Pakistan Journal of Professional Psychology: Research and Practice Vol. 17, No. 1, 2026
https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

Social Media Usage, Social Comparison and Feedback Seeking, and Interaction Anxiousness in Youth

Jane Vincent, Sumaira Ayub* & Shahnila Tariq
University of Management and Technology, Lahore

This study aims to explore the relationships between social media use, social comparison, and feedback seeking, and interaction anxiousness among youth. It was hypothesized that (i) there is a positive relationship between social media use, social comparison and feedback seeking, and interaction anxiousness in youth, (ii) Social media use, and social comparison and feedback seeking is likely to positively predict interaction anxiousness in youth, (iii) there are gender differences in term of social media use, social comparison and feedback seeking, and interaction anxiousness in youth. A correlational cross-sectional research design was used in the present study. The sample comprised 208 university students aged 18–35 (M = 21.97, SD = 3.191) from public and private sector universities of Lahore. The assessment measures included Social Media-Activity Questionnaire (Ozimek et al., 2023), Social Comparison and Feedback-Seeking Scale (Nesi & Prinstein, , 2015).) Interaction Anxiousness Scale (Leary et al., 1983). Results revealed that passive social media was positively related to social comparison and feedback seeking and had no significant relation to interaction anxiousness. In contrast, active social media use was positively related to social comparison and feedback seeking and negatively related to interaction anxiousness. Lastly, social comparison and feedback seeking was positively related to interaction anxiousness. The results indicated that passive social media use positively and active social media use negatively predicted interaction anxiousness. Further, social comparison and feedback seeking positively predicted interaction anxiousness. Additionally, the results also showed that men reported higher active social media use, while women exhibited higher interaction anxiousness. Further, no significant gender differences were found in passive social media use as well as social comparison and feedback seeking. Future implications should be implemented to reduce anxiety, youth should be educated on the detrimental effects of social media, and educational institutions should develop strategies that promote responsible usage. Peer support programs and readily accessible mental health services can also assist youths in sharing their experiences and building coping techniques.

Keywords: social media; social comparison; feedback seeking; anxiety; active social media usage; passive social media usage; youth

Social media has become a central part of modern youth culture. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok keep young people constantly engaged in virtual communities. Although social media provides a variety of advantages, including immediate communication and convenient access to information, its influence on young people is a cause for concern, as it has been linked to issues like cyberbullying, mental health problems, and a distorted sense of reality. Social media usage that contributes to its impact on youth is the phenomenon of social comparison (Bozzola et al., 2022). In Pakistan (a nation with one of the world's largest populations), there has been a traditional reliance on the joint family structure. However, similar to trends in many Asian countries, there has been a gradual shift towards the nuclear family model over time. In January 2022, Pakistan boasted 71.70 million social media users, constituting approximately 31.5% of the total population (Kemp, 2020). Predominantly, internet and social media usage in the country are observed among individuals aged 18–35. Notably, an 80% of the majority are Facebook users and Twitter users, with the highest percentage of males (Javed & Bhatti, 2019).

Social media usage includes the instant creation and distribution of content, such as sharing updates, photos, or videos. Furthermore, using social media involves consuming

[1]Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ms. Sumaira Ayub, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: sumaira.ayub@umt.edu.com

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

content passively, such as going through news feeds or viewing videos. The unique characteristics and consequences of these different forms of social media engagement shape our interactions and communication patterns in the digital domain (Rana et al., 2019). The active utilization of social media enables people to share their opinions, creativity, and help to express themselves. This type of use creates connections between people; people who are like-minded can develop a network. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the passive utilization of social media fosters a sense of inspiration, one can relax, and it also provides an escape from stressful situations in everyday life. Social media, undoubtedly, has essentially proven to be a seamless part of our lives, influencing the way we interact, receive information, and view the world around us (Patti & ile, 2022). The frequent sharing of personal life activities and updating others about your activities and content is associated with increased levels of social comparison. It is thought that this association results from people being exposed to a greater variety of material by actively using social media platforms, which raises the possibility that people may draw parallels (Nor et al., 2025).

Social comparison is referred to as the process by which thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and abilities are evaluated by individuals in relation to others (Festinger, 1957). It can also be defined as a psychological mechanism by which beliefs, abilities, and characteristics are assessed by individuals through juxtaposition with others. The comparison among individuals is established when people compare themselves in terms of social status, appearance, intelligence, and achievements made by others. Individuals thought that this comparison made them change into better people in terms of improvement in their daily life activities. They found an area where they could grow, prosper and achieve success. By changing and improving themselves, they believe that they can improve self-esteem, play a better role in society, become motivated, and their actions and perception can improve their attributes and increase their sense of superiority (Gerber et al., 2019). Furthermore, feedback-seeking behavior is an evaluative type, referring to one's endeavors to obtain information to improve one's skills, competence, or performance in one's work or endeavor. Hence, it could be defined as a process encompassing the initiation of feedback, the perception of the feedback received, and the response elicited from the feedback process (Ashford et al., 2003). Feedback seeking can also be classified on the basis of dimensions such as frequency, timing, source, and the content of the feedback, and can also be defined by these terminologies. 'Frequency' is defined by how often individuals seek feedback, while 'timing' is when they request feedback following an event. 'Source', includes the expertise and trustworthiness of the feedback provider. Seeking feedback from others and taking responsibility for the outcomes of one's actions are also considered forms of feedback seeking (Anseel et al., 2015). The presentation of flawless lives on social media platforms, lead to the low self-esteem amongst youth because they know it's impossible to lead such perfect lives. These two cycles lead to levels of interaction anxiety among the users (Elizabeth et al., 2020).

