

## Relationship between Attachment styles and Social Media addiction among young adults: Mediating role of Self-esteem

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To investigate the mediating role of self-esteem between attachment styles and social media addiction among young adults.

**Study Design:** Descriptive Cross-sectional study

**Place and Duration:** Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha, from 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020 to 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020

**Methodology:** A purposive sample of young adults from University of Sargodha was recruited. Relationship Questionnaire, Social Media Addiction Scale (Student Form) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were used to measure attachment styles, social media addiction and self-esteem respectively.

**Results:** A total of 350 young adults were assessed. Path analysis in Amos indicated the positive direct effect of secure attachment styles on self-esteem ( $\beta = .55, p < .001$ ). Insecure attachment style had negative effect on self-esteem ( $\beta = -.30, p < .001$ ) and positive effect on social media addiction ( $\beta = .11, p < .02$ ). High level of self-esteem had negative effect on social media addiction ( $\beta = -.68, p < .001$ ). Self-esteem mediated the positive relationship between insecure attachment styles and social media addiction ( $\beta = .20, p < .001$ ) and negative relationship between secure attachment style and social media addiction ( $\beta = -.37, p < .001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Self-esteem could be one of the causal links between attachment styles and social media addiction.

**Keywords:** Secure attachment style, Insecure attachment style, Self-esteem, Social media addiction.

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### INTRODUCTION

Usage of the smartphone is widespread throughout the world and this ratio is increasing every day with drastic effects on the psychosocial development of youth<sup>1</sup>. According to the global social media statistics of 2019, there are more than 3.5 billion social media users with a high expectancy rate in near future, this high ratio equates to 45% of the current population<sup>2</sup>. Social media addiction can be defined as a maladaptive behavioral compulsion or dependency and/or a disorder marked by behavior that contributes to the feelings of pleasure and

releases discomfort, anxiety, and strain, and significantly difficult to control or limit the behavior even with considerable destructive consequences<sup>3</sup>. Self-esteem is the evaluation of self-worth that how much you give value to yourself. Anti-social, risky, and addictive behavior is the result of low self-esteem<sup>4</sup>.

According to psychoanalytical theories, addictive behavior is a type of attachment disorder. People with insecure attachment style have more inclination toward substance abuse and addiction than those who are securely attached<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, research on South Korean workers revealed that a secure attachment style is negatively related to internet addiction and an insecure attachment style is positively associated with behavioral addiction<sup>6</sup>.

Similarly, securely attached individuals are more stable and confident in difficult situations and know how to get rid of their problems, and have feelings of trust while interacting with others. They have fewer tendencies to experience distress, substance, and behavioral addiction and have a higher level of self-esteem. While insecure attachment style exhibits the tendency of excessive smartphone usage, maladaptive behavior, and low level of self-esteem<sup>7-9</sup>.

Moreover in research, low level of self-esteem is related to negative self-beliefs, more addictive behavior, and pathological use of social media and mobile phones<sup>4</sup>. Self-esteem mediates between attachment style and smartphone addiction. Secure attachment style predicts a high level of self-esteem yielding to less smartphone and gaming addiction. While, insecurely

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attached individuals who have low self-worth and a pessimistic approach toward self are more disposed to maladaptive behaviors especially social media addiction<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, self-esteem had a higher mediating effect between attachment style and smartphone usage. It explained that addictive and problematic behavior is more displayed by those students who had negative self-belief and low self-worth that develops because of their weak bonding with caregivers in childhood<sup>11</sup>. Although in Pakistan, these variables have been studied in different connections very few researches address the combination of these variables in this specific sample. This study will surely be helpful for counselors dealing with people with behavior addiction to help the target sample in getting out of this addiction through strengthening their relationships with their parents and by boosting the level of self-esteem. In order to fill this gap, this study was conducted to analyze in adults the mediating role of self-esteem between attachment styles and social media addiction. In lieu of the aforementioned objective, it was hypothesized that a secure attachment style will be positive and an insecure attachment style will be a negative predictor of self-esteem. Secondly, insecure attachment style will be a positive and high level of self-esteem will be a negative predictor of social media addiction. Thirdly, self-esteem will mediate the relationship between attachment styles and social media addiction. So, this study was conducted with an objective to investigate the mediating role of self-esteem between attachment styles and social media addiction among young adults.

