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Emotional Dysregulation and Social Media Addiction Among Young Adults: The Moderating Role of Mindfulness

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Abstract: This paper has discussed the association between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction in young adults, as well as investigated how mindfulness mediates these relationships. With the continued increase in the use of social networking platforms, such as Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, and X, the problem of overuse and compulsive behavior have increased. Young adults are prone to problematic use of social media due to issues related to development such as exploration of identity, emotional volatility, academic stress and comparison with peers. The research was conducted on the premise that the people who find it hard to understand, accept, and control their emotions are more likely to use excessive social media usage as a coping strategy to deal with negative emotions. Meanwhile, the concept of mindfulness was discussed as a protective element, which can undermine the correlation between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction. The quantitative research design was employed where young adults were recruited based on standardized self-report measures of emotional dysregulation, mindfulness and social media addiction. The results revealed that the emotional dysregulation was positively related to increased levels of social media addiction. People with more emotional problems were more prone to showing compulsive behaviour of social media use. Mindfulness, however, was observed to have a negative relationship with emotional dysregulation and social media addiction which meant that the more mindful individuals were, the lesser the chances of them becoming social media addicts. The paper highlights the applicability of emotional regulation and mindfulness to elaborate problematic use of social media. These findings might be utilized to create preventive strategies, counseling strategies, and mindfulness-based interventions that might be used to promote optimal digital habits and mental health among young adults.

Keywords: *Emotional Dysregulation; Social Media Addiction; Mindfulness; Young Adults; Behavioral Addiction.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

➢ *Context of the Study*

The high level of development of digital technology has radically changed the tendency of communication, interaction, and formation of identity within modern society. Social networking sites like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and X have become a primary part of daily life among young adults over the last ten years. These websites facilitate instant communication, content sharing, self-presentation, and social approval. On the one hand, social media has numerous positive effects, including social connectedness, access to information, and the possibility to express oneself; on the other hand, it has already been associated with problematic consumption patterns, which are familiar to behavioral addiction (Andreassen, 2015; Kuss and Griffiths, 2017). Young adulthood is the time of identity-forming, when age is 18 to 30 years old, there is academic and occupational pressure, alterations in romantic attachments, and emotional swings (Arnett, 2000). Peer assessment and social comparison are very delicate at this transitional stage. Social media platforms amplify these dynamics by providing feedback, unlimited opportunities in terms of likes, comments, and number of followers. It is known that social networking sites are a particularly frequent type of network among young adults and, therefore, they are particularly prone to the emergence of problematic applications (Pew Research Center, 2022). The social media addiction (SMA) is considered through the prism of behavioral addiction and its nature is identical to any other non-substance addiction, including gambling disorder and internet gaming disorder (Griffiths, 2005). Behavioral addictions are also present as it was explained in the components model of addiction,000. i.e salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse (Griffiths, 2005). Addicted patients additionally document that they are preoccupied with what they do on the site, dedicate additional time on the site, get annoyed when someone cannot use social media, and have academic, work, and relational performance problems (Andreassen et

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al., 2016). Even though it was not a clinical diagnosis within the broad classification frameworks, problematic social media usage was associated with anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep disturbances, and poor well-being (Keles et al., 2020). Emotional dysregulation is one of the key psychological variables that plays a major contribution in addictive behaviours. Emotional regulation is the form through which people control the level, length, and display of their feelings (Gross, 1998). Emotional dysregulation takes place when persons face troubles in recognizing, comprehending, acknowledging, or coping with feelings in adaptive manners (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Emotionally dysregulated persons also have issues with impulse control, emotional clarity, and distress tolerance. Consequently, they can be tempted to use maladaptive coping mechanisms like avoidance, suppression, or becoming over-absorbed in distracters (Aldao et al., 2010). The relationship between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction can be explained using affect regulation and reinforcement theories. Social media also allows people to adjust their mood when they feel strongly negative, i. e., sadness, anxiety, boredom, or loneliness (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). The reward systems are activated by the short-term pleasurable effect of notifications, likes, and social interaction and become part of the frequent use habit. With time, such a pattern of emotional distress, followed by online activity, reinforces routines, which may result in the development of compulsive habits. Empirical research has established that emotion regulation issues are a good predictor of problematic internet use and smartphone addiction (Hormes et al., 2014; Rozgonjuk et al., 2018). Moreover, impulsivity and experiential avoidance are closely associated with emotional dysregulation. People with poor management abilities can turn to social media to forget or anesthetize painful emotions. Such dependence on exogenous stimuli to relieve emotions predisposes one to addiction-related tendencies (Elhai et al., 2017). Specifically, young adults facing academic or relationship pressure or who are unsure of what to do with their lives can rely on the online platform to help them overcome emotional difficulties. Problematic use of social media is not seen in everyone with emotional dysregulation. This implies that there are some protective or moderating variables that cushion the effects of emotional predicaments. Mindfulness is one of these protective factors. Mindfulness is a state of remaining mindful and conscious at the present moment without judging and accepting thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). When applied to psychological research, mindfulness is viewed as a dispositional characteristic and a skill that can be developed with the help of structured interventions. A lot of research has shown that mindfulness practice helps to improve emotional sensitivity and to reduce automatic reactivity when faced with stressful situations. People who are highly mindful tend to have ngreater cognitive flexiblity and are better able to tolerate distress due to their lower level of impulsive behavior (Baer, et al., 2006). Instead of repressing or evading feelings, mindful beings just watch their inner life and do not have judgmental feelings about it, letting emotions come and go. This adaptive response style would minimize the chances of adopting maladaptive coping behaviors, such as addictive behaviors (Bowen et al., 2014). According to recent studies, problematic internet use and addiction to smartphones are negatively correlated with mindfulness (Gamez-Guadix and Calvete, 2016). Mindfulness can disrupt the urges-compulsive response loop that urges lead to habitual responding by raising awareness of urges and decreasing habitual responding. For example, if someone is feeling anxious or lonely, a mindful person will recognize that feeling and will not instinctively be able to download the internet as a way of resolving that feeling. By using this ability to recognize or stop before taking any other action to find a solution, reduces the cycle of reinforcement that maintains addiction. The theoretical and practical importance of the moderating role of mindfulness in the correlation between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction is thus important. A moderator variable is used to determine the magnitude or even direction of the relationship between a predictor and outcome variable (Baron and Kenny, 1986). It is theorized in this regard that mindfulness could moderate the positive relationship between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction. Higher emotional dysregulation and high mindfulness may be associated with less addictive behavior in individuals with high mindfulness in comparison with low mindfulness. The analysis of this mediated association can be added to the more complex explanation of psychological processes underlying social media addiction. Although past researchers have conducted independent studies of emotional dysregulation and mindfulness and their association with behavioral addictions, few studies have incorporated them into one model specifically with young adults. With the growing rate of overuse of social media and its negative mental health effects, it is necessary to determine both risk and protective factors to be able to develop the most useful prevention and intervention strategies. The findings from this research will aid in guiding university counselor programs and mental health treatment options that will help improve digital wellbeing. Mindfulness-based treatments, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), have been shown to help individuals become better emotionally and behaviorally regulated and reduce the likelihood of using maladaptive coping styles (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness training can be introduced to student support services to alleviate the adverse consequences of emotional dysregulation on social media addiction.

