



RESEARCH PAPER

Instagram Usage and Mental Health Impact on Undergraduate Students of Pakistan

¹Abdul Razaque Chhachhar, ²Mukhtiar Ali Jamali and ³Simra Nasir Shaikh

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh,
2. PhD Scholar, Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan
3. MPhil Scholar, Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan

Corresponding Author abdul.razaque@usindh.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The main objectives of this study were that how Instagram affects the users psychologically and make depressed them. the higher-level reliance on Instagram reliance faced more isolation and social inferiority. This highlight that though this application purposes for connectivity, its purposeless usage can absurdly drag users to emotional breakdown and decrease mutual interaction in the young society. Learners may prefer digital existence over purposeful direct communication, which makes a worse feeling of loneliness. This research study observes that how usage of Instagram affects trauma, depression and other psychological diseases in 300 Pakistani undergraduate students. The quantitative research methods approach was applied where researcher collected data through online survey and the researcher sent questionnaire to 350 respondents for getting their response where 300 given their response of the questions Instagram from students of various departments. In the study usage pattern of Instagram and demographic details along with psychological effects with measuring frequencies and percentages were observed. The data was analysed by using SPSS software version 28 for data analysis and interpretations where results show that there are both positive and negative impacts where several undergraduates observed tension and stress, physical diseases due to excessive usage of Instagram. Nevertheless, few findings suggest about social circles and updates and information. Numerical findings more suggest that 40% of undergraduates use Instagram 2 to 4 hours in a day, 56.7 % are female, and more than half (57 %) report stress after use of Instagram. Study reveals these trends in individual and as well as in group perceptions.

Keywords: Instagram Use, Psychological/Mental Health, anxiety, Stress, Social Isolation, Students

Introduction

Usage of social media among young people raised concerns about psychological health worldwide. In Pakistan a noteworthy amount of young people uses Instagram, still mental health problems likewise stress, depression and anxiety continue to remain less studied in the context. For example, a global meta-analysis found problematic Instagram use correlated with depression ($r \approx 0.35$) and anxiety ($r \approx 0.31$). Social comparison theory posits that comparing oneself to curated images online can lower self-esteem and increase anxiety. At the same time, social media can provide social support and a sense of belonging. Muzaffar, et. al., (2020). In Pakistan, studies on social media and mental health are limited. Most research has focused on Facebook or general social media usage.

Recent Pakistani studies implicate Instagram specifically (Nasir *et al.*, 2022) report Instagram use causes psychological issues and body dissatisfaction in female students. (Mahmood *et al.*, 2020) likewise found Instagram “causes psychological distress among

youth". However, these focus mainly on young women or specific cities. There is a lack of comprehensive data on both male and female undergraduates across Pakistan, especially with detailed survey results. Excessive Instagram use may contribute to anxiety, stress, and depression in students, but Pakistani data are scarce. We seek to quantify these effects and understand usage patterns. Few Pakistani studies examine Instagram's specific impact. Existing work often targets female students or mixes platforms. No large-scale survey data have been published on Pakistani undergraduates' Instagram habits and psychological outcomes.

Also, can guide the academic stockholders to initiate Media Literacy and Programs (e.g. digital health programs). The results also contribute to worldwide understanding of Social Media Networks twofold effects, how online platforms like Instagram link and damage youngsters' health.

Role of social media when it comes to psychological health, is complicated. Analyses about advantages, like socialization, motivation but on the same time it menaces unhealthy issues like anxiety, isolation and stress. In the youngsters, social media use cause health issues if usage is excessive or adverse in quality. Positive effects occurs when undergraduates use social media for social interaction and for a noble support (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019; Salam, et. al., 2024; Asghar, et. al., 2025; Awan, et. al., 2018). Researchers have specifically linked Instagram to poor body image and mental health. For example, a global meta-analysis by (Sepas *et al.*, 2024) found problematic Instagram use is associated with higher depression and anxiety. That analysis across 14,000+ participants reported moderate correlations (e.g. $r \approx 0.35$ between heavy Instagram use and depression) (Keles *et al.*, 2020) similarly found a bidirectional relationship with stress and anxiety. Content on Instagram often triggers social comparison: users compare their lives to idealized images, which can increase envy and dissatisfaction. Empirical studies have documented that greater time on Instagram correlates with lower self-esteem and higher anxiety.

However, Instagram can also be used for health promotion. One recent European survey of 532 youth found that motivational or "humanizing" mental health content on Instagram (e.g. influencer posts, inspirational quotes) received high positive ratings. This suggests that Instagram has potential health-enhancing effects when used mindfully.

