

Relationship between Anxiety Sensitivity and Problematic Social Media Use

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of

Bachelor of Science in Psychology

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ST. TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), ERNAKULAM

Nationally Re-accredited at 'A++' level (4th cycle)

Affiliated to: Mahatma Gandhi University

MARCH 2025

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, “Relationship between Anxiety Sensitivity and Problematic Social Media Use”, is a bonafide record submitted by Sreelakshmi Raju, SB22PSY060, of St. Teresa’s College, Ernakulam under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Nivya Sabu and that it has not been submitted to any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma, fellowship, title, or recognition before.

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I, Sreelakshmi Raju , do hereby declare that the work represented in the dissertation embodies the results of the original research work done by me in St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Nivya Sabu, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, it has not been submitted by me to any other university or institution for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship, title or recognition before.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is not possible to prepare a project report without the assistance and encouragement of other people. This one is certainly no exception. I would like to express my deep heartfelt gratitude to the Department of Psychology, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam for providing me with the opportunity to undertake the research.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ms. Ann Joseph, the Head of the Department of Psychology, for her guidance and support throughout the duration of my project. I am truly thankful for her expertise, unwavering encouragement, patience, and mentorship, which have been pivotal in my academic journey.

I acknowledge my indebtedness and deep sense of gratitude to my research guide, Ms. Nivya Sabu, Assistant Professor, for encouraging and guiding me throughout all the phases of my research.

I extend my sincere thanks to my parents, teachers, and my friends who all have supported me throughout the time. I am grateful to each and every one who has given me guidance, encouragement, suggestions, and constructive criticisms which has contributed immensely for this project.

Above all, I thank God Almighty for blessing me in all the stages of the project and for helping me complete the project successfully.

Thanking you

Sreelakshmi raj

Abstract

Anxiety sensitivity refers to the fear of anxiety-related sensations due to the belief that these sensations may have harmful consequences. Problematic social media use (PSMU) is characterized by excessive or maladaptive engagement with social media platforms, leading to negative impacts on daily functioning and mental well-being. The current study aimed to examine the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use in adults, with a focus on gender differences. A sample of 200 participants, including males and females aged 20 to 35, took part in the study. Data was collected using the Anxiety Sensitivity Index-3 (ASI-3) developed by Taylor et al. (2007) and the Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS) developed by Jelenchick et al. (2014). Spearman's correlation and Mann-Whitney U tests were used for data analysis. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use, indicating that individuals with higher anxiety sensitivity tend to engage in more problematic social media behaviors. However, no significant gender differences were found in anxiety sensitivity or problematic social media use. The findings suggest that anxiety sensitivity may play a crucial role in driving maladaptive social media behaviors, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these issues.

Keywords: anxiety sensitivity, problematic social media use, adults, gender differences, mental health, coping mechanisms

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Abstract

Anxiety sensitivity refers to the fear of anxiety-related sensations due to the belief that these sensations may have harmful consequences. Problematic social media use (PSMU) is characterized by excessive or maladaptive engagement with social media platforms, leading to negative impacts on daily functioning and mental well-being. The current study aimed to examine the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use in adults, with a focus on gender differences. A sample of 200 participants, including males and females aged 20 to 35, took part in the study. Data was collected using the Anxiety Sensitivity Index-3 (ASI-3) developed by Taylor et al. (2007) and the Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS) developed by Jelenchick et al. (2014). Spearman's correlation and Mann-Whitney U tests were used for data analysis. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use, indicating that individuals with higher anxiety sensitivity tend to engage in more problematic social media behaviors. However, no significant gender differences were found in anxiety sensitivity or problematic social media use. The findings suggest that anxiety sensitivity may play a crucial role in driving maladaptive social media behaviors, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these issues.

Keywords: anxiety sensitivity, problematic social media use, adults, gender differences, mental health, coping mechanisms

Chapter I

Introduction

Background of the Study

The modern digital environment is marked by widespread engagement with social media, which has become a vital part of everyday existence for a large segment of the global population. The emergence of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok has altered the manner in which people communicate, disseminate information, and interact with the world. While the advantages of social media are well-recognized, including improved connectivity, social support, and access to varied forms of entertainment and knowledge, issues have arisen regarding its possible adverse psychological effects. One particular area of concern is the occurrence of problematic social media use (PSMU), which is described as compulsive or excessive involvement with social media platforms to the detriment of one's mental health, social relationships, and daily functioning (Keles et al., 2020). Problematic social media use can be evident in behaviors such as excessive screen time, difficulty managing social media usage, neglecting offline obligations, and experiencing withdrawal symptoms when not engaged with social media.

