

PARENTING STYLES AND ADOLESCENT EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

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Abstract

Adolescence is a developmental period of significant emotional, social and behavioral change taking place in a growing digital social landscape. While parenting styles can influence adolescents' emotional health and social media use, the complicated interactions between parenting styles, social media addiction, and emotional well-being have not been well explored, especially in the context of Pakistan. The present study aimed to explore the correlation between parental styles, social media addiction, and emotional well-being in adolescents and the additive effect of social media addiction in the association between parental styles and emotional well-being. A quantitative cross sectional correlational design was used and 300 adolescents were selected from educational institutions by convenience sampling in Faisalabad, Pakistan. The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) and Emotional Well-Being Scale (EAS) were used to gather data. The study variables were analyzed by descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, and mediation analysis. The results showed significant relationships between parenting styles, SMD, and emotional well-being.

Authoritative parenting was positively related to emotional well-being, while authoritarian parenting was negatively related to emotional well-being. A few parenting dimensions and emotional well-being were also strongly connected to social media addiction. Mediation analysis revealed that parenting styles had significant indirect effects on emotional well-being via social media addiction, even though the direct effects were not significant. The results point to the need to take into account family relationships and adolescents' digital experiences in tandem to grasp their emotional well-being. The study adds to existing literature on adolescent psychological adjustment in the context of sociocultural environment of Pakistan.

Keywords: Adolescents, parenting styles, social media addiction, emotional well-being, parental authority

1. Introduction

Adolescence is one of the most important periods of life in human beings characterized by rapid biological, psychological, emotional and social changes. This is a time when adolescents are trying to find their identity, emotional independence, and social acceptance, and are more sensitive to environmental influences. The last few years have witnessed fast

development of digital technology and the internet, which has given a huge change in the life style and communication of the adolescents in the recent years. Adolescents' social interactions, emotional expression and psychological functioning are all impacted by the use of social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and Snapchat. Social media is a good way to communicate, entertain and express yourself, but too much use has been linked with negative emotional and psychological outcomes among adolescents.

As more and more people have been using social networking sites, this addiction has become a concern all over the world, including the negative effects it has on adolescent mental health. Social media addiction is defined as the excessive use, compulsion and inability to control access to social media platforms with harmful effects. Adolescents who use social media in a problematic way typically exhibit feelings of anxiety, emotional instability, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, loneliness, sleep disturbance, and depressive tendencies.

Adolescents are still developing their emotional regulation and decision-making skills, making them especially sensitive to the psychological impact of overuse of the Internet. The social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO) and reliance on peer validation also created in social media can have a negative impact on emotional wellness. Therefore, there is a need to study the factors related to social media addiction in psychology which has become an important field of study.

Parenting style is one of the most significant parenting factors involved in adolescent psychological adjustment. Parenting style is the consistent attitudes, behaviors, emotional responsiveness, and disciplinary approaches used by parents in their parenting approach. The parenting styles are typically classified as authoritative, authoritarian and permissive, according to Baumrind. Authoritative parenting is warm, emotionally supportive, reasonable, and communicative. Authoritarian parenting is characterized by high control, obedience, and low emotional responsiveness, while permissive parenting is characterized by high emotional responsiveness and low levels of control and/or behavioral regulation. Over the years, research has shown that parenting styles have a profound effect on adolescents' emotional functioning, coping skills, adjustment to behavior, self esteem, and interpersonal interactions.

Parents' parenting styles can influence adolescent social media use. Emotionally supportive and responsive relationships in the family foster positive coping skills and healthy Digital use among adolescents. In contrast, inconsistent, emotionally detached, or psychologically controlling parenting can have an impact on adolescents' reliance on social media for emotional escape, social validation, and psychological comfort. Social media may be an alternative space in this context for meeting unmet emotional and social needs. Thus, parenting techniques can be either protective or risk factors for problematic adolescent social media use and/or addictive online behavior.

Emotional functioning is also a critical part of adolescent functioning. Emotional well-being is characterized by positive emotions, emotional satisfaction, emotional stability and coping effectively with stressful experiences. Adolescent emotional health is typically characterized by resilience, social competence, coping skills and positive relationships with other people. But emotional difficulties are frequently linked with emotional distress, anxiety, depression, irritability and social withdrawal. The literature indicates that heavy social media usage can have adverse effects on emotional health, such as feeling more focused on social comparison, victimization due to cyberbullying exposure and dependent relationships with online interpersonal interactions. Concurrently, positive parenting has also been associated with

improvement in emotional resilience and psychological adjustment of adolescents.