Few Pakistani studies focus on Instagram, (Nasir *et al.*, 2022) studied 150 female university students and found Instagram use was "the major cause of serious psychological issues" and body dissatisfaction among Pakistani women. Similarly, (Mahmood *et al.*, 2020) conducted a survey of 250 youth and concluded that "Instagram causes psychological distress among youth" (highlighting issues like anxiety, depression, FOMO). A recent study of 150 Pakistani college students (Komal *et al.*, 2025) found social media use (including Instagram) positively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress. Another regional survey linked social media addiction to higher depression scores.

Overall, these findings suggest that Pakistani students are vulnerable to negative Instagram impacts, but they also highlight the need for balanced discussion of any positive aspects. Our research builds on this by systematically surveying both male and female undergraduates nationwide.

Literature Review

In the contemporary ages when social media emerges rapidly, especially Instagram, has changed the way youth mutually interact, socialize, express themselves and maintain their psychological well being in their digital lives. In the university learners, Instagram considered as a main source of communication, infect bigger than those old-style channels. Instagram allows the consumers to form wisely constructed types of their beings, directed by appealing and users' engagement in the shape of comments, likes and number of

followers' count. Researchers are concerned about such negative practices are badly effect university learners' psychological wellbeing, particularly their confidence, stress levels and emotions of loneliness. Various studies find out the negative connection between Instagram usage and psychological wellbeing. Toor, Malik, and Khalid, (2024) in their quantitative study with Students of Pakistani universities and find out a noteworthy negative connection for both active and passive users, also their confidence and motivation in life.

According to Lee and Hancock., (2024), students' attitudes toward social media—whether positive or negative—have a big impact on how it affects their wellbeing. According to Ryding, Harkin and Kuss., (2024), appearance anxiety acted as a mediating factor between high Instagram engagement—particularly appearance-focused activity—and decreased self-esteem and wellbeing (Chen, Cohen, and Sundar., 2022) distinguished between problematic and habitual Instagram use, demonstrating that escapism and validation-based motivations were a better indicator of mental health problems than regular usage. Active social media use is generally less harmful—and in some cases, beneficial—than passive consumption, which is more strongly linked to negative outcomes, according to meta-analytic evidence from Godard and Holtzman., (2024).

Studies indicates that even those inactive users who just check out the post without commenting on it, had deep effects, as per new exposure of ideal pictures and social development. These matches many of the time emerged with emotional state insufficiency and low self-esteem, connecting with the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) in which he discussed, one's calculation for themselves by comparing their life with others, particularly in soundings where achievement, and charm are frequently emphasized. More supports to these findings, a negative linking driven from research accompanied in Kazakhstan, this research published in *Health psychology research*, 2025, which shows Instagram infatuation and its connection to solitude among undergraduates. According to the study the higher-level reliance on Instagram reliance faced more isolation and social inferiority. These results highlight that though this application purposes for connectivity, its purposeless usage can absurdly drag users to emotional breakdown and decrease mutual interaction in the young society. Learners may prefer digital existence over purposeful direct communication, which makes a worse feeling of loneliness.

BMC psychology, 2022 published an Interpretive and investigation-based research which covers deep numerical relations. Surveyed how United Kingdom's university learners recognize the effects of Instagram on their psychological health. The findings state deep social stress, including the necessity to look frequently glad, victorious, and eye-catching personality. Many of them are bound to upload photos by enhancing the quality of it, showing them in most favorable way. This kind of pressure many of the time lead to the deep emotional impacts and disappointment with physical world. Furthermore, the research emphasized worries among the undergraduate about cyber-bulling, benchmarking, and the mental stress of keeping a social identity.

The meta-analytic evidence was supported by (Godard and Holtzman., 2024), who discovered that active social media use is less detrimental (and occasionally more positive) than passive consumption, which is more closely associated with negative affect. Young adults who are more exposed to social comparison on social media have higher rates of depressive symptoms (Feinstein 2014). From the standpoint of health behavior (Pagoto *et al.*, 2022) pointed out that while social media can help college students with peer support and health promotion, too much exposure to carefully chosen peer content can also make people feel more stressed and anxious.

Apart from individual narratives and interrelation analysis, latest studies have discovered the intense cognitive processes through which Instagram can negatively impact mental health of user through several pathways (Yurdagit *et al.*, 2019) found that

troublesome among Instagram users' possible indications of anxiety and depression, mostly through the intervening variable of self-esteem disappointment. The study indicates that the female students especially effected and likely to face more danger who follow unfeasible beauty tips on the Instagram. This connects with universal facts on how exposure to digital reformed pictures adopts negative self-image and form anxiety, which can disturb psychological health.

