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SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Kinza Ishaq

BS, Department of CS Computer Science, The Cosmic Degree College (For Women) ,University of Okara

ABSTRACT

Social media has become an important part of modern romantic relationships, influencing the ways individuals communicate, express affection, maintain emotional connections, and respond to relationship-related experiences. Although social networking platforms provide opportunities for interaction and emotional support, excessive use, online comparison, jealousy, privacy concerns, and digital interference may negatively affect emotional well-being. The present study aims to examine the relationship between social media use and emotional well-being in romantic relationships among young adults. Emotional well-being refers to individuals' emotional experiences, including positive and negative feelings, perceived emotional support, relationship-related happiness, stress, and emotional security. Social media use will be examined in terms of frequency, duration, interaction patterns, partner communication, and potentially problematic behaviors. The proposed study will employ a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design involving young adults aged 18–29 who are currently in romantic relationships. Data will be collected using a demographic questionnaire and appropriate standardized measures of social media use and emotional well-being. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, and regression analysis will be used to investigate the relationship between the study variables, provided that the relevant statistical assumptions are met. The research will consider both the potential benefits of supportive online communication and the possible emotional challenges associated with problematic digital engagement. It is anticipated that the study will help clarify whether different patterns of social media use are associated with emotional well-being in romantic relationships.

KEYWORDS:*Social media use; emotional well-being; romantic relationships; young adults; digital communication; social media jealousy; relationship satisfaction; emotional support; online comparison; psychological well-being; partner surveillance; interpersonal relationships.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed the way individuals communicate, develop relationships, and express their emotions. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, and WhatsApp enable people to share experiences, exchange messages, publish photographs, and maintain contact across geographical distances. These platforms have become especially relevant to romantic relationships because they provide additional opportunities for partners to communicate, demonstrate affection, and remain involved in one another's daily lives. At the same time, social media introduces new emotional challenges, including uncertainty about online interactions, pressure to display a successful relationship, jealousy, privacy concerns, and conflict over digital boundaries. Drouin, M., Abbasi, I., Dibble, J. L., & McDaniel, B. T. (2025). Explains thatUnderstanding how social media use relates to emotional well-being is therefore an important topic in contemporary psychology. Emotional well-being refers to the emotional dimension of psychological functioning. It includes experiences of happiness, contentment, calmness, emotional security, and positive engagement, as well as the ability to manage stress, disappointment, and other difficult emotions. In romantic relationships, emotional well-being may be influenced by whether individuals feel supported, respected, understood, and secure with their partners. It can also be affected by disagreements, uncertainty, perceived rejection, and concerns about the stability of a relationship. Social media may influence these experiences by changing how

partners communicate, interpret one another's behavior, and evaluate their relationships in comparison with others.The relationship between social media and emotional well-being is complex because online interaction can provide both benefits and risks.

A 2025 scoping review by Nguyen examined 14 studies concerning social media use and romantic relationship outcomes. The review identified a variety of outcomes, including satisfaction, commitment, relationship conflict, well-being, and digital dating behaviors. It concluded that the relationship between social media use and romantic outcomes depends on specific online behaviors and relevant contextual factors rather than on usage alone. This distinction is important because measuring only the number of hours spent online may overlook whether people are using social media to communicate affectionately, seek emotional support, compare themselves with others, or monitor a partner.Young adulthood is a particularly relevant period for investigating these processes. Individuals aged approximately 18–29 may be navigating higher education, employment, greater independence, identity development, and changing expectations about intimacy. Romantic relationships during this period can provide companionship, affection, validation, and emotional support. Amodeo, A. L., Giaquinto, V., Reginelli, F., Esposito, C., De Alfieri, E., & Belluzzo, M. (2026). found that At the same time, they may involve uncertainty about commitment, expectations regarding communication, and sensitivity to perceived rejection. Since social media is often integrated into everyday social interaction, online experiences can become closely connected with the emotional experiences of young adults.The present study therefore focuses on the relationship between social media use and emotional well-being in romantic relationships. Rather than assuming that social media is universally harmful or beneficial, the study will examine whether patterns of use are associated with differences in emotional well-being among young adults who are currently in romantic relationships.

