Relationship between Social Media Addiction and Urgency in Young Adults

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Abstract

This study intended to inspect the relationship of urgency (positive and negative) and social media addiction (SMA) in young adults. The study also explored the gender differences on SMA and urgency. Two of the proposed hypotheses were put into testing, i.e., i) There is a relationship between SMA and urgency among young adults, and ii) There are gender differences in SMA and urgency. This research used a correlational research design and convenience sampling strategy. A sample of 300 university students was collected that included 150 males and 150 females age ranging between 18-25 years (M= 19.03, SD= 3.29). The data was collected in person through a self-constructed demographic questionnaire, Social Networking Addiction Scale (SNAS), and Urgency, Premeditation, Perseverance, Sensation Seeking, and Positive Urgency (UPPS-P) Impulsive Behavior Scale. The data was analyzed through SPSS software and Pearson correlation along with independent sample t-test were employed to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that there is a positive relationship between urgency and SMA among young adults, however, no significant gender differences were found in urgency, social media addiction, and their subscales. This study urges young adults to limit social media use to prevent psychological dependence that can harm both productivity and mental well-being. It highlights the tendency of individuals to turn to social media as an escape when overwhelmed by emotional states, often sharing more than they would in a more balanced state of mind. This emotional oversharing can lead to unintended consequences, impacting personal and professional lives.

Keywords: Negative Urgency, Positive Urgency, Social Media Addiction, Urgency, Young Adults

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Introduction

The internet has become an essential part of today's world, and so has the social media networking sites (Sitamraju, 2019). Youth is increasingly turning towards social media use as a tool for social engagement. Over the last decade, casually scrolling and browsing on social networking sites have emerged as an increasingly prevalent activity especially among the young generation. The use of social media networking sites provides the users with entertainment and social interaction; however, excessive internet and social media use can be problematic and can have negative effects for individuals. Even though most of the people's social media usage patterns cannot be put into the category of problematic social media usage, but there is a significant percentage of users who engage in excessive and compulsive social media use and despite making efforts to control the usage, they are unable to do so (Shahnawaz & Rehman, 2020). The statistics reveal that the incidence of social media addiction or SMA in the youth of Pakistan is about 40% in people who are aged from 18-22 and 37% between the ages of 23-38 (Maya, 2021). A number of studies have explored various variables associated

with SMA and Urgency is one such variable that has found to be frequently associated with SMA (Willie et al., 2022). Urgency is a personality trait that is explained as a type of impulsive behavior under the influence of extreme positive or negative emotional states. Given in to the alarming prevalence of SMA and its strong association with urgency (Willie et al., 2022), this study was designed to investigate the relationship between these two variables.

SMA can be defined as not being able to control the excessive unhealthy use (using social media for long hours) of social media platforms despite of making efforts to do so and spending hours on these platforms that it becomes problematic to the extent that one's personal relations and everyday activities start to be adversely affected.

SMA can have a wide range of effects on various areas of life. Demircioğlu and Köse, (2018) stated that problematic internet use has been linked to academic and/or work-related dysfunctions, deprivation, and withdrawal symptoms such as withdrawing from simple everyday tasks. Users who are addicted to social media, use it to forget about their personal issues and to decrease their negative emotions. They use social networking sites to modify their mood. The users typically spend excessive time scrolling on social networking sites to achieve a desired level of contentment and they usually spend extended period of time thinking about social networking sites. They find it difficult in controlling, stopping, or even reducing the use of social media and when they are not using social media or are unable to use it, they become irritable, anxious, and bored. Users are more inclined to overlook their hobbies, companions, friends, and family, and so their relationships, well-being, and health are negatively impacted because of their addictive use of social media platforms. The increasing and constant use of these social media platforms often results in a range of interpersonal issues, including neglecting actual real-life relationships,