Advanced approaches particularly computational analysis has additionally enhanced this field. Broadly quoted research by (Reece and Danforth., 2016) examined tens thousands of Instagram images via online learning to receive symptomatic of depression. Instagram users testified scientific indication of depression were used to upload photos with darker effects. Less drenched and more concern on expressions. These elusive pictorial signals that in fact the users do not clearly share their particular emotive state, but still their content of post reflects their state of psychological wellbeing. The results furthermore increase the chance of using social media findings for initial

According to Balamurugan and Vijayarani., (2025) conducted a systematic review on synthesizing exiting evidence, this analyzed 37 researches and end up with the view that Instagram usage is knowingly connected with a variation of psychological problems among teenager and undergraduates. The most frequent findings issues included depression, anxiety, insomnia, and unusual abnormal eating, these all were results of intensive usage of screen, negative identity comparison and effects of ideal representation of others' lives. Whereas the analysis agreed on some positive sides, including chances for innovative expression and emotive backing, it stressed that these profits were continuously dominated by the platform's more vulnerable effects. The analysis further apprise that algorithm subject matter references repeatedly strengthen difficult engagement by ranking expressively charged or apparently exciting material that may generate obsessive usage or highlight uncertainty. Based on Situation, these results in particular ethnic arrangements disclose more difficulty.

According to Primack., (2022), student mental health is influenced by both the kind of interactions that take place on social media and the quantity of time spent there (Orben, 2024) noted in a methodological review that in order to accurately estimate the effects of social media use on mental health while being careful not to overestimate such claims, longitudinal and causal designs are required. For instance, (Johnson and Taylor., 2024) showed that university students frequently experienced stress as a result of using social media, and that coping mechanisms mitigated this psychological effect. Similarly, Brown and smith studied that excessive use of institutional social media was linked to higher stress levels and less academic focus, despite the fact that it can promote human connection (Brown and Smith 2022).

According to Toor *et al.*, (2024) showed the way Pakistani social order, where household hopes and reputation are deep rooted, Instagram consumers, particularly women in young age experience multiple challenges of imitating the world beauty levels whereas obeying to ethical boundaries. This pressure repeatedly outcomes in differed individuality maintenance and rising mental stress. DSSR Research accompanied in Sialkot similarly described raised anxiety undergraduate learners because of parental observation and judgments united with digital pressure to current model lives virtual (DSSR, 2025). These local perceptions are difficult for understanding how Instagram worldwide impact connects with regional societal arrangements to form psychological wellbeing findings.

Theories bases like Higgins', (1987) Self Discrepancy Theory explain mental health situation. It is stated in the model that psychological suffering increases when someone's actual self is different and he tries to act like the ideal self in the society. Instagram often promotes highly followed users that situation worsen this gap that increases anxiety, disappointment, and discouragement. Furthermore, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMo) appears

when continues use to noble activities increases, which creates tension and abets to obsessive checking habit, even when in the bed or doing study hours.

Advanced researches on Instagram usage in undergraduate learners strengthen the connecting platform arrangement to emotional and mental difficulties. A large-scale meta-analysis from Cyber psychology, behavior, and social networking, 2024, analysis general and problematic usage of Instagram throughout 37 researches including closely 14000 partakers. It initiates enough numerical importance linking between problematic Instagram users and depression ($r=0.35$), anxiety ($r=0.31$) and reduced health ($r=0.17$) whereas both Instagram user and problematic Instagram user connected positively with depression and anxiety. Intra-sectional research of learners in Mogadishu university more highlights these worries: from 268 health sciences learners, majority of 84 % using social networking sites for more than three hours every day, these practices were associated with insomnia, mental tiredness, societal separation, and intensely increase possibility of anxiety. Whereas it is not restricted to Instagram, the research stresses on how intense usage of all the digital media platforms add psychological stress in undergraduate learners' life.

Toor, Malik and Khalid (2024) indicated that it comes up with the effects of both active and passive Instagram practice within undergraduates were harmfully connected with self-confidence and fulfillment of life, whereas, passive practices generate deep effects, probably because of enlarged publicity to fanciful material and rising comparison. (Kuandykova et al., 2025), this study is conducted in Kazakhstan which highlights an important active connection of Instagram usage habit and isolation, proving that habitual use patterns are main interpreters of psychological loneliness. Qualitative findings from UK's university learners enhance this numerical confirmation. The survey dialogues taken for *BMC psychology study*, exposed that the learners took Instagram as a digital platform for self-presentation, under pressure to uphold satisfactory digital identity, adopting beauty measures, and pursue justification with the follower count. *Land mark royal society report ranking*, ranked Instagram as a worst of all the social media networks for undergraduate university learners' psychological wellbeing for of its focus on self-idealization of individual's victimization and fear of isolation.