Currently, young people are the predominant users of social media platforms. These platforms offer youths a space to establish social connections and relationships. In today's era, the allure of cutting-edge electronic devices is captivating the attention of the younger demographic, who constitute the primary consumers of such gadgets and services. Addiction in young people is often the result of this fast adoption. The negative effects of excessive social media use are widespread and can endanger young people's mental and physical health, especially if they haven't fully developed the ability to tell the difference between fact and fiction (Singh et al., 2020). This study integrates Cognitive Theory of interaction anxiety (Clark & Well, 1995) and Self-Presentation and Social Anxiety Theory (Leary et al., 2000) to investigate how social media usage, social comparison and feedback seeking interacts to predict interaction anxiety among youth, with a focus on the underlying cognitive and self-presentation motivations that contribute to the development of social anxiety. According to

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

Clark and Well's Cognitive Social Anxiety Theory (1995), anxious people often emphasize the negative aspects of social encounters while minimizing the good ones. They frequently inflate the possibility of unfavorable outcomes, overestimate the perceived threat level of circumstances, and underestimate their capacity to handle them. As a result, individuals could feel more anxious, which makes them avoid social contact. These people's beliefs and expectations have a major role in the development of anxiety. They usually overstate the danger which events bring, underestimate their capacity to deal with them skillfully, and exaggerate the possible outcomes. Overemphasizing performance can obscure social connections and lead to skewed recollections, wherein unpleasant experiences from the past are remembered more vividly than they actually were (Beck et al., 1976). People with social anxiety frequently use avoidance strategies to stop bad things from happening. For example, people may be afraid of appearing stupid if they don't speak up in social situations. A popular treatment for social anxiety is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which tries to assist patients in assessing and modifying their unfavorable expectations and beliefs about social interaction. However, depending on the patient, several therapies might work better. The concept emphasizes awareness regarding the social comparison process, feedback-seeking behavior, and social media usage on levels of social anxiety. It means that the actual or at least perceived nature of social interactions within cyberspace significantly affects how people's symptoms of SA reveal and consolidate themselves (Leigh & Clark, 2018).

The Social Anxiety Theory of Self-presentation holds that people become anxious in social situations where they are concerned about how they wish to be seen, but they are uncertain how effectively this image can be managed. This theory is corroborated by research evidence and is consistent with the other approaches to understanding interaction anxiousness, including deficits in social skills. It means that social anxiety results from concerns regarding the reaction of other people and one's ability to regulate these impressions when there is only a certain degree of certainty (Leary et al., 2000). The theory is highly connected with the utilization of social networks and a constant search for feedback. When individuals participate in cyberspace, they are most likely to portray a specific social persona, and therefore raise issues related to image and judgment. Social media also provides a rich environment for social comparison, as people compare their opinions and abilities with those of others to determine where they stand. This tendency is especially strong when comparing oneself to people who are considered to excel in certain areas, a phenomenon that is particularly common on social media. It is more likely that social media use will have a negative impact when engaging in behaviors such as soliciting criticism, strategic self-promotion, and participating in social comparisons. The goal of receiving likes, comments, and shares to gain validation and positive responses helps to maintain the ideal self-image. However, interaction anxiety can also be exacerbated by a lack of clarity about how their online identity is viewed. The need to control perceptions and receive validation from one's online social network is ultimately the motivation for using social media and seeking feedback. This desire can exacerbate anxiety when these goals are not met or when insecurities arise regarding perceived impressions. The objectives of the study were to determine the relationship between the usage of social media, social comparison and feedback seeking, along with interaction anxiousness in youth; to examine the predicting role of social media use, social comparison and feedback seeking in determining interaction anxiousness in youth and to see the gender differences in terms of the use of social media, social comparison and feedback seeking, and interaction anxiousness in youth.