The relationship between parenting styles, social media addiction, and emotional well-being can be explained by a number of theoretical frameworks. Self-Determination Theory states that emotional wellness is related to meeting need states that include autonomy, competence and relatedness. These needs can be supported by parenting environments that allow for healthy emotional functioning and are not supportive of environments that are controlling or emotionally neglectful, which can lead to increased vulnerability to maladaptive behaviors like excessive use of social media. Likewise, Uses and Gratifications Theory holds that people purposefully utilize media platforms to meet psychological and social desires that consist of amusement, belongingness, and emotional evade. Adolescents with emotional discontent in their familial relationships may thus turn increasingly to social networking sites for satisfaction and social bonding.

The present study is significant especially in the sociocultural context of Pakistan, where the traditional family system, authority of the parents and collectivistic values substantially shape the lives of adolescents. At the same time, Pakistani adolescents are being immersed in digital culture, while being embedded in culturally oriented family systems that focus on the values of obeying and respecting elders. While the use of social media is emerging in young people in Pakistan, there exists little research that has examined the combined effect of parenting styles, social media addiction and emotional well-being. Thus, the study aimed to examine the correlation between parenting styles, social media addiction and emotional well-being among adolescents and to explore the role of social media addiction as a mediator. The results could offer important information for psychologists, teachers, parents, and policy makers interested in helping adolescents grow up in a healthier emotional state and to be responsible social media users.

2. Literature Review

One of the most salient contextual factors that can impact upon adolescent emotional and behavioral adjustment is parenting practices. Developmental research is consistently positive about the importance of warm, responsive, behaviourally regulated parenting in fostering emotional competence and psychological resilience, and the detrimental impacts of psychologically controlling and inconsistent parenting on emotional outcomes (Steinberg, 2001). Authoritative parenting has consistently been linked to greater self-esteem, coping and emotional stability in children whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have been linked to emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and poorer psychosocial functioning (Pinquart, 2017). During adolescence, the relationship patterns of the parents become more important as the teen is more emotionally sensitive and is developing his or her identity and is being evaluated socially.

With the introduction of digital social environments, there has been a significant change in adolescents' psychosocial experiences. Today social media sites are used for the main part of interacting with peers, self-presenting, and emotional expression. While there are benefits to being moderate with social media and feeling socially connected, there are also risks to excessive and compulsive use, such as psychological distress and poorer well-being. Social media addiction is defined as excessive attention to online social interactions, decreased self-control, social media withdrawal and dysfunction in emotional, school and social interactions (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014). There are clear empirical links between adolescents' problematic social media use and depression, anxiety, loneliness, emotional instability, and lower life

satisfaction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

The linkages between parenting and problematic social media use have been increasingly examined from an empirical perspective. Adolescents in families that foster emotional support and communication tend to have healthier modes of digital engagement and are more likely to have better self-regulatory abilities. Conversely, parental psychologically controlling or emotionally distant behaviors could foster adolescents' emotional compensation and social validation in virtual environments (Liu et al., 2020). Adolescents who lack the experience of making their own choices may be more susceptible to maladaptive coping strategies, such as social media addiction, when parents are overly controlling. Likewise, low levels of parenting monitoring and inconsistent boundaries have been linked to high levels of online activity and problematic Internet use (Wartberg et al., 2021).

There are several theories that could help account for these connections. According to Self-Determination Theory, psychological well-being is achieved when people's three needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Online social interaction can be a means for adolescents to meet their emotional and psychological needs when parent behaviors are negatively supportive. Similarly, Uses and Gratifications Theory indicates that users seek media to satisfy emotional and interpersonal requirements, such as social approval, escapism, and belongingness (Katz et al., 1973). In sum, these views imply that the problematic use of social media could be a compensatory strategy for "missing" emotional events in the family context.

