

THE IMPACT OF ADDICTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AMONG UNIVERSITY DWELLING EMERGING ADULTS CURRENTLY IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Habiba Jan^{*1}, Hassan Shehzad², Dr. Ulfat Nisa³

^{*1,2,3}National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21279992>

Keywords

College students, sexual interactions, developing maturity, intimate partner violence, and social media dependency.

Article History

Received: 29 January 2026

Accepted: 14 March 2026

Published: 28 March 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Habiba Jan

Abstract

Background:

The potential effects on interpersonal and romantic relationships have raised worries about the rising usage of social media among emerging adults. The dynamics of relationships and the probability of conflicts among romantic partners may be considerably influenced by the overuse of social networking platforms. However, there is a dearth of research regarding the relationship between intimate partner violence and the excessive use of social media among university students in Pakistan.

Objectives:

This study examines the association between intimate partner violence and excessive social media use among emerging adults residing on college campuses who are in romantic partnerships. The investigation studied the relationship between addictive social media usage and intimate partner violence, along with the presence of gender discrepancies in these occurrences...

Methods:

A quantitative cross-sectional study design was employed. Purposive sampling was utilised to pick a sample of 260 university students currently involved in romantic relationships. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI) were utilised to collect data. Descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, simple linear regression, and independent samples t-tests were employed in the statistical analysis.

Results:

The findings indicated a non-significant relationship between intimate partner violence and excessive social media usage. Furthermore, addictive social media use did not significantly predict intimate partner violence. The findings indicated no significant gender disparities in the utilisation of addictive social media and intimate relationship violence among male and female participants..

Conclusion:

The study concluded that the prevalence of intimate partner violence among university-aged emerging adults is not significantly affected by their intensive engagement with social media. The findings indicate that intimate partner violence may be affected by psychological, interpersonal, and contextual factors. Further research should explore additional aspects that may enhance the understanding of intimate partner violence in romantic relationships.

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has substantially changed the socialising and communicating way for young adults. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Snapchat have become a staple of university students' daily routines. According to Andreassen et al. (2016), the dysfunctional and obsessive use of digital platforms can cause addictive behaviours that have detrimental effects on interpersonal relationships and psychological health.

Emotional development, identity exploration, and the formation of intimate relationships are generally observed in persons aged 18 to 29 (Arnett, 2000). University students often engage in such romantic partnerships throughout this developmental stage. These relationships are maintained through the use of a primary source, social media, which creates opportunity for both connection and conflict.

Addictive social media use is the uncontrollable use and excessive use of social media platforms that leads to psychological dependence and disruption of daily activities (Andreassen et al., 2016). "Addictive social media activities can lead to mood shift, withdrawal symptoms, preoccupation, conflict, tolerance and relapse in people. These tendencies are conducive to internet surveillance, envy, interpersonal issues and relationship surveillance.

Intimate partner violence is the use of physical, psychological, emotional, sexual or relational violence between intimate partners (World Health Organization, 2021). Traditionally IPV was thought to be associated with married couples, yet it is now more identified as a phenomenon within young adults romantic relationships and dating behaviours. Relational violence can manifest in various ways for college students, such as verbal abuse, intimidation, emotional manipulation, and physical assault.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) proposes that behaviours are taught through modelling, reinforcement and observation. Aggressive behaviours, dysfunctional relational standards and domineering activities may be part of relationship dynamics in social media environments. Excessive usage of social media can generate jealousy, mistrust, and disputes with peers.

Elphinston and Noller (2011) found a correlation between problematic social media use and violence, conflict, jealousy and marital unhappiness. If surveillance of a partner's online behaviour goes overboard, it can lead to suspicion and emotional strain, and potentially relational trouble. Higher romantic tension and lower relationship quality have been linked to social media addiction (Drouin et al., 2017).

Evidence of technology-enabled interpersonal violence among teenagers and young adults has been found by researchers. Stonard et al. (2014) noted the effect of digital communication and social media on emotional abuse and controlling tendencies. Reed et al. (2016) have shown that dating partners may develop psychological antagonism and controlling tendencies through the usage of digital communication platforms. Relationship hostility was associated with online interactions at a higher level.