Active and passive use are also important distinctions. Active use includes sending messages, commenting, sharing content, and interacting directly with other users. Passive use involves browsing posts, viewing photographs, or observing other people's activities without substantial direct interaction. Active use can support connection when it facilitates meaningful communication, although it can also create conflict when messages are misunderstood or interactions cross relationship boundaries. Passive use may provide entertainment and information but can also expose users to social comparison or repeated monitoring of a romantic partner.Problematic social media use refers to patterns of engagement that become difficult to control or interfere with everyday responsibilities, sleep, emotional regulation, or interpersonal relationships. It should not automatically be equated with frequent use. High-frequency use may be necessary for educational, professional, or social reasons without producing substantial difficulties. Conversely, a shorter period of online activity may create significant distress if it involves persistent checking, conflict, or fear about a partner's behavior.For this study, social media use will be conceptualized as a multidimensional behavior rather than a single measure of screen time. The researcher will distinguish ordinary use from potentially problematic patterns and, where possible, identify activities directly related to romantic relationships. This approach will provide a more meaningful basis for investigating associations with emotional well-being.Emotional well-being in romantic relationships concerns how individuals experience and manage their emotions within the context of an intimate partnership. It may include feelings of happiness, affection, trust, acceptance, security, and emotional support.

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A supportive romantic relationship can contribute to emotional well-being when partners listen to one another, communicate openly, respect boundaries, and provide reassurance during difficult situations. Emotional support may help individuals cope with academic pressures, employment challenges, family responsibilities, and personal uncertainty. When partners respond constructively to one another's concerns, the relationship may provide a source of stability and belonging.In contrast, emotional well-being may be undermined when individuals repeatedly experience mistrust, hostility, uncertainty, or perceived rejection. For example, a person may become distressed if their partner frequently ignores messages, publicly interacts with others in ways that violate mutually agreed boundaries, or uses social media in ways that undermine trust. These situations do not necessarily indicate wrongdoing; the interpretation may depend on the circumstances and the expectations of both partners. However, repeated uncertainty can contribute to relationship-related stress when concerns are not discussed constructively.Emotional well-being should not be treated as identical to relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction concerns an individual's overall evaluation of their romantic relationship, whereas emotional well-being is a broader psychological concept that includes positive and negative emotional experiences. The two may be related, but they are not interchangeable.

Digital communication can also provide emotional reassurance during stressful situations. A supportive message before an examination, an encouraging response to a work-related problem, or a brief expression of affection may help a partner feel remembered and valued. Such communication can contribute to emotional well-being when it is welcomed, sincere, and consistent with the expectations of both individuals.Social media may also help partners participate in one another's experiences. Sharing photographs, discussing interests, and responding to personal achievements can create opportunities for connection. Public expressions of support may communicate appreciation, although public displays are not necessary for a healthy relationship. Some individuals prefer privacy and may experience discomfort when their romantic lives are displayed online.A 2026 study by Langlais and colleagues examined social media behaviors and relationship quality among 80 heterosexual couples. The findings indicated that associations differed according to the specific behavior and the partner involved: some activities, such as commenting on a partner's content, were associated with better relationship quality, while other activities showed negative associations. This research illustrates why the emotional effects of social media should not be reduced to a simple assumption that more online interaction is always better.For emotional well-being, the relevant question is whether digital communication helps individuals feel supported and connected. The frequency of online contact alone may be insufficient to determine its value.

However, online information is often incomplete. A comment or photograph may have several explanations, and the absence of a response may not indicate rejection. When individuals interpret ambiguous digital behavior as evidence of betrayal or loss of interest, they may experience anxiety, anger, or insecurity. These feelings can influence communication and contribute to repeated questioning or conflict.Research published in the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy in 2025 examined attachment anxiety, social media jealousy, electronic partner surveillance, and relationship satisfaction among 322 young adults aged 18–29 over a two-year period. The study found that social media jealousy was associated with increased electronic partner surveillance and lower relationship satisfaction at