personal responsibilities, and physical and mental wellbeing, all of which can aggravate a person's dysphoric mood states. When social media users repeat this recurrent cycle of using social media sites to modify their undesirable moods, their psychological dependence on these social media platform increases (Hilliard, 2022). Although, social media platforms have their benefits, frequent usage of these sites can also lead to developing feelings of inferiority complex, low self-esteem, fear of missing out, self-consciousness, isolation, jealously, depression, dissatisfaction with life, suicide ideation, social anxiety, and social comparisons (Hilliard, 2022). Social media's interactive nature allows users to publicly make a comment on each other's appearance and compare other people's appearance with their own, resulting in negative self-evaluations, setting unattainable appearance standards, triggering sensitive feelings, and leading to stress (Hawes et al., 2020).

Social media is affecting the mental health of chronic users negatively. It is negatively impacting their real-life relationships, their social interaction skills, their work or academic performance and is also meddling with their personal and social responsibilities. After establishing an understanding of its effects, it also seems pertinent to look into the factors that lead to SMA. The dopamine-inducing social contexts created by social media platforms are largely responsible for the drastic rise of social media addiction. These platforms activate the same neural pathways that gambling and recreational drugs do making it difficult for the users to not engage with these social media platforms and because of this neural circuitry, social media consumers are unable to reduce their social media sites consumption and use. Notification alerts, likes, mention, comments, and posts of individual interests on the explore page form dopamine-driven feedback loops, keeping the users interacting on these sites for long past the

point where the users start to perceive that they are getting some psychological reward from the behavior (Wigmore, 2019). When an individual experiences something rewarding, they feel pleasure. The brain associates that rewarding activity with positive reinforcement. Social media platforms provide the users with a constant stream of instant gratification in the form of other people's attention for comparatively minimal effort. This continuous positive reinforcement alters the brain, causing users to seek out likes, mentions, retweets, and emoticon reactions (Hilliard, 2022). Another contributing factor to social media addiction is that individuals may receive positive social feedback on the pictures they post online on these social media platforms, which prompts the brain to release dopamine. This reinforces the posting behavior further strengthening the habit (Hilliard, 2022).

The usage of social media sites becomes problematic when it is perceived as a significant coping tool for depression, stress, or loneliness. Individuals who use social media as a coping tool, receive a sense of satisfaction when they are interacting on these social media platforms and are getting continuous rewards that they are not getting in their real lives in return of their interactions with people. These continuous rewards act as the key factors behind their increased social media usage and interaction.

Apart from the above discussed factors, various personality traits have also been reported to contribute to the development of SMA such as agreeableness, openness, extraversion, neuroticism, and conscientiousness (Tang et al., 2016). Urgency is a trait of personality that has been frequently informed to be related with SMA (Pilatti et al., 2021; Willie et al., 2022). Urgency is a sub facet of impulsivity which can be defined as the inclination to act without thinking (Cooper, 2022). Since urgency is a subdimension of impulsivity and impulsive individuals seek immediate gratification therefore, people high on

urgency are more prone to get involved in Social Media Addiction given in to their inability to delay gratification. Social media addiction is positively linked with urgency. The concept of urgency was first given in 2001 by Whiteside and Lynam. They defined that urgency has two types that are positive urgency and negative urgency, and it can be described as the inclination to act rashly in response to intense positive or negative emotions. As reported by Cyders and Coskunpinar (2010), individuals who are high on urgency have a greater likeliness of engaging in risky behaviors such as social media addiction, as urgency is a prominent predictor of risky behaviors. Positive urgency prospectively predicts over sharing intimate details with other people, indulging in over shopping and excessive spending, excessive buying on credit cards, risky sexual practices, disordered eating, problem gambling and online gambling disorder, increased drug use and alcohol consumption, greater increase in risk taking, and problematic use of social media sites (Cyders et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2016; Pilatti et al., 2021; Willie et al., 2022).

Negative urgency is a prospective predictor of binge eating behaviors, compulsive buying, social media addiction, self-harm, suicide ideation, aggressive behavior, physical violence, destruction of property, frequent outbursts, obsessive-compulsive disorder behaviors, escalating problems, and disorderly alcohol use (Alemis & Yap, 2013; Smith & Cyders, 2016; Willie et al., 2022).