While there is an increasing body of research on parenting styles, social media addiction, and adolescent well-being, there are still areas that warrant attention. Most of the previous research has focused on these variables separately and not on how they operate and interact with each other. However, little research has examined the mediating effect of S.M. addiction on the relationship between parenting styles and emotional well-being, particularly in collectivistic culture like Pakistan. Furthermore, gender gap in the emotional functioning and in the use of digital technology in adolescents is under-studied in South Asian populations. Filling these gaps can help to move towards a fuller picture of adolescent psychological adaptation to increasingly digital societies.

The Objectives formulated for this study are:

1. To investigate the connection between parenting styles, social media addiction, and emotional health of adolescents.
2. The relationship between parental styles and emotional health among adolescents was investigated with social media addiction as a mediator.

The Hypotheses formulated for this study are:

H1: The results of the study will significantly correlate between the parenting style, social media addiction, and emotional well-being of adolescents.

H2: The relationship between parenting styles and emotional well-being of adolescents will be significantly mediated by social media addiction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study used quantitative cross sectional correlational research design to evaluate the relationship between parenting styles, social media addiction and emotional well-being of adolescent. A correlational method was used because the purpose of the study was to

examine the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the study variables without manipulating the variables. The design also enabled the researchers to evaluate demographic characteristics associated with the social media applications use by adolescent.

3.2 Participants

In Faisalabad, educational institutions were used for convenient sampling and 300 adolescents were selected as a sample. The participants ranged from boys to girls, and from varied family backgrounds and education. The study included adolescent users of the active social media applications Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and Snapchat. All data collection was voluntary and informed consent was obtained before data collection. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was respected at all stages of the research process.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ): The parenting styles were measured by John R. Buri's Parental Authority Questionnaire, which was constructed in 1991. The scale has 30 items measuring 3 parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive), each with 10 items. The responses are rated on a 5 point likert scale. The instrument has been used widely by adolescents and young adults and has acceptable reliability ranging from .74 to .87 according to Cronbach's alpha.

Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS): The Social Media Addiction Scale developed by Şahin Cengiz in 2018 was used to measure social media addiction. The scale consists of 29 items grouped into 4 domains (preoccupation, withdrawal, mood modification and social issues) and measures excessive and compulsive social media use. The responses are rated by using 5 point Likert scales with 1 representing the least and 5 representing the most in terms of social media addiction. The scale showed very good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .93.

Emotional Well-Being Scale: The Hierarchy of Emotional Well-Being Scale developed in 1990 by Richard D. Lane and colleagues was used for the evaluation of emotional well-being. Scale items are measured on a Likert-type response scale for positive emotional functioning, emotional regulation, and psychological adjustment. This scale is higher the better the emotional well-being and better the emotional functioning. Previous studies have found reasonably good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha scores of .80 to .90.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

The IBM SPSS Statistics software package was used to analyze the data. The demographic characteristics and use of social media applications were analyzed by descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage distribution. To explore the relationship between parenting styles, social media addiction and emotional well-being, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted. Demographic Frequency tables and a correlation matrix table were used to present the results so that the findings could be clearly expressed and interpreted concisely.

4. Findings

4.1 Pearson Product–Moment Correlation

Table 1

Pearson Correlation in Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), and the Emotional Well-being Scale (EAS)

Variables	<i>n</i>	PAQFP	PAQFA V	PAQF AN	PAQM P	PAQM AV	PAQM AN	SMA	EAS
PAQFP	300	-							
PAQFAV	300	.461**	-						
PAQFAN	300	.141*	-.453**	-					
PAQMP	300	.879**	.420**	.097	-				
PAQMAV	300	.460**	.908**	-.468**	.500**	-			
PAQMAN	300	.145*	-.437**	.915**	.179**	-.418**	-		
SMAS	300	.430**	.338**	-.125*	.382**	.301**	-.091	-	
EAS	300	.175**	.485**	-.496**	.122*	.467**	-.498**	.200**	-

Note. *n*= Sample, *PAQ*= Parental Authority Questionnaire (P= Permissive, AV= Authoritative, AN= Authoritarian), (F= Father, M= Mother)

The results showed significant associations among parenting styles, social media addiction, and emotional well-being. Authoritative and permissive parenting was generally positively associated with emotional well-being, whereas authoritarian parenting showed negative associations with emotional well-being.