a later measurement point. Its findings highlight the importance of considering the emotional processes that accompany online interaction rather than simply measuring time spent on social media. Social media jealousy may be associated with emotional well-being because repeated suspicion can make individuals feel uncertain about the relationship. It may also increase the frequency of conflict and reduce opportunities for relaxed, supportive interaction. Nevertheless, jealousy is not determined by social media alone. Previous relationship experiences, attachment-related concerns, personal expectations, and the behavior of both partners may contribute to these feelings.The present study will consider jealousy and emotional insecurity as potentially relevant explanations for the association between social media use and emotional well-being, without assuming that all users experience these difficulties.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the relationship between social media use and emotional well-being among young adults involved in romantic relationships.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Is there a significant relationship between social media use and emotional well-being among young adults involved in romantic relationships?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between social media use and emotional well-being can be understood through several psychological and communication theories. These perspectives help explain why digital communication may strengthen emotional connection in some circumstances while contributing to insecurity or conflict in others. Rather than assuming that social media has one uniform effect, these theories emphasize the importance of individual motivations, interpersonal expectations, and patterns of interaction.The social comparison perspective suggests that individuals evaluate aspects of their lives by comparing themselves with other people. On social media, users encounter selected presentations of romantic experiences, appearance, happiness, and relationship milestones. These portrayals may influence how individuals judge their own relationships. When comparisons lead individuals to believe that their relationships are inadequate, they may experience disappointment or insecurity. However, comparisons may also provide reassurance or useful perspectives, depending on the content and the individual's interpretation.Attachment theory provides another relevant framework. Mazur, M. (2026). Explained that Attachment-related expectations can influence how individuals interpret closeness, distance, and uncertainty in romantic relationships. Individuals who feel insecure about their relationships may be particularly sensitive to delayed messages, ambiguous online interactions, or visible signs of a partner's engagement with others. In these circumstances, social media may become a source of reassurance-seeking or monitoring.

well-being

Research on social media and psychological well-being has produced mixed findings. Some studies emphasize the potential benefits of online communication, including social support, belonging, and emotional connection. Other research highlights associations between problematic use, social comparison, anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties. These differences

suggest that the nature of social media engagement is an important consideration.The 2025 scoping review by Nguyen synthesized 14 studies concerning social media use and romantic relationship outcomes. Çaktı, S. U. Z. (2026). Explains that It identified relationship satisfaction, commitment, well-being, conflict, and other relational experiences as important outcomes in the existing literature. The review also highlighted the diversity of behaviors and contextual factors investigated across studies. One implication is that researchers should distinguish between general social media use and use that directly involves a romantic partner. An individual who uses social media for entertainment or educational purposes may have different experiences from someone who repeatedly checks a partner's online activity.

Social media jealousy and relationship-related stress

Métellus and colleagues (2025) examined these issues in a longitudinal study involving 322 young adults aged 18–29. Their findings linked social media jealousy with electronic partner surveillance and lower subsequent relationship satisfaction. This study is particularly relevant because it investigates young adults and examines emotional and behavioral processes over time rather than relying exclusively on a single cross-sectional measurement. Hanan, F., Majid, A., Alfehaid, M. M., Ali, A., Ahmad, H., Manzoor, A., & Fatima, S. H. (2026). revealed that Nevertheless, these findings do not mean that every experience of jealousy is caused by social media or that all monitoring behavior has the same explanation. Personal insecurity, previous experiences, actual breaches of trust, and relationship expectations may also contribute. Research should consider these factors when interpreting associations between online activity and emotional well-being.

Electronic partner surveillance and privacy

Electronic partner surveillance refers to the use of digital platforms to monitor a romantic partner's activity. It may include repeatedly checking profiles, observing followers and comments, reviewing activity indicators, or looking for information that reduces uncertainty. Although individuals may engage in these behaviors to obtain reassurance, persistent monitoring may also maintain anxiety by encouraging repeated checking.Surveillance can affect relationships when it undermines trust, reduces privacy, or creates pressure to justify ordinary online behavior. Individuals may feel that their autonomy is restricted or that their partner assumes wrongdoing without sufficient evidence. This can contribute to conflict and emotional discomfort. Fobare, S., Sharpe, C., Quinn, K., Bryant, K., Miles, L. A., Bowman, R. L., ... & Byrd, J. C. (2026). Elaborated onThe longitudinal research by Métellus and colleagues (2025) suggests that electronic partner surveillance is relevant to the relationship between social media jealousy and relationship satisfaction.This makes privacy and digital boundaries important considerations when studying social media and emotional well-being.Healthy digital relationships require mutual respect and communication about boundaries. Partners may agree to share certain experiences online while keeping other matters private.

Social media addiction and broader psychological well-being

Problematic or compulsive social media use may interfere with everyday responsibilities, sleep, concentration, and interpersonal relationships. When online engagement becomes difficult to regulate, individuals may spend less time on activities that support their well-being or become distracted during important interactions.A 2025 study published in the Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care investigated social media addiction, self-

esteem, and life satisfaction among 385 married individuals. The researchers reported an association between social media addiction and life satisfaction, demonstrating the relevance of problematic online engagement to broader psychological outcomes. The study's population and outcomes differ from the present research topic. Life satisfaction is not identical to emotional well-being, and findings from married adults cannot automatically be generalized to young adults in dating relationships.

