THE IMPACT OF TRUST ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG EMERGING PAKISTANI FEMALES: MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA SALIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Objectives*: The current study aimed to understand the contribution of trust in maintaining and enhancing romantic satisfaction and further assess this within the current era of social media and internet usage.*
Design of Study: *Correlational study*
Place and Duration of the Study*: February 2023 to June 2023 at the Institute of Professional Psychology, Bahria University, Karachi campus,*
Sample and Method*: 317 emerging Pakistani females between the age ranges of 18-29, approached through convenience sampling through multiple areas of Karachi, Pakistan. It was hypothesized that Trust will have a significant impact on Relationship Satisfaction and that Social Media Salience will moderate this relationship. Demographic Form, Relationship Assessment Scale, Social Networking Addiction Scale (Salience Subscale) and Trust in Close Relationships Scale were used.*
Results and Conclusion: *The regression analysis showed that Trust had a substantial 44.3% (p< 0.05) impact on Relationship Satisfaction. The moderation` analysis showed that the interaction term between trust and social media salience was -0.053, indicating that Social Media Salience plays a negative moderating role in relating Trust and Relationship Satisfaction. The findings of this study expand the understanding of salient use of social media, and the extent of the negative effects media has on trust and satisfaction within romantic relationships.*

Keywords: *Social media salience; Trust; Relationship satisfaction; Emerging female adults; Pakistan*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of being in a romantic relationship translates into a potential long-term commitment for many individuals, in which they are not only allowed to express their feelings and thoughts freely but also continue to do so within a nurturing environment. Findings show that for many individuals, especially females, romantic relationships, or its diverse types of commitment (especially engagement or marriages) may be a form of improved well-being and life satisfaction as well as a way of reducing emotional loneliness (Bucher et al., 2019). Being social creatures, individuals are often a part of an extensive group of social engagements one of which is romantic relationships. To ensure the longevity of such interactions, commitment is highly associated with relationship satisfaction (Sternberg, 1986).

Relationship satisfaction is a crucial determinant of the quality of a relationship and whether it will thrive but can be affected by multiple other aspects, one of which is trust. When individuals sense that their partners are trustworthy, reliable, and emotionally available, they will feel a sense of security and continue to navigate their relationship in a supporting and nurturing manner (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Cassidy, 2000) whereas the opposite of this prospect may create conflict and dissatisfaction of different kinds within the relationship. Being a significant component, however, trust is often explained as a by-product of attachment (Campbell & Stanton, 2019) or other relationship-enhancing aspects like communication, intimacy, forgiveness, etc. The current study aims to not only understand the contribution of trust in maintaining and enhancing romantic satisfaction but also view it within the current social era of internet usage.

Being a predictor of many commitment-enhancing factors, for example, forgiveness (Molden & Finkel, 2010), which in the light of previous research, can lead to higher relationship satisfaction by the increasing perception of dependability and the idea that the partner involved has the best intentions at heart in regard to one's current relationship dynamics and well-being. In the light of prior literature, lack of trust may also be attributed to low self-esteem, past dissatisfactory experiences regarding romantic connections, ideas related to infidelity, and peer discussion (Norona et al., 2017), all prominent themes within the digital age.

Trust is an essential component of any relationship and provides stability and purpose for the couple (Laborde et al., 2014). However, when couples do not

trust each other, it can lead to feelings of emotional instability, intentions of breaking up, and related conflicts. A study conducted revealed increased cell phone snooping and its significant relation to partner trust (Arikewuyo et al., 2020), similarly, the use of social networking apps like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and many other have also been linked negatively to relationship satisfaction (Yacoub et al., 2018). However, it is to be noted that with all these increasing obstacles in maintaining a healthy and fulfilling romantic connection in this day and age, many emerging couples, as reported by prior research, continue to prioritize pro-relationship behaviors as a way to increase partner trust within their romantic relationships, after experiencing a potential stressor which originally, may have resulted in a decrease in the level of trust instead (Matson et al., 2021).

