

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA BURNOUT, LONELINESS AND BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

*Fazaila Sabih<sup>\*</sup> #, Maria Jameel<sup>\*\*</sup> #, Amna Hassan<sup>\*\*\*</sup> #, Asia Mushtaq<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> #, Syeda Shamama-tus-Sabah<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>*

**#Department of Applied Psychology, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan**

**\*\*\*Department of Psychology, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan**

**\*\*\*\*Department of Higher Education, Rawalpindi Women University, Lahore, Pakistan**

## Abstract

To explore the effect of social media burnout on loneliness and body image among university students in Pakistan. Current study was conducted in Riphah International University Islamabad, Pakistan and comprised of 306 university students including 152 male and 154 females with age range from 19-29 years. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 students including 10 male and 10 females to explore the effect of social media usage on body image. Cross sectional research design was used in which quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. UCLA loneliness scale by Russell was used to assess loneliness. Multi-dimensional body self-relations scale by Cash was used to measure body image and social media burnout scale developed by Han was used to measure social media burnout. Findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between social media burnout and dissatisfaction with body image ( $r=0.175$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and positive relationship exists between social media burnout and loneliness ( $r=0.187$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). There is also a positive relationship between loneliness and dissatisfaction with body image ( $r=0.314$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Female students feel more exhausted by social media than male students ( $t=4.28$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Loneliness and body dissatisfaction are found to be high in social media exhausted university students. Loneliness also leads to dissatisfaction with body image. Female university students got social media burnout more quickly than male students. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 22 (4): June 2021: 1-10.*

**Keywords: Social Media, Social Media Burnout, Social Media Exhaustion, Body Image and Loneliness**

## Introduction

To grab the attention of people social networking market has introduced new social sites and applications *i.e.*, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and Tiktok. They provide facilities and new functions to spend more time while engaging in these sites and applications. Rapid growth of social media with new social applications, features and functions has become a

big challenge for the users who have multiple social accounts and try to maintain them. In order to maintain multiple accounts they feel exhausted. Social media burnout can be related as mental exhaustion in profession or other activities.

Social media is commonly used as an interactive tool to share posts, ideas, and self-presentation (selfie and status). Social media's most popular sites are Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp, YouTube and Instagram [1]. It provides opportunity to connect with each other as a result offline and online behaviour of users is not separated and clearly defined side effects of using social media for longer period of time whether intentionally or unintentionally is basically social media fatigue. Agreeing to Manago, Taylor and Greenfield, numerous other social network sites have multiple users and enable them to start and maintain online strong relationships [2]. Social media exhaustion refers to psychological and behavioural outcomes that result from the continuous use of online social media sites. Social media exhaustion describes intendancy of users to withdraw from excessive use of social media even when individual feels tiredness, results in too much social consumption and depletion from that environment [3].

Fatigue can be defined as a phenomenon that can be subjective, experimental and complicated in nature. Fatigue leads to burnout. Burnout refers to state of distrust, unbelief, reduction and elimination from stress creating environment [4,5]. Social media fatigue is a phenomenon in which social network users don't want to stay or engaged in online activities and few users deactivated their online account ids [6]. This condition showed that users experienced exhaust by social services, facilities and features given by social media sites and as a result indicated that users decreased online activities. It is explained in a study that social media fatigue and mental tiredness was based on this concept of information overload [7]. Advancement in the technology, services providers offered lot of services free at cost to their users and their source of income is only the advertisements.

Social media exhaustion is a big challenge experienced by social networking sites' providers or owners because exhaustion results in decreased use of social media sites which results in loss of provided services. In prior researches main focus was on users' satisfaction, social overload, discontinuous behaviour,

excessive use of social media, privacy risk factors, social media fatigue and well-being personality traits such as psychological but social media exhaustion was not addressed as much as other issues. The present study is designed to investigate the relationship between effects of social media burnout, loneliness and body image which examined through mixed method to identify the relationship [8].

Out of many online social media platforms, Facebook is the most popular website worldwide and still the number of users has been increased on the daily basis but its users feel tiredness after using it. This phenomenon is called as Social media fatigue. Burnout was known as physical or emotional exhaustion due to the reasons of long time stress [9,10].

Social media burnout refers to the process result in negative consequences on psychological wellbeing including anxiety and stress. Most common sign of burnout is apathy instead of energy. Favourite activities become exhausting than entertaining. The extreme phase of social media burnout is silence. Where you stop responding to email, tweets or you start ignoring the social media circle, you might think that ignoring of the social media is the only way of relief from fatigue [11,12].