Social media and emotional support between partners

Emotional support includes listening, validating feelings, offering reassurance, and demonstrating concern for another person's experiences. Social media can facilitate these behaviors through direct messages, voice notes, video calls, and shared content.Digital support may be especially helpful when partners are separated by distance or cannot speak face-to-face. A brief message can communicate availability, while an extended conversation may allow partners to discuss stressful experiences and receive reassurance. Such interactions may contribute to emotional well-being when they are genuine and responsive to the recipient's needs.However, digital communication can also produce misunderstandings. Messages may lack tone or contextual information, and individuals may interpret short responses differently. Expectations about how quickly a partner should respond can also create tension. The emotional quality of communication may therefore matter more than the simple number of messages exchanged.

Social media and emotional well-being among young adults

Young adulthood involves important changes in identity, independence, social relationships, and future planning. Romantic relationships may become increasingly meaningful during this period, while expectations concerning communication and commitment continue to develop. Social media may influence these experiences by making online interaction a regular component of romantic life.Young adults may use social media to seek reassurance, express affection, compare relationships, or maintain contact during busy schedules. They may also experience stress when online behavior creates uncertainty about a partner's intentions. The same platform can therefore provide emotional support in one context and contribute to distress in another.The 2025 longitudinal study by Métellus and colleagues is directly relevant because its participants were aged 18–29 and currently involved in romantic relationships. Its findings concerning jealousy, partner surveillance, and later relationship satisfaction provide a foundation for examining digital experiences in this age group. Nevertheless, relationship satisfaction and emotional well-being should remain conceptually distinct.

Cultural considerations and research in Pakistan

The influence of social media on romantic relationships may vary across cultures because relationship expectations, privacy norms, family involvement, and public expressions of affection differ between social settings. In Pakistan, young adults may encounter particular expectations concerning romantic relationships and public online behavior. Some may prefer private communication, while others may be comfortable expressing affection through social media.These circumstances may influence how online interactions are interpreted. For example, not posting photographs of a partner may reflect a preference for privacy rather than a lack of affection. Similarly, expectations about the timing of replies may be shaped by family responsibilities, education, employment, or restrictions on communication.A culturally

appropriate research study should avoid assuming that a particular form of online relationship behavior has the same meaning for every participant. It should also protect participants' privacy and ensure that sensitive questions can be skipped where appropriate.

Research gap

Recent research has explored social media jealousy, partner surveillance, relationship satisfaction, and relationship quality. However, these outcomes do not fully capture the broader emotional experiences that individuals may have within romantic relationships. More focused research is useful to examine how social media use is associated with emotional well-being among young adults, particularly in specific cultural and social contexts.A further issue is that social media use is often treated as a single behavior even though different forms of engagement may have different emotional implications. Supportive messages, passive browsing, public relationship posts, and repeated partner monitoring should not automatically be assumed to produce equivalent outcomes.The proposed study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between social media use and emotional well-being among young adults aged 18–29 who are currently involved in romantic relationships.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study, titled Social Media Use and Emotional Well-Being in Romantic Relationships, will investigate the association between social media use and emotional well-being among young adults aged 18–29 who are currently involved in romantic relationships. The study will adopt a quantitative approach because the principal variables can be assessed through structured questionnaires and analyzed using statistical procedures. The target population will include young adults who use one or more social media platforms and have experience of a current romantic relationship. Participants may be recruited from universities, colleges, community organizations, and other suitable settings, subject to institutional permission and ethical approval. A non-probability convenience sampling technique may be used to recruit accessible participants, with eligibility screening to ensure that respondents meet the specified age and relationship-status criteria. The proposed sample size will be approximately 200 participants, although the final target should be determined through a statistical power analysis based on the expected effect size, desired statistical power, and planned analysis. Data will be collected using a demographic questionnaire and standardized instruments selected to measure social media use and emotional well-being. A measure of problematic social media use may be considered if the study intends to distinguish ordinary engagement from potentially harmful patterns. Emotional well-being will be assessed using an instrument appropriate to the study's definition of positive and negative emotional experiences, rather than relying exclusively on relationship satisfaction.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study will use a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional correlational research design. This design is appropriate because the primary objective is to determine whether social media use is statistically associated with emotional well-being among young adults in romantic relationships. A quantitative design will allow the researcher to collect numerical scores using structured questionnaires and examine patterns through statistical analysis. The non-experimental nature of the research means that participants will not be assigned to different levels of social media use, and the researcher will not manipulate their online