- *Rationale of the Study*

The astronomic increase in digital technology and social networking sites has drastically altered the psychosocial milieu of the young adults. Application like Tik Tok and Instagram have been chosen as the main forms of communication, entertainment and identity formation. Although these platforms provide a chance to connect and express oneself, growing evidence points to the opportunities that the heightened and compulsive usage of such platforms may have problematic consequences that can be likened to behavioral addiction (Andreassen, 2015; Griffiths, 2005). The young adults are one of the most active cohorts of users of the social media, and, therefore, they are especially susceptible to addictive use habits and related mental outcomes (Pew Research Center, 2022). Thus, the

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study of the psychological predictors of social media addiction in this group of population is topical and required. Emotional dysregulation is also a significant risk factor that has been reported to be a critical factor in different addictive and maladaptive behaviors. Gross (1998) asserts that good emotion regulation is the ability to observe, appraise and regulate emotional reactions in adaptive manners. In case such regulatory abilities are missing in people, they can experience distress and adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms (Gratz and Roemer, 2004). According to the earlier studies, the issue of emotional dysregulation is positively correlated with problematic use of the internet, addiction to smartphone use, and compulsive online use (Elhai et al., 2017; Rozgonjuk et al., 2018). The immediate mood modification effect of social media is achieved by social validation and distraction, and upholds the repetitive usage patterns. Although these results, very few studies have looked specifically on emotional dysregulation as a predictor of social media addiction in empirical frame of reference among young adults. Moreover, risk factors to social media addiction have been extensively studied, however, minimal focus has been made on protective psychological processes that can moderate such relationship. The connection between the concept of mindfulness and better emotional regulation, less impulsivity, and greater psychological well-being allows this concept to become a vital topic of psychological studies in recent years (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindful people are well positioned to notice emotional events without responding in an impulsive and avoidance manner. The studies indicate that mindfulness has a negative relationship with problematic internet use and other behavioral addictions (Gámez-Guadix and Calvete, 2016). The mediating effect of mindfulness on the correlation between emotional management and social media addiction has not been fully studied, especially in the young adults demographics. The other significant reason why the current study is considered to be necessary is the growing mental health issues that are being experienced by young adults during the digital era. The overuse of social media has been associated with anxiety, depression, sleeping problems, and low academic performance (Keles et al., 2020). Determining the adjustable psychological variables like mindfulness can help with the preventive mental health treatment. This research can be considered a step further in terms of understanding the interaction between emotional vulnerabilities and adaptive coping methods by analyzing mindfulness as a mediating factor. Moreover, the majority of the current research in the field has been performed in the Western framework and, therefore, it cannot be applied to the study of various cultural environments. There is an increased demand to explore these associations in more socio-cultural contexts where the habit of using social media can vary. Research has been proposed to look at the impact of mindfulness into a moderated model of emotional dysregulation with the intention to address a significant conceptual and empirical gap in current research on behavioral addictions, and for the results to have implications for influencing counseling practice, mental health initiatives at universities, and online well-being programs to decrease young adult problem social media use.

- *Statement of the Problem*

The growing consideration of social networking sites like Instagram, Tik Tok and Facebook in the lives of young adults has raised an increasing concern as to the problematic and addictive forms of use. Despite offering a chance to socialize, exchange information, and identify, despite having disadvantages, one can find that excessive use of social media has been associated with the development of psychological distress, decreased academic achievement, sleep problems, and interpersonal conflicts (Andreassen et al., 2016; Keles et al., 2020). The young adults who are one of the most active users are especially vulnerable to compulsive use patterns as their developmental issues like emotional instability, identity exploration, peer comparison and school requirements because they are easily carried along by their developmental issues (Arnett, 2000). However, even though the use of social media is so widespread, the lack of understanding of the psychological mechanisms behind the emergence of addiction-like behaviors is rather obvious. Emotional dysregulation is one of the most notable psychological causes of addictive behaviors. Emotional dysregulation is a problem with respect to tracking, assessing and controlling emotional reactions in adaptive means (Gross, 1998; Gratz and Roemer, 2004). Emotionally invalid individuals usually have strong negative emotions which they cannot cope with effectively as they do not have good coping mechanisms to overcome distress. The empirical studies have also shown that emotional dysregulation has a positive correlation with a range of maladaptive behaviors, such as substance abuse, compulsive internet use, and addiction to smartphones (Elhai et al., 2017; Rozgonjuk et al., 2018). Social media networks provide prompt mood alteration and distraction that may support repetitiveness among emotionally vulnerable people. Nevertheless, although previous studies show that emotional hardships and problematic online behaviors can be interrelated, a few studies have examined emotional dysregulation as a determinant of social media addiction specifically in young adult groups. In addition, available literature has mainly been used to identify risk factors to social media addiction and relatively less attention has been paid to any protective variables that can mitigate its development. Mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn 1994) is defined as "non-judging acceptance of the present moment"(Baer et al., 2006). Several studies to date have concluded that present moment awareness is associated with an increased ability to control one's emotions and exhibit less impulsiveness. It is theorized that mindfulness will be negatively correlated with addictive behaviours such as problematic internet use or other types of behavioural addictions (Gámez-Guadix & Calvete 2016). Nevertheless, the moderating effect of mindfulness on the emotional dysregulation and social media addiction association is an underinvestigated issue. Comprehension of mindfulness weakening the effects of emotional dysregulation in addictive behaviors relating to social media is vital in the development of effective prevention and treatment interventions. In addition, the majority of the empirical data in this field has been obtained in the West, which reduces the applicability of results in different cultural backgrounds. Considering the fast increase in the use of

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social media in the world and the escalating mental health issues amongst young adults, it is necessary that a thorough research is conducted that incorporates both risk and protective variables in a single conceptual framework. Thus, the current paper attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the effects of emotional dysregulation on social media addiction in young adults and determining whether mindfulness mediates this connection. In this way, the proposed study is expected to make a contribution to the enhanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms of problematic social media use and to guide the field of evidence-based mental health interventions.

➢ *Objectives of the Study*

- To determine the degree of emotional dysregulation in young adults.
- To find out the degree of social media addiction in young adults.
- To investigate the correlation between emotional regulation and social media dependency.
- To determine the degree of mindfulness among young adults.
- To investigate whether emotional dysregulation and social media addiction have a mediating moderator (mindfulness).

➢ *Hypotheses*

- H1: Social media addiction will be positively related to emotional dysregulation.
- H2: There will exist a negative relationship between mindfulness and emotional dysregulation.
- H3: Mindfulness will have negative correlation with social media addiction.
- H4: Mindfulness will be the most important moderator of the connection between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction, so that the connection will be less strong with the higher levels of mindfulness.

➢ *Operational Definitions*

To make sure that the concept is clear and the results are precise, the following operationally defined key variables of the current research include:

- *Emotional Dysregulation*

Emotional dysregulation is a severe complication in the process of being aware, comprehending, accepting, and controlling of emotional responses, especially when it comes to dealing with emotional suffering. It incorporates impulse control problems when suffering negative feelings, inaccessibility of effective emotion regulation methods, emotional ambiguity, and non-acceptance of emotion (Gratz and Roemer, 2004; Gross, 1998). The current literature identifies emotional dysfunction as having multiple dimensional aspects, thereby defining emotional dysfunction as emotionally driven dysfunctional behaviour. Emotional dysfunction includes not being aware of your emotions; being able to neither identify your emotions nor name your emotions when you're feeling distressed; and not being able to respond to your emotions in a way that is goal-directed or take into consideration your emotional impulse when you are distressed. When measuring emotional dysfunction, self-report measures will be used that are standardised (i.e., the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale) to assess emotional dysfunction. A score will be higher on the scale which means the inabilities to control the emotions. In the context of this study, emotional dysregulation will be used as an independent (predictor) variable, which affects social media addiction.

- *Social Media Addiction*

Social media addiction can be described as compulsively and inappropriately using social media that negatively disrupts or increases the discomfort of the user's personal, academic, professional, or social life (Griffiths et al., 2005 and Andreassen et al., 2016) and is theorized to be part of the behavioral addiction model that contains six primary elements, salience (preoccupied with using social media), mood modification (using social media changes your emotional state), tolerance (using social media for longer periods), withdrawal symptoms (psychologically distressed from not being able to access social media), conflict (interpersonal or intrapersonal conflict caused by using social media), and relapse (returning to high levels of social media use, despite attempts to reduce) (Griffiths et al., 2005; Andreassen et al., 2016).