Socio-cultural perspective theory and body image describes significant influence of media on the self-presentation [13]. Messages conveyed through media have impact on viewers to comply with reality of beauty. Internalization is generally described as the absorption of some idea or opinion to such an extent that it becomes a part of someone's character or life. Portrayal of beauty presented by media, has become ideal standard of physical appearance. Internalization leads toward dissatisfaction of body image. It is one of the major causes of eating disorder. Due to arrival of new technology and devices of android mobile rapidly grabbed the attention and participation of youth. Time spend on the television has shifted to mobile phone [14].

Continuous use of online social media was one of the reasons of individual's feeling of

loneliness. Social technology has reduced social involvement and psychological well-being. The study findings showed that every person use social media to satisfy his desires. Purpose of using social media varies from person to person. Social media was commonly used for interaction. Excessive use of internet decreases the interaction with family members, it reduces their social circle and it leads towards high level of loneliness and depression. A model was proposed after comparative study of different models suggested that persons involved in excessive use of social media, experience more loneliness [15].

Addressing and understanding of the current phenomenon of Social media burnout and body image dissatisfaction is very important. Social media is used to promote the body obsession, comparison, competition and self -presentation. The study described the role of media to influence the body appearance in the west. Consumption of media is to change and to promote the perfect ideal image of slim women. It is found that females are more interested in losing their weights to meet that ideal image. Thus it is raising an unrealistic approach in the society. Media emphasized more on the content that promoted the physical beauty. Because of that it created negative impact on body satisfaction.

Social media needs and gratification theory focused on belief that public is active when it uses media. It emphasized that public use media to satisfy its physical and psychological needs and demands. Social comparison is the cause of social media exhaustion it might took more time to spend online and offline when they are dissatisfied about their own body image and it had strong psychological effects on the users.

### **Rationale of the study**

Psychological health is badly affecting due to social media exhaustion. Excessive social media exhaustion creates loneliness. Perception of users is to live without social media is impossible. After introducing 4G internet, sharing of information has become fast. In social media

information is sharing on one click without thinking of its effects. In the current time stay online becomes problematic (exhaustion) which affects the young users psychologically. That is why this topic has been selected for research.

Asian developing countries like Pakistan are rapidly affected by economic and social changes. Continuous use of social media may enhance the adoption of western habits, values, norms, living style and attitude. As an effect of change in cultural values and norms body image refers as an unusual concept in traditional societies. It is significant to study how body image is uniquely used for self-presentation on social media to satisfy and to find out its potential factors for body image in order to conclude the need to be aware and educated.

Thus no prior research has addressed the gender difference of social media burnout why female students feel more exhausted by social media sites than male students. Moreover present study attempts to investigate the effect of social media burnout on loneliness and body image among universities students.

### **Materials and Methods**

Mixed method research design was used to determine the effects of social media burnout on loneliness and body image among university students. The sample of the study was consisted of (N=306; male=152, female=154) age ranges from 19 to 29 years for quantitative data and sample of N=20 was used for in-depth interviews from different universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. They were asked to fill the questionnaires along with demographic sheet. Three measuring tools were used to measure body image, social media burnout and loneliness.

- UCLA Loneliness Scale: University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Loneliness scale developed by Russell in 1996, used to measure the individual feelings of loneliness. It consists of 20 items 10 items are positive statements and 10 are negatives statements with a four point response set (1=never to 4=always). High score indicates greater level of loneliness. Reverse-

Scored items are 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19, and 20.

- Body Image self-relations Scale: Multidimensional body self-relations questionnaire (MBSRQ-AS) scale developed by Cash in 2000 to measure individual's assessment and effect of physical appearance. It consists of 34 items with five points response set (1=definitely disagree to 4=definitely agree). Reverse-Scored items are 18, 19, 11, 14, 16, and 20.
- Social Media Burnout Measurement Scale: 24 Social media Burnout developed by Han in 2016 to measure depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and ambivalence. It consists of 11 items, used to measure on 7 point Likert type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Reliability test for any type of population

Cronbach's alpha was 0.911, 0.833 and 0.840 for ambivalence, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

#### *In Depth Interviews*

Individual interviews were conducted with 20 participants. Responses were carefully recorded for analysis. Some of the questions asked in interview were: role of social media in promoting body image, planning and strategies social media will be more beneficial tool to help in your body image (self-presentation), Social media have positive/negative impact on your Body Image, Use of social media sites to represent your body image, Online post without care about personal look, Concern about small change about body images, etc. Every respondent's answer is analysed qualitatively.