Method

A correlational research design was used. Participants were taken through different universities, including public and private sector universities in Lahore. The sample comprised

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

208 university students aged 18–35 (*M* = 21.97, *SD* = 3.191) who actively engage in social media and are proficient in the language of the study (Lazzara, 2020). The purposive sampling technique was used. For sample description, see Table 1. Sample included all the active social media users and participants aged between 18 and 35 years old. Other than that participants who are already undergoing treatment for social anxiety disorder and those who have any form of physical and intellectual disability were excluded from the study.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables (N=208)

Variables		***f (%)***	***M(SD)***
Which Social Media app do you most frequently use?	Above 5	19(9.1%)	
	Facebook	20(9.6%)	
	Instagram	94(45.2%)	
	Twitter	2(1.0%)	
	TikTok	27(13.0%)	
	YouTube	46(22.1%)	
	Other	19(9.1%)	
Social media Usage (Hours)			4.91(4.03)
For what purposes do you frequently use social media?	Business	18(8.7%)	
	Time Pass/ Entertainment	37(17.8%) 107(51.4)	
	Interacting with family or friends	46(22.1%)	
No. of friends on social media	Below 500	169(81.3)	
	500-1000	18(8.7%)	
	Above 1000	21(10.1%)	
Relationships in social media with friends	Close	130(62.5%)	
	Time pass	78(37.5%)	

Assessment Measures

***Social Media-Activity Questionnaire (*SMAQ)**

This scale was used to assess both active and passive engagement in social media. The SMAQ elements were revised from the "Facebook Active and Watching" scale of the Facebook Activity Questionnaire. Eleven passive things (e.g., “I examine the newsfeed to observe the recent activities of other users, such as new friendships”) and eight active items (e.g., “I upload photographs”) were created. Responses were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "never," and 5 indicated "very frequently." The dimensionality of the items was analyzed by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The EFA validated the anticipated two-factor structure, revealing simple structures for 17 of the 18 components (10 passives and 7 active). The results indicated little active engagement with social media and moderate levels of passive consumption. A high score indicates heightened interaction on social media, seen as advantageous. The reliability of the scale for active social media usage was α = .845, while the reliability for passive use was α = .853 (Ozimek et al., 2023).

The Social Comparison and Feedback-Seeking Scale

This scale is part of the Motivations for Electronic Interaction Scale, which was used to assess social comparison and feedback seeking in youth. The questionnaire had a total of 10 questions (e.g., I use technological interaction to compare my look with that of others).

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

Response options ranged from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true). A mean was calculated for each category, and higher scores corresponded to higher levels of SCFS based on technology. The overall score was calculated by adding the item scores together; a greater score on social media corresponds to a higher level of social comparison. α = .94 indicates the questionnaire's reliability (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

The Interaction Anxiousness Scale

This scale is frequently employed in related research and is mostly used to evaluate the subjective experiences that people have with interaction anxiety. Higher overall scores on the 15-question test, which is assessed on a 5-point scale (1 being not at all to 5 being extremely), indicate higher levels of interaction anxiety. The questionnaire's Cronbach's α value in this study was .81 (Leary et al., 1983).

Demographic Information Sheet

The demographic sheet includes information regarding age, gender, education, relationship status, siblings, family system, family income, history of psychological illness, history of physical illness, residence, and information related to social media usage.

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the ethical committee, the correlational cross-sectional study was conducted. The researcher distributed consent forms and participant information sheets. Those interested received a participant information sheet along with an informed consent form. They then responded to the questionnaire. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study. Participants were asked to answer truthfully, and their information was treated confidentially. The form included a section for informed consent, a demographic information sheet, and study questionnaires. A total of 250 responses were collected, out of which 208 responses were selected only, and the rest were removed because they did not fulfil the criteria. The response rate was 83.2%.

Results

Analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26.0. Initially, data screening was done to identify any outliers and missing values in the data. Subsequently, reliability analyses were conducted for all scales and subscales (See Table 2). Further, the Pearson product-moment correlation was run (see Table 3) to investigate the relationship between Social media usage, social comparison and feedback seeking, and interaction anxiety. Furthermore, Multiple Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to predict interaction anxiety based on social media usage, social comparison and feedback seeking (See Table 4). Further, independent sample t-test analyses were done to find gender differences in study variables (See Table 5). The psychometric properties of all the scales and subscales are discussed in Table 2.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Scales and Subscales

Scale	*k*	*M*	*SD*	*Range*	*Cronbach's α*
Social Media Activity Questionnaire					
Passive Social Media Use	10	25.52	6.92	10-47	.80
Active Social Media Use	7	14.55	5.66	7-35	.82
Social Comparison and Feedback Seeking	10	20.65	8.58	10-47	.89
Interaction Anxiousness Scale	15	42.70	8.56	24-71	.71

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

The results of Table 2 showed descriptive statistics and reliability of the scales. The passive social media use subscale showed a reliability of .80, and the active social media use subscale showed a reliability of .82. The social comparison and feedback seeking scale reported a reliability of .89. Furthermore, the Interaction Anxiousness Scale showed a reliability of .71. Therefore, all the scales had enough reliability to carry out further analyses. It was hypothesized that social media use, social comparison and feedback seeking would positively relate to interaction anxiousness in youth. To test the hypothesis, Pearson Product moment correlation analysis was conducted (See Table 3).