The research available on the subject matter is huge at the worldwide level yet the relationship between compulsive social media usage and intimate partner violence is underexplored among university students in Pakistan. Cultural norms, relationship conventions and societal expectations impact social media behaviours and experiences of interpersonal violence. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to examine this relationship among college-going young adults.

The study aims to investigate the impact of excessive social media use on intimate partner violence among university students in romantic relationships. These findings might contribute to the knowledge about digital behaviour in romantic relationships and might motivate preventive strategies for the promotion of healthy relationship dynamics.

Hypothesis

H1: Intimate partner violence will correlate positively with excessive social media usage among university-residing emerging adults currently engaged in romantic partnerships.

H2: Addictive social media use will significantly predict intimate partner violence among university-dwelling emerging adults currently in romantic partnerships.

H3: A greater extent of verbal, emotional, and relational aggressiveness in romantic

relationships will correlate with elevated levels of addicted social media usage..

Methodology

Study design

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational methodology was employed to assess the association between addictive social media use and intimate partner violence, without manipulating any factors..

Study Participant

The study's sample consisted of two hundred and sixty (260) individuals. The research was carried out with university students registered in multiple government and private institutions in Rawalpindi. The survey approach was utilised to collect the sample. The survey encompassed adults of both genders aged 18 to 29.

Sampling Technique

This investigation employed a purposive sampling strategy. Participants received an invitation to engage in the study through an in-person questionnaire. This strategy was chosen for its practicality and accessibility to a substantial number of participants..

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants were required to understand the language of the survey to qualify for this study. Participants must have the signed informed consent form before engaging in the study. Participants who did not submit a sufficient number of questionnaires or offered inconsistent responses were excluded from the study. Furthermore, people who self-identified as possessing significant mental health disorders were eliminated. Musical Instrument Andreassen et al. (2016) utilised the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) to investigate the addictive characteristics of social media usage among university students. The measure is based on six essential elements of behavioural addiction: salience, mood modulation, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. It consists of six objects, each representing a distinct facet of addiction. The responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, where one indicated "extremely rarely" and five indicated "very often. Elevated scores

signify a more pronounced addiction to social media in the individual.

The intimate partner violence experienced by the participants was measured using the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI) created by Wolfe et al. (2001). It measures a range of aspects of interpersonal violence such as anger and victimisation. The subscales are relational aggression, sexual abuse, physical violence, verbal/emotional abuse and threatening behaviour. The scale includes 24 items that are mostly rated on a four-point scale from 0 (never) to 3 (frequently/often). A higher score means more involvement in intimate partner violence, either as victim or aggressor.

Ethical considerations

The research was performed in compliance with the recognised ethical guidelines for psychological studies involving human subjects. The data gathering process began with the acquisition of official approval from the relevant institutional authorities for the study of university students.

The participants were apprised of the study's purpose and nature before their involvement, and participation was fully voluntary. They were assured the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any moment without facing any penalties or consequences.

Before the dissemination of questionnaires, all participants were apprised of the study's aims and furnished with written informed consent. The research methodology was executed with the highest degree of confidentiality and anonymity. The remarks were exclusively for scholarly purposes, and no personal data, including names, registration numbers, or identifiers, was gathered.

Study Procedure

We administered a survey to 260 college students involved in romantic relationships. A purposive sample was obtained from multiple universities. The demographic indicators were examined to confirm the sample makeup after the data collection process.

One hundred forty-one individuals (54.2%) were aged 18 to 23, whereas one hundred nineteen participants (45.8%) were aged 24 to 29. This information was uncovered during the

demographic analysis. This indicates that more than 50% of the sample comprised young emergent adults.

The sample consisted of 157 male participants (60.4%) and 103 female participants (39.6%). The quantity of male participation exceeded that of female participants.

The survey included 42 (16.2%) first-year students, 85 (32.7%) second-year students, 77 (29.6%) third-year students, and 56 (21.5%) fourth-year students. The academic year has been revealed. The majority of participants were now in their second or third year of academic education.