The operationalization of social media addiction for this current study will consist of the sum of the items on a validated scale measuring social media addiction (i.e., BSMAS). An increase in scores will indicate an increased level of addictive behavior with social media. The dependent (outcome) variable in this research is social media addiction.

- *Mindfulness*

Mindfulness is a psychological attribute that describes the ability to be conscious and fully aware of the current moment with a non-critical and inquisitive attitude to thoughts, feelings, and bodily impressions (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It is a conscious awareness of current experiences without excessive identification or automatic reactivity. Mindfulness has been linked to better emotional control, less impulsivity and better psychological well being (Baer et al., 2006).

Mindfulness is viewed in this paper as a dispositional characteristic and not a transient state. It will be assessed through a self-report scale that is standardized like the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) or the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). An increase in scores will indicate the increase of mindfulness. The moderating variable is mindfulness, which implies that it is theorized to determine the strength and direction of the association between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction.

- *Young Adults*

The 18 to 30yr of age range means young adults. This is the period of developmental stage that is characterized by the exploration of identity, a greater level of independence,

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academic and employment changes and greater level of emotional experiences (Arnett, 2000). The individuals to be included in the current research will be falling within this age bracket. Age will be authenticated with demographic data, which will be collected in the process of data gathering.

- *Moderating Role*

A moderating effect is a statistical and conceptual effect of a third variable which modifies the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable in strength or direction (Baron and Kenny 1986). Within the framework of this research, it is assumed that mindfulness mediates association between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction. Namely, the expected result is that the positive correlation between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction is stronger with people with lower mindfulness levels.

➢ *Significance of the Study*

The current research has great relevance into the area of clinical psychology especially in determining psychological risk and protective factors that are related to behavioral addictions. The problem of emotional dysregulation has been continuously associated with multiple maladaptive and dysfunctional behaviors such as substance abuse, self-harm and problematic internet use (Gross, 1998; Gratz and Roemer, 2004). This research can help advance the literature that has already understood emotional dysregulation as an antecedent to social media addiction by operationalizing excessive social media use as a behavioral addiction (Griffiths, 2005). The knowledge of the emotional processes that underlie addictive digital behaviors can help clinical psychologists to create specific interventions that would appeal to the very root of the existing emotional vulnerabilities instead of taking the reduction of screen time as the main goal of an intervention. In case emotional dysregulation has been identified to be a strong predictor of social media addiction, therapeutic interventions like Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) or Emotion Regulation Therapy can be modified to treat compulsive use of social media in young adults.

The research is also very applicable to counseling programs in universities and higher institutions of learning. Young adulthood is a life phase marked by school anxiety, comparison with their peers, experimentation of identity and emotional swings (Arnett, 2000). Instagram and Tik Tok are examples of social networking sites that exacerbate the process of social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors, which may enhance emotional distress. The issues of procrastination, decreased academic activity, sleep disruptions, and anxiety associated with the excessive use of the social media are regularly reported to the university counseling centers. This study establishes an evidence-based intervention in counseling students because it defines emotional dysregulation as a psychological vulnerability factor and mindfulness as a protective factor. Emotion regulation and mindfulness can be combined in workshops and psychoeducational interventions to encourage more healthy digital habits among students.

The other significant contribution of this study is that it has developed mindfulness-based digital well-being methods. Mindfulness has been linked to a better emotional awareness, less impulsivity, and lesser involvement in addictive behavior (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). In cases where mindfulness proves to mediate the association between emotional dysregulation and social media addiction, it would be in support of the incorporation of mindfulness-based interventions in digital wellness programs. The programs can be structured in the form of mindfulness meditation sessions, mindful use of technology training, and cognitive-behavioral interventions to assist people in becoming aware of emotional stimuli that trigger compulsive internet use. This practice will turn the emphasis on the restrictive action to self-regulatory improvement to enable people to attain sustainable and adaptive coping skills in the digital age.

Lastly, the research paper leads to the theoretical growth of the field of behavioral addiction. Although other sources of literature have confirmed direct relations between emotional dysregulation and problematic internet use (Elhai et al., 2017), few studies have investigated moderated models taking into consideration protective psychological constructs. This study is more integrative in nature because it tests mindfulness as a moderating variable between variables instead of simple correlational analysis. This helps gain a fine dimension of the interaction of emotional vulnerabilities with adaptive cognitive processes. The results can be used in the future to conceptualize the theories of digital addiction and motivate future studies to consider other moderators like resilience, self-compassion, or emotional intelligence. Therefore, the current research has both practical and theoretical implications in the development of the psychological study in the fast-changing digital environment.

➢ *Conceptual Framework*

The theoretical basis of the current research is the invention of the emotion regulation theory and the behavioral addiction model. Emotional dysregulation is put forward as the independent (predictor) variable affecting social media addiction which is the dependent (outcome) variable. The emotional regulation theory drives that the person who is found to have trouble in controlling his or her emotional reactions is more probable to move towards maladaptive coping strategies (Gross, 1998). Young adults can find themselves in a situation where they are facing negative experiences of anxiety, loneliness, boredom, or frustration and are drawn to the experience of seeking immediate relief with the help of external stimuli. The notifications, likes, comments, and never-ending streams of content offered by social media platforms give almost instant gratification, which supports the repetitive engagement. With time, such mood alteration pattern can turn into compulsive and addictive usage habits (Griffiths, 2005).

According to the direct pathway that is presented in this model, an increase in emotional dysregulation will be linked to an increase in social media addiction. Individuals

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who have difficulty controlling their impulses and managing their distress may engage in exaggerated forms of scrolling, frequent monitoring and long-term communications using various digital devices. Research confirms that emotional dysregulation is related to poor internet use; this means that individuals with an emotional disorder use digital devices to escape or avoid their feelings, (Elhai et al., 2017). Thus, the concept of emotional dysregulation is defined as a psychological risk factor that predisposes addiction-like interaction with social networking sites.

Nevertheless, the framework also adds the moderating variable in terms of strength of such a relationship, namely, mindfulness. Mindfulness, having been described as current moment awareness with non-judgmental acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), increases levels of emotional clarity and decreases the levels of automatic reactivity. When people are highly mindful, they will have less likelihood of responding to their emotions without necessarily reacting to them. Such quality of reflective mindfulness breaks an automatic loop between emotional distress and compulsive use of social media. Mindfulness is supposed to undermine the positive correlation of emotional dysregulation and social media addiction as a moderator. That is, whilst emotional dysregulation can make people more vulnerable, more mindful individuals can show less addictive social media behavior than less mindful ones.

Theoretically, the framework implies an interaction effect. Emotional dysregulation in itself does not define social media addiction, but on the other hand it influences it depending on the degree of mindfulness. Throughout low levels of mindfulness, one would anticipate that the relationship between emotional dysregulation and addiction is high. This association should be looser at high levels of mindfulness. This mediating model offers a deeper insight into the psychological processes that surround digital addiction and the role of protective adaptive cognitive-emotional skills. The combination of risk and protective variables into a single framework facilitates the theoretical clarity of the study and contributes to the practical use of interventions to ensure the healthy use of digital technologies by young adults.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- *Introduction*

The quick advancement of digital technology integration into the daily life has changed the communication, social interaction and expression of emotion patterns very strongly. The use of social networking sites like Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, and X has become the main means of connection and identity development among young adults. In as much as these sites have significant advantages, over use has been a cause of concern as far as social media addiction (SMA) is concerned. The new studies indicate that emotional dysregulation can be an important psychological indicator of addictive digital behaviors and mindfulness can be a protective factor. This chapter examines the theoretical backgrounds, empirical evidence, and research that has been done in the related areas of emotional dysregulation, social media addiction, and mindfulness, with a conclusion of an integrative comprehension of the relationship between them.

