

Research Paper

Committed Relationships: Relationship between Social media Addiction, Quality of Romantic Relationship, Interpersonal Trust, Self-Esteem, and Life Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Social Media has become an integral part of modern-day life. It has penetrated all aspects of life including romantic relationships. Romantic relationships are built on a building block called “trust”. With the rise in social media platforms, networking has become easier than ever. Partner monitoring or “stalking” one’s partner online has deteriorating effects on the relationship. Keeping track of other people’s lives has led to social comparisons which can cause the self-esteem of a person to take a dip. Further, this can lead to a negative view of one’s life leading to low life satisfaction. The purpose of the current research is to find out the relationship between Social Media Addiction on the Quality of Romantic Relationships, Interpersonal Trust, Self-Esteem, and Life Satisfaction in couples in committed relationships. Standardized scales were used on 60 individuals (N=60, 30 males, 30 females) in the age range of 20-30 years. Saliency of social media usage was found to be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction and interpersonal trust. A negative correlation was observed between social media addiction and faith. A negative correlation was also seen between conflict about social media usage and self esteem. Social media has become an indispensable part of our lives. Hence, we should make a conscious effort to monitor our social media usage and become more aware of how we can minimize its impact on our personal lives.

Keywords: *Social Media Addiction, Romantic relationship, Interpersonal Trust, Self- esteem, Life Satisfaction*

Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that the better for us all. –**Erik Erikson.**

Why do humans have such a strong need to connect? Why are we social animals? What purpose does socialization serve? Why is it that we need to be surrounded by people to survive? A lot of these questions can be answered by Darwin’s theory of evolution and natural selection. According to the theory, human beings living in small groups had a better chance of survival than others. Developing social skills not only ensured the survival of the individuals but also of the human species. These small groups later took the form of civilizations.

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Received: July 08, 2023; Revision Received: September 27, 2023; Accepted: September 30, 2023

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As the social brain continued to develop, the neocortex formed more connections and human interaction became more important than ever. Lieberman's (2013) study, "Social: Why our brains are wired to connect", explained how our brain got wired because of evolution to reward social bonding, how information is interpreted by our brain is influenced by our social environment. Also, the evolution of our brain allowed human beings to 'psychologically read' other humans for the purpose of connecting, cooperating, and competing. Thus, it shows how social interaction is an integral part of our survival as a species.

With the advancement in technology, the way we bond has taken a shift. From face-to-face interactions, we came to interact through the medium of the internet. With the rise of social networking platforms, our mode of interaction has changed (perhaps, forever).

According to a report published by Statista Research Department (2021), over 3.6 billion people use social media sites worldwide, an outrageous number that is expected to reach a staggering 4.41 billion in 2025. On average, people spend 144 minutes every day on social networking sites. The time spent has increased by more than half an hour since 2015.

The top 15 social media sites include: Facebook (2.74 billion active users), YouTube (2.291 billion active users), WhatsApp (2.0 billion active users), Facebook messenger (1.3 billion active users), Instagram (1.221 billion active users), WeChat/Weixin (1.213 billion active users), TikTok (689 million active users), QQ (617 million active users), Douyin (600 million active users), Sina Weibo (511 million active users), Telegram (500 million active users), Snapchat (498 million active users), Kuaishou (481 million active users), Pinterest (442 million active users), Reddit (430 million active users while, India has the highest number of active Facebook users in the world (290 million) (Karl, 2021)

Social media has changed the way people socialize, communicate, and how they initiate and maintain intimate relationships. It has wide-ranging implications for individuals in committed relationships. Although the impact of social media has been studied in detail, insufficient attention has been paid to its relationship with intimate relationships. Social networking sites have made communication very convenient. It has also made the process of finding eligible partners easier. However, the use of social media by individuals in committed relationships can have negative consequences like infidelity, jealousy, and lack of trust. Seeing your partner interact with an attractive member of the opposite sex can induce jealousy (Muisse et al., 2009).