activities or romantic relationships. Instead, the study will assess participants' naturally occurring behaviors and emotional experiences. The cross-sectional component indicates that data will be collected at one principal point in time, allowing the researcher to examine the association efficiently within the available resources. Social media use will serve as the main predictor variable, while emotional well-being will serve as the outcome variable for the planned statistical model. These labels will describe the analytical roles of the variables and will not imply that social media use causes changes in emotional well-being. The target population will consist of individuals aged 18–29 who are currently in romantic relationships and use social media. Eligibility criteria will be established before recruitment, and the sampling procedure will be described transparently. Where appropriate, additional information such as age, gender, relationship duration, frequency of social media use, and the platforms most commonly used may be collected to describe the sample or explore theoretically justified differences.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data will be analyzed using suitable statistical software, such as IBM SPSS Statistics or R, after the completion of data collection. The first stage will involve data screening to ensure that responses meet the eligibility criteria and that the questionnaire scores have been calculated correctly. The researcher will examine missing values, potential duplicate responses, unusual observations, and inconsistencies in the dataset. Any decisions concerning missing data or the exclusion of incomplete questionnaires will be based on a prespecified procedure and reported transparently. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, will be calculated to summarize demographic characteristics, social media use, and emotional well-being. Depending on the selected instrument, scores may also be summarized according to relevant subscales, provided that the scoring guidelines support such interpretation. Reliability analysis will be conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the selected measures within the study sample, using an appropriate coefficient such as Cronbach's alpha or McDonald's omega. The main analysis will examine the association between social media use and emotional well-being. Pearson's product-moment correlation will be used if the data are suitable and the assumptions are sufficiently met. If the assumptions are not appropriate, Spearman's rank correlation may be considered. The correlation coefficient will indicate the direction and strength of the association, while the confidence interval will provide information about its precision. A conventional significance level of .05 may be specified before analysis, but the results will not be interpreted on the basis of p-values alone.

FINDINGS

The findings section will report the actual outcomes obtained after data collection and statistical analysis. In the absence of an original dataset, the following outlines the findings that the proposed study will examine rather than claiming that specific results have already been observed. First, demographic findings will summarize the characteristics of the participants, including age, gender where collected, relationship duration, and other relevant variables. These details will help readers understand the sample and assess the extent to which the results may apply to other young adults. Second, descriptive findings will summarize the participants' social media use and emotional well-being scores. Measures of central tendency and variability will provide information about the distribution of the variables, while reliability estimates will indicate the internal consistency of the selected

scales in the sample. Third, the principal finding will address whether social media use is significantly associated with emotional well-being. A positive correlation would indicate that higher social media use scores tend to occur alongside higher emotional well-being scores, depending on how the social media measure is scored. A negative correlation would indicate an inverse association, while a result close to zero would suggest limited evidence of a linear or monotonic relationship, depending on the analysis conducted. The magnitude of the coefficient and its confidence interval will be important for interpreting the strength and precision of the association. If separate measures of supportive online communication and problematic social media use are included, their associations with emotional well-being may differ. For example, supportive communication could be associated with better emotional experiences, whereas problematic engagement could be associated with greater distress. These are possible patterns to investigate, not findings that can be assumed in advance.

CONCLUSION

The proposed study, Social Media Use and Emotional Well-Being in Romantic Relationships, addresses an important issue in contemporary psychology by examining how digital interaction is associated with emotional experiences among young adults. Social media provides opportunities for partners to maintain contact, express affection, share experiences, and offer emotional support. At the same time, online interaction may introduce challenges involving jealousy, social comparison, privacy concerns, digital interference, and misunderstandings. The emotional consequences of social media use are therefore unlikely to be identical for all individuals or relationships. Recent research provides a basis for investigating these processes. A 2025 longitudinal study of young adults examined social media jealousy and electronic partner surveillance in relation to relationship satisfaction, while a 2026 dyadic study found that different partner-directed social media behaviors had different associations with relationship quality. These findings reinforce the importance of distinguishing between supportive digital communication and potentially problematic patterns of engagement. The proposed quantitative, cross-sectional correlational study will examine the association between social media use and emotional well-being among young adults aged 18–29 who are currently involved in romantic relationships. The use of appropriate standardized measures, ethical recruitment, transparent data handling, and suitable statistical analysis will help establish a systematic basis for answering the research question. The study may contribute to relationship education and psychological counseling by identifying patterns of digital engagement that warrant further investigation.

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