4.2 Mediation Analysis

Table 2

Mediation Analysis of Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) on Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), and the Emotional Well-being Scale (EAS)

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>	95% <i>CI</i>
Total Effect X on Y	.01	.02	.49	[-.03, .06]
Direct Effect X on Y	-.01	.02	.62	[-.06, .03]
Indirect Effect X on Y	.02	.01		[.02, .12]

Note. *B*=Effect, 95%*CI*= Confidence Interval (Lower limit, Upper limit)

The mediation analysis indicated that the total and direct effects of parenting styles on emotional well-being were not statistically significant. However, the indirect effect through social media addiction was significant, as the 95% confidence interval did not include zero.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the present study, the relationship between parenting styles, emotional well-being, and social media addiction among adolescents was discussed. The correlation results showed that authoritative parenting was positively related to emotional well-being while authoritarian parenting was negatively correlated with emotional well-being. In particular, the authoritative parenting of both fathers and mothers was significantly positively related to emotional well-being, and the authoritarian parenting of both fathers and mothers was significantly negatively related. The results are similar to those from other studies that have shown that parental warmth, responsiveness and appropriate behavioral control is correlated with better psychological adjustment while controlling and less responsive parenting is associated with worse emotional adjustment in adolescents (Pinquart, 2017). The results thus underscore the significance of a nurturing family environment in adolescence, when young people are becoming more emotionally sensitive and more self-reliant, making the nature and quality of parent–adolescent relationships more meaningful.

The results also showed that parenting styles are significantly related to social media addiction. Authoritative parenting and permissive parenting were positively related to social media addiction and paternal authoritarian parenting showed a weak negative correlation. The association between parenting and youth's use of digital devices does not necessarily follow a straight path. Recent studies also show that relationships between parenting dimensions and problematic social media use differ across parenting dimensions as well as the parent–teen relationship (Vossen et al., 2024). The positive association of authoritative parenting with the social media addiction could be due to parents' openness and autonomy in adolescents' social life, which facilitated greater access to online worlds, while the negative association of authoritarian parenting with social media addiction could be linked to greater behavioral restriction. The results should however be interpreted with caution as this is a cross sectional design and therefore cannot account for the direction of these relationships.

Another result was the strong positive correlation between emotional health and social media addiction. This study contradicts previous research which found problematic social media use to be associated with worse psychological outcomes; however, more recent studies have found that the relationship between social media use and well-being is not straightforward and is multipartite (Ansari et al., 2024). Social media can be enjoyable, emotional, social, and connect us with others while also posing threats of overuse and misuse. Therefore, the positive relationship seen in the current study is not concluded as being a positive influence on emotional well-being due to social media addiction but can be interpreted as due to the multidimensionality of youth's digital lifestyles.

An additional analysis of these relationships was submitted in the form of a mediation analysis. Overall, there was no significant direct or overall effect of parenting on emotional well-being; however, the indirect effect via social media addiction was significant, as shown by the

confidence interval that did not contain zero. This discovery implies that social media addiction could be a significant channel by which parental experiences are linked to youth's emotional health. The data were cross-sectional, however, so this was an indirect effect and should be interpreted as a statistical relationship rather than a causal mechanism. The results collectively reinforce the need to take a holistic approach to understanding adolescents' emotional wellbeing by drawing on both psycholinguistic and digital behaviors dimensions.

This current research study emphasizes the interrelatedness of parenting styles, social media addiction and the adolescent's emotional well-being. Authoritative parenting was linked to higher levels of emotional well-being, while authoritarian parenting was linked to lower levels of emotional well-being. The problems of social media addiction were significantly correlated with some parenting dimensions and indirectly showed significant relationships with emotional well-being through parenting styles. In general, the results highlight the significance of positive parent-teen interactions and healthier and more balanced technology use. More studies are required to understand the time sequence and cause/effect of these relationships, especially within the context of Pakistan.

6. Limitations and Recommendations

The study was limited by a number of factors that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. The cross sectional design does not allow for causal inferences and the convenience sampling of educational institutions in Faisalabad reduces the generalizability of the findings to other geographical and sociocultural contexts. Self-report measures may also have led to response and common-method biases. Longitudinal and multi-informant designs are recommended for future research to elucidate the directionality of the parenting-social media addiction-emotional well-being relationships. Further research is also recommended that involves more diverse samples from other regions of Pakistan, as well as other cultural contexts, and focuses more on the purpose, intensity and context of social media usage.

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