girls	100	3.24	0.54	

Not Significant

The results indicate that there are no significant gender differences in trust among teenage boys and girls $t(198) = 0.504$. The mean and standard deviation for trust in teenage boys are 3.29 and 0.58 respectively. The mean and standard deviation for social media addiction in teenage girls are 3.24 and 0.54 respectively. The minimum difference between the two means indicates that there is a barely any difference in the degree to which teenage boys and girls are generally trusting. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in trust between teenage boys and girls.

A similar study was conducted by Maddux and Brewer (2005) investigating gender differences in the relational and collective bases for trust. The results stated that women tend to be more relationally interdependent, men tend to be more collectively interdependent which indicates that men are more likely to trust individuals based on whether or not they shared group memberships and women are likely to trust those who shared direct or indirect relationship connections.

Table 10 Showing the Mean, Standard Deviation, 'CR' value of empathy between teenage boys and girls

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	C.R. value
Empathy	Teenage Boys	100	39.17	8.91	5.385**
	Teenage Girls	100	45.17	6.69	

** $p < 0.01$

The results indicate that there are significant gender differences in empathy. There was a significant effect for gender $t(198) = 5.385$, $p < 0.01$, with females obtaining higher empathy

scores than males. Teenage girls ($M=45.17$, $SD=6.69$) obtained higher scores than teenage boys ($M=39.17$, $SD=8.91$) which indicates that girls have better capacity to understand others' thoughts and feelings than boys do. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in empathy between teenage boys and girls is rejected.

Similar results were reported by Toussaint and Webb (2005) who investigated gender differences in the relationship between empathy and forgiveness. They found that women were more empathic than men, but no gender difference for forgiveness was found. However, the association between empathy and forgiveness did differ by gender in which empathy was associated with forgiveness in men, but not in women. In another study, Schulte-Rüther et al focused on the biological reasoning for gender difference in empathy. They investigated the differences using functional magnetic resonance imaging. Subjects either focused on their own emotional response to emotion expressing faces (SELF-task) or evaluated the emotional state expressed by the faces (OTHER-task). The results suggested that females recruit areas containing mirror neurons to a higher degree than males during both SELF- and OTHER-related processing in empathic face-to-face interactions.

CONCLUSIONS

The study examined the relationship between prejudice, social media addiction, empathy and trust among teenage boys and girls and whether there were any differences in prejudice, social media addiction, empathy and trust between teenage boys and girls. The following are the conclusions of the study:

1. No significant relationship was found between prejudice and social media addiction among teenagers.
2. No significant relationship was found between prejudice and trust among teenagers.
3. There was significant relationship between prejudice and empathy among teenagers.
4. No significant relationship was found between social media addiction and trust among teenagers.
5. No significant relationship was found between social media addiction and empathy among teenagers.
6. No significant relationship was found between trust and empathy among teenagers.
7. There were significant gender differences in prejudice among teenage boys and girls.
8. There was no significant difference in social media use among teenage boys and girls.
9. There was no significant difference in trust among teenage boys and girls.
10. There were significant gender differences in empathy among teenage boys and girls.

Limitations

1. The study was conducted with a sample size of only 200 teenagers.
2. The age range was exclusive to teenagers (13-19).
3. The study was limited to the geographical location of Chennai.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. The study could be expanded over a wider age range.
2. The study could be inclusive of a larger sample size.
3. Variables pertinent to prejudice, social media addiction, empathy and trust can be investigated.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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