Research suggests that social media can positively and negatively affect relationship satisfaction. On the positive side, social media can facilitate communication, increase intimacy, and strengthen emotional bonds between partners (Valkenburg et al., 2006) which will increase relationship satisfaction. Sharing personal information, photos, and updates on social media can also increase connectivity between partners and make them feel more involved in each other's lives (Utz, 2015). In addition, it can be a helpful platform for people experiencing relationship problems to find social support, according to a study by (Ellison et al., 2011). On the other hand, the negative aspect entails that platform like Facebook make it easier to engage in extramarital affairs (Valenzuela et al., 2014), Increase conflict behaviors in response to jealousy and monitoring of romantic partners (Arikewuyo et al., 2020), increases self-concealment (Uysal et al., 2012) and overall decrease partner-trust (Kim et al., 2015).

With social media usage accessibility rising in unprecedented ways due to fast technological advancements, where it has positively impacted many people's lives, enabling social, relational, and occupational interaction among people (Borrelli, 2015), excessive use of social media may hinder the development of genuine, in-person social ties (Glaser et al., 2018; Young, 2019), it may also negatively affect interpersonal relationships (Griffiths, 2013). The unreasonable and excessive use of social media to the point that it adversely impacts the user's everyday life is known as "social media addiction" (Griffiths, 2012) however, addiction comprises multiple dimensions, one of which is salience, a less intensive element of addiction which explains how social networking becomes the predominant component in a person's life and directs his or her thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Griffiths, 2005).

Social media salience is defined as a concept that focuses on understanding the idea that when experiencing network salience, one's life is dominated in terms of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors regarding the content one consumes online. This leads to situations where even if the individual is not actively taking part in the usage of social media, they would continue to think about it (Shahnawaz & Rehman, 2020). Becoming a double-edged sword phenomenon in the present era, increased social media usage has led to users experiencing social media salience, one that affects both their interpersonal and intrapersonal relations. Social media usage has become a great concern with the ever-growing opportunities for people to engage in multiple ways online, from support and interest groups to sensationalized views into the lives of others; it has continued to connect and web out ways for information to travel into the lives of those who consume it.

In the current cultural context, however, Facebook has been identified as one of the major representations of social media salience, with an increase in jealousy and monitoring behaviors of couples. It was also revealed that between genders, women tend to harbor feelings of jealousy and monitoring behavior more than their male counterparts (Iqbal & Jami, 2019). Females also tend to be much more affected by marital conflicts and relationship dissatisfaction, which often leads to the need to find support elsewhere other than within the marital relationship, consequently leading to virtual dependence (Sabbagh et al., 2020).

Additionally, since social media platforms actively provide a space for many to connect, it is inevitable to not come across relationship difficulties of others, research conducted (MacKinnon & Boon, 2012) proposed that during such situations, the third-party evaluator may evaluate the event and advice the victim by attributing blame and responsibility involved within the interaction without the desire of gaining more information. The current study not only aims to assess the growing intensity of social network usage in emerging females but its impact on their level of trust and level of relationship satisfaction, a literature gap that is yet to be addressed within the cultural context of romantic relationship experiences of emerging Pakistani females.

It was hypothesized that Trust will have a significant impact on Relationship Satisfaction and that Social Media Salience will moderate this relationship.

METHOD

The current study is based on a quantitative research design with a regression approach. It aimed to explore the impact of trust on relationship satisfaction while assessing the moderating role of social media salience. The main steps for the study included participant selection, administration of measures, and data analysis.

Participants

The participants of the current study comprised of 317 emerging females with the age ranged between 18-29 years, currently married or in an exclusive dating relationship of a three months at least. The participants were also screened out for any clinical psychological disorders as part of the exclusion criteria for the study.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

The form consisted of basic personal information about the participants, including their age, gender, and relationship status. Questions regarding the duration of the relationship and the use of social media platforms were also assessed.

Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988)

Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) is a short 7-item self-report measure of general relationship satisfaction. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). Total scores can range from 3 to 21, with high scores meaning better relationship satisfaction. As well as being consistent across samples of ethnically diverse and age-diverse couples, the RAS shows moderate to high correlations with marital satisfaction measures. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale is 0.86.

Social Network Addiction Scale (Shahnawaz & Rehman, 2020)

To measure social media salience, a subscale of the Social Network Addiction Scale (Shahnawaz & Rehman, 2020) was used. The measure comprises of 4 items. The respondents were asked to choose from the 7-degree

Likert scale that best represents their choice. The rating was completed by adding up each participant's choice of items. The average for the subscale is 0.51, which suggests appropriate convergent validity and the composite reliability was established to be 0.81, which suggests appropriate reliability.