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation of Study Variables in Youth (N=208)

Variables	***M***	***SD***	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*
1. Gender[a]	.54	.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			-
2. Internet usage time	7.18	5.38	-.03	-	-	-	-	-	-			-
3. No.of social media accounts	3.30	1.64	-.06	.24**	-	-	-	-	-			-
4. Social media usage time	4.91	4.04	.04	.54***	.27***	-	-	-	-			-
5. No. of social media friends	927.77	4664.5	-.07	.03	.05	.07	-	-	-			-
6. Relationship with social media friends[b]	.38	.49	-.12	.12	.04	.02	-.07	-	-			-
7. Passive Social Media Use	25.52	6.92	-.09	.09	.23**	.12	.03	.17*	-			-
8. Active Social Media Use	14.55	5.66	-.18**	.09	.15*	.16*	-.03	-.02	.40***			-
9. Social Comparison & Feedback Seeking	20.65	8.58	-.09	.05	.12	.07	-.10	-.04	.40***	.48***		-
10. Social Anxiety	42.70	8.56	.19**	-.07	.08	-.02	-.02	-.07	.07	-.14*	.14*	-

Note: [a] *0*=Men, *1*=Women; [b] *0*=Close, *1*=Timepass

**p* <.05. ***p* <.01. ****p* <.001.

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

The results of Table 3 showed that passive social media use was positively related to social comparison and feedback seeking in youth. However, there was a nonsignificant relation between passive social media use and interaction anxiousness. In contrast, active social media use showed a positive relation with social comparison and feedback seeking, and a negative relation with interaction anxiousness. Lastly, social comparison and feedback seeking was positively related to interaction anxiousness in youth.

The relationship between demographic variables and study variables was also determined in youth. Overall, gender has a positive correlation with adolescents' interaction anxiousness and a negative correlation with active social media use. Both active and passive social media use were positively correlated with the number of social media accounts. There was a positive correlation between social media usage time and active social media usage. Passive social media use was positively correlated with relationships with friends on social media.

It was hypothesized that social media use, social comparison and feedback seeking would positively predict interaction anxiety in youth. To test the hypothesis, Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis was conducted (See Table 4).

Table 4

Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Interaction Anxiousness in Youth (N=208)

		95 % CI					
Predictors	*B*	*LL*	*UL*	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1						.04	.04**
Constant	42.34***	37.72	46.97	2.35			
Passive social media use	.19*	.01	.37	.09	.15*		
Active social media use	-.31**	-.53	-.09	.11	-.21**		
Step 2						.08	.04**
Constant	41.30***	36.71	45.88	2.33			
Passive social media use	.12	-.07	.30	.09	.09		
Active social media use	-.45***	-.68	-.21	.12	-.30***		
Social comparison and feedback seeking	.24**	.08	.40	.08	.24**		

Note. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

The results of Table 4 showed that the overall variance was 8%, with F (3,204) = 6.11, $p < .01$. The findings revealed that passive social media use positively predicted interaction anxiousness ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$), while active social media use negatively predicted interaction anxiousness ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .01$) in youth. The results also showed that social comparison and feedback seeking positively predicted interaction anxiousness ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$) in youth.

It was hypothesized that there would be gender differences in terms of social media use, social comparison and feedback seeking, and interaction anxiousness in youth. To test the hypothesis, an independent t-test analysis was conducted (See Table 5).

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

Table 5

Independent Sample t-Test Comparing Men and Women on Study Variables in Youth (N=208)

Variables	Men (n=96)		Women (n=112)				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(206)*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Passive social media use	26.18	6.28	24.96	7.41	1.26	.21	-
Active social media use	15.64	5.72	13.62	5.46	2.60	.01	.36
Social comparison and feedback seeking	21.45	8.61	19.96	8.53	1.24	.22	-
Interaction anxiousness	40.91	7.32	44.23	9.26	-2.89	.00	.40

*p <.05. **p <.01. ***p <.001.

The results of Table 5 showed a significant gender difference in active social media use and interaction anxiousness in youth. Men exhibited higher scores in active social media use (M = 15.64, SD = 5.72) compared to women (M = 13.62, SD = 5.46). While women exhibited higher scores in interaction anxiousness (M = 44.23, SD = 9.26) compared to men (M =40.91, SD = 7.32). However, a non-significant gender difference was found in passive social media use, and social comparison and feedback seeking.

Discussion

Interpersonal models of youth depression highlight a cyclical pattern between social experiences, maladaptive behaviors, anxiousness, and depressive symptoms (Hames et al., 2021). As youth navigate more complex and unsupervised social environments, peer relationships become crucial in shaping their self-esteem and identity, increasing vulnerability to interpersonal stress. Those prone to anxiety and depression may engage in harmful social comparison and feedback-seeking behaviors, like excessive reassurance-seeking or heightened sensitivity to rejection, which reinforce negative self-views and worsen depressive symptoms. Social media amplifies these patterns, providing constant opportunities for comparison and feedback, potentially deepening feelings of inadequacy. Addressing these dynamics is essential for effective interventions in anxiety and depression (Choukas et al., 2019).