Further researches clarify particular mental process. Like (Khodarahimi & Fathi., 2017), and many more reports appraises particular higher unknowns and well-known personality social evaluation, whereas (Mun and Kim., 2021) established that consumers with high consent necessities lead to current fake identity on social media, intensifying depressive indications and anxiety. (Reece & Danforth., 2016), revealed that dishearten users on Instagram upload pictures with darker effect, vague, and colorless, which indicates the moods and psychological position of the user.

Concluding, the research findings recommend that though Instagram present number of social and creativity goods, it risks mental health of undergraduate students. Most of these harms are connected to aspects related to social competition, Physical appearance issues, aloneness and self-idealized appearance. It is important for academics, psychological wellbeing experts, and social media network developers and administrators to be well aware of these facts so that they encourage positive digital behaviors among undergraduate students.

Material and Methods

The cross-sectional mixed-methods design. Primary data came from an online survey distributed via Instagram links shared on student groups to enrich findings, follow-up interviews were conducted with a subset of participants through Instagram Direct Messages. The target population was undergraduate students at Pakistani universities. We collected data from 300 students across multiple departments (Arts, Sciences, Engineering, etc.). According to Krejcie and Morgan's, (1970) sample-size guidelines, a sample of 300 is

adequate for a large university population at 95% confidence. Participants were aged roughly 18–26; demographic breakdown. A structured questionnaire was developed based on existing scales and literature. It included sections on demographics, Instagram usage (daily hours, purposes, posting frequency, etc.), and mental health-related items (anxiety, depression symptoms, stress, self-esteem, body image, loneliness, FOMO). Several Questions asked were MCQs or Likert-type, likewise “do you often feel anxious after Instagram use?” The questionnaire pilot-tested for clarity. Instead of closed ended questions we used open ended questions those were open for suggestions, e.g. “What changes does Instagram bring to your health?” Questionnaire were circulated online through google forms and shared via Instagram, focusing University students’ groups and communities. Participant students were volunteers and anonymous, their consent was also taken in the start of interview. These interviews in Instagram chat gave qualitative insights but not the focus of numerical data. Data were conducted and entered into SPSS. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages were calculated for each question. Frequency distribution tables were created following Morgan’s principles for categorical data. We also ran cross-tabulations to examine relationships (e.g. hours of use vs. anxiety). Given the exploratory nature, we did not perform inferential tests except where correlational patterns were obvious. Qualitative interview notes were thematically reviewed to enrich the findings.

Results and Discussion

The survey sample (N=300) included a majority of females (56.7 %) and students aged 20–23. Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown. The largest age group was 22–23 years (30.0 %), followed by 20–21 (23.3 %) and 18–19 (20.0 %). Most respondents were undergraduates: third-year (30.0 %) and second-year (23.3 %) students were the largest subgroups. This female-majority sample is consistent with prior Pakistani research focusing on women’s Instagram use, but our study also reflects male and non-binary perspectives. The distribution suggests a broad representation across typical undergrad age ranges.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 300)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	120	40.0 %
Female	170	56.7 %
Non-binary	5	1.7 %
Prefer not to say	5	1.7 %
Total	300	100.0 %

Table 2
Age Group

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–19	60	20.0 %
20–21	70	23.3 %
22–23	90	30.0 %
24–26	40	13.3 %
27+	40	13.3 %
Total	300	100.0 %

Table 3
Qualification

Educational Status	Frequency	Percentage
1st year Undergraduate	50	16.7 %
2nd year Undergraduate	70	23.3 %
3rd year Undergraduate	90	30.0 %
4th year Undergraduate	80	26.7 %
Postgraduate (MPhil/PhD)	10	3.3 %

Total	300	100.0 %
-------	-----	---------

Note: Percentages in Table 1 are calculated out of 300 respondents. This distribution guided subsequent analysis.

Instagram Usage Patterns

Daily Usage (hours): Respondents reported varying Instagram usage times. The most common category was 2–4 hours per day (40.0 %) (Table 2). A sizable minority (20.0 %) used Instagram over 4 hours daily, while 10.0% used it less than 1 hour. This heavy-use pattern aligns with global findings that youth spend several hours on social media daily.