## **Results**

**Table 1: Mean, standard deviation, psychometric properties and descriptive statistics of UCLA, SMB, MBSRQ-AS (N=306)**

Scales	n	M	SD	$\alpha$	Potential	Actual	kurtosis	skewness
SMB	10	36.6	10.5	0.76	12 – 65	10 – 70	-0.297	0.317
UCLA	20	50.12	7.07	0.69	20 – 73	20 – 80	0.806	-0.147
MBSRQ -AS	34	97.6	13.67	0.75	61 – 143	34 – 170	0.202	-0.048

Note: SMB: Social Media Burnout Scale; UCLA: Loneliness Scale; MBSRQ-AS: Multi-dimensional Body Self-relations Questionnaire; n: no. of items; M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

Table 1 indicates Mean, Standard Deviation, psychometric properties and descriptive statistics of Loneliness; Multi-dimensional Body Self-relations and Social Media Burnout Questionnaire. Cronach Alpha reliability of all three scales proves them to be reliable and

effective for the present study sample. The values of kurtosis and skewness indicate that data is within acceptable range that is between -2 and +2 and satisfying the assumption of normal distribution.

**Table 2: Mean, standard deviation and t-values for SMB=Social Media Burnout Scale; UCLA Loneliness Scale; MBSRQ-AS=Multi-Dimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire between male and female university students**

Variable	Gender								Cohen's d
	Males		Females		95% CI				
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL	
SMB	34	9.4	39.1	10.95	4.28	0	-7.3	-2.7	0.49
UCLA	50	6.32	50.2	7.77	232	0.817	-17.82	1.4	0.02
MBSRQ-AS	97	14.55	97.2	12.79	464	0.643	-2.35	3.8	0.05

Note: SMB: Social Media Burnout Scale; UCLA: Loneliness Scale; MBSRQ-AS: Multi-dimensional Body Self-relations Questionnaire; CI: Confidence Interval; LL: Lower Limit; UP: Upper Limit; M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

The findings revealed significant gender difference as female university students report more exhausted (M=39.10, SD=10.95) than male university students (M=34.09, SD=9.40);  $t(306) = 4.28, p < 0.01$ . On the other hand, Loneliness on Questionnaire male students report (M=50.02, SD=6.32) as female university students

(M=50.21, SD=7.77);  $t(306) = 232, p < 0.01$ . Multi-dimensional Body Self-relations male students report possessing (M=97.97, SD=14.55) than females (M=97.24, SD=12.79);  $t(306) = 643, p < 0.01$ . So, hypothesis; females students feel are more exhausted by social media than males, are significantly accepted.

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix SMB=Social Media Burnout Scale; UCLA=Loneliness Scale; MBSRQ-AS=Multi-dimensional Body Self-relations Questionnaire (N=306)**

Variables	1	2	3
SMB	0	0.187**	0.175**
UCLA	0	0	0.34**
MBSRQ-AS	0	0	0

Note: SMB: Social Media Burnout Scale; UCLA: Loneliness Scale; MBSRQ-AS: Multi-dimensional Body Self-relations Questionnaire \*\*:p<0.001.

The results in Table 3 highlighted that social media burnout questionnaire is positively related with loneliness and multi-dimensional body self-relations; however loneliness positively correlates with multi-dimensional body self-

relations. Social media burnout scale is positively correlated with loneliness; multi-dimensional body self-relations scale. All the study variables are significantly correlated with each other at p=0.01 level of significance.

