

Research Paper

Peer Pressure and Internet Usage: A Study on Mizo Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Peer pressure and internet usage are two influential factors shaping adolescents' experiences in the digital era. Peer influence, social decisions, self-image, and everyday interactions have been found to intensify online platforms. Exploring how these variables relate is important for understanding the challenges faced by young people growing up in an increasingly connected environment. This study examined the relationship between peer pressure and internet usage among Mizo adolescents. A total of 300 samples were selected from four different higher secondary schools in Aizawl from which 150 are males, and 150 are females. The participants' age range was 16 to 19 years ($M = 17.5$ years). The Peer Pressure Scale (Singh & Saini, 2010) and the Internet Usage Scale (Saini & Kaur, 2017) were used for psychological measurements. The results showed a strong positive correlation between the two variables ($r = .498^{**}$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher internet usage is associated with greater peer pressure. Male students reported significantly higher peer pressure than females ($M = 64.32$ vs. 58.98 ; $t = 3.91$, $p < .001$), while no significant gender difference was found in internet usage ($t = 0.483$; $p = 0.63$). These findings point to the importance of creating safer online environments and fostering constructive peer influence among adolescents.

Keywords: *Peer Pressure, Internet Usage, Adolescents, Mizo*

Peers play a significant role in shaping children and adolescents' social and emotional development. Their influence begins early and continues to increase throughout adolescence. Peer pressure refers to the social influence that drives people to alter their beliefs and behaviors to conform to the norms or expectations of their social group (Brown, 2004). Peer pressure can encourage social integration and cooperation, but it can also cause people to act in ways that go against their moral principles (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011).

During the adolescence stage, where peer pressure becomes more prevalent; individuals go through rapid physical growth, emotional development, identity formation, and increased independence as they navigate social relationships and responsibilities (Santrock, 2019). They have a heightened sensitivity to social influences and peer relationships (Erikson,

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1968). Adolescents strive to establish their identity and sense of belonging and this made them vulnerable to the opinions and behaviors of their peers (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Adolescents interact directly with their peers for longer periods of time during their waking hours than with their family. This interactive influence is more powerful than the influence of teachers, parents, or other authority figures in the adolescent's life (Treynor, 2009). According to Social Identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups which lead them to conform to the norms and behaviors of those groups. An individual creates an in-group identity by categorizing themselves and others into different social groups, such as gender, ethnicity, or peer groups. People are motivated to conform to the group's norms to preserve their membership and status because this in-group identity fosters a sense of belonging and loyalty. In the context of peer pressure, adolescents may feel compelled to adopt the attitudes and behaviors of their peers to reinforce their sense of identity and avoid exclusion. This need for social validation can make individuals more vulnerable to peer pressure, particularly when they perceive their group's norms are important for maintaining their social identity.

In today's digital world, internet usage is becoming significantly more prevalent worldwide. It enables its users to share information and access a vast array of resources and services. This complex infrastructure allows individuals and organizations to send and receive data, facilitate real-time communication, retrieve information, and share multimedia across the globe (Kurose & Ross, 2017). The internet has become an integral part of adolescents' lives, offering countless benefits such as access to information, social connection, and entertainment. It can serve as a valuable educational tool. However, the increased reliance on the internet has also led to various adverse effects, including internet addiction, social isolation, mental health issues, academic problems and many other problematic behaviors. It also exposes them to inappropriate content and online dangers.

According to International Telecommunication Union, 82 percent of people aged 15 to 24 use the internet globally (ITU, 2025). The World Health Organization also found a sharp increase in problematic social media use among adolescents. More than 1 in 10 adolescents displayed signs of problematic social media behavior, difficulty controlling their use and experiencing negative consequences. Girls reported higher levels of problematic social media use when compared to boys. More than one-third (36%) of young people reported constant communication with friends online, with 15-year-old girls reporting the highest rates (44%). A third of adolescents (34%) reported playing digital games daily, and more than 11 in 5 (22%) reported playing for at least four hours on days when they engage in gaming. With 12% of adolescents are at risk of problematic gaming and boys are more likely than girls to exhibit signs of problematic gaming (16% vs. 7%) (WHO, 2024).