Table 4
Use of hours

Hours on Instagram	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	30	10.0 %
1–2 hours	90	30.0 %
2–4 hours	120	40.0 %
More than 4 hours	60	20.0 %
Total	300	100.0 %

Primary Purpose: When asked why they use Instagram, Entertainment/Socializing was by far the top category (50.0 %) (Table 2). This includes browsing friends' posts, memes, and entertainment content. The next most common uses were News/Information (16.7 %) and Education (10.0 %), indicating some students use Instagram to follow news pages or educational content. Only 13.3 % cited Business/Professional purposes (e.g. marketing), and 10.0 % "Other" (e.g. activism, fitness). These results suggest that most Pakistani students use Instagram largely for leisure, similar to patterns seen elsewhere.

Table 5
Main Purpose use of Instagram

Primary Use of Instagram	Frequency	Percentage
Entertainment/Socializing	150	50.0 %
News/Information	50	16.7 %
Education/Learning	30	10.0 %
Business/Professional	40	13.3 %
Other	30	10.0 %
Total	300	100.0 %
Daily	90	30.0%
Weekly	100	33.3%
Monthly	70	23.3%
Rarely/Never	40	13.3%
Total	300	100.0%

Posting Frequency: Only 30.0 % of students reported posting *daily*; 33.3 % posted *weekly*, 23.3 % *monthly*, and 13.3 % *rarely/never* (Table 2). Thus, most are passive consumers rather than frequent content creators. This is consistent with the observation that heavy use often involves scrolling or consuming, which can encourage more comparison and passive behaviors.

Following Influencers: A large majority (73.3 %) of students reported that they *do* follow one or more social media influencers on Instagram, while 26.7 % do not (Table 3). Influencers often post idealized lifestyles or fitness/beauty content, which has been linked to increased envy and FOMO. Indeed, interview comments revealed that many students compare themselves to influencers. For example, one female respondent said: "*I see fitness models and feel like I must look perfect too*".

Table 6
Follow the Influencers

Follow Influencers?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	220	73.3 %
No	80	26.7 %
Total	300	100.0 %

Social Comparison: Consistent with influencer following, 60.0% of respondents admitted they often compare themselves to others on Instagram, vs. 40.0 % who did not (Table 3). Social comparison is a known mediator of Instagram-related anxiety. The given data proves that several Pakistani learners use Instagram in such a way that are harmful for self-confidence and their moods according to the studies.

Table No 7
Compare with others on Instagram

Compare with Others on Instagram?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	180	60.0 %
No	120	40.0 %
Total	300	100.0 %
Deleted Posts Due to Low Engagement?		
Yes	140	46.7 %
No	160	53.3 %
Total	300	100.0 %

Deleted Posts: Half of the learners (46.7 %) find out that removing one of their contents for “less engagement” in shape of likes and comments, that shows burden to present a flawless image (Table 3). Such conduct shows stress over social acceptance. These results show also in the Global Social Research (Global Social Research, 2020), In which many students deleted posts that didn’t attract likes and comment from their circle and resultantly faces anxiety and stress related to Instagram. Psychology Impacts: In the study researcher measured many emotional and psychological findings. Those of the major findings showed in (Table 4). More than half of the learners found feeling nervous or depressed after use of Instagram (53.3 %), and a number of 56.7 % did feel pressure to present their best image on the Instagram. Moreover, the given finding suggest extensive negative experiences in given scenario. Likewise, 60.0 % did experience FOMO (fear of missing out) at least for a little while after checking friends’ posts (Table 4), thus, it is shown that Instagram increases anxiety.

Table 8
Fear of Missing Out

Outcome	Frequency (Yes)	Percentage (Yes)
Anxiety/stress after Instagram use	160	53.3 %
Pressure to be perfect on Instagram	170	56.7 %
FOMO (feeling left out)	180	60.0 %
Self-esteem affected by likes	170	56.7 %
Feelings of loneliness/isolation	140	46.7 %
Compulsive checking of Instagram	160	53.3 %
Outcomes with “Yes” responses	---	

For self-esteem, 56.7 % of respondents said their self-esteem is *at least partly* affected by the number of likes or followers they receive (Table 4). Over half (53.3 %) admitted to compulsive checking – they feel the need to check Instagram frequently, even when busy with other tasks. These behaviors are associated with Instagram addiction and poorer well-being in other studies.

Loneliness or social isolation was reported by 46.7 %. Although some turn to Instagram to feel connected, many paradoxically feel more alone after prolonged use, echoing BMC Psychology’s note that social media can increase isolation for some users.