**Table 4: Frequency and percentage of Demographic variables of sample (N= 306)**

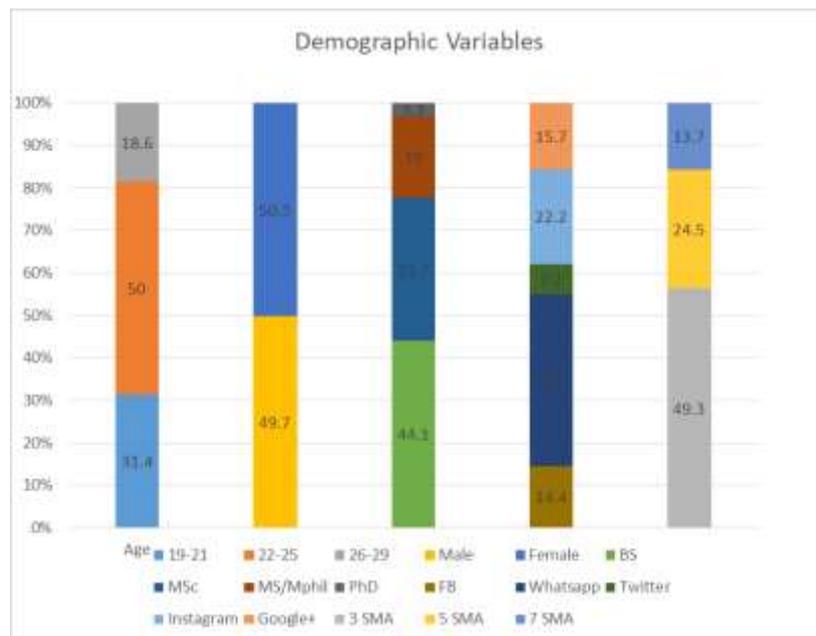
Sample	Variables	f	%
Age	19-21	96	31.4
	22-25	153	50
	26-29	57	18.6
Gender	Male	152	49.7
	Female	154	50.3
Education Level	BS	135	44.1
	Master	103	33.7
	M.Phil	58	19
	PhD	10	3.3
Time Spent	Less than 30 min	13	4.2
	30 to 60 min	34	11.1
	2 h	51	16.7
	2-3h	88	28.8
	4-5 h	120	39.2
Social Media Platform	Facebook	44	14.4
	Whatsapp	124	40.5
	Twitter	22	7.2
	Instagram	68	22.2
	Google +	48	15.7
Accounts for Social Media Platform	1	38	12.4
	3	151	49.3
	5	75	24.5
	7	42	13.7

Note: f = Frequency, % = Percentage

Table 4 shows frequency and percentage of demographic variables; age, gender, education level, social media using in terms of Time Spend (TS), most using Social Media Platform (SMP) and Account of Social Media Platform (ASMP). The sample consisted of university students with age range 19–21 years (f=96, 31.4%) were more than the university students with age range 22–25 years (f=153, 50%) and with age range 26–29 years (f=57, 18.6%). Female students (f=154, 50.3%) were more than the male students (f=152, 49.7%). Participants studying at M.phil

level (f=58, 19.0%) PhD level (f=10, 3.3%) master (f=103, 33.7%) were lesser than the participants studying at BS level (f=135, 44.1%). Participants having account of social media platform 3+ (f=151, 49.3%) were highest in number than rest of the categories i.e. 1 (f = 38, 12.4 %), 5 (f=75, 24.5%) and 7 (f=42, 13.7%).Social media platform Facebook (f = 44, 14.4%) What’sapp (f=124, 40. 5%) Twitter (f=22, 7. 2%) Instagram (f=68, 22. 2%) Google+ (f=48, 15.7%).

**Figure 1: The graphical representation of the data in terms of age, gender, educational level, social media platforms and social media accounts**



## Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship among social media burnout, loneliness and body image in university students of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. In prior studies researchers had investigated relationship between social media fatigue and exhaustion. Therefore, relationship between body image, loneliness and effect of social media burnout were not known. This research gap is addressed through present study.

T-Test is used for finding the gender differences in social media burnout. Some studies pointed gender differences regarding problematic use of internet. Finding of the current study depicts that female students tend to feel more exhausted than male students  $t=4.28$ ;  $p<0.01$ . Males were shown to have greater tendency to use social media. Findings are consistent with the prior literature. Present studies found that females feel more exhausted from social media than men do. So the results are consistent with the literature.

H1: Individuals with high social media burnout show lower satisfaction with their body appearance.

This study suggests that social media burnout have influence on user's body appearance. However, if users have not identified expected consequences, they feel dissatisfaction when

they were using social media sites. It makes user's perception that excessive use of social media was just waste of time and distrust. Users who use social media limitedly have more satisfaction towards their body appearance than those who use social media limitlessly. Individuals with high social media burnout show lower satisfaction with their body appearance and tend to be more involved in social media burnout,  $r=0.175^{**}$  and,  $r=-0.314^{**}$ ;  $p<0.01$ . It is consistent with many other researches presentation [16]. The study described the role of media to influence the body appearance in the west. Consumption of media is to change and to promote the perfect ideal image of slim women. It is found that females are more interested in losing their weights to meet that ideal image. Thus it is raising an unrealistic approach in the society. Media emphasized more on the content that promoted the physical beauty. Because of that it created negative impact on body satisfaction.