According to Smith and Cyders (2016) males tend to display a higher average of positive urgency than females, while there is no significant difference in negative urgency between the genders. Gender had no effect on the correlations between urgency attributes and risk - taking behaviors consequences.

This article presents the rationale for exploring the relationship between SMA and urgency, particularly within the context of Pakistani culture. SMA is particularly

prevalent among youth, who often find themselves compulsively scrolling through feeds. While most users don't exhibit problematic behaviors, a small percentage struggle with excessive use despite attempts to control it (Shahnawaz & Rehman, 2020). This study aimed to investigate the relationship between SMA and urgency. As discussed previously, very few comparisons are made in collectivistic cultures, and not even a single study has been done on social media addiction and urgency in Pakistan. Examples of urgency can easily be found in Pakistani culture, such as overspending on celebrations, overeating, and drug addiction due to difficult life circumstances (Fatima, 2021; Malik et.al., 2019; Masood & Sahar, 2014; Mumtaz, 2013) but to our knowledge, it's link with SMA has not been yet explored. This research addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining both positive and negative urgency, and also seeks to identify high-risk groups susceptible to SMA. This research will psychoeducate youngsters about the fact that the addictive use of social media platforms is because of urgency and so they need to learn how to manage themselves during overpowering emotional states rather than using social media sites during such emotional states and oversharing on the social networking platforms. Additionally, the study explores potential gender differences in these dynamics among young adults.

Hypotheses

The following hypothesis were generated. There is a relationship between social media addiction and urgency among young adults. There are gender differences in social media addiction and urgency.

Method

Research Design

The research was quantitative in nature and employed a correlational research design.

Participant Characteristics and Sampling Strategy

A sample of 300 young adults enrolled in Forman Christian College University, Lahore, Pakistan was taken including 150 males and 150 females ages between 18-25 using convenience sampling strategy.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Males and females who were aged from 18-25 and who were social media users were selected as a participant of the study.

Measures

Demographic Sheet

A self-constructed demographic questionnaire was utilized to collect the personal information from the participants such as their gender, age, educational level, and the number of hours they use social media per day.

Social Networking Addiction Scale

Social Networking Addiction Scale by Shahnawaz and Rehman (2020) was used. SNAS has 21 items in total and is based on Griffiths' (2005) component model, which emphasizes the role of dimensions in addictions i.e., 'salience', 'mood modification', 'tolerance', 'withdrawal', 'conflict', and 'relapse'. It is a seven point Likert scale where one indicates strongly disagree and seven indicates strongly agree. This scale is a robust psychometric tool for assessing social media addiction, having a test-retest reliability of .88 over a 25-day period.

Urgency, Premedition, Perseverance, Sensation Seeking, and Positive Urgency Impulsive Behavior Scale

(UPPS-P Impulsive Behavior Scale)

Positive and Negative Urgency Subscales from the UPPS-P Impulsive Behavior Scale by Lynam et al. (2006) were used. UPPS-P is a four point Likert scale with 24 items. The scale possesses strong psychometric properties The alpha coefficients were reported as .87 for the negative urgency subscale and .93 for the positive urgency subscale.

Table 1
Psychometric Properties of the Scale (N=300)

Subscale Name	A	Number of Items
SMA Total	.91	21
Salience	.74	4
Mood Modification (MM)	.75	3
Tolerance	.78	3
Withdrawal	.86	4
Conflict	.67	3
Relapse	.88	4
Pos Urgency	.90	14
Neg Urgency	.83	12
Urgency Total	.92	26

Note. SMA= Social Media Addiction

Table 1 shows the psychometric properties of the scales and their subscales. Internal consistency α for the social media addiction scale is .91 and the subscales ranges from .67-.88. Similarly, the internal consistency α for urgency is .92, whereas the internal consistency for the subscales ranges from .83-.90.