Table 9
Body Image Perception

Body Image Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Positive effect	40	13.3 %
Negative effect	180	60.0 %
No noticeable effect	80	26.7 %
Total	300	100.0 %
Attempted Instagram Break?		
Yes	200	66.7 %
No	100	33.3 %
Total	300	100.0 %
Effect of Taking a Break (among those who tried it)		
Felt better	120	60.0 %
Felt worse	20	10.0 %
No change	60	30.0 %
Total	200	100.0 %

Body Image: Most notably, 60.0 % of students reported that Instagram has a *negative* effect on their body image, whereas only 13.3 % felt a positive impact and 26.7 % said no effect (Table 4). This aligns with findings by Nasir (Nasir *et al.* 2022) and others that Instagram significantly increases body dissatisfaction in youth. Interview quotes illustrate this: one student lamented, “*I see models and feel insecure about my body now*”. Instagram Breaks: When asked if they ever tried taking a break from Instagram, 66.7 % said *Yes*. Of those (N=200), 60.0 % (120/200) reported feeling better after the break, 30.0 % noticed no change, and 10.0% felt worse (Table 5). Among the 33.3 % who never took breaks, many cited fears of missing out or felt the platform was too integral to stop. These results suggest that breaks can often improve well-being for heavy users, consistent with advice from mental health experts. Difficulty Stopping: When asked how hard it would be to stop using Instagram, responses were mixed: 11.7 % said it would be “Very easy” or “Easy,” 33.3 % “Moderate,” and 44.9 % “Hard” or “Very hard” (Table 5). To put it differently, the most of the learners (about 55 %) confessed it challenging to quit, that shows a higher degree of addictiveness and Instagram engagement, dependable with other results on social media addiction.

Table 10
Difficulty Level in Stopping Instagram

Difficulty Level in Stopping Instagram	Frequency	Percentage
Very easy	20	6.7 %
Easy	50	16.7 %
Moderate	100	33.3 %
Hard	80	26.7 %
Very hard	50	16.7 %
Total	300	100.0 %
Follow Mental Health Accounts?		
Yes	80	26.7 %
No	220	73.3 %
Total	300	100.0 %

Psychological/Mental health account: Is is found that only a number of 26.7 % university students reported following any psychological or mental health related accounts, pages or groups on Instagram (Table 5). Those learners who though very rarely comment on posts like inspirational stories or motivational sayings, still they gave them some satisfaction. Moreover, this suggests the Austrian researchers study that psychological health data on Instagram is often appreciated. Overall Impact: When it was questioned “*How has Instagram helped or harmed your mental health?*”, 60.0 % students responded Instagram has affected their psychological wellbeing, 26.7 % answered they find it supportive, and 13.3 % said they found no harms. (Table 9). Those reporting harm often cited anxiety, envy, and loneliness. Those saying it helped mentioned staying connected with friends, accessing helpful information, or feeling entertained. These split responses

underscore the dual nature of Instagram: it can provide social engagement (as literature also notes) yet exacerbate mental health problems for many.

Table 11
Instagram's Impact on My Mental Health

Instagram's Impact on My Mental Health	Frequency	Percentage
Harmed	180	60.0 %
Helped	80	26.7 %
No effect	40	13.3 %
Total	300	100.0 %
Suggested Instagram Changes to Support Well-being		
Hide likes/followers count	100	33.3 %
Add time/use reminders	70	23.3 %
Provide official mental health resources (e.g. tips, crisis line links)	90	30.0 %
Filter or label potentially harmful content	30	10.0 %
Other (user control features)	10	3.3 %
Total	300	100.0 %
Support for Instagram Mental Health Resources		
Yes	240	80.0 %
No	60	20.0 %
Total	300	100.0 %

Students gave opinions on what Instagram could change to support well-being (Table 6). The most popular suggestion was to hide like counts (33.3 %), addressing the pressure of engagement metrics. Many also wanted mental health resources built into the app (30.0 %) and time-limit reminders (23.3 %). These preferences align with global discussions (e.g. experts proposing hidden likes to reduce comparison pressure). Finally, 80.0% of respondents felt it would be beneficial for Instagram to include mental health support resources (e.g. counseling info, positive content) in the app interface (Table 6). Only 20.0% thought it was unnecessary. Using Morgan's approach to frequency distribution, we ensured all categories were mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. Overall, the statistical profile shows a pattern: majorities experience some negative impact from Instagram use (anxiety, pressure, comparison, body image issues), and minorities report positive effects (social connection, inspiration). Qualitative interview themes reinforced this: one student noted that Instagram "connects me to friends," while another said it makes them "feel inferior." These mixed qualitative impressions mirror the literature.