Regarding the duration of the relationship, 142 (54.6%) participants indicated being in a relationship for one to two years, 91 (35.0%) for two to four years, and 27 (10.4%) for four to six years. This indicates that most individuals were involved in romantic relationships of a somewhat short to medium duration.

The sample demographic accurately reflects university students across diverse age groups, academic years, and relationship lengths, hence providing a robust basis for investigating the correlation between excessive social media usage and abusive personal relationships.

Results

Table 4.1 Psychometric properties

Variable	No. of items	M	SD	α
Social media	6	19.95	8.57	.977
IPV	24	41.48	19.04	.860

Note: M=mean, SD=standard deviation, α = Cronbach's alpha

The study variables exhibited satisfactory internal consistency, as demonstrated by the psychometric characteristics. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) exhibited remarkable reliability ($\alpha = .977$). The Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI) had moderate reliability ($\alpha = .860$). The mean assessment of addictive social media

The values for intimate relationship violence were 19.95 (SD=8.57) and 41.48 (SD=18.04), respectively. The findings demonstrate that both tools are suitable for assessing addicted social media usage and intimate partner violence among emerging adults in a university setting.

Table 4.2 Correlation analysis:

Variables	Social media	IPV
Social media	1	-.091
IPV	-.091	1

Note: $p=.142$, total number of participants= 260, IPV=Intimate partner violence

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between BSMAS and IPV among university students. Intimate partner violence exhibited a negative correlation with addictive social media usage ($r(260) = -.091$, $p = .142$).

A moderate negative correlation is present between social media addiction and intimate

partner violence; however it lacks statistical significance. Research demonstrates that there is no substantial link between intimate partner violence and problematic social media usage among emerging adults in romantic partnerships residing in university housing.

Table 4.3 Regression analysis

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	45.318	2.83	-	15.9	.000
Social media use	-0.192	0.13	-0.091	-1.47	.142

Note: SE=standard error, $p=.142$,

A simple linear model was employed to analyse the correlation between addicted social media usage and intimate partner violence among university students. The findings demonstrated that the model lacked statistical significance, with a $F(1, 258)$ value of 2.169 and a p -value of 0.142. It explained merely 0.8% of the variation in intimate partner violence ($R^2 = 0.008$).

The utilisation of addictive social media did not significantly predict intimate partner violence ($\beta = -.091$, $t = -1.473$, $p = .142$). The findings indicate that elevated addictive social media usage does not significantly forecast intimate partner violence among emerging adults residing in universities.

Table 4.4 Independent sample t test

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Social media	Male	157	20.41	8.56	1.064	258	.288
	Female	103	19.25	8.57			
IPV	Male	157	40.61	17.80	-0.959	258	.338
	Female	103	42.81	19.42			

Note: N=number of participants, SD= standard deviation, df=degree of freedom

An independent samples t-test was used to examine gender disparities in the utilisation of addictive social media and intimate partner violence among university students.

The findings indicated no statistically significant difference in addictive social media usage between boys and females ($t(258) = 1.064$, $p = .288$). Although males ($M = 20.41$, $SD = 8.56$) attained slightly superior scores compared to females ($M = 19.25$, $SD = 8.57$), this difference was not statistically significant.

No notable gender difference was detected in intimate relationship violence ($t(258) = -0.959$, $p = .338$). Conversely, females ($M = 42.81$, $SD = 18.42$) demonstrated somewhat elevated IPV ratings compared to males ($M = 40.61$, $SD = 17.80$); still, the difference was not statistically significant.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that gender does not substantially affect addictive social media usage or intimate partner violence among emerging adults residing in universities..

DISCUSSION

The primary hypothesis of the study posited a strong positive link between the engagement with addictive social media by university students and intimate partner violence. The results failed to corroborate this hypothesis, as no discernible connection existed between the two variables. This suggests that the predominant factor contributing to intimate partner violence in romantic partnerships among college-attending emerging adults may

be the over utilisation of social media. Prior study has produced incongruous findings. Certain research suggest that the utilisation of problematic social media sites may result in heightened jealousy and marital conflict. Others demonstrate weak or insignificant correlations that depend on contextual circumstances.