Trust in Close Relationships Scale (Rempel et al., 1985)

The Trust Scale (Rempel et al., 1985) was used to measure the level of trust within a female's relationship. The 17-item measure is designed to gauge trust in one's relationship partner. Each item is answered based on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It has three subscales i.e., faith, dependability, and predictability. The sum of the three subscales represents the overall trust measure. The authors' stated alpha reliabilities for faith, dependability, predictability, and overall scale were .80, .72, .70, and.81, respectively.

Procedure

The scales chosen for the current study are all available online and free for use, requiring no permission for utilization. Participants were informed about the nature and objective of the study i.e., to understand the impact of social media salience on relationship satisfaction with the moderating role of trust within emerging females, in addition to confidentiality and voluntary participation. Demographic information was collected, after which each participant within the criteria was required to fill out the research booklet containing a demographic form, the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), the Social Network Addiction Scale (SMSS), and Trust in Close Relationships scale (TICRS) in the sequence accordingly. All data were collected in person.

Data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted without any biases or manipulation. All information collected by the participants was voluntary and confidentiality was maintained. The participants were informed regarding the purpose of the study and were communicated regarding their right to withdraw at any time during the process. Psychological and physical harm to all participants involved was also avoided. It was ensured that the data collected, analyzed, and reported was done with objectivity and honesty.

Statistical Analysis

In this present study, the data is analyzed statistically by descriptive and inferential analysis to test our hypotheses if social media salience moderates the relationship between Relationship satisfaction and Trust. These analyses include Mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, linear regression, and moderator analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Participants (N=317)

Characteristics	F	%	M	SD
Age			1.79	0.67
18-21	111	35.0		
22-25	161	50.8		
26-29	45	14.2		
Gender				
Female	317	100		
Educational Level				
Matric/O Levels	8	2.5		
Intermediate/A Levels	33	10.4		
Undergraduate degree	184	58.0		
Graduate Degree	65	20.5		
Postgraduate Degree Socioeconomic Status	27	8.5		
Lower Class	2	0.6		
Lower Middle Class	14	4.4		
Middle Class	161	50.8		
Upper Middle Class	127	40.1		
Upper Class	13	4.1		
Relationship status				

Dating	120	37.9
Engaged	83	26.2
Married	114	36.0
Duration		
3-6 Months	76	24.0
6-12 Months	50	15.8
1 Year +	191	60.3
Screener 1		
Yes	317	100
No		
Screener 2		
Less than an hour	18	
1-2 Hours	100	
3+ Hours	199	

Note: f= Frequency, %= Percentage

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Variables (N=317)

Scales	Items	α	M	SD	SK	K	Range *Action Potential*
RAS	7	0.83	28.17	5.44	-0.93	0.28	12 35
TICRS	17	0.67	84.58	12.53	-1.17	1.73	33 108
SMSS	4	0.81	18.83	5.74	-0.42	-0.48	4 28

Note: α= Cronbach's alpha reliability scale RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, TICRS = Trust in close Relationships scale, SMSS = Social Media Salience subscale, M = mean, SD = standard deviation, SK = skewness, K = kurtosis.

Table 3

Impact of Trust on Relationship Satisfaction through linear regression (N=317)

Variables	B	β	SE	Sig
Constant	3.7		1.56	0.01
Trust	0.28	0.66	0.01	0.00
R2	0.44			
ΔR^2	0.44			

Note: B= unstandardized beta, β=Standardized beta, R^2=R-squared, ΔR^2=Adjusted R-squared

Table 4

Moderator Analysis between Trust, Relationship Satisfaction and Social Media Salience (N=317)

Effect	Coefficient	SE	LL	UL	p
Constant	-4.5	4.82	-13.99	4.99	0.35
Trust	0.39	0.56	0.27	0.50	0.00
SMS	0.432	0.24	-0.04	0.90	0.07
Interaction	-0.053	0.00	-.0.01	0.00	0.05

Note: SE = standard error. LL = lower limit of the 95% confidence interval. UL = upper limit of the 95% confidence interval. p = p-value

DISCUSSION

Trust has been counted as a central basis for the successful relationship. It serves as an important aspect that create lasting effects on the overall quality as well as the satisfaction experienced within the relationship. Relationship satisfaction includes assessment of the positive emotions as well as the interpersonal attraction within a relationship context (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Due to the technological advancements and increased accessibility to media,

social media salience occurs which occupy an individual's attention, awareness, or cognitive processes, leading to significant effects on their thoughts, feelings, and behavior in numerous aspects of their life. Considering the importance of trust within relationships and the widespread influence of social media, it is imperative to acknowledge that social media can have both positive and negative implications on relationship satisfaction.