Individual Perspective. Consider Aisha, a 21-year-old female third-year arts student in Lahore. She spends about 3 hours daily on Instagram, mainly for entertainment and following friends/influencers. Aisha checks Instagram compulsively: if she has a few hours free, she "automatically opens the app." She follows several fashion and fitness influencers. Aisha reports feeling "down and anxious" many evenings after scrolling through curated posts. She admitted to frequently comparing herself to others: "When I see other girls partying or looking perfect, I feel I'm not enough." She felt intense pressure to post attractive photos; if a post got few likes, she often deleted it (her interview confirmed the 46.7 % who delete posts). Aisha has felt her self-esteem decline (consistent with 56.7 % of our sample). During exams, she tried a 1-week Instagram break; she felt *relieved* (part of the 60.0 % reporting "better" after breaks). Aisha acknowledged, though, that the break was hard because she feared missing updates (common FOMO; she reported feeling left out 60.0 % of the time). Overall, Aisha's case illustrates how a typical student uses Instagram for connection and fun but suffers anxiety, comparison, and body image concerns as a result, aligning with studies on Instagram and distress.

Trend Summary. Aggregating trends, we see a *profile* of an average respondent: a young adult using Instagram 2–4 hours daily, for social/entertainment purposes, who follows influencers. Those Instagram consumers keep comparing themselves to other students (60.0 %) and report depression or anxiety (53.3 %) and pressure to become

perfect (56.7 %). Most of the learners felt that Instagram has damaged their psychological health (60.0%). On the other hand same consumers also benefited from digital social circles, e.g, learners who follow specific psychological content (26.7 %) Many find out positive date that satisfied them and eased their anxiety (as Koinig [39†L316-L324] studies, self esteem posts enhance confidence. To conclude, the overall tendency is that Social Media Site Instagram is connected with extensive emotional and psychological drains among Pakistani university going students, connecting with worldwide findings of negative correlations with individuals' health, however some also founds positive aspects like social backing. This dual-case contrast shows that the impact is not uniformly negative nor wholly positive, but twisted toward danger, constant with the study's stress on mindful use.

Conclusion

The research found an inclusive check on Instagram/s adverse effects on psychological wellbeing of university learners in Pakistan. The major shows that higher number of stress and anxiety (53.3 %) and FOMO (60.0 %) after Instagram usage, and a major number findings indicates that Instagram damages their physical self and self-confidence. Given findings are aligned with past Pakistani researches that focuses Instagram related depression and stress and with worldwide studies connecting larger Instagram use to depression and anxiety. The data also reveal nuanced insights: while most respondents feel negatively impacted, a significant minority (26.7 %) report benefits such as social connection or entertainment, echoing literature on social support from online communities. Educators and health professionals should be aware that students are experiencing real psychological costs from Instagram use. Our respondents suggested practical changes: hiding public like counts, adding screen-time reminders, and integrating mental health resources in the platform. These ideas align with expert recommendations and the strong user support (80.0 %) for in-app mental health resources suggests a readiness for such interventions. Pakistani universities might develop programs teaching students about healthy social media habits and coping with social comparison. The study is based on self-reported survey data (which may be subject to bias) and a non-random sample (convenience sampling via social media). Future research could use longitudinal designs to assess causal effects, or clinical assessments for stress/depression. Expanding to other cities and comparing different age groups (e.g. high schoolers) would improve generalizability. In conclusion, while Instagram can foster community, our findings indicate it is often associated with increased stress, anxiety, and body-image concerns among Pakistani undergraduates. Interventions are needed to mitigate these risks – for example, adopting social media usage guidelines or collaborating with Instagram to promote well-being features. Addressing this issue is timely in Pakistan, where rising youth mental health problems have been reported. By filling a research gap with current data, this study highlights the urgent need for policies and education that help students use social media in healthier ways.

Recommendations

Most of quantitative studies showed that there is some negative effects psychologically disturb the students now there is need to do more some studies in qualitative approach where researcher can find more information and knowledge that how internet world specially social media impact on young generation