The present research, however, hypothesized that among young people, interaction anxiousness would be positively correlated with social media usage, social comparison and feedback seeking. While active usage is inversely connected to interaction anxiousness but still tied to social comparison and feedback seeking, the correlation analysis found that the passive social media use in adolescents is favorably related to social comparison and feedback seeking and had no significant relationship with interaction anxiousness. Higher social comparison and feedback-seeking behaviors aggravate interaction anxiousness. Moreover, less is known about the linkages among social behaviors, depressed symptoms, and in-person peer relationships among teenagers utilizing technological media such as text messaging and social networking sites (SNS). This is despite a wealth of research on the subject. These platforms have significantly altered the way teenagers engage with their peers, increasing the occurrence and changing the nature of their interactions. More notably, technology-based social comparison and feedback seeking has developed into distinct behaviors relevant to these digital settings. Users are presented with others' highlights, and as people become more self-obsessed in their adolescence, social comparison may occur even more actively. These behaviors influence self or others' self-perception and can have consequences regarding feelings and emotions; thus, more research is warranted to

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

understand how they contribute to the construction of social interactions and psychological well-being in the contemporary digital world (Manago et al., 2008).

In the second hypothesis, it was assumed that social media use, social comparison, and feedback seeking would likely predict positive interaction anxiety in youth. The current study outcome highlighted that passive social media usage positively predicted interaction anxiousness. Further, active usage of social media in a negative manner predicted interaction anxiousness practices among the youths. The results also established that social comparison and feedback-seeking positively influenced the extent of interaction anxiousness among youth. The research also shows that active social media use increases well-being by increasing social capital. Unlike active use, passive use lowers well-being by raising envy and stimulating upward social comparison (Verduyn et al., 2020). A well-known misconception permeating the well-being literature is the colloquial dichotomy between active and passive: “active is good” and “passive is bad” (Valkenburg et al., 2021). This framework was a major advancement over the more global parameters of time spent using the App and its frequency, which have been vague to capture the role and impact of social media on the self-centered thoughts of individuals. Moreover, researchers reported that the potential predictor of social comparison on SNS is considered to be higher levels of very depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem. These emotional states may make individuals more vulnerable to developing a negative self-image, as they are likely to focus on the positive portrayals and lifestyles of others that dominate their social media feeds (Appel et al., 2015).

In another research, the association between online and offline traits, including social comparison and feedback seeking as well as symptoms of anxiety and sadness in teenagers, was investigated. Sixteen hundred average-aged fourteen-year-old children - one fifth of them were female—filled a self-report questionnaire twice. The questions pertaining to their usage of technology—cell phones, Facebook, Instagram—as well as their intense search for affirmation and their technology-based search for social comparison and feedback - baseline and one year later, they presented their data. One such approach of gauging popularity was socio-metric nominations. The research revealed that for women and individuals who were less popular, the link between technology-based social comparison and feedback seeking, and feelings of anxiety and despair was more pronounced. These results were nevertheless significant when considering overall technology use, seeking comfort without an online connection, and previous degrees of anxiety and depressed symptoms (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

The third hypothesis postulated gender variations in terms of social media usage, social comparison and feedback seeking, and interaction anxiousness among youngsters. According to the findings of the present research, young people's active social media usage and interaction anxiousness clearly vary depending on their gender. Men show higher social media engagement than women. However, when comparing men and women, interaction anxiousness was more prevalent in women. Nonetheless, when it came to social comparison and feedback seeking, as well as passive social media usage, there was no significant difference between the genders. Several studies compared these results; for instance, one found that gender correlated favorably with interaction anxiousness and negatively with active social media usage. Interaction anxiousness is predicted to be greater in those who use social media passively, while it is reduced in those who use social media actively. There were also notable disparities between the sexes in terms of interaction anxiousness and active social media usage. Nonetheless, these results were in line with other studies showing that 90% of women and 60% of men use social media to compare themselves to others, with 40% reporting increased negative emotions as a result (Bessenoff & Del Priore, 2021). However, other studies, such as those from the Jed Foundation (2023), suggest that more

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

research is needed to determine if women are more impacted than men and if gender plays a significant role in social media comparisons. Therefore, current evidence remains inconclusive regarding the influence of gender on social comparisons.

A study also found a significantly stronger correlation between anxiousness and depressive symptoms in females, and the comparison was based on technology and feedback seeking. Previous research conducted by Prinstein et al. (2021) indicates that offline reassurance-seeking behaviors also heighten the risk of anxiousness and depressive symptoms in teenage girls who tend to focus on and compare themselves regarding physical attractiveness in online settings. Given the prominence of photo sharing on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, girls are more prone to post photos as compared to boys and it is likely that girls engage in more personal and potentially threatening comparisons online (Scully et al., 2020). According to theories, interpersonal stressors such as disagreements and social rejection have a greater influence on girls and can increase their risk of developing anxiousness and depressive symptoms. Girls are more susceptible to internalizing stressors and experiencing emotional pain because they tend to place greater importance on social bonds. In addition, differences in coping mechanisms between the sexes, such as increased rumination, may exacerbate this vulnerability (Rudolph et al., 2022).