Current findings indicate that all the data is normally distributed, as seen in Table 1., the descriptive statistics indicate that all the ranges of skewness is within the normal range of -2 and +2 whereas kurtosis is between -7 and +7. The mean age value of the participants was 1.79 and the gender was female. Regarding the selection of participants, we made a thoughtful decision to focus on females aged 18-29, that was based on the understanding that women in this age group tend to be more susceptible to the effects of social media salience. Previous studies have indicated that females are more prone to feelings of jealousy and engage in online monitoring behavior, especially when they have mistrust in their relationships with male counterparts. This suggests that social media significantly impacts on their emotional experiences (Sabbagh et al., 2020). Marital conflicts can greatly impact females which further leads to feelings of dissatisfaction. In such type of situations, women may seek support from virtual platforms, that in turn create a sense of virtual dependency (Sabbagh et al., 2020). This phenomenon dignifies the importance of investigating the association between trust, social media salience, and relationship satisfaction among young women. Research findings (Clements & Swensen, 2000) found that women generally found less satisfied in marital relationships when compared to men, which may be attributed to their pessimistic view of the overall marital experience including sensitivity towards problems and the challenges of maintaining the relationship itself (Heaton & Blake, 1999).

Results for the first hypothesis indicate that trust has a significant impact on relationship satisfaction where trust had a substantial 44.3% impact on relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.05$), making it a significant predictor of the level of satisfaction experienced within committed romantic relationships as shown in Table 3. Prior research shows that individuals who have high levels of trust in their partners are not inclined to seeing them negatively and are more likely to show supportive and caring behavior, experiencing less distressed and anger towards their spouse. As a result, they may find greater satisfaction in their marital relationship (Atta et al., 2013).

Trust is also considered as a significant source of providing emotional support (Fraley & Davis, 1997; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and good trust levels can be a predictor of adequate relationship satisfaction. It has also been discussed time and time again how trust often plays an important role in the building of relationship satisfaction between partners, emphasizing that individuals who perceive their partners as trustworthy and emotionally available as well as supportive tend to experience higher nurturing interactions in their relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Cassidy, 2000). Kim and colleagues found the association between lack of trust and conflict resolution (Kim et al., 2015) and increased self-concealment behavior (Uysal et al., 2012). Furthermore, individuals having high levels of trust tend to adopt a more optimistic and constructive attitude when it comes to conflict resolution (Holmes & Rempel, 1989), as compared to those with low trust levels. The latter group usually responds in a negative manner or adopts a self-centered approach, subsequently lead to undesirable outcomes such as reduced partner trust, and relationship satisfaction, and ineffective conflict resolution strategies (Campbell et al., 2010). In the context of Pakistan, Atta et al. (2013) found that female spouses display lower reactivity to negative feelings due to the respect, trust, and stronger commitment to their partners, that in turn increase their marital satisfaction.

The second aim of the study was to explore the role of social media salience and how it moderates the relationship between trust and relationship satisfaction. In our study, we proposed a hypothesis stating that the relationship between trust and relationship satisfaction will be moderated by social media salience. Results indicate that there is a negative interaction effect between trust and social media salience as shown in Table 4. Moderator analysis shows that interaction between trust and social media salience was -0.053 ($p < 0.05$). The result of the moderator analysis indicates that social media salience negatively moderates the relationship between trust and relationship satisfaction.

A study conducted by Akinola et al. (2021) proposes that the media has the ability to shape and influence individuals' opinions, attitudes, and behavior by giving prominence to specific issues or topics, thereby increasing their salience and impact on people's thoughts and actions. According to the findings of our current study social media salience works on a similar principle explaining how different online platforms and the information present on them may affect an individual's level of trust and relationship satisfaction. The findings of our study are consistent with the previously conducted study by Yacoub et al. (2018) which found that individuals who extensively and intrusively use social media in their daily lives tend to experience lower relationship satisfaction compared to those