Adolescents who experience peer pressure are more likely to engage in excessive internet use, which can lead to negative consequences such as increased anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem (Oberst et al., 2017). The constant need to maintain online presence and measure up to the perceived success and popularity of their peers seems to be high. However, the desire to receive "likes," comments, and followers can create a sense of competition leading to an unhealthy preoccupation with appearance and self-image (Chua & Chang, 2016).

A study conducted by Martínez-Ferrer et. al (2018) found that adolescents with high problematic SNS use engaged in all forms of peer aggression and experienced higher levels

of victimization. Boys scored higher levels in all types of peer victimization and girls scored highest on relational victimization.

Xu et al. (2023) examined whether peer pressure on mobile phone use predicts adolescent mobile social media addiction and whether self-esteem and self-concept clarity can moderate this relationship. The results showed that peer pressure significantly predicted higher mobile social media addiction among adolescents while both self-esteem and self-concept moderated this relationship. Peer pressure had a strong effect on addiction for adolescents with low self-esteem but for those with high self-esteem, the effect was negligible. Peer pressure also strongly predicted addiction in adolescents with low self-concept clarity but not in those with high self-concept clarity.

Adolescents' strong desire for belonging and acceptance often encourages conformity, leading them to adopt behaviors, attitudes, or values that reflect those of their peers. During this developmental stage, the fear of social rejection heightens their vulnerability to risky behaviors, shifts in self-perception, and compromises their personal values to satisfy peer expectations (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

Research indicates that teenagers who spend excessive time online tend to experience decreased psychological well-being including traits like self-control, emotional stability, and social functioning (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Adolescents may feel pressured to follow trends, imitate the behaviors of popular influencers, or conform to beauty standards set within their peer network. This behavior can result in lower self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and heightened risk of developing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

In examining how peer pressure and peer conformity relate to popularity, general conformity to authority and risk behaviours; Santor et al., (2000) found that peer pressure and peer conformity were strong predictors of risky behaviors like early sexual activity and substance abuse.

Although peer pressure is often associated with negative outcomes, it can also have positive effects on internet use. Positive peer influence can encourage adolescents to engage in prosocial behaviors, such as supporting friends, participating in awareness campaigns, or sharing educational content (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Online communication has also been found to be positively related to the quality of adolescents' friendships and higher levels of well-being (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

Although much research has been conducted on peer pressure and on internet usage, there remains limited literature examining the relationship between these two variables within the Mizo population. Earlier research on peer pressure has mostly emphasized on traditional social contexts like family, school, and community interactions. Similarly, studies on adolescent internet use have often focused on general patterns of access, frequency, and online risks. Yet relatively fewer studies have examined how peer pressure operates within online environments while also taking cultural or ethnic-specific dynamics into account. In the context of Mizoram, characterized by collectivist values, close-knit kinship networks, and rapid digital adoption, the interaction between peer influence and online behaviour may manifest in ways that are not fully explained by existing peer pressure frameworks. These factors are particularly relevant during adolescence, a critical stage of change and challenges, where social influences and online activities may significantly shape behaviour

and decision-making. Considering the growing prevalence of internet use and its relation to peer-related influences, exploring the association between peer pressure and internet usage among the Mizo adolescent population will be an important contribution in understanding how peer influence relates to adolescents' online behaviour. These findings can enrich knowledge and contribute to the development of culturally appropriate interventions, school-based programmes, and digital-literacy efforts that can promote healthy development, safer and responsible internet use among Mizo youth.

Objectives:

1. To find out the relationship between peer pressure and internet usage among Mizo adolescents.
2. To find out gender differences in peer pressure among Mizo adolescents.
3. To find out gender differences in internet usage among Mizo adolescents.

Hypotheses:

1. It is expected that there will be a significant positive correlation between Peer Pressure and Internet Usage.
2. It is expected that male adolescents will significantly score higher in Peer Pressure than female adolescents.
3. It is expected that male adolescents will significantly score higher in Internet Usage than female adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and procedure:

A total of 300 Mizo adolescents were selected through a non-probability sampling called convenience sampling. The students were selected from four different schools in Aizawl, Mizoram i.e. Chaltlang Higher Secondary School, Mount Carmel School, Government Mizo Higher Secondary School, and Synod Higher Secondary School. The sample size consists of male (n=150) and female (n=150). The age range of the participants is between 16-19 years (M=17.5 years).