Procedure
After selecting the variables for the study, permission was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After the approval of IRB, permission was taken from the authors of the scales through email before using the selected questionnaires. The data was collected in person through survey questionnaire via group administration. The researcher collected the data for this study by going into different classes and briefed the students about the purpose of the research as well as guided them about how they are going to fill the questionnaire. Before they started to fill in the forms, they signed the informed consent where they were also made aware about the ethics and their right to withdraw at any time. All the participants' concerns were addressed.

Statistical Analysis
The data collected from this study was then analyzed through SPSS software version 26. Descriptive Statistics was used to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the demographic variables of the study. Cronbach alpha's Reliability analysis was used to explore the psychometric properties of the scales along with their subscales.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social media addiction and urgency among young adults. Furthermore, Independent Sample T-test was employed to test the gender differences in social media addiction and urgency.

Ethical Considerations
All the ethical guidelines were followed according to APA 7. The research was duly approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Permission was obtained to use the scales in the present study from the authors. All the participants of the study were pre-informed about the research objectives as well as their written informed consent was also obtained. Confidentiality was assured by assigning different codes to the filled questionnaires. The data collected remained confidential, no personal information about the participant was revealed at any time of the research. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw if they want to from participating in the research. Any kind of discrimination was not given space. The participation of the participants was fully voluntary. The privacy of the participant was respected. No physical or mental harm or high risk for participants was involved.

They were provided with a way to contact the investigator at any time after the research was completed regarding any queries they had about the research.

Results
Table 2
Demographic Information of the Participants (N=300)

Demographic Variables	κ	M	SD	F	Skew (X)	Range
Gender	-2.01	1.50	.50		.00	1
Male				150		
Female				150		
Age	-.60	19.03	3.29		-.13	3
18-19				25		
20-21				99		
22-23				126		
24-25				50		
Education Level	-1.14	2.92	1.1		-.48	3
Freshmen				41		
Sophomore				67		
Junior				68		
Senior				124		
Avg no. of hours spent on SM via smartphone per day	-.48	2.40	.82		.13	3
1-2 hr				37		
3-5 hr				132		
6-10 hr				104		
11 hr or more				27		

Note: κ *= Kurtosis,* F*= Frequency,* M*= Mean,* SD*= Standard Deviation,* Skew [X]*= Skewness*

Table 2 mentioned the demographic characteristics of participants. The total sample size was comprised of 300 participants (*N*=300), in which there were 150 male and 150 female. The participants' age was divided into four different categories and the participants belonged to different semesters. 12.3% participants reported their daily social media usage as 1-2 hours, 44.0% participants reported that they spend about 3-5 hours on social media sites daily, 34.7% said that they use it for about 6-10 hours daily and about 9.0% participants reported more than 11 hours of social media usage per day.

Table 3

Correlation between Social Media Addiction Scores and Urgency Scores (N=300)

Subscales	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Negative Urgency	28.38	6.73	--	.68**	.89**	.26**	.25**	.22**	.23**	.23**	.27**	.33**
Positive Urgency	32.32	8.35	--	---	.93**	.21**	.21**	.27**	.19**	.34**	.31**	.39**
Urgency Total	60.74	13.85	--	---	---	.26**	.25**	.27**	.23**	.32**	.33**	.37**
Salience	19.68	4.94	--	---	---	---	.42**	.51**	.47**	.44**	.35**	.71**
Mood Modification	14.36	3.93	--	---	---	---	---	.53**	.48**	.36**	.33**	.67**
Tolerance	12.90	4.51	--	---	---	---	---	---	.52**	.46**	.56**	.79**
Withdrawal	15.97	6.08	--	---	---	---	---	---	---	.53**	.44**	.79**
Conflict	10.14	4.28	--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	.62**	.76**
Relapse	15.33	6.08	--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	.76**
SMA Total	88.37	22.32	--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

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

Table 3 shows positive correlation between all the variables of SMA and urgency i.e., = $p<.01$. Thus, the first hypothesis, there will be a relationship between SMA and urgency among young adults was proved.