Research suggests that social comparisons, where individuals compare themselves to others perceived as 'better off,' are more prevalent on social media than in other contexts. These comparisons are linked to decreased self-esteem and life satisfaction following social media use (Boer et al., 2021). Studies involving adolescents have demonstrated this connection, associating social media comparisons with negative outcomes such as increased depressive symptoms, greater body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and lower life satisfaction (Krause et al., 2021). Such comparisons are considered a crucial factor mediating the relationship between social media use and well-being, particularly in adolescents and adults. Passive use of platforms such as Instagram, has also been found to diminish life satisfaction through these upward comparisons (Choi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, current studies show that, the higher the level of social comparison, the greater the negative effects in females as compared to those who indulges less in this practice. In particular, the results showed that comparing traits is most likely to lead to lower body satisfaction among women after being exposed to manipulated Instagram posts. It is therefore important to note that, more often engagement in social comparison, especially with ideals or modified figures on the new social media, will have adverse impacts on body image and self-esteem. The explanations the women gave for feeling more shameful and dissatisfied after doing so suggested that social comparison really is toxic for well-being (Kleemans et al., 2018).

Another feature of SAD is the exclusion of such situations: the young person with SAD may not want to seek help, as he or she may expect rejection (Spence & Rapee, 2016). For these adolescents, help-seeking can be even less attractive since the chance of embarrassment, shame, or stigmatizing replies will always be a reality, and SAD symptoms will only worsen it (Shechtman et al., 2018).

This means that stigma remains another considerable hindrance to service utilization and can lead to adolescents being worried about how they are viewed by either their peers or even the caregivers they turn to. In this context, stigma is often divided into two types: the 'stigma awareness,' also referred to as the 'perceived stigma,' and the 'personal stigma'. Personal stigma means agreeing to some attitudes about a particular group. Both forms can discourage youths from seeking help. The authors in a systematic review highlighted 'perceived stigma' as a concern that discourages children and adolescents from seeking help (Radez et al., 2021).

https://doi.org/10.62663/pjpprp.v17i1.297

Unfortunately, what concerns teenagers about the stigma from other people is usually pretty accurate. For example, during a vignette study, students demonstrated a negative attitude toward a character being portrayed as having SAD, a fact implying that people have a negative perception of the disorder. To the author's knowledge, no research directly looks at the correlation between stigma awareness and help-seeking behavior for SAD, but it is worth noting that there was a positive connection between stigma and help-seeking for other mental health disorders (Reavley et al., 2011). Based on the findings of the participants, accepted 'social stigma' and 'perceived stigma' are both associated with help-seeking behavior of depressed adolescents; there is reason to believe that it influences help-seeking behavior of adolescents experiencing SAD (Nearchou et al.,2018).

What one can elicit from the details identified here is that socially avoidant behavior, which results from SAD symptoms, coupled with the feeling of stigma, forms a complex barrier to treatment. This indicates that attention is now being paid to psychological therapies for SAD, and on erasing the discrimination which characterizes the lives of people with this condition. As predicted by cognitive behavioral models of the disorder, people diagnosed with SAD are more likely to seek more feedback from others than from themselves or from other impersonal sources. According to these models, SAD sufferers tend to overestimate the probability of negative social events and typically avoid contact, or at least try to do so (Hofmann et al., 2021). However, this finding presents an interesting paradox: Though people with this type suffer from fear of negative judgment from others, they constantly seek reassurance, reminding them that in some situations, they cannot avoid social encounters. This suggests that for individuals with SAD the need for approval may be even stronger than people's fear of social interaction. This is of great clinical significance. Cognitive behavioral therapists ought to determine the degree to which victims with SAD attend to the responses of others and how this influences their capabilities in societal existence. For instance, the reliance on others in the form of appendages may help perpetuate and even exacerbate interaction anxiousness since gathering positive affirmation relegates the afflicted to reliance on outside sources rather than building up self-esteem and decision-making capacity (Wilson et al. 2018).