### METHODOLOGY

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at the Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha from 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020 to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Participants were recruited through non-probability, purposive sampling. Participants with an age range between 19-25 years were included in the present study. Data was collected through self-reported valid measures. Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)<sup>12</sup> was used to measure attachment styles. This scale consists of 4 items with 7 points Likert-type response format (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Social media addiction was measured through Social Media Addiction Scale (Şahin & Yağcı, 2017)<sup>13</sup> containing 29 items with 5 points Likert-type response format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Higher total scores on this scale demonstrated more social media addiction. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)<sup>14</sup> comprising of 10 items was used to assess self-esteem. Items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree).

**Table-I: Correlation Matrix and Descriptive of Scales (N = 350)**

Variables	1	2	3	4	N	M	SD	Range		Skewness
								Potential	Actual	
Secure	-	-.53**	.71**	-.50**	350	4.07	2.38	1-7	1-7	-.004
Insecure	-	-	-.59**	.52**	350	12.15	4.24	3-21	4-21	-.18
Self-esteem	-	-	-	-.75**	350	26.66	6.71	10-40	13-40	-.04
Social Media Addiction	-	-	-	-	350	84.75	18.35	29-145	49-120	.31

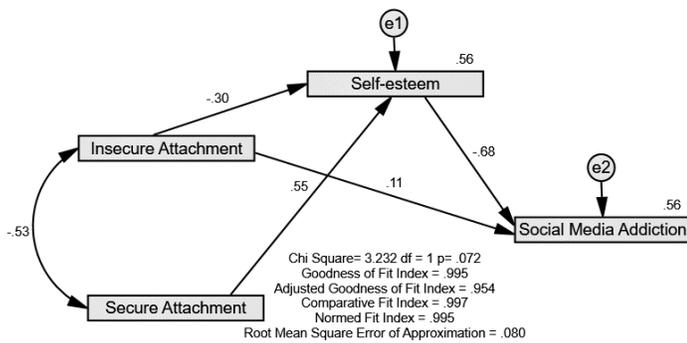
Item no. 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 were reverse coded. High scores on this scale correspond high level of self-esteem and vice versa.

All the scales were in English language. Fillers and reverse coded items were used in the scales to detect random responses. Data was collected after taking ethical approval from the institutional ethical committee for conducting this study. Afterward, permission from the head of concerned departments was taken by assuring that confidentiality will be maintained. Permission was also taken from the authors to use the selected scales. After taking permission, participants of the study were approached and contacted personally in their classrooms. After taking written informed consent from the participants, they were briefed about the aims and objectives of the present study and guidelines regarding the completion of questionnaires. Each participant took almost 15-20 minutes for completing the questionnaire. After collecting data, respondents were acknowledged for their cooperation and precious time. Five hundred questionnaires were handed over to the participants from which 350 were selected for analysis and 150 questionnaires were discarded due to incomplete and insufficient information.

**Data Analysis:** The data were analyzed through IBM SPSS (version 24) and AMOS (version 24). A G\* power 3.0-factor analysis was carried out to estimate effect size with ( $\alpha = .01$ ) and power of .95. Descriptive statistics were used to measure the symmetrical distribution of the data. Pearson correlation was performed to measure the linear relationship between continuous variables. Through AMOS path analysis mediating role of Self-esteem between attachment styles and social media addiction was assessed.

### RESULTS

From the total sample of 350 young adults, 121 (34.6%) were boys and 229 (65.4%) girls with an age range between 19-25 (mean  $22.7 \pm 3.3$ ). Values of skewness were not aberrantly high, indicating the normal distribution of the data. Results of correlation analysis were in the expected direction. Secure attachment style was positively related to self-esteem and negatively related to social media addiction. Insecure attachment style was negatively related to self-esteem and positively related to social media addiction. Self-esteem was negatively related to social media addiction. Self-esteem mediated the relationship between attachment styles and social media addiction. Table I describe the significant positive correlation between SAS and SE. significant negative correlation of SAS with IAS and SMA. IAS has a significant positive correlation with SMA and a negative with SE. SE has a negative relationship with SMA.



**Figure-1: The mediating role of self-esteem between attachment styles and social media addiction**

Path diagram produced by AMOS software is presented in figure-1. On each route, single headed arrows shows the values of standardized regression coefficients. Model demonstrates that the model fitted well to the data ( $\chi^2 = 3.23, df = 1, p = .07$ ; CFI = .99; GFI = .99; RMSEA = .08).