Table 4

Gender Comparisons in Urgency and Social Media Addiction (N=300)

Scales	Male		Female		*t*(df)	*P*	*d*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
SMA Total	89.24	21.81	87.51	22.86	.67(298)	.66	0.07
Salience	19.73	5.14	19.63	4.74	.16(298)	.15	0.01
Mood Modification	14.49	3.99	14.23	3.86	.57(298)	.49	0.06
Tolerance	13.07	4.82	12.74	4.20	.62(298)	.09	0.07
Withdrawal	15.99	6.20	15.94	5.97	.07(298)	.54	0.01
Conflict	10.35	4.26	9.92	4.30	.87(298)	.62	0.10
Relapse	15.61	6.11	15.05	6.06	.80(298)	.92	0.09
Urgency Total	64.31	13.01	61.58	14.79	1.69(297)	.16	0.19
Negative Urgency	30.69	6.79	30.48	7.09	.26(297)	.71	0.03

| Positive Urgency | 33.61 | 7.52 | 31.03 | 8.94 | 2.70(298) | .08 | 0.31 |

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, SMA= Social Media Addition

Table 4 displays results of the independent sample *t*-test that was carried to explore the gender differences of males and females on urgency, social media addiction, and their subscales. The results indicated that no significant difference was found in urgency between the genders, social media addiction, and their subscales. Thus, the second hypothesis, there will be gender differences in social media addiction and urgency was not proved right.

Table 5

Comparative Analysis of Participants Scoring Above and Below the Cutoff on the SMA Scale (N=300)

Items	CUTOFF .00		CUTOFF .01		*t*(df)	*p*	Cohen's *d*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Positive and Negative Urgency	57.35	14.82	66.55	12.19	-5.85(297)	.04	0.68
Positive Urgency	28.85	8.17	34.55	7.69	-6.11(298)	.43	0.71
Negative Urgency	28.50	7.80	31.93	5.96	-4.3(297)	.001	0.49
Cutoff Score = 84							

Note. 0= < 84, 1= > 84; Scores depicting 0 do not imply social media addiction whereas, scores depicting 1 show social media addiction

In addition, an independent sample *t*-test analysis was carried out to compare the participants' scores who scored above 84 on the SMA scale as well as the participants' scores who scored below 84. The results showed significant differences among the groups with above and below cutoff scores on SMA. The individuals who scored above cut off on SMA, also scored higher on urgency in comparison to those who scored below cut off. This can be an indication towards high levels of SMA in individuals high on urgency.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations of SMA Scores by Age Group (N=300)

Age	Social Media Addiction		F (3, 296)	η²
	M	*SD*		
18-19	86.80	22.23		
20-21	86.45	20.07		
22-23	88.49	23.91	.44	.36
24-25	92.66	22.47		

Additionally, One-Way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in social media addiction scores across different age groups. The results showed that there were no significant differences in SMA scores among the four age groups.

Discussion

The first hypothesis posited that a significant relationship exists between both positive and negative urgency and SMA. Findings from Willie et al. (2022) lend strong support to this hypothesis, revealing that both forms of urgency significantly predict SMA, with negative urgency emerging as the most substantial predictor. Negative urgency has been highlighted as a critical risk factor for various behavioral issues making it essential for treatment considerations in mental health contexts.

These results are consistent with earlier studies by Pilatti et al. (2021) and Rothen et al. (2018), which established direct associations between urgency and problematic social media use. The convergence of these findings suggests that individuals with heightened urgency are more likely to engage in excessive social media use, potentially as a maladaptive coping mechanism for emotional distress.