Based on previous works with a young adult sample, the study focused on social comparison orientation as a variable in youth. We expected that respondents more inclined to social comparisons would present stronger direct relationships between SNS use and adverse outcomes such as reduced self-esteem and negative effect, and weaker hostile relations between upward comparisons and positive outcomes for example increased self-esteem and positive effect (Vogel et al.,2014; Park et al., 2021). Conversely, young adults with a lower tendency for social comparison were anticipated to show less significant connections between social media use and these emotional and psychological impacts (Park et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The present study concluded that active and passive social media usage leads to significantly different effects on youth. As expected, it was established that social comparison and feedback seeking, and interaction anxiousness were significant and positively related to passive use of SNSs. Regarding the research, social comparison and feedback seeking showed a positive association with active social media use and interaction anxiousness, while active social media use showed a negative link. Positive interaction anxiousness confounding factors included social comparison and feedback seeking, whereas negative ones included active social media use. Although men and women were compared in the overall use of the social network, women had lower levels of active usage of social

media and higher degrees of social phobia. The men, on the other hand, use social media actively more and apparently still have lower levels of interaction anxiety.

Limitations and Suggestions

The study included only university students; thus the research cannot generalize its findings to other demographics, such as those of a different age or ethnicity. Therefore, the samples should be more diverse in future studies to draw firm conclusions on the racial and ethnic differences in interaction anxiousness, social comparison and feedback seeking, and social media usage. Studies which focus on students do not include non-student groups, including working adults, people who cannot afford higher education, and people who live outside of cities. Because of this, the study may have missed several social anxiety causes and experiences. Furthermore, because the study used a correlational cross-sectional design, it was limited in its ability to determine the causal relationships between social media use, social comparison, feedback seeking, and interaction anxiety. Longitudinal studies are therefore required to determine causation and to investigate causality between variables.

Implications

Future implications should be done to reduce anxiety, youth should be educated on the detrimental effects of social media, and educational institutions should develop strategies that promote responsible usage. Peer support programs and readily accessible mental health services can also assist youths in sharing their experiences and building coping techniques.

References

Ainin, S., Parveen, F., Moghavvemi, S., Jaafar, N. I., & Mohd Shuib, N. L. (2015). Factors influencing the use of social media by SMEs and its performance outcomes. *Industrial Management & Data Systems, 115*(3), 570-588. https://doi.org/10.1108/IMDS-07-2014

Anseel, F., Beatty, A. S., Shen, W., Lievens, F., & Sackett, P. R. (2015). How are we doing after 30 years? A meta-analytic review of the antecedents and outcomes of feedback-seeking behavior. *Journal of Management, 41*(1), 318–348. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313484521

Appel, M., Marker, C., & Gnambs, T. (2020). Are social media ruining our lives? A review of meta-analytic evidence. *Review of General Psychology, 24*(1), 60-74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1089268019880891

Asch. (1955). Opinions and Social Pressure. *Scientific American, 193*, 31–35.

Ashford, S. J., Blatt, R., and VandeWalle, D. (2003). Reflections on the looking glass: a review of research on feedback-seeking behavior in organizations. *Journal of Management, 29*(6), 773–799. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-2063(03)000795

Atske, S. (2022, December 15). *Teens, social media and technology 2022*. Pew Research Center: Internet & Technology.

Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive therapy and emotional disorders.* New York, NY: International Universities Press.

Bessenoff, G. R., & Del Priore, R. E. (2021). Women, weight, and age: Social comparison to magazine images across the lifespan. *Sex Roles, 56,* 215–222. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9164-2

Boer, M., Stevens, G. W., Finkenauer, C., de Looze, M. E., & van den Eijnden, R. J. (2021). Social media use intensity, social media use problems, and mental health among

adolescents: Investigating directionality and mediating processes. *Computers in Human Behavior, 116,* 106645. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106645

Bozzola, E., Spina, G., Agostiniani, R., Barni, S., Russo, R., Scarpato, E., & Staiano, A. (2022). The use of social media in children and adolescents: Scoping review on the potential risks. *International Journal Of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*(16),9960-9969. https://doi.org/10.3390%2Fijerph19169960

Choi, J. (2022). Do Facebook and Instagram differ in their influence on life satisfaction? A study of college men and women in South Korea. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 16*(1),15-20. https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2022-1-2

Choukas-Bradley, S., Prinstein, M. J., Lewis, M., & Rudolph, K. D. (2019). *Social media use and adolescent depression: A review of the literature*. In Handbook of Developmental Psychopathology (pp. 185-204). Springer.

Elizabeth, A., Adam, L., Louis, M., & Nicholas, W. (2020). A meta-analysis of the association between adolescent social media use and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 275*, 59-68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.06.029

Festinger, L. (1957). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*(2), 117–140.

Gerber, J. P., Wheeler, L., & Suls, J. (2019). A social comparison theory meta-analysis 60+ years on. *Psychological Bulletin, 144*(2), 177-80. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000127

Hames, J. L., Hagan, C. R., & Joiner, T. E. (2021). Interpersonal processes in depression. Annual review of clinical psychology, 9(1), 355-377. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-050212-185553

Kemp, S. (2020). *Digital 2020: Pakistan. Report, We Are Social*, New York.