It is therefore hypothesised that social media addiction will considerably predict intimate partner violence. The findings did not corroborate this hypothesis, indicating that social media addiction is not a valid predictor of aggressiveness in romantic relationships. Intimate partner violence is a complex conduct influenced by various psychological and social elements, including personality, attachment, and emotion management, rather than solely by digital activity (Capaldi et al., 2012).zThe third hypothesis proposed that significant differences would exist in the prevalence of intimate partner violence and the compulsive use of social media between male and female university students. The findings contradicted this idea, indicating that men and women display similar trends in their use of social media and intimate partner violence.

Possible interpretations of the results

The lack of significant cooperation may stem from one or many issues. Participants may have been predisposed to conceal sensitive behaviours, such as intimate partner violence, owing to social desirability bias. Challenges may emerge in the revelation of cultural traditions

inside South Asian civilisations due to romantic discord and hostility. The present study did not consider specific psychological characteristics, such as attachment insecurity, resentment, and emotional regulation, which are likely to affect intimate partner violence.

Implications for the study

The results suggest that the sheer existence of widespread social media usage may not adequately account for intimate partner violence among college students. This necessitates a more holistic approach to the study of interpersonal violence that considers psychological and relational factors. This study addresses a gap in existing research within a South Asian context, proposing that cultural differences may influence the association between technology usage and interpersonal violence.

The interventions designed to mitigate intimate partner violence should concentrate on emotional control, communication skills, relationship dynamics, and social media usage among young adults.

Limitations

Unfortunately, the present work is hindered by several limitations. The study's cross-sectional nature prevents the results from being interpreted as causal. Bias may have been introduced due to the dependence on self-report measures, especially concerning sensitive subjects such as intimate partner abuse. The sample was confined to university students, hence limiting its generalisability. Moreover, the phenomena were not examined in relation to essential psychological characteristics, such as emotional regulation and attachment style.

Recommendations

Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to more effectively establish causal interactions among factors. To improve generalisability, research should encompass a diverse array of persons, including those beyond the university student demographic. Future study should focus on incorporating psychological elements, such as attachment styles, jealousy, and emotional regulation, to improve the comprehensiveness of the intimate partner violence model. Mixed methodologies

approaches may be helpful in understanding interpersonal interactions.

REFERENCES

- Andreassen, C. S., Billieux, J., Griffiths, M. D., Kuss, D. J., Demetrovics, Z., Mazzoni, E., & Pallesen, S. (2016). The relationship between addictive use of social media and psychological well-being. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 30(2), 252–262. <https://doi.org/10.1037/adb0000160>
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Capaldi, D. M., Knoble, N. B., Shortt, J. W., & Kim, H. K. (2012). A systematic review of risk factors for intimate partner violence. *Partner Abuse*, 3(2), 231–280. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1946-6560.3.2.231>
- Elphinston, R. A., & Noller, P. (2011). Time to face it! Facebook intrusion and the implications for romantic jealousy and relationship satisfaction. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(11), 631–635. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2010.0318>
- Lenhart, A. (2015). *Teens, social media & technology overview 2015*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>
- Muise, A., Christofides, E., & Desmarais, S. (2009). More information than you ever wanted: Does Facebook bring out the green-eyed monster of jealousy? *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(4), 441–444. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2008.0263>

- Reed, L. A., Tolman, R. M., & Ward, L. M. (2016). Gender matters: Experiences and consequences of digital dating abuse victimization. *Journal of Adolescence*, 59, 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.05.015>
- Stonard, K. E., Bowen, E., Walker, K., & Price, S. A. (2014). “They’ll always find a way to get to you”: Technology use in adolescent romantic relationships and its role in dating violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(16), 3083–3097. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514535096>
- Tokunaga, R. S. (2011). Social networking site or social surveillance site? Understanding the use of interpersonal electronic surveillance in romantic relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2), 705–713. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.08.014>
- World Health Organization. (2021). Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>