Culturally, the implications of urgency are particularly relevant in Pakistan, where societal pressures often lead to extreme behaviors such as overspending on celebrations, overeating, and substance abuse as coping strategies (Fatima, 2021; Malik et al., 2019; Masood & Sahar, 2014; Mumtaz, 2013). These cultural behaviors reflect a broader context in which emotional responses can lead to impulsive actions, including social media overuse. As such, the high prevalence of SMA among Pakistani youth, as reported by Maya (2021), aligns with the notion that urgency significantly influences digital behaviors within this demographic.

The second hypothesis proposed that there would be gender differences in social media addiction and urgency levels. Contrary to expectations, our findings revealed no significant gender differences in either urgency or overall SMA. This aligns with Smith and Cyders (2016), who found that while males displayed higher levels of positive urgency, no significant gender disparities were evident for negative urgency. The absence of gender differences in the current study suggests that urgency may manifest similarly across genders in the context of SMA, challenging assumptions that might attribute greater vulnerability to one gender over the other.

This lack of support for the second hypothesis contradicts findings from Tutal et al. (2021), which indicated that females reported higher levels of SMA. This discrepancy may arise from cultural factors, differing methodologies, or sample characteristics that influence how urgency and addiction are expressed among genders in various contexts. The findings imply that future research should explore these dynamics further, considering factors such as cultural expectations and the role of socialization in shaping digital behaviors.

Further an additional independent sample t-test was conducted comparing participants who scored above the cutoff score of 84 on the SMA scale to those who scored below it. The results revealed significant differences between the two groups, with individuals scoring above the cutoff exhibiting higher levels of urgency compared to those below it. This finding underscores a critical link between heightened urgency and increased SMA, suggesting that individuals with elevated urgency may engage in more impulsive social media behaviors, potentially as a form of emotional regulation or escape.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the importance of urgency as a pivotal component in understanding SMA among young adults, particularly within the cultural context of Pakistan. While gender differences were not supported, the strong association between urgency and social media addiction highlights the need for targeted interventions that address emotional regulation strategies. Practitioners should consider incorporating approaches that mitigate negative urgency to reduce the risk of SMA, thereby promoting healthier social media use. Furthermore, ongoing research is essential to explore the complexities of these relationships and inform culturally

sensitive interventions that cater to the unique needs of diverse populations.

Implications

This research opens new avenues for future studies on SMA and urgency, encouraging deeper exploration of these variables. It highlights to young adults how excessive use of social media can lead to psychological dependence and negatively impact their mental health. This research will help identify high risk groups of individuals who are more vulnerable to develop social media addiction as well as help identify individuals who are high on urgency so that such individuals can limit their usage of social media platforms especially during overwhelming states of emotion.

Establishing the link between urgency and SMA is crucial, as urgency can predict SMA and is associated with various psychopathologies such as social anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideation, bingeing, disordered eating, aggressive behavior, and OCD whereas social media addiction can contribute to unhappiness and overall discontentment with life among its users, it also heightens the risk of developing certain mental health issues including anxiety and depression. The findings raise awareness among young adults about the risks of compulsive social media use, promoting the importance of emotional regulation to prevent oversharing and related negative outcomes.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study utilized a convenience sampling strategy, including participants exclusively from FCCU. This sampling strategy did not provide a representative sample of the broader population, which potentially limited the diversity of the sample and the generalizability of the findings to other groups of young adults. Future studies should utilize a representative sample to enhance the applicability of findings across diverse groups of young adults.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the relationship between addiction of social media sites and urgency as well as explored the gender differences on social media addiction and urgency. The data collected has proved that positive urgency and negative urgency both have direct significant associations with problematic use of social media sites supporting the findings of the literature review. However, the findings of the present study also indicated that there was no significant difference in genders when it comes to urgency and SMA. This study is an eyeopener for the young adults to limit their social media usage to some extent so that their psychological dependence on these platforms to escape from reality cannot hinder their productivity as well as negatively impact their mental health. Those individuals who especially seek refuge in the use of social media platforms while overpowering emotional states tend to share a lot more than they would actually prefer to share when not under such overwhelming emotional states.

Contribution of Authors

Zahra Amir: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft
Afshi Yahya Khan: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

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