- *Conceptualizing Social Media Addiction*

The social media addiction is normally understood in the context of a behavioral addiction. Griffiths (2005) suggested the model components of addiction that entail salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. These are the criteria used in problematic use of the digital technologies, such as social networking sites. Andreassen et al. (2016) created the scales of the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) on the basis of these elements, which supports the empirical approach to the addiction framework in the study of social media.

The empirical evidence demonstrates that the negative psychological consequences of excessive social media use are anxiety, depression, loneliness, poor academic achievement, and sleeping issues (Keles et al., 2020; Marino et al., 2018). Hormes et al. (2014) discovered that problematic social networking behavior is more similar to the substance-related disorders especially in their craving and withdrawal-like symptoms.

According to neuropsychological studies, the use of social media stimulates the reward circuit with dopaminergic systems, which promotes recurrent use (Turel et al., 2014). The immediate rewarding elements found in likes, shares, comments, add up to reinforcement processes that can enhance compulsive behaviors. Therefore, the addiction to social media is becoming an acknowledged problem of behavioral concern in young adults.

- *Emotional Dysregulation: Theoretical Bases.*

Emotion regulation is a set of processes through which people control what emotions they are feeling, the time they are feeling them and also the way they are expressing them (Gross, 1998). Process Models as described by Gross have identified situation selection, cognitive reappraisal, and response modulation as part of the strategies. Emotional dysregulation is a result of people having no useful mechanisms to deal with emotional experiences.

Gratz and Roemer (2004) presented the conceptualization of emotional dysregulation as a multidimensional construct of non-acceptance of emotions, inability to become involved in goal-oriented behavior under distress, problems with impulse control, inaccessibility of regulation, and inability to become emotionally clear. In the field of empirical studies, their Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) has been extensively applied.

In their meta-analytic results, Aldao et al. (2010) have proven that maladaptive emotion regulation strategies like rumination and suppression are related with psychopathology, such as, anxiety and depression. Impulsivity and experiential avoidance, which are the central processes of addictive behaviours, are also closely associated with emotional dysregulation.

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Neurobiological studies have shown that dysregulation of emotions is characterized by impaired circuitry of the prefrontal limbic areas and especially the inability to exert top-down regulation of amygdala reactions (Ochsner and Gross, 2005). These shortcomings can precondition these people who want to get instant help with eliminating distress by external means, including online activities.

- *Addictions to Behavior and Emotional Dysregulation.*

It has always been shown that there exists a connection between addictive behaviors and emotional dysregulation. There are various maladaptive coping strategies, like substance use, binge eating, gambling, and compulsive use of the internet, which are common among people who cannot cope with negative emotions (Elhai et al., 2017).

Kardefelt-Winther (2014) has developed one theory that is relevant in the context of problematic internet use, namely the compensatory internet use theory, where people are hypothesized to use the online environment to soothe the negative feelings or stressful life situations. The model is consistent with results that emotional distress is predictive of excessive engagement on digital platforms.

Although the study by Rozgonjuk et al. (2018) did not identify the problematic smartphone use, difficulties in emotion regulation were found to be strong predictors of this behavior in young adults. In the same way, Elhai et al. (2017) have found that emotional dysregulation correlated with an increased level of problematic smartphone and internet behaviors.

These results indicate that emotional dyseducation serves as a vulnerability factor in psychology and predisposes more and more dependence on digital platforms to adjust moods and escape emotions.

- *Emotional Dysregulation and Social Media Addiction.*

The connection between fluctuation in emotion and emotional dependency upon social networking sites has been reinforced by specific studies. Patients with acute negative moods can resort to social media as a means of distraction, validation, or distraction (Marino et al., 2018). The short-term gratification that is achieved through internet use supports further consumption, which is likely to result in addictive behaviors.

According to a study conducted by Hormes et al. (2014), emotionally reactive persons had greater chances of developing addictive behaviors of social networking. At the same time, Yen et al. (2017) discovered that the severity of internet addiction among college students was predicted by the lack of emotion regulation.

The social comparison theory also gives insight on the relationship. Young adults often use the comparison of the published online images, which can worsen the state of emotions and solidify the activity in an attempt to restore self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014). This recurring trends reinforces the dysregulation- addiction connection of emotion.

- *Conceptualizing Mindfulness*

Mindfulness was brought to Western clinical psychology through Kabat-Zinn (1994) with the introduction of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). It is a part of the contemplative traditions of Eastern religions and described as being present in an experience in a non-judgmental manner.

Baer et al. (2006) developed a model to conceptualize mindfulness which consists of five different components: observing (the awareness of what you are doing), describing (the ability to put words on your experience), acting with awareness (being mindful of your actions), being non-judgmental (the ability to accept your experience without making any comment), and being non-reactive (the ability to respond with no reaction to irritable thoughts). Trait mindfulness is linked to better psychological health, emotional control and less impulsivity.

Mindfulness improves the ability to exert cognitive control and lessen the automatic responding to emotional stimuli (Bishop et al., 2004). According to neuroimaging researchers, mindfulness enhances prefrontal cortical control of emotional reactions that positively affect adaptive coping (Holzel et al., 2011).

- *Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation*

Much empirical data is in favor of the correlation between mindfulness and better emotion regulation. Baer et al. (2006) established that the higher the mindfulness the lower the emotional reactivity and distress tolerance. Kabat-Zinn (1994) has shown that mindfulness can be used as a way to reduce rumination, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.

Bowen al. al, 2014 demonstrated that addiction behaviour is reduced with mindfulness-based relapse prevention through increased awareness of our emotional triggers. Instead of repeating emotionally reactive patterns (bad emotional habits), we learn to respond positively to our emotions and regulate them through awareness in the present moment.

Overall, we believe that mindfulness may provide an effective form of buffering against the negative effects of emotional dysregulation.

- *Mindfulness and Addiction to Social Media*

Recent studies opine that mindfulness has a negative correlation with problematic use in internet and social media. Gámez-Guadix and Calvete (2016) discovered that mindfulness minimized compulsive behaviors through internet by reducing experiential avoidance. On the same note, Lan et al. (2018) also noted that trait mindfulness had a negative relationship with smartphone addiction in university students.

Mindfulness decreases impulsivity in checking and enhances awareness of the use of digital devices. Mindful people tend not to be automatic scrollers (or emotional escapeers). This implies that mindfulness can moderate the

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effect of emotional susceptibility to addictive social media use.

- *Research Gap*

Despite the presence of the existing literature that formulates meaningful correlations between emotional dysregulation and multiple behavioral addictions, there are still a number of conceptual and empirical gaps. To start with, although emotional regulation has been described as a problematic use of the internet and smartphone addiction (Elhai et al., 2017; Rozgonjuk et al., 2018), less research has directly explored emotional regulation as a predictor of social media addiction as a construct. The social media have distinctive processes of reinforcement (including social validation feedback loops, content exposure through algorithms, curated identity presentation), which is what makes the difference between the use of the internet in general and the use of the social media, in particular.

Hence, it is impossible to generalize internet addiction results worldwide to social media addiction without specific study.

Second, the available studies have mainly concentrated on a direct correlation between psychological risk factors and social media addiction. Despite the evidence of the negative association between mindfulness and addictive behaviours (Gámez-Guadix and Calvete, 2016), few studies have also been conducted in a moderated context when it comes to mindfulness. Most of the previous studies consider mindfulness as a predictor or an outcome variable, but not as a protective moderator that can affect the strength of the correlation between emotional dysregulation and addiction. This poses a big gap in the theoretical understanding of the interactive processes of digital behavioral addiction.

Third, the cross-sectional correlational study designs are overly represented in the literature, and they are carried out in the Western cultural backgrounds. Culture dictates the emotional expression, coping, and patterns of social media use. Social validation and peer approval can be more influential to inform online engagement behaviors in the collectivistic cultures. Thus, the applicability of results to the socio-cultural contexts is not high. Research that explores these constructs among various groups of young adults is required to increase cross-cultural application.