**Table-II: Direct and Indirect Effects of attachment styles and self-esteem on Social Media Addiction (N = 350).**

Paths	$\beta$	p	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Insecure attachment → Self-esteem	-.30	.001	-.38	-.21
Secure attachment → Self-esteem	.55	.001	.48	.62
Insecure Attachment → Social media addiction	.11	.023	.02	.21
Self-esteem → Social media addiction	-.68	.001	-.76	-.60
Insecure Attachment → Self-esteem → Social media addiction	.20	.001	.14	.27
Secure attachment → Self-esteem → Social media addiction	-.37	.001	-.44	-.31

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

Table-II shows the direct and indirect effects of attachment styles and self-esteem on social media addiction. Insecure attachment style had a direct negative effect on self-esteem and social media addiction. Secure attachment style had a direct positive effect on self-esteem. Self-esteem had a direct negative effect on social media addiction. Self-esteem mediated the relationship between attachment styles and social media addiction.

**DISCUSSION**

The current study has integrated both secure (SAS) and insecure attachment styles (IAS) that may have a significant contributed in self-esteem (SE) and social media addiction (SMA). Furthermore, the mediating role of SE between SAS, IAS, and SMA was also examined. Results of the present study supported first hypothesis of the study indicating SAS as significant positive and IAS as negative predictor of self-esteem (table-II, Step I & II). These results are in line with the pertinent literature. Findings reported by Mikulincer and Shaver suggest that those individuals who have an insecure style have a low level of self-

worth. Insecure bonding cultivates pessimism and lack of self-esteem<sup>15</sup>. In the cultural context of Pakistan, where family bonding is considered very important and mothers gave their maximum time to their children even in a busy schedule give rise to a secure and healthy relationship where children can easily share their true feeling with parents. While in case of poor parent-child bonding, children gone through severe physical and psychological problems with severe negative effects in later life.

Second hypothesis of the study was supported by the analysis as results revealed that IAS significantly positively predicts SMA. Results revealed that social media addiction depends on attachment styles. Those adults who have experienced trust, warmth, and love with their parents in childhood are less addicted (behavioral and substance) as compared to those who are ignored and has gone through painful childhood experiences. Therefore, they use the social media to compensate and replace the missing affection, love and care<sup>16</sup>. Results of Indigenous research on students presented that early attachment patterns play a significant role in adaptive and maladaptive behavior in later life. It was found that those students who had spent childhood with more neglected, abusive and careless parents are more prone to psychological problems than those who had supportive, caring, and nurturing parents. In later life, insecurely attached individuals have a more negative self-concept and prefer indirect communication (text messages) with others. Therefore, on account of their negative view of self, insecurely attached individuals show more addictive behavior<sup>17</sup>.

Furthermore, analysis revealed that high level of SE negatively predicts SMA, which again supported the second hypothesis. These results are also in line with the previous researches that low self-esteem predisposes some individual to show maladaptive cognitions and behavior and cause SMA on an account to get rid of current stress and anxiety. Because getting busy with cell phone give them temporary relief from worldly worries and causes a state of relief. It can also, be attributed by the fact that individuals with low self-worth feel confident while using social networking and online gaming<sup>18</sup>.

Finally, AMOS path analysis also revealed the mediating effect of SE between AS and SMA. In this model, SE predicted SMA in a negative direction (see table 2, Step V & VI). Parenting is considered very important factor in contributing to healthy bonding and boosting positive self-concept in adolescents<sup>19</sup>. Good family practices like caring and supportive attachment styles not only help in forming and maintaining positive and intimate relations but also improve cognitive functioning and self-esteem<sup>20</sup>. Good interpersonal relationships also help in reducing the loneliness and obsession for social media and increase the level of self esteem<sup>21</sup>. Likewise, self-esteem mediates between attachment styles and media addiction. it was explained that secure attachment yield a sense of protection and love in children and boost self-esteem and decreases the probability of cognitive and behavioral addiction whereas, insecure bonding inculcates the feeling of fear and rejection in individuals and decreases self-worth and confidence and in return increase maladaptive practices and dependence

on smartphones and social media<sup>11</sup>. In the cultural context of Pakistan, the study was conducted on university students with an age range between 18 to 27 years and results revealed that securely attached individuals have more strong interpersonal bonding and spent less time on social media particularly facebook<sup>22</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

Self-esteem could be one of the causal links between attachment styles and social media addiction.

**Limitations and Suggestions:** A cross-sectional study can never give clear evidence for the causal interpretation of the hypotheses. It is recommended to use a mixed-method approach (experimental and longitudinal) in order to harvest more evidence regarding cause and effect. Further research must consider the role of parental rearing practices and personality traits in said variables.

### AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

**Yousaf A:** Conceived idea, Manuscript writing, Literature search

**Adil A:** Data analysis, Literature search

**Hamza A:** Data collection

**Ghayas S:** Critical analysis, Manuscript writing

**Niazi S:** Data analysis, Data collection

**Khan A:** Literature search, Proof reading

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