H2: If there is higher level of loneliness then there will be higher rate of Social media burnout. Social media burnout states that users feel exhausted from continuous and longer use of social media sites and applications. When they stop using social media sites, they experience loneliness. While experiencing loneliness they feel depersonalization and emotional gap with social media. When users feel burnout from

social media sites, they stop using social media sites. It is illustrated that lonely people experience more pain, depression, and fatigue than those who had more social connections. Results indicate that there is positive significant correlation  $r=0.187^*$  between social media burnout and loneliness, Thus the present study's hypothesis is accepted significantly. Results are inconsistent with the theory of social presence. However some literature suggests the non-significant relationship between social media burnout and loneliness. In Pakistani culture males are considered as strong and females as attractive. Data indicates that there is pressure on male to display their physical appearance on my space. Thus both males and females experience discomfort about their own physical attraction [17].

H3: If there is higher dissatisfaction with body image then it leads towards higher level of loneliness. While discussing the hypothesis, if there is higher level of dissatisfaction with body image then it leads towards higher level of loneliness  $r=0.314^{**}$  is significantly accepted. Current study shows significant positive relationship between body image and loneliness of the university students. Findings are consistent with the study conducted by Perloff explained the effects of social media on self-presentation and self-observation among young women. Mostly women were heavy users of social media than men [18]. Study determined that individual perception persuaded by social media about as well as it lead towards dissatisfaction of body image. This study suggested that social media use is a predictor of body image dissatisfaction and disorders of eating.

H4: Female students feel more social media burnout than male students  $t=4.28$ ,  $p<0.01$  is accepted significantly but it is inconsistent with the prior literature. Exhaustion influences the use of social media. However, when individuals continuously use social media sites, they create their online accounts to build and maintain relationships [19]. For this purpose they need time to handle information and friend requests, they got simultaneously from different accounts. Thus overloaded social information may cause

users to feel stress when they reduce online activities [20].

Current study emphasizes on effects of social media burnout on body image and loneliness and investigates burnout aspects on social media user. Findings of this current study can contribute in social media research in the followings ways. First, this study introduced conceptual framework to examine effect of social media burnout. Prior studies identify the symptoms of social media fatigue, depression and anxiety in addition to understand phenomena of social media burnout [10].

All research variables such as body image, loneliness and social media burnout have negative effects on social media usage and loneliness. The findings show students perception towards social media vibrant factor, which changes their usage intensity over time. When user signed in social media, its features, information and interaction make them excited. Therefore after some passage of time user started to dislike and ultimately discontinue use of social media. Information and feature overload cause social media burnout. When user feels exhausted and reaches at last stage, user stimulatingly stop using social media sites. In order to escape from its effects on body image and loneliness users start using social media sites again. They take short time break from social media sites.

In interview participants said that now they use their favourite social media sites less frequent than they use earlier. Point of views from all female participants was they got exhausted with few social media applications such as Facebook and whatsapp it also influences female's perception of body image. Half of the male participants also indicated that they experienced fatigue and got exhausted from social media. Here comes a gender difference of social media exhaustion. Findings suggest that individuals with high social media burnout show higher level of body dissatisfaction and loneliness as well as female students feel more exhausted by social media than male students. Pew research centre US conducted national survey to evaluate the usage of social media sites among demographic variables (*i.e.*, age, education level) across

gender. Women are at higher level of engagement on social sites than the men. The current study opens the door for future researchers to study the social media exhaustion with other psychological variables [21-26].

### **Conclusion**

An assortment of affordances, such as constant connectivity, visibility, social feedback and accessibility, make social media platforms highly attractive for users. Increasingly, research has shown that because of unregulated and excessive use of social media platforms, users (particularly the younger cohort) are prone to damaging psychological and physiological outcomes. Building on prior scholarly work on the problematic use of social media, the findings from the current study contribute to the literature by increasing our understanding of social media fatigue and its underlying mechanisms.

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***\*Corresponding author: Amna Hassan, Department of Applied Psychology, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan.***

***E-mail: amna\_wah@hotmail.com***

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