Fourth, existing literature tends to divide emotional dysregulation or mindfulness and not to consider them as the same conceptual entity. Models of behavioral addiction focus more on mechanisms of reinforcement, but often ignore processes that are going on on an emotional level. On the other hand, the studies on emotion regulation seldom include exposure to digital behavioral results in the theoretical context. A more holistic insight into the psychological functioning in the digital age is offered by an integrative model that studies emotional dysregulation as a vulnerability factor and mindfulness as a buffering mechanism.

Lastly, little research has been conducted to examine implications to practice regarding intervention development. Recognizing mindfulness as a mediator may guide prevention mental health interventions to minimize social media addiction by training in emotion regulation and mindfulness-based interventions. Nevertheless, intervention strategies cannot be systematically designed before such moderated relationships can be empirically validated.

Thus, the current research covers these gaps with the help of:

- ✓ Taking emotional dysregulation as a direct predictor of social media addiction.
- ✓ Examining mindfulness as a confounding factor.
- ✓ Making risk and protective factors a part of one conceptual framework.
- ✓ Adding to culturally applicable research on young adults.

Filling these gaps, the work contributes to the theoretical clarity, the depth of the empirical research and the relevance of the research to application in the sphere of the behavioral addiction studies.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of conducting this research was to examine the characteristics of emotional dysregulation that could contribute to social networking site addiction, as well as how aspects of distress intolerance may impact SNS addiction through emotional dysregulation. This chapter contains the information about the research design and methodology of this study. I also comment on the potential threats to validity and also ethical procedures.

- ➢ *The Research Design and Rationale*

This paper discussed the variables by applying a quantitative research design. In the process of deciding the research design to undertake in this study, I established that conducting cross-sectional surveys was the most appropriate approach (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The design was useful in responding to the descriptive and answer questions involving the dependency of variables (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The relations that can be studied in the context of the cross-sectional survey design appear to be the SNS addiction and distress intolerance versus emotional dysregulation. Emotional dysregulation was my independent variable (IV) in this research. These 6 areas of emotional dysregulation include nonacceptance of emotional reaction, inability to participate in goal-focused conduct, inability to regulate impulse control, inability to sense emotions, inability to grasp emotions, and low access to control strategies (Gratz and Roemer, 2004). SNS addiction was the dependent variable (DV). I also explored the possibility of distress intolerance to mediate the addiction to SNSs based on the dysregulation of emotions, thus the mediating variable of the study was distress intolerance (Akbari, 2017). The mediating variables in the study are four domains of distress intolerance (i.e., tolerance, appraisal, absorption, and regulation) (Akbari, 2017; J. S. Simons and Gaher, 2005). A cross-sectional survey design would be fast in terms of data

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collection and time constraints are crucial factors to consider in a study (Evans and Mathur, 2018; Wright, 2005). Another crucial factor is resources, and survey is the best choice as it is also subject to lower costs (Evans and Mathur, 2018; Wright, 2005). Surveys may target massive numbers of individuals as well, primarily when the survey delivery takes place over the internet, which was my intention (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Evans and Mathur, 2018).

- *Methodology Population, Sample Size, and Recruitment Target Population*

This study targeted individuals who had an active account in one or more SNSs who were adults. The sample size that I used was calculated in G+Power version 3.1.9.7. G*Power is used to determine the smallest possible sample size when the degree of confidence is known (Faul et al., 2009). The G+Power software also relies on the number of predictors, effect size, power level as well as alpha level to calculate the sample size (Faul et al., 2009). The effect size is the level of connection among variables. An effect size of 0.2 reflects a small degree of association, the effect size of 0.15 reflects a medium degree of association, and the effect size of 0.35 reflects a large degree of association (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Fritz and McKinnon, 2007). The effect size of.15 is common in the social sciences (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Fritz and McKinnon, 2007), so that is the effect size that I applied. The level of power usually used by researchers who conduct a study in the field of psychology is .8 (Creswell, and Creswell, 2018; Fritz and McKinnon, 2007), which is also my choice of the power level to calculate the sample size. The alpha level I used was .05. The minimum sample size was 68 that was obtained after the application of the values. I used Qualtrics to ease the process of recruiting the participants, administration and delivery of the tools.

- *Data Collection and Instrumentation of Data Demographics*

I used age, gender and number of Social Network Service (SNS) accounts as part of the study questionnaire to request the participants to provide their details. The respondents were also able to describe themselves as either 18-20, 21-30, 31-40 or 41+ years old. Total number of active SNS account respondents had the option of choosing either 1-4+ accounts.

- *The DTS*

To determine the intolerance to the distress I demonstrated the DTS. J. S. Thus, Simons and Gaher published the DTS in 2005 as they were convinced of its reliability and validity. The DTS contains 15 questions that the respondent must answer on a five point Likert scale with 1 implying that they strongly agree, 2 moderately agree, 3 agree and disagree, 4 moderately disagree and 5 strongly disagree (J. S. Simons and Gaher, 2005). The DTS tolerance has four subscales as well, i.e., tolerance, appraisal, absorption, and regulation (R. M. Simons et al., 2018). The authors of the DTS, J. S. Simons and Gaher (2005) presupposed, that intolerance of distress may be a serious cause of substance use and that substance use was a coping mechanism, which focused on the moment, allowing having relief of unpleasant emotions because of the awkward situations. The self report measures that were in place could not deal directly with the distress intolerance, but the self report measures that could be used at the time could deal with experiential avoidance issues (J. S. Simons and Gaher, 2005). Since its invention, DTS has been implemented in many studies on addiction by researchers. Howell et al. (2010) used the DTS in the study to establish its relationship with the alcohol use problems in young adults. R. M. Using the DTS, Simons et al. (2018) examined the relationship between cognitive schemas and distress tolerance and the effects of such relationship on alcohol problems. The DTS has also been applied in analyzing various behaviors on the internet. In her study, Akbari (2017) analyzed the DTS using distress intolerance, emotional dysregulation, and PIU.

- Reliability- J. S. Simons and Gaher (2005) have discovered that a four-factor model supports the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). This model was comprised of four subscales including tolerance (a = 0.72), appraisal (a = 0.82), absorption (a = 0.78), and regulation (a = 0.70; Akbari, 2010). J. S. Simons and Gaher studied the test-retest reliability of the DTS, at 6 months and they found that there was consistency in the outcomes of the test and that the intraclass correlation was equal to.61. You and Leung (2012) found the total score to have a Cronbachs alpha of.91, tolerance, appraisal and regulation to have a Cronbachs alpha of.76 and.75 respectively. You and Leung had moderate levels of stability with the Chinese version of the DTS with a correlation of .48 on the basis of total score, .40 on the basis of tolerance, .45 on the basis of absorption, .44 on the basis of appraisal and.31 on the basis of regulation.

Sandin et al. (2017) demonstrated similar values of Cronbachs alpha to J. S. Simons and Gaher in the Spanish version of the DTS with tolerance (.83), absorption (.83), appraisal (.83), and regulation (.83) values. Sandin et al. determined test-retest reliability at 7 months, and the correlation values of DTS total score, tolerance, absorption, appraisal and regulation were .70, .60, .67, and.48, respectively.

- Validity- J. S. Simons and Gaher (2005) employed the DTS and other assessments (i.e., the General Temperament Survey, Affective Lability Scale, and Negative Mood Regulation Expectancies) to prove the convergent, discriminant, and criterion validity.

J. S. Simons and Gaher also collected data about mood acceptance and typicality, frequency of lifetime alcohol and marijuana use and alcohol and marijuana use motives. The authors have discovered negative/positive correlations with affective distress (r = -.59) and positive affectivity (r =.26). The research showed positive correlations with mood regulation expectancies (r =.54) and mood acceptance (r). = .47). J. S. Simons and Gaher used criterion validity by evaluating the relationship between substance use coping where both alcohol and marijuana showed negative relationships of -.23 and -.20 respectively.