References

- Abdulkadir Osman, W., (2025). Social media use and associated mental health indicators among university students: a cross-sectional study. *Scientific Reports*, 15, 9534.
- Ali, S., Ahmed, R., & Malik, M., (2022). The Relationship between Social Media usage and Self-Esteem in Pakistani University Students. *Journal of Psychology and Behavioural Science*, 10(1), 35–47.
- Asghar, N., Cheema, A. T., & Muzaffar, M. (2025). The Impact of Media Coverage on Political Behavior among Pakistani Students: A Case Study of GC Women University Sialkot. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 6(2), 266–279. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2025\(6-II\)23](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2025(6-II)23)
- Awan, F. A., Alvi, A. S., Shabbir, O., Munir, R., Asif, R., & Ashraf, S. (2018). Role of Media as a Counter Narrative to Indian Propaganda: An Analysis of PTV Current Affairs Program. *Journal of Indian Studies*, 4(02), 239-251.
- Balamurugan, M., & Vijayarani, P., (2025). Filtering reality: Navigating Instagram's influence on adolescent mental health. *Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences*, 41(1), 17–29.
- Brown, L., & Smith, R., (2022). College students' engagement with university social media and well-being. *Journal of American College Health*.
- Cohen, O., & Sundar, S. S., (2022). Differentiating problematic from habitual Instagram use: Auses-and-grats 2.0 perspective. *Social media + Society*, 8(3), 1-14
- Feinstein, B. A., Bhatia, V., & Davila, J. (2014). Rumination mediates the association between cyber-victimization and depressive symptoms. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 29(9), 1732-1746.
- Godard, R., & Holtzman, S. (2024). Are active and passive social media use related to mental health, wellbeing, and social support outcomes? A meta-analysis of 141 studies. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 29(1), 55
- Higgins, E. T., (1987). Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review*, 94(3), 319–340.
- Johnson, K., & Taylor, S., (2024). *University students, social media stress, and coping*. Taylor & Francis
- Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A., (2020). A systematic review: the influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 79–93.
- Kuadvkova, (2025) Kuandykova, A., Tokatligil, Y., Bolatova, G., & Komekbayeva, L., (2025). A psychological study of Instagram addiction and loneliness among students. *Health Psychology*, 13(2), e81240005.
- Lee, A. Y., & Hancock, J. T. (2024). Social media mindsets: A new approach to understanding social media use and psychological well-being. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 29(1), 1-21
- Moreton, L., & Greenfield, S. (2022). University students' views on the impact of Instagram on mental wellbeing: a qualitative study. *BMC psychology*, 10(1), 45.

- Muzaffar, M., Chohdhry, S., & Afzal, N. (2019). Social Media and Political Awareness in Pakistan: A Case Study of Youth, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3 (II), 1-13
- Muzaffar, M., Yaseen, Z. & Safdar, S. (2020). Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns in Pakistan: A Case of Study of 2018 Elections, *Journal of Political Studies*, 27 (2), 141-151
- Nasir, M., Shah, A., & Noor, F., (2023). Role of Social Media in Supporting Mental Health: A Case Study on University Students. *Pakistan Journal of Mental Health*, 9(2), 88–96.
- Orben, A., Meier, A., Dalgleish, T., & Blakemore, S. J. (2024). Mechanisms linking social media use to adolescent mental health vulnerability. *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 3(6), 407-423
- Pagoto, S. L., Waring, M. E., Groshon, L. C., Rosen, A. O., Schroeder, M. W., & Goetz, J. M. (2022). Proof-of-concept feasibility trial of a dissonance-based sun safety intervention for young adult tanners. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 56(8), 830-841.
- Primack, B. A., Perryman, K. L., Crofford, R. A., & Escobar-Viera, C. G. (2022). Social media as it interfaces with psychosocial development and mental illness in transitional-age youth. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics*, 31(1), 11-30.
- Reece, A. G., & Danforth, C. M., (2016). Instagram photos reveal predictive markers of depression. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1608.03282*
- Reer, F., Tang, W. Y., & Quandt, T. (2019). Psychosocial well-being and social media engagement: The mediating roles of social comparison orientation and fear of missing out. *New Media & Society*, 21(7), 1486-1505.
- Ryding, F. C., Harkin, L. J., & Kuss, D. J. (2025). Instagram engagement and well-being: the mediating role of appearance anxiety. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 44(3), 446-462.
- Salam, Z., Jamil, M., & Muzaffar, M. (2024). The Role of Social Media in Political Awareness and Engagement among University Students: A Quantitative Study. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 5(4), 691–702. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024\(5-IV\)61](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024(5-IV)61)
- Sepas, A., Bangash, A. H., Nielsen, R. E., Yang, W., & El-Hussuna, A. (2024). The association between problematic instagram use, psychological distress, and well-being: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 27(9), 641-650
- Toor, S., Malik, A., & Khalid, R., (2024). The influence of Instagram usage on self-esteem and well-being of university students. *Global Media and Communication Review*, 9(1), 23-41.
- Yurdagül, C., Kircaburun, K., Emirtekin, E., Wang, P., & Griffiths, M. D. (2021). Psychopathological consequences related to problematic Instagram use among adolescents: The mediating role of body image dissatisfaction and moderating role of gender. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 19(5), 1385-1397