who do not perceive social media as intrusive in their lives. According to another study, excessive Facebook use was associated with heightened levels of jealousy and decreased relationship satisfaction among couples (Clayton et al., 2014). Similarly, a study conducted by (González-Rivera et al., 2022) found that Facebook usage has a negative impact on overall relationship satisfaction between individuals. A study conducted by Iqbal and Jami (2019) also provides valuable insight into the impact of evolving technology on marital satisfaction within the Pakistani context. The study revealed a gender disparity in marital satisfaction and trust levels, with men exhibiting higher levels of satisfaction and trust in their wives compared to women. Conversely, women reported experiencing more feelings of jealousy and engaging in greater surveillance of their spouses on Facebook when compared to men (Iqbal & Jami 2019). Furthermore, a study by Muise et al. (2014) revealed that females tend to engage in increased online monitoring behavior on days when they experience higher levels of jealousy.

Another important aspect of the current nature of the target population was highlighting social media salience within emerging adults and how it may affect their respective views regarding relationship satisfaction and partner-trust long term. Generally, it has been discussed in previous literature that there is a negative relationship between age and social media activity (Ozimek & Bierhoff, 2016) with the younger population often engaging in social media addictive behaviors (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011) much more regularly. This may be a result of peer pressure (Orchard & Fullwood, 2010), social comparison (Ozimek & Bierhoff, 2016) or simply building connectedness, though it is to be noted that this observed decline may be a result of a difference in one's professional and personal life goals, that may come with age.

The need for stability within different aspects of life, particularly in the context of romantic satisfaction within the current study is a phenomenon well-studied, though the current research was able to view it within a more isolated structure by particularly bringing focus upon the emerging female adult population within the age range of 18-29 as mentioned previously.

This study enhances our comprehension of the detrimental effects of social media salience on trust levels and relationship satisfaction among women. It suggests that it is not merely the time spent on social media that contributes to decreased relationship satisfaction, but rather the level of engagement and interaction with social media content, the significance attributed to social media in one's social life, and the overall influence on an individual's thoughts and

behaviors resulting from media usage. By building upon existing literature, this study extends our understanding of social media salience and its potential impact on trust and relationship satisfaction, highlighting its relevance in relationships and providing insights that can potentially be used to develop interventions or support mechanisms tailored to the needs of young women in similar contexts.

The current study aims to understand the impact of trust on relationship satisfaction with moderating role of social media salience among Pakistani females, a significant gap that is yet to be explored in terms of a particular cultural context. Moreover, it can be of great use in terms of providing interventions related to marriage counseling and family therapies. Clinicians can better identify, understand, and explore the impact of social media salience within relationships and marital conflicts, providing specific interventions on the healthy usage of social media and networking groups.

The findings also aim to shed light on the current level of social media usage among emerging Pakistani females and their dispositions of trust influenced by it, which further impacts multiple domains of life. Focusing on relationship satisfaction and social media use, according to prior literature, increased usage of social media has a negative impact on one's relationship satisfaction, be it in terms of self-concealing, decreased trust, decreased partner-forgiveness, monitoring behaviors, increased jealousy, etc. but with social media being a prominent life aspect for many, the research may also help us understand the extent of one's social media usage in terms of influencing their level of trust within romantic connections and how it affects an individual's satisfaction within their relationship.

Conclusion

The current research aims to not only bring light to these previously discussed concepts but also understand the idea of salience in relation to social media usage, particularly for Pakistani females. This significant addition will also further our understanding of social media salience and its impact related to perceived real and virtual support networking. Furthermore, the findings are to bring forward the role of trust between partners as a primary and long-term foundation of a healthy relationship rather than simply being a by-product of other known factors such as forgiveness, communication, etc. in the light of prior literature.

Limitations and Recommendations

The current study aims to understand the impact of trust on relationship satisfaction with moderating role of social media salience among Pakistani females, a significant gap that is yet to be explored in terms of a particular cultural context. Moreover, it can be of great use in terms of providing interventions related to marriage counseling and family therapies. Clinicians can better identify, understand, and explore the impact of social media salience within relationships and marital conflicts, providing specific interventions on the healthy usage of social media and networking groups. To enhance the scope of future research, it is recommended to broaden the sample to include a more broad range of participants and gather data from multiple social media platforms. Since the current study solely focused on female participants, it is recommended for future research to examine the influence of media salience on men and their relationships. Furthermore, Comparative analysis of other age groups in relation to the emerging adult population may also help in broadening the understanding related to social media salience and its role when it comes to the level of trust and satisfaction an individual may experience in their relationship.

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