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You and Leung (2012) also established convergent and discriminant validities with the help of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS), Emotion Reactivity Scale (ERS), and Maladaptive Impulse Behavior Scale (MIBS) alongside the Chinese DTS. The DTS was also strongly correlated with the DASS subscales with an interval of between .43 and.52 with the ERS being strongly correlated as well at.53 (You and Leung, 2012). The DTS was poorly correlated with the MIBS (r =.34; You and Leung, 2012). In their work, Sandín and colleagues (2017) discovered that the Spanish version of the DTS had inverse relationships with psychopathology as measured by the SA-45 as evidenced by inverse correlations between the two measures for hostility, interpersonal sensitivity, somatization, anxiety, OCD, and depression. In addition, Sandín and colleagues showed that the EPQR-A has a significant positive correlation with extraversion and the subscales of the DTS.

➢ *The DERS*

I applied the DERS to the emotional dysregulation. Gratz and Roemer published the DERS in 2004. The DERS was created by Gratz and Roemer (2004) since various measures were employed by the researchers in examining the constructs which constitute emotional regulation. The DERS enables one to have a comprehensive perception of emotional regulation by assessing the following factors; awareness/understanding of ones emotions; acceptance of own emotions; engaging in goal directed behaviour; controlling impulses; knowing what ones emotions are; accessing an effective means of regulating emotions; understanding what ones emotions are (Gratz and Roemer, 2004). DERS consists of 36 items and it is rated in 5 points with the following rating system; 1=almost never, 2=occasionally, 3=approximately 1/2 the times, 4=most of the times, 5=almost always (Gratz and Roemer, 2004).

Researchers have applied the DERS in many studies. Fox et al. (2007) used the DERS to examine the emotional regulation and impulse control of individuals who went through abstinence as a result of cocaine. Gratz and Tull (2010) also discussed the relationship between emotional dysregulation and self-destructive behaviors among individuals who had substance abuse conditions using the assistance of DERS. The DERS is the best test to apply in this research since the research conducted by Hormes et al. (2010) used the DERS to examine the correlation between emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction.

- Reliability- The internal consistent a of Cronbach of the DERS was.93, and the correlation between the items was between.16 and.69 (Akbari, 2017; Gratz and Roemer, 2004). The alpha values of the Cronbach used in the DERS subscales exceeded the value of.80 (Gratz and Roemer, 2004). Nordgren et al. (2020) analyzed the Swedish form of the DERS and discovered that the McDonalds Omega values, which they declare can be considered weighted coefficient alpha values, were between.796 and.963. Reivan-Ortiz et al. (2020) used a version of the DERS translated into Spanish, and they reported that the value of Cronbach alpha between. 60 and. 93 of each subscale. The overall reliability was also found to be Cronbachs alpha of 0.90 by Reivan-Ortiz et al.
- Validity- Gratz and Roemer (2004) compared the overall score and subscales of DERS with the Generalized Expectancy Negative Mood Regulation (NMR) Scale to ascertain the construct validity. The subscales were found to have a range of between -.34 and -.69 and the correlation to the overall score of the DERS was found to be -.69 (Gratz and Roemer, 2004). The CFA was applied by Nordgren et al. (2020) to identify the construct validity of the DERS with the help of the Structured Eating Disorder Interview (SEDI) and the Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q). They discovered that the bifactor model was the most appropriate with a comparative fit index (CFI) of .912, a root means squared error of approximation (RMSEA) of.055 (Nordgren et al., 2020).

➢ *The IAT*

I applied the IAT in the measurement of SNS addiction. The IAT is aimed at identifying the level of internet addiction of an individual (Widyanto and McMurran, 2004; Young, 1998). I will request the participants to answer the IAT items keeping in mind SNS use and not the general use of the internet.

Young published the IAT in 1998. It is a 20-item self-report tool that is called the IAT (Akbari, 2017; Widyanto and McMurran, 2004). The respondents make their response according to a five-point Likert scale whereby 1 is rarely, 2 is sometimes, 3 is often, 4 is very often, and 5 is always (Widyanto and McMurran, 2004). The IAT generates scores between 0 and 100, and the scores reflect different intensities of the level (Akbari, 2017). As an illustration, 40 to 69 represent a high level of internet addiction, and 70 to 100 level of internet addiction is severe (Akbari, 2017).

- Reliability- Widyanto and McMurran (2004) examined the psychometric properties of the IAT. Widyanto and McMurran identified six factors to use in factor analysis: salience (α =.82), excessive use (α = .77), neglecting work (α = .75), anticipation (α = .61), lack of control (α = .76), and neglecting social life (α = .54). Widyanto and McMurran found that each of the six factors correlated and had correlation values of .62 to .226. Jelenchick et al. (2012) examined the psychometric properties of the IAT among college students in the United States and found that Cronbach's alpha values for the factors were between .91 and .83. The study of Tafur-Mendoza et al. (2020) resulted in the analysis of the psychometric characteristics of the Spanish version of the IAT. Tafur-Mendoza et al. also concluded that the Spanish IAT was satisfactorily internally consistent and has alpha values of more than.70.
- Validity- Jelenchick et al. (2012) used exploratory factor analysis and they among the factors that they would use in the study include the dependent use and excessive use. Jenlenchick et al. have determined that the two factors that they set contributed to the total variance of 91 percent and thus they came with the conclusion that the IAT is a valid tool.

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Jelencheck et al. also compared their results with that of other researchers of the former researchers, such as Widyanto and McMurran (2004) and they discovered that they were more or less similar in their studies.

Jelencheck et al. came to the conclusion that the IAT is reliable and valid due to their findings, as well as similarities with the past studies. Tafur-Mendoza et al. (2020) determined the validity of the IAT scores as convergent because the scores were used to correlate with the Social Skills Scale and the average time the participants spent on the internet. Tafur-Mendoza et al. found that there were statistically significant correlations between the overall score of internet addiction, the average time of use of the internet, time/control, and average time of use of the internet. Similar results were obtained by Tafur- Mendoza et al. who also reported the existence of significant negative associations between the IAT and the Social Skills Scale.

➢ *Research Question and Hypotheses*

I designed the research questions in such a way that they build up on the study by Akbari (2017). The mediating effect of distress tolerance and PIU was shown in the study done by Akbari via emotional dysregulation. I tested the relationship between emotional dysregulation (using DERS scale) and SNS addiction (using IAT scale) and also found out whether distress intolerance (using DTS scale) mediates.

- RQ1: Which predicts emotional unregulation to SNS addiction among the user of SNS in adulthood?
- H01: SNS addiction among adult SNS users is not predicted by emotional dysregulation. H11: SNS addiction in adult users of SNSs is predicted by emotional dysregulation.
- RQ2: How does emotional dysregulation predict distress intolerance and SNS addiction in adult users of SNSs?
- H02: The emotional dysregulation does not forecast distress intolerance SNS addiction in adult SNS users.
- H12: SNS addiction is predicted by distress intolerance via emotional dysregulation in adult SNS users.

➢ *Data Analysis Plan*

To test the relationship between these variables, I employed the multiple linear regression. There are 6 domains of emotional dysregulation, which include nonacceptance of emotional responses, inability to engage in goal-focused behavior, impulse control problems, emotional awareness, emotional clarity, and limited availability of regulatory strategies (Gratz and Roemer, 2004). The independent variables (IV) in the study are the areas of emotional dysregulation. The SNS addiction is the dependent variable (DV). The mediating variables in the study are the four domains of intolerance to distress (i.e., tolerance, appraisal, absorption, and regulation) (Akbari, 2017; Simons and Gaher, 2005).