When we interact with members of the opposite sex face to face, it is easier to establish boundaries and violations which can have repercussions for the partner engaging in such behavior. However, with the mode of interaction largely being online platforms, these boundaries seem to be blurring. Often, people engage in such behaviors with minimal guilt and consequences as the behavior is not "seen". Online boundary crossing is linked to lower relationship satisfaction and partner responsiveness. Participants who reported lower relationship satisfaction were more likely to engage in online boundary-crossing (Norton et al., 2017).

In a study conducted by Yacoub et al., (2018), a negative correlation between social networking site intrusion (SSNI) and relationship satisfaction was found. The implications of these above-mentioned studies deserve to be explored further.

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Social media users may experience a decrease in their self-esteem. Social comparisons made online can lead to a deflated view of oneself. In a study conducted by Jan, Soomro and Ahmad (2017), it was found that 88% of people engage in making social comparisons on Facebook and 98% of the people out of the 88% engage in making upward social comparisons i.e., perceiving someone to be better than us. The study also found that one hour spent on Facebook daily leads to a decrease of 5.574 in the self-esteem score.

Social media addiction has a negative association with self-esteem and self-esteem has a positive association with life satisfaction (Hawi & Samaha, 2016). Studies have shown that Facebook addiction leads to lower satisfaction with life (Błachnio et al., 2016). One reason could be that watching profiles of seemingly “perfect” people leading “perfect lives” may make us feel that our lives are unworthy of being displayed.

Social Media Addiction

According to the article published online, social media addiction is “a behavioral addiction that is defined by being overly concerned about social media, driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on to or use social media, and devoting so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other important life areas.”

Griffiths’ Components model of Addiction (2009) argues that all addictions have some common component which is salience (when the activity dominates a person’s life including the thinking, feelings, and behavior), mood modification (consequences of engaging in the behavior); tolerance (increased amount of time that is required to experience the same amount of mood modification); withdrawal (feelings of sadness that are experienced when unable to engage in the activity); conflict (issues stemming in intrapersonal or interpersonal relations from engaging the activity) and relapse (going back to the activity despite trying to control or prevent use). Social media use can lead to a dopamine release in the brain. It is this dopamine rush that leads to addictive social media behaviors. The neural circuitry is like the one in the brain of a drug addict or a gambler.

Numerous studies have shown that using social media has harmful effects on the mental health of people. In a study by Hou et al., (2019), it was found that intrusive social media usage is negatively associated with the mental health of college-going students. Higher social media addiction scores during the Covid -19 pandemic were linked to mild depression in students (Saputri & Yumarni, 2021).

Romantic Relationship

Romantic love is “a type of love in which intimacy and passion are prominent features. Although the loved party is often idealized, research indicates that the lover’s sexual arousal is an especially important component of this type of love. In some taxonomies of love, romantic love is identified with passionate love and distinguished from companionate love; in others, it is seen as involving elements of both.”(APA dictionary).

According to the Triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 2006), there are 3 components of love in an intimate relationship: intimacy, passion & decision/commitment.

The research on the impact of social media addiction on the quality of romantic relationships is divided. However, several studies indicate a negative relation between the two. Social networking sites are easily accessible which also gives rise to easy accessibility of potential

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partners. Social media profiles are usually curated in such a way that makes the viewer feel that the person is perfect and free from flaws. When we get to know a potential partner in person, the flaws cannot remain hidden for long. Hence, alternate potential online partners have the charm to them. Such profiles can make people feel dissatisfied with their own partners which may cause relationship dissatisfaction. (Abbasi & Alghamdi, 2017)

McDaniel and Coyne (2015) studied the impact of “technoference” i.e., technological intrusions in everyday life in couples. The participants admitted to having frequent “technoference” which resulted in the loss of quality time spent with their partners. Overall, participants who reported more technology-based interferences in their life also reported less relationship satisfaction.

Social media addiction is likely to take a major portion of one’s life. More time spent online means less time spent with others. This may impact the quality of the romantic relationship leaving the partner dissatisfied (Nie, 2001)

Drouin et al., (2015) found that merely thinking about an alternate potential partner on social networking sites can leave a person feeling dissatisfied with their romantic relationship. It can also lower the commitment level towards the current partner.

Interpersonal Trust

Rotter (1980) defined interpersonal trust as "a generalized expectancy held by an individual that the word promise, oral or written statement of another individual or group can be relied on".