Kleemans, M., Daalmans, S., Carbaat, I., & Anschütz, D. (2018). Picture perfect: The direct effect of manipulated Instagram photos on body image in adolescent girls. *Media Psychology, 21*(1), 93-110. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2016.1257392

Krause, H. V., Baum, K., Baumann, A., & Krasnova, H. (2021). Unifying the detrimental and beneficial effects of social network site use on self-esteem: A systematic literature review. *Media Psychology, 24*(1), 10-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1656646

Javed, M. W., & Bhatti, R. (2019). Usage of social media by medical and dental students at Nishtar Medical College, Multan, Pakistan. *Journal of Hospital Librarianship, 15*(1), 53-64. https://doi.org/10.52403/ijhsr.20230639

Leary, M. R. (1983). Social anxiousness: the construction and its measurement. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 47*(1), 66–75. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4701_8

Leary, M. R., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). The nature and function of self-esteem: Sociometer theory. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 32, pp. 1–62). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/S00652601(00)80003-9

Leigh, E., & Clark, D. M. (2018). Understanding social anxiety disorder in adolescents and improving treatment outcomes: Applying the cognitive model of Clark and Wells (1995). *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 21*(3), 388–414. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-018-0258-5

Manago, A. M, Graham. M. B, Greenfield, P. M., & Salimkhan, G. (2008). Self-presentation and gender on Myspace. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 29,* 446–458. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.07.001

Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015). Using social media for social comparison and feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 43,* 1427-1438. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-015-0020-0

Nearchou, N. A., Bird, N., Costello, A., Duggan, S., Gilroy, J., Long, R., McHugh, L., & Hennessy, E. (2018). Personal and perceived public mental-health stigma as predictors of help-seeking intentions in adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 66,* 83–90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.05.003

Nor, N. F. M., Iqbal, N., & Azianura Hani Shaari. (2025). The Role of False Self-Presentation and Social Comparison in Excessive Social Media Use. *Behavioral Sciences*, *15*(5), 675–675. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15050675

Nordahl, H., & Wells, A. (2021). CBT for Social Anxiety Disorder. In *Cambridge University Press eBooks* (pp. 115–135). https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108355605.008

Ozimek, P., Brailovskaia, J., & Bierhoff, H. W. (2023). Active and passive behavior in social media: Validating the Social Media Activity Questionnaire (SMAQ). *Telematics and Informatics Reports, 10,* 100048. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teler.2023.100048

Park, J., Kim, B., & Park, S. (2021). Understanding the behavioral consequences of upward social comparison on social networking sites: The mediating role of emotions. *Sustainability, 13*(11), 5781. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13115781

Prinstein, M. J., & Cillessen, A. H. (2021). Forms and functions of adolescent peer aggression associated with high levels of peer status. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 47*(3), 310–342. https://doi.org/10.1353/mpq.2021.0019

Rana, N. P., Slade, E. L., Sahu, G. P., Kizgin, H., Singh, N., Dey, B., Gutierrez, A., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2019). *Digital and Social Media Marketing*. Springer Nature.

Radez, J., Reardon, T., Creswell, C., Lawrence, P. J., Evdoka-Burton, G., & Waite, P. (2021). Why do children and adolescents (not) seek and access professional help for their mental health problems? A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative studies. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 30,* 183–211. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-019-01469-4

Reavley, N. J., & Jorm, A. F. (2011). Young people's stigmatizing attitudes towards people with mental disorders: Findings from an Australian National Survey. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 45*(12), 1033–1039. https://doi.org/10.3109/00048674.2011.614216

Rudolph, K. D. (2022). Gender differences in emotional responses to interpersonal stress during adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 30,* 3–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x(01)00383-4

Scully, M., Swords, L., & Nixon, E. (2020). Social comparisons on social media: online appearance-related activity and body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, *40*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1017/ipm.2020.93

Shechtman, Z., Vogel, D. L., Strass, H. A., & Heath, P. J. (2018). Stigma in helpseeking: The case of adolescents. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 46*(1), 104–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2016.1255717

Singh, M. M., Amiri, M., & Sabbarwal, S. (2020). Social media usage positive and negative effects on the life style of Indian youth. *Iranian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, 5*(3). 123-133.

Spence, S. H., & Rapee, R. M. (2016). The etiology of social anxiety disorder: An evidence-based model. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *86*, 50–67. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2016.06.007

The Jed Foundation. (2023, May 11). *Understanding social comparison on social media*. JED.

Valkenburg, P. M., van Driel, I. I., & Beyens, I. (2021). The associations of active and passive social media use with well-being: A critical scoping review. *New Media & Society*, *24*(2), 530–549. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211065425

Verduyn, P., Gugushvili, N., Massar, K., Täht, K., & Kross, E. (2020). Social comparison on social networking sites. Science Direct, 36, 32–37. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 36,* 337. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.04.002

Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 3*(4), 206-222. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000047

Wilson, G. A., Koerner, N., & Antony, M. M. (2018). An examination of feedback seeking in individuals with social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, or no history of mental disorder using a daily diary method. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy, 32*(1), 15-37. https://doi.org 10.1891/0889-8391.32.1.15.