Baron and Kenny (1986) came up with a mediating testing technique that utilized multiple regression. I adopted this technique in this research. The process suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) includes four steps. The initial part will involve the regression analysis of the IV and the DV. In this study, I was required to perform a regression analysis of emotional dysregulation, the IV and SNS addiction, the DV. Baron and Kenny note that the next two stages include regression analysis of the IV and mediator with another regression analysis of the mediator and DV (MacKinnon et al., 2002). That is, I needed to run a regression analysis between emotional dysregulation (IV) and distress intolerance (mediator). The results of the regression analysis between the IV and mediator were followed by a regression analysis between the IV and the SNS addiction (DV). The last one is the multiple regression where the IV and the mediating variable predicts the DV (Baron and Kenny, 1986), MacKinnon et al. 2002). I have used the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS; Version 27) to do this study. The SPSS is a statistical program that can undertake different tasks like linear regression, multiple regression, Factorial ANOVA, and Multivariate ANOVA (Wagner, 2016).

➢ *Threats to Validity*

This research was based on self-reported research. One of the problems of self-report measures is the bias of recalls. Recall bias is the quality of the memory of an individual concerning the events that happened in the past (Akbari, 2017). There are cases when recall bias may lead to wrong answers. Inaccurate responses could also be given by the participants due to the prevailing emotional condition or insufficient self-awareness. The participants can give false answers as well since they do not want to portray themselves as undesirable otherwise referred to as the Hawthorne effect.

Another factor that was considered is the COVID-19 pandemic. Indicatively, social distancing and quarantine can give additional time to people to use SNSs. Education and work places are likely to use internet and SNSs to carry out their day to day activities, which can result in more day to day SNSs. One of the issues to consider during the analysis of the data is the possibility of the effects of the COVID-19 quarantine and social distancing.

➢ *Ethical Considerations*

The study did not started till the time the Walden's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. To ensure that the participants could seek help in case they needed it, I also offered contact information to them regarding a crisis hotline before the survey. The information has been gathered anonymously via the survey services of Qualtrics. Qualtrics servers are scanned on a regular basis to find out whether they have any vulnerabilities in their systems and their servers are safeguarded by firewall systems (Qualtrics, 2020). Qualtrics use encryption based on Transport Layer Security (TLS) to send data, and the surveys are passworded (Qualtrics, 2020). Qualtrics has certificates that facilitate compliance with the United States government security and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Herbal (HIPAA) (Qualtrics, 2020). I will keep all raw data in a password-protected device that ensures safety not exceeding five years after the dissertation is completed (Walden University, 2021).

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IV. RESULTS

The study was aimed at understanding the association between SNS addiction, emotional regulation, and distress intolerance. Emotional dysregulation, distress intolerance, and other addictive behaviors have been reported to be associated in the literature of Chapter 2 (Akbari, 2017; Andreassen and Pallesen, 2015; Fox et al., 2007; Gratz and Tull, 2010). Studies have also established that PIU, emotional dysregulation, and distress intolerance are related but it was not clear that emotional dysregulation and distress intolerance are related to the particular activity of SNS use. I explain the methods of collecting data and explain how the data were analyzed and discussed in this chapter.

- *Data Analysis and Data Collection*

To collect the required data in this study, I used IAT, DERS and DST. Invitation to participate in the study was sent out by Qualtrics. The data was collected within a period of one week and 212 people were responsive to the invitation to participate in the survey which was more than the minimum sample size of 68. Two of the respondents failed to fill the survey and data analysis did not include the incomplete surveys. The survey received 210 responses, made up of 47 men, 162 women, and one non-binary individual. Of those who answered the survey, 52.4% were greater than 41 years of age, 28.3% were between 31 and 40 years, 16.5% were between 21 and 30 years, and only 1.9% were between 18 and 20 years. No respondents reported any discrepancies in the data they provided. The demographic data that I gathered consisted of age, gender and SNS accounts that are active. I created and arranged the obtained data into an SPSS record.

- *Demographic Population*

The first research question was created by me to identify the predictive relationship between emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction among adult SNS users. My hypothesis is that emotional dysregulation predicts SNS addiction in adult SNS users but not the null hypothesis which predicts SNS addiction in adult SNS users, is the null hypothesis. In order to respond to RQ1, I used paired samples t test to test my hypotheses. In the paired samples t test, t = -15.007, and the degree of freedom = 209. The average is -0.76199 and the p is less than.001 and this suggests that emotional dysregulation predicts SNS addiction hence null hypothesis of RQ1 is rejected. The reason why the null hypothesis was rejected implies that I am able to run a linear regression to establish the predictive association between emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction. Table 2 presents the finding of the paired samples t test that I employed to test the RQ1 hypotheses.

- *SNS Addiction and Emotional Dysregulation Paired Samples t Test*

I applied linear regression to investigate the connection between emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction. The finding indicates a value of 27.7 percent which can be attributed as a result of emotional dysregulation which explains the R-value of 0.727. This model is also highly applicable in describing the SNS addiction with F(1, 208) = 79.867, p <.05. I also employed linear regression to respond to the subscales of the DERS with SNS addiction. Subscales of DERS are non-acceptance, goals, impulse, awareness, strategies and clarity. By the model F(6, 203) = 19.64 and p < .001. The subscales with having only significant results (p < .001) by model were the impulse and clarity ones. This is an attestation that emotional dysregulation, impulse, and clarity are significant predictors of SNS addiction.

- *SNS Addiction, DERS and DERS Subscale Regression Analysis.*

To address RQ2, to establish the predictive relationship between distress intolerance and SNS addiction using emotional dysregulation, a mediation analysis is needed. Note. SNS = social networking site; a = the linear regression pathway between emotional dysregulation and distress intolerance; b = the multiple linear regression pathway between emotional dysregulation, distress intolerance and SNS addiction; c' = the direct effect of model; a(sa) = the unstandardized value of B and standard error of pathway a; b(sb) = the unstandardized value of B and standard error of pathway b. The initial one was to prove the existence of a predictive relationship between the emotional dysregulation and addiction to the SNS. This is done to identify whether a regression analysis can be performed to identify whether a mediation analysis can be carried out. The predictive nature between SNS addiction and emotional dysregulation was demonstrated when I responded to RQ1. The second process involved linear regression of DERS and DTS. Assessing the relationship between emotional dysregulation and distress intolerance by performing linear regression on DERS and DTS yields an R value of .668 which indicates that 44.4% of the variance can be accounted for by the regression model; therefore, emotional dysregulation is considered a strong predictor of distress intolerance (p<.001).

The results continue to demonstrate that F(1, 208) = 167.651, p<.001. Linear regression results are provided in Table 4 with b = .668.

- *Emotional Dysregulation and Distress Intolerance Regression Analysis*

The third step involved the multiple regression analysis of emotional dysregulation, distress intolerance and SNS addiction. This step was meant to show the impact of the mediating variable. The multiple linear regression of the variables demonstrates that the percentage of variance that can be explained using this model is 28.0. The model also showed that F(2, 207)= 40.348, p <.001. Table 5 presents the results of the multiple linear regression and indicates that emotional dysregulation is the only significant predictor of the SNS addiction.

- *Multi Linear Regression of Emotional Dysregulation, Distress Intolerance and SNS Addiction*

The final step that I used was Sobel Test. In this step, the unstandardized coefficients (of the preceding steps) B and the standard error were used in the pathways a and b. Sobel Test formula is Z =[?]=(22 + 22).

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Test reveals a Z value of 0.925. The tool that I used to obtain the same results was created by Preacher and Leonardelli (2021). SE = 0.077 and p = 0.354 were also found using the tool. This evidence demonstrates that distress intolerance is not a determinant of emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction that exists through an intermediary.

➢ *Summary*

The data analysis results indicate that emotional dysregulation is an important predictor of SNS addiction. Additional results showed that impulse and clarity subscales of DERS were of significant predictors of SNS addiction. The analysis of the multiple regression showed emotional dysregulation to be the only significant predictor of SNS addiction. It was established using Sobel Test that distress intolerance did not make a significant predictor of SNS addiction as an intermediary variable between emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction.