The most important aspect of trust is faith. Faith is the belief that one’s partner will act lovingly no matter what the situation is. Inconsistent behavior in a relationship often violates trust. (Rempel et al., 1985). For a relationship to thrive, trust in one’s partner is crucial. According, to a study by Elphinston & Noller (2011), social media provides easy access to attractive people, exes, and friends of partners. A lot of unnecessary contact with others can cause distrust and jealousy in relationships.

According to Rempel et al., (1985), trust is built in a relationship when the partner is seen as reliable and predictable, which is reflected in consistent behavior. One feels a sense of confidence that his/her needs will be met.

Being “Facebook Official” has become an important milestone in every relationship. Not being on your partner’s profile may be indicative of an attempt to conceal the relationship from the world. This may be unsettling for some people. Women tend to feel more hurt and distrust if their partners omit them from their profiles (Muscanell et al., 2013) Also, intrusive Twitter use has been linked to increased conflict with a spouse or romantic partner leading to break-up divorce and infidelity (Clayton, 2014)

Self Esteem

According to Rosenberg (1965a), self-esteem is one’s positive or negative attitude toward oneself and one’s evaluation of one’s own thoughts and feelings overall in relation to oneself. Self-esteem is regarded as a personal psychological characteristic relating to self-judgment based on one’s values about humans (Alesi et al., 2012).

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A large-scale study was conducted on over 23,500 participants in Norway by Andreassen et al., (2017) and it was found that addictive social media use was linked to low self-esteem. Vogel et al., (2014), found that participants with poorer trait self-esteem tended to use Facebook most often. State self-esteem and self-evaluation were also found to drop when participants' profiles contained more upward social comparisons.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is defined as an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive (Buetell, 2006)

Accordingly, Veenhoven (1996), defined Life Satisfaction as the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life. In other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads.

A lot of factors can have an impact on life satisfaction including stress, anxiety, and depression all of which are positively associated with social media addiction. Satici and Uysal (2015) found a negative association between problematic Facebook use and life satisfaction. Krasnova et al., (2013) conducted research on the feelings of envy on Facebook and life satisfaction. The results indicated a negative correlation between the two variables.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between social media addiction, quality of romantic relationships, interpersonal trust, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

Sample

The research was conducted on a sample of 60 individuals that included 30 females and 30 males. All the participants were in committed relationships for 10 months or more. The age range was 20-30 years. The data was collected from Tricity (Chandigarh, Panchkula & Mohali)

Hypothesis

- There will be a negative correlation of social media addiction on the quality of romantic relationships.
- There will be a negative correlation of social media addiction on interpersonal trust.
- There will be a negative correlation between social addiction and self-esteem.
- There will be a negative correlation between social media addiction and life satisfaction.
- There will be no difference between males and females in social media addiction, interpersonal trust, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

Measures

Standardized scales were used for data collection.

- **Social Networking Addiction Scale:** The scale was developed by Shahnawaz & Rehman (2020) which is a 21-item questionnaire reported on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). The scale follows the component model by Griffiths (2005). The scale has 6 subscales; Salience, Mood

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Modification, Tolerance, Withdrawal, Conflict, Relapse. The score can range from 21-147. Any score above a total of 84 signifies addiction. The scale had a test-retest reliability of 0.88 with an interval of 25 days.

- **Relationship Assessment Scale:** The scale was developed by Hendrick (1998). It is a 7-item scale. Respondents answer each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). A higher score indicates a higher relationship Satisfaction. The RAS shows moderate to high correlations with measures of marital satisfaction, good test-retest reliability and consistent measurement properties across samples of ethnically diverse and age-diverse couples
- **Trust in Close Relationships Scale:** The scale was developed by Rempel et al., (1985). Each item is answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale can be divided into 3 subscales: Predictability, Dependability & Faith.
- **Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale:** The scale was developed by Rosenberg (1965) which is a 10-item questionnaire reported on a 4 point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A higher score indicates higher self-esteem. The scale has high ratings in reliability areas with internal consistency of 0.77 and test-retest reliability for 2-week intervals being 0.85 and 0.63 for 7-month intervals.
- **Satisfaction with Life Scale:** The scale was developed by Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin. It is a 5-item scale. The respondents answer each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The analysis of the reliability of the SWLS shows an internal consistency of 0.74 (Cronbach's alpha). High correlations between items were also seen with values in the range of 0.64 to 0.74 respectively.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. The consent was taken from each participant, and they were thanked for their cooperation. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

RESULTS

Table 1: N, mean and standard deviation.