All psychological tools for the participants were prepared ahead of time. Prior to conducting the research, permission was obtained from the principals of the participating schools to ensure compliance with institutional guidelines. Participants were identified and engaged in the study using incidental sampling method. A rapport-building session was conducted with the participants, ensuring they were aware of the confidentiality of their responses and their autonomy to withdraw from the project at will, in line with the ethical standards outlined in Section 8 of the APA Code of Conduct.

Each participant received a consent form, a demographic profile, and two questionnaires (Peer Pressure Scale and Internet Usage Scale). No time constraints were imposed, and participants were not forced into completing the questionnaire.

Upon completion, the questionnaires were collected, after which a debriefing session took place, during which the purpose of the research was explained to the participants. Finally, the participants were thanked for their invaluable contributions to the research, and incentives were distributed.

Tools used:

- 1) **Peer Pressure Scale:** The Peer Pressure scale was developed by Sandeep Singh and Sunil Saini (2010). The scale is a unidimensional scale which gives estimate of peer pressure in adolescents. It is a self-report 5-point Likert scale. A score of 1 represented the option “strongly disagree” while a score of 5 on the scale represented the category “strongly agree”. The minimum possible score is 25 and maximum possible score is 125. High score indicates high peer pressure, and low score indicates less peer pressure. This scale is meant for individuals aged 16 years to 21 years. The scale has good reliability, face validity and content validity.
- 2) **Internet Usage Scale:** The Internet Usage Scale was developed by Shaloo Saini and Dr. Parminder Kaur (2017). The scale consists of 20 scale items which assess the internet usage level of secondary school students. The scale is self-administrable. The scoring follows a 5-point Likert scale and consists of the options: “Rarely”, “Occasionally”, “Frequently”, “Often”, and “Always”. High score indicates high internet usage.

Design of the study:

The present study employed correlational design to find out the relationship between Internet Usage and Peer Pressure. The study also employed between group design to compare males (n = 150) and females (n = 150) in Peer Pressure and Internet Usage.

Statistical Analysis:

The present study employed IBM SPSS version 25 for data analysis. Descriptive Statistics (Mean, SD, Skewness, Kurtosis, etc.,) were employed to provide an outline of the general characteristics of the variables under study. The reliability of the scales was analyzed using Cronbach’s Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the scales. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was employed to find out the relationship between peer pressure and internet usage. Independent sample t-test was also employed to find out significant difference between male and female on the selected scale i.e., Peer Pressure Scale (PPS) and Internet Usage Scale (IUS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Frequency of Hours Spent Using the Internet

Hours Spent	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Less than 1 hour	7.3	4.7	12
1-2 hours	20.7	17.3	38
3-4 hours	48.7	50.7	49.7
5-6 hours	16	18.7	17.3
More than 6 hours	7.3	8.7	8

Table 1 presents the distribution of participants based on the number of hours spent using the internet per day, categorized by gender. The findings indicate that the largest proportion of participants fall within the 3–4 hours usage category, accounting for 49.7% of the total sample. Within this group, 50.7% of females and 48.7% of males reported using the internet for 3–4 hours daily, showing that this is the most common usage pattern for both genders. The least frequent category is less than 1 hour, accounting for 12% of the total participants, with 7.3% males and 4.7% females.

Table 2: Frequency of Most Used Social Media on the Internet

Most Used social media	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Instagram	81.3	82	81.7
WhatsApp	18.7	18	18.3

Table 2 shows the frequency for most used social media platforms on the internet. The table shows that majority of males (81.3%) and females (82%) use Instagram while only 18.7% of males and 18% of females use WhatsApp.

Table 3: Frequency of Peer Pressure felt

Peer Pressure felt	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Never	5.3	3.3	4.3
Rarely	28	30	29
Sometimes	48	50	49
Often	14	14	14
Very Often	4.7	2.7	3.7

Table 3 shows that the majority of both males 48% and females (50%) reported experiencing peer pressure *sometimes*. A considerable proportion of the participants also reported feeling peer pressure *rarely* (males: 28%, females: 30%, total: 29%). The percentage of students who reported feeling peer pressure *often* is identical for both males and females (14%). Very few students reported experiencing peer pressure at the extremes. Only 4.3% overall reported *never* feeling peer pressure (males: 5.3%, females: 3.3%), and few reported feeling it *very often* (total: 3.7%; males: 4.7%, females: 2.7%). This indicates that extreme experiences of peer pressure are not common.