V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The research problem of this quantitative study was to test the relationship among emotional dysregulation, distress intolerance, and SNS addiction. In 2020, the number of users of SNSs has reached 3.23 billion and keeps increasing (von Abrams, 2020). The SNSs have become more accessible with the devices such as smart phones and tablets. The lockdown due to the COVID-19 made the utilization of SNSs inevitable in business and educational activities (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017). I would have researched the effect that how an individual copes with and perceives stress has on the use of SNSs.

I applied the linear regression analysis to determine which emotional dysregulation predicts addiction to SNS. I also got to know that SNS addiction is significantly predicted by emotional dysregulation. During my assessments of the DERS subscales using SNS addiction, I also discovered that impulse and clarity were some of the key predictors of SNS addiction. The combination of multiple linear regression, Sobel Test helped me to conclude that distress intolerance does not play a significant role as a mediator between emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction. In this chapter, the author of the study is introducing the findings of the study, the study recommendations, future study limitations and implications of the social change.

➢ *Discussion of the Findings*

The research available on the behaviors relating to use of SNS is sparse. Much of the literature on behaviors on the internet is connected with the overall use of the internet, and the studies which study behaviors and SNS use do not factor in its relationship with the perception of stress and stress management (Akbari, 2017; Andreassen and Pallesen, 2015; Wegmann et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2013). Akbari (2017) had conducted a study that had determined the correlation between PIU and emotional dysregulation with distress intolerance. I intended to build upon the work of Akbari and examine the relationship between emotional dysregulation, distress intolerance, and SNS addiction.

➢ *Addiction to SNS and Emotional Dysregulation*

The IAT and the DERS were the measures I used to measure SNS addiction and emotional dysregulation respectively. As the outcome of the analysis showed, SNS addiction is highly predicted by emotional dysregulation. Emotional dysregulation refers to the awareness, the acceptance and recognition of their emotions (Gratz and Roemer, 2004). The study authors used undergraduate students in one of the Northeastern Universities to recruit (Hormes et al., 2014), and they discovered that higher IAT scores resulted in higher DERS scores.

To establish the predictive relationship between the emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction, the subsequent analysis indicated that the following subscales of DERS against SNS addiction were significantly predictive including impulse, and clarity.

The impulse subscale entails the inability of the individuals to control their behaviors whenever they undergo negative emotions (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). The subscale of clarity is the consciousness and perception of one of his or her feelings (Gratz & Roemer, 2004).

Impulsiveness is one of the symptoms typical of addicts (Asenio et al., 2020; Kuss and Griffiths, 2017; Stockdale and Coyne, 2020). Addicts usually do not realize their emotions, and they will also do something to fulfill a yearning without thinking about the outcomes of their behavior (Asenio et al., 2020; Kuss and Griffiths, 2017; Stockdale and Coyne, 2020; Wu et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2015). The studies have revealed that addictive behaviors are correlated with lack of emotional clarity and impulsive behaviors (Liang et al., 2021; Ottonello et al., 2019). The statistics of this paper also prove that there is an interdependence between the deficiency of emotional clarity and impulsive tendencies toward SNS addiction.

According to Bandura (1989), people who are unable to make proper self-appraisals err in their self-efficacy determination. Due to that, there can be an overperformance or underperformance of a person in the course of fulfilling their intended purpose (Bandura, 1989; Wu et al., 2013). It was also mentioned by Bandura (1989, 2001) that, at the lower levels of self-efficacy due to inaccurate self-appraisal, it may result in indecisiveness or impulsivity. This theory appears to be consistent with the outcomes of this research.

➢ *The Mediation of Distress Intolerance*

I utilized the DTS in order to gauge distress intolerance, and I aimed at ascertaining whether distress intolerance mediated the correlation between emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction. My findings showed that emotional dysregulation still significantly ($p < .001$) predicted SNS addiction independent of distress intolerance, which means no mediation effects. The outputs of the Sobel Test were that SE. >= 0.077 and p = 0.354 and that the findings should be significant ($p < .05$) in order to conclude that DTS is a mediating variable. These findings indicated

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that emotional dysregulation is a very strong predictor of distress intolerance but the Sobel Test showed p >.05 of distress intolerance is not a strong mediating factor in relationship between emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction.

The analysis of Akbari (2017) indicated that emotional dysregulation is connected to PIU through distress intolerance. According to Akbari, PIU is a general term, the breadth of activities people can engage in may lead to different psychopathologies. It could be difficult to mediate the association between the emotional dysregulation and SNS addiction because distress tolerance is a mediator of another specific activity of the internet use instead of the SNS addiction in this study. In this study, Akbari used participants who were recruited at the University of Tehran, and I recruited individuals at the United States. Most of the participants were aged 41 years and above.

Howell et al. (2010) enrolle the youths in the state of Vermont to examine the element of distress tolerance, anxiety sensitivity, coping with the stress of conforming, and alcohol consumption. Even though Howell et al. found that a reduced distress tolerance score usually creates a greater probability of alcohol use in young adults due to increased anxiety of not wanting to be like others. Rette et al. (2021) conducted the research to investigate the relationship between demographic factors and trauma and distress intolerance. Rette et al. have found that older people are predisposed to score low on distress intolerance, which means that a distress intolerance and an age are inversely linked. Consequently, the demographic data and geographical position of the participants could have contributed to the reason why the outcomes of this study are not similar to those of Akbari (2017).

- *Limitations of the Study*

Self-selection bias was one of the limitations to this study. Invitations to take part in the study were through email that is, only those who had access to email could decide to take part. Another limitation is sample bias since out of the 210 respondents 79.4 percent were female and 52.4 percent were 41 years old and above. Due to the sample bias the results of the study cannot be generalized. It appears to be also the case that age is a factor, which determines other variables (Howell et al., 2010; Rette et al., 2021). The other weakness is that the Sobel Test assumes normal distribution and significance test (Fritz and Mackinnon, 2007). The Sobel Test is able to test the existence of mediation but fails to give details on the strength of the indirect effect (Fritz and Mackinnon, 2007). Another weakness is that the respondents were not filtered before the questionnaires were handed out to establish the level of their SNS addiction. The validation of the presence of addiction in a person can give greater information on the presence of emotional dysregulation and distress intolerance as variables that affect people who experience confirmed cases of SNS addiction. Finally, the IAT is a scale that evaluates the addiction of a person to the internet, and not to a particular activity of SNS use. Though the questionnaire was created to allow participants to respond to the questions in relation to SNS use, there were chances that it did not address the behaviors related to SNS addiction fully.

- *Recommendations*

Inclusion criteria used in this study were that the participants had to be adults over 18 years old and have at least one active SNS account. Among the recommendations is to explore emotional dysregulation, distress intolerance, and SNS addiction in a more heterogeneous age sample. Another recommendation is to use an alternative recruitment method, i.e., through mail, to prevent self-selection bias. The research could have also produced different outcomes in case people who had been diagnosed of SNS addiction took part. The research could also be useful to explore the impact of SNS addiction in the emotional dysregulation and distress intolerance. The application of various scales aimed at measuring the behaviors related to SNS addiction can also be useful in future research.

I did not research in this paper to determine how the use of SNSs affects children. The usage of the SNSes also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic among children since it was a necessity to have schools operating. There are still no known exposure to SNSs at an early age and the influence of the use of SNSs at younger ages.

- *Conclusion*

The consumption of SNSs has turned into a daily routine. The population of SNSs users is growing, and SNSs can be easily accessed through technology (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). SNSs are a type of human interaction where very little research has been made. The results of this paper are valuable in the determination of the behaviors that can contribute to SNS addiction. The conclusions also shed some light into the areas where researchers can continue their research on SNSs and human behavior to enable people to learn how to use technology responsibly.

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