	Gender	Saliency	Mood Modification	Tolerance	Withdrawal	Conflict	Relapse	Total SNAS	Self esteem	Satisfaction with life	Dependability	Faith	Predictability	Total Trust	Relationship satisfaction
N	Male	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Female	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Mean	Male	14.7	10.8	11.3	9.43	7.57	10.7	64.5	30.4	19.9	9.83	15.9	4.87	30.6	31.3
	Female	16.0	11.2	10.0	11.0	7.47	12.5	68.1	30.3	21.5	8.17	15.4	4.50	28.1	30.7
Standard deviation	Male	4.91	5.27	5.11	5.63	4.82	6.32	24.2	4.58	6.72	4.00	4.39	4.06	9.37	3.97
	Female	6.32	4.66	4.43	5.87	3.95	7.14	26.2	5.10	7.16	3.64	4.34	2.75	7.39	3.81

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Table 2: Correlation between social media addiction (saliency, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse), quality of romantic relationships, interpersonal trust (faith, dependability, and predictability), self-esteem, and satisfaction with life.

	Saliency	Mood Modification	Tolerance	Withdrawal	Conflict	Relapse	Total SNAS	Self esteem	Satisfaction with life	Dependability	Faith	Predictability	Total Trust	Relationship satisfaction
Saliency	—													
Mood Modification	0.494 ***	—												
Tolerance	0.572 ***	0.451 ***	—											
Withdrawal	0.545 ***	0.647 ***	0.531 ***	—										
Conflict	0.456 ***	0.326 *	0.409 **	0.552 ***	—									
Relapse	0.613 ***	0.271 *	0.572 ***	0.600 ***	0.664 ***	—								
Total SNAS	0.802 ***	0.673 ***	0.757 ***	0.840 ***	0.726 ***	0.824 ***	—							
Self esteem	0.051	0.115	-0.006	-0.095	0.299 *	0.106	0.138	—						
Satisfaction with life	0.017	0.199	0.031	0.068	0.103	0.049	0.034	0.253	—					
Dependability	0.364 **	0.228	-0.056	-0.161	0.125	0.120	0.229	0.218	0.301 *	—				
Faith	0.262 *	0.135	-0.063	-0.299 *	0.226	0.223	0.266 *	0.304 *	0.148	0.455 ***	—			
Predictability	0.075	0.035	0.000	0.026	0.010	0.097	0.020	0.123	-0.086	0.160	0.211	—		
Total Trust	0.332 **	0.160	-0.058	-0.217	0.177	0.130	0.233	0.306 *	0.179	0.757 ***	0.807 ***	0.588 ***	—	
Relationship satisfaction	0.322 *	0.060	-0.156	-0.204	0.116	0.174	0.229	0.234	0.172	0.327 *	0.568 ***	0.267 *	0.550 ***	—

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

Table 3: T-test of the variables

	Group	N	Mean	SD	Statistic	p	df
Saliency	Male	30	14.70	4.91	-0.8895	0.377	58.0
	Female	30	16.00	6.32			
Mood Modification	Male	30	10.83	5.27	-0.2853	0.776	58.0
	Female	30	11.20	4.66			
Tolerance	Male	30	11.27	5.11	1.0253	0.309	58.0
	Female	30	10.00	4.43			
Withdrawal	Male	30	9.43	5.63	-1.0326	0.306	58.0
	Female	30	10.97	5.87			
Conflict	Male	30	7.57	4.82	0.0879	0.930	58.0
	Female	30	7.47	3.95			
Relapse	Male	30	10.73	6.32	-0.9955	0.324	58.0
	Female	30	12.47	7.14			
Total SNAS	Male	30	64.53	24.18	-0.5484	0.586	58.0
	Female	30	68.10	26.16			
Self esteem	Male	30	30.40	4.58	0.0799	0.937	58.0
	Female	30	30.30	5.10			
Satisfaction with life	Male	30	19.87	6.72	-0.9299	0.356	58.0
	Female	30	21.53	7.16			
Dependability	Male	30	9.83	4.00	1.6878	0.097	58.0
	Female	30	8.17	3.64			
Faith	Male	30	15.87	4.39	0.3845	0.702	58.0
	Female	30	15.43	4.34			
Predictability	Male	30	4.87	4.06	0.4097	0.684	58.0
	Female	30	4.50	2.75			
Total Trust	Male	30	30.57	9.37	1.1318	0.262	58.0
	Female	30	28.10	7.39			
Relationship satisfaction	Male	30	31.33	3.97	0.6639	0.509	58.0
	Female	30	30.67	3.81			