Table 4: Frequency of Online Interaction

Online Interaction	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Rarely	10.7	6	8.3
Sometimes	33.3	24	28.7
Often	41.3	42	41.7
Very Often	14.7	28	21.3

Table 4 shows that the majority (41.7%, males: 41.3%, females: 42%) of the participants reported to have online interaction often, while the minority (8.3%) of the sample have online interactions rarely.

Table 5: Frequency of Internet Usage Impact

Internet Usage Impact	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Somewhat Negative	13.3	12.7	13
Neutral	46.7	53.3	50
Very Negative	4.7	3.13	2.3
Somewhat Positive	29.3	2.7	30.3
Positive	6	6	4.3

Table 5 shows that the majority of males (46.7%) and females (53.3%) reported to have a neutral attitude towards the impact of internet usage in their lives. While in the least frequent category, only 2.3% participants (males 4.7% and females 3.13%) reported to have very negative attitude towards the impact of internet usage.

Table 6: Frequency of Social Support System

Social Support	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Strong Support System	21.3	23.3	22.3
Moderate Support System	32.7	30	31.3
Limited Support System	22	28.7	25.3
No Support System	8.7	6.7	7.7
Prefer not to say	15.3	11.3	13.3

Table 6 shows that the majority of males (32.7%) and females (30%) reported to have a moderate support system in their lives while 22.3% of the entire sample reported to have a strong support system. Further, 25.3% of the samples reported to have limited support system. Additionally, 7.7% of respondents indicated they have no support system.

Table 7: Reliability Statistics of the Peer Pressure and Internet Usage Scales

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach alpha
Peer Pressure	25	0.818
Internet Usage	20	0.752

Table 7 shows that the Cronbach's Alpha values for the sample in Peer Pressure Scale is 0.818, and 0.752 in Internet Usage Scale which indicates that the scales have a good reliability value for the target population - Mizo adolescents.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics of Peer Pressure Scale and Internet Usage Scale:

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
PPS	300	34	103	61.65	12.11	0.15	-0.27
IUS	300	27	89	55.04	12.65	0.03	-0.4

The descriptive statistics in Table 8 revealed that the mean value for the participants in peer pressure scale (PPS) is 61.65 ($M=61.65$) with a standard deviation of 12.114 ($SD=12.11$). Moreover, the scores varied between 34 and 103 in the Peer Pressure scale where the maximum possible score is 125 and minimum possible score is 25. The skewness and kurtosis of the peer pressure scores were found to be 0.15 and -0.27 respectively, indicating that the distribution is normal.

The table also showed that the mean value for the participants in Internet Usage Scale is 55.04 ($M=55.04$) with a standard deviation of 12.65 ($SD=12.65$). The scores varied between 27 and 89. The minimum possible score was 20 and the maximum possible score was 100. The skewness and kurtosis of the internet usage scores were found to be 0.03 and -0.4 respectively, indicating that the population distribution is normal.

Table 9: Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Peer Pressure and Internet Usage Scales:

Scales	1	2
Peer Pressure Scale	1	
Internet usage Scale	.498**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between peer pressure and internet usage ($r=.498^{**}$; $p<.01$).

Table 10: Independent Sample t-test

Gender differences in Peer Pressure and Internet Usage among Mizo Adolescents.

Variables	Males ^a		Females ^b		t (298)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Peer Pressure	64.32	12.62	58.98	11.00	3.91	<.001	.45
Internet Usage	55.39	12.09	54.69	13.21	0.48	.63	.05

Note. N = 300. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

^an = 150. ^bn = 150

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 10 shows the Independent Sample t-test for males and females in peer pressure and Internet Usage. In peer pressure scale, males (M= 64.32; SD= 12.62) scored significantly higher than females (M= 58.98; SD= 11.00), $t(298) = 3.91$, $p < .001$ indicating a statistically significant gender difference with a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = .45$). In Internet usage scale, males (M=55.39; SD= 12.09) score slightly higher than females (M=54.69; SD= 13.21) but there was no significant difference between these two groups $t(298) = 0.48$, $p = .63$.