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results found a significant negative correlation between Salience of social media use and relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.322$, $p < .05$). However, no significant correlation was found between social media addiction and the quality of romantic relationships.

Norton and Baptist (2014) found that the rise in social media has led to a decrease in trust, violations of fidelity, and decreased satisfaction in romantic relationships. Setting boundaries for social networking usage serves a great purpose. It is not ideal to post about fights or contacting previous partners online. The researchers did a study on married couples and the results indicated that trust, not relationship satisfaction was associated with online boundaries. This is contrary to the popular notion that trust means more privacy. The results indicated quite the opposite. Individuals who scored higher on the trust scale were more transparent about their online activity.

A negative association was found between social networking addiction and faith ($r = -0.266$, $p < .05$). There was also a negative correlation between salience and dependability ($r = -0.364$, $p < .01$) and between salience and interpersonal trust ($r = -0.332$, $p < .01$). There was no significant correlation between social media & interpersonal trust.

A negative correlation was found between conflict about social media usage and self-esteem ($r = -0.299$, $p < .05$). We found no significant correlation of Social Media Addiction & Self Esteem. Valkenburg, Beyens et al., (2021) revealed through their study that spanned across 3 weeks that participants who spent more time on social media sites (Instagram, Whatsapp, and Snapchat) scored lower on self-esteem scores than the participants who spent less time online.

No significant correlation was found between social media addiction and life satisfaction. Further, no significant differences were seen in the two groups i.e. males and females on any of the variables. Hence, we accept the hypothesis that there will be no difference between males and females in social media addiction, interpersonal trust, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Social media has become an integral part of modern-day life. It has penetrated all aspects of life including romantic relationships. Romantic relationships are built on a building block called “trust”. With the rise in social media platforms, networking has become easier than ever. Partner monitoring or “stalking” one’s partner online has deteriorating effects on the relationship. Keeping track of other people’s lives has led to social comparisons which can cause the self esteem of a person to take a dip. Further, this can lead to a negative view of one’s life leading to low life satisfaction. The purpose of the current research was to find out the impact of social media addiction on the quality of romantic relationships, interpersonal trust, self esteem and satisfaction with life in couples in committed relationships. The study was conducted on 60 individuals (30 Males, 30 Females) in the age range of 20-30 years.

Salience of social media usage was found to be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction, dependability and interpersonal trust. Social media addiction and faith were also negatively correlated. There was also a negative correlation between conflict about social media usage and self esteem. No significant correlation was found between social media addiction, quality of romantic relationships, interpersonal trust, self-esteem, and life

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satisfaction. Like every other technology, social media has its pros and cons. It has helped millions of people stay connected even despite being miles away. However, it does not take away the well-established fact that social media does impact one's life including personal relationships. The impact may be direct or insidious. The relationship between social media addiction and relationships should be studied on a vast sample for more credibility. The results can have long lasting benefits for couples. As individuals, all we can do is be conscious of our social networking habits and not let what we see on social networking sites misguide us into believing that our relationships are not as worthy as the ones being displayed online.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Vashisht, R. (2023). Committed Relationships: Relationship between Social media Addiction, Quality of Romantic Relationship, Interpersonal Trust, Self-Esteem, and Life Satisfaction. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(3), 4745-4755. DIP:18.01.443.20231103, DOI:10.25215/1103.443