DISCUSSION

Our findings show a significant positive correlation between peer pressure and internet usage. Our first hypothesis was accepted. This pattern of relationship observed in our study aligns with previous research findings particularly in the context of problematic usage or internet addiction (Xie, 2024; Zhou et al., 2019). Internet has been used as a medium for social interaction. Our findings indicate that most of the participants (81.7%) reported using Instagram. While 18.3% reported using Whatsapp. Many participants (41.7 %) reported to have online interaction often while only few (8.3%) reported to have online interaction rarely. Activities that can be done online such as active participation in social media groups, maintenance of online presence, and communication through messaging apps are closely tied to peer recognition and group identity. Adolescents may feel compelled to remain engaged online to avoid social exclusion, stay updated with peer conversations, and display their social identities (Przybylski et al., 2013). Therefore, peer pressure may appear to serve as an important factor for increased internet usage among Mizo adolescents. This pattern of relationship can also be understood through Mizo socio-cultural context, which is characterized by collectivistic values, close-knit community networks, and high emphasis on social belonging. In collectivistic societies, adolescents are more sensitive to peer norms and approval, and group conformity is an important determinant of daily behaviors (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In our findings, male participants significantly score higher than females in peer pressure. Our second hypothesis was accepted. Studies have revealed that girls often face pressure regarding social conformity, relationships and appearance, while boys often experience pressure regarding toughness and dominance and are more likely to take risky behavior (McMillan et al., 2019). While boys tend to form larger groups, girls tend to form smaller, more intimate friendships (Galambos, 2004; Maccoby, 1990). In the Mizo socio-cultural context, boys typically spend a large amount of time in larger peer groups and outdoor social settings, which may expose them to more intense pressure to maintain their status as compared to female adolescents. As social approval is highly regarded in a close-knit society, failing to participate in shared group activities can often result in loss of status within a group. Mizo male adolescents have been found to score higher in self-esteem than

female adolescents (Ralte et al., 2024). Self-efficacy is closely associated with an individual's perceived ability to perform effectively in social contexts. When peer group norms highly regard traits such as toughness and boldness, adolescents may experience increased pressure to display these characteristics to maintain their self-image and social standing within the group.

Our present findings do not show significant gender difference in Internet Usage. Therefore, our third hypothesis was rejected. In our study, the largest proportion of participants fall within the 3–4 hours usage category, accounting for 49.7% (48.7% males and 50.7% females) of the total sample. In online interaction frequency, 41.3 % of males and 42 % females reported to have online interaction often. Approximately an equal number of male and female participants use Instagram (81.3% males and 82% females) and WhatsApp (18.7% males and 18 % females). This may suggest that both genders have broadly similar access to and engagement with digital technologies in this context. This pattern aligns with broader trends in youth-oriented digital environments, where gender differences in amount of internet use are often weak or absent, even though preferences for specific activities (such as gaming, social media, or academic use) may still vary (Niskier et al., 2024). The internet functions as the primary medium for peer interaction, academic engagement, and social participation for both boys and girls. The collectivistic nature of Mizo society, where group belonging and social connectedness are highly valued, may encourage adolescents of both genders to remain equally active online.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between peer pressure and internet usage, along with gender differences in these variables among Mizo adolescents. A significant positive relationship between peer pressure and internet usage may suggest that the internet serves as an important medium through which peer interaction and group belonging are maintained. A significant gender difference was observed in peer pressure, with males scoring higher than females, whereas no significant gender difference was found in internet usage. The absence of gender difference in internet usage suggests that access to and engagement with the internet is relatively similar for both males and females. However, the higher level of peer pressure reported by males implies that boys may experience stronger expectations from their peer groups, which could influence how and why they engage in online environments.

Limitations and Suggestions

The limitations of the study include the design of study and sampling which restricts finding causal relationship between the variables under study. The samples were collected from limited number of schools in Aizawl. Future study may focus on collecting samples from different districts in Mizoram.

The present study assessed overall internet usage among adolescents but did not examine the specific patterns, purposes, or types of online activities, which may vary between boys and girls. The study also did not assess problematic forms of internet use, which have been linked to adverse psychological and social outcomes. The role of adolescents' social support systems was not explored in our study, despite its potential influence on their susceptibility to peer pressure and online behavior. As social media continues to serve as an important platform for peer interaction and engagement among adolescents; the limitations cited above suggest the need for future research. It will be useful for parents, teachers and policymakers to design culturally appropriate interventions, school-based programmes and digital-literacy

efforts that encourage positive peer interaction, safer and responsible internet use among Mizo youth.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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