Anxiety sensitivity (AS), a trait that denotes the apprehension of anxiety-related sensations owing to the belief that these sensations may lead to harmful outcomes, has received growing attention in psychological studies. Anxiety sensitivity includes the cognitive, emotional, and physical responses to perceived anxiety symptoms. People with elevated anxiety sensitivity are likely to misconstrue harmless bodily sensations, such as a racing heart or shortness of breath, as signs of imminent physical, psychological, or social disaster. This increased sensitivity to anxiety symptoms has been associated with multiple psychopathological disorders, including panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and depression (Taylor et al., 2007). High anxiety

sensitivity is also linked to avoidance behaviors, emotional dysregulation, and intensified stress responses. Recent research indicates that anxiety sensitivity may additionally contribute to maladaptive behaviors, such as problematic social media engagement, as individuals might resort to social media as a maladaptive coping strategy to relieve anxiety or distract from uncomfortable sensations. For instance, individuals with higher anxiety sensitivity may compulsively check social media in search of reassurance, validation, or an escape from perceived social threats.

The current study aims to investigate the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use among adults aged 20 to 35. This group is particularly noteworthy due to their increased interaction with social media platforms, motivated by professional, social, and recreational considerations. Individuals in this age range are digital natives or have matured alongside swift technological progress, leading to greater reliance on social media for networking, enjoyment, and communication. This demographic is also experiencing significant transitional life phases, including career development, higher education, and the formation of social networks, which may heighten vulnerability to both anxiety and excessive social media usage. Moreover, the developmental tasks and psychosocial challenges typical of early adulthood, such as identity formation, relationship building, and achieving financial independence, can lead to elevated stress and emotional sensitivity.

Additionally, the distinct psychosocial stressors faced by adults in this group, including job insecurity, academic demands, and shifting interpersonal connections, may further intensify tendencies toward problematic behaviors on social media. Social media can act as a sanctuary from these stressors, delivering temporary relief but possibly reinforcing unhelpful patterns of avoidance and dependency. With time, excessive dependence on social media as a coping

strategy may sustain cycles of anxiety, stress, and reduced psychological well-being. This study intends to illuminate the fundamental processes that connect anxiety sensitivity to problematic use of social media, providing insights that could guide the creation of targeted interventions to foster healthier digital consumption practices and enhance mental health outcomes in adults aged 20 to 35.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is founded on the Interaction of Person Affect Cognition Execution (I-PACE) model. This model indicates that problematic internet usage arises from the intricate interaction of personal vulnerabilities like anxiety sensitivity emotional reactions, cognitive distortions, and challenges in executive functioning. It emphasizes the significance of emotional management and maladaptive coping mechanisms in influencing and perpetuating problematic online behaviors. By offering a thorough perspective, the I-PACE model aids in investigating how anxiety sensitivity contributes to excessive social media engagement. It holds particular relevance to this research as it facilitates an examination of how these interactions develop over time, illuminating how problematic social media usage may be impacted by psychological factors and reinforced by individual experiences.

In addition to the I-PACE model, this study also draws on Reiss's Expectancy Theory of Anxiety Sensitivity (1991), which explains why some people are more sensitive to feelings of anxiety than others. This theory suggests that individuals with high anxiety sensitivity interpret normal bodily sensations like a racing heart or shortness of breath as signs of something dangerous. This fear can lead to avoidance behaviors, emotional distress, and even reliance on external coping mechanisms like social media. For these individuals, social media can become a way to escape

or manage anxiety, whether by seeking reassurance, distraction, or validation. Over time, this can reinforce unhealthy patterns of excessive social media use.

By combining these two theories, this study takes a well-rounded approach to understanding why anxiety sensitivity might contribute to problematic social media habits. It explores how psychological factors, emotional reactions, and online behaviors are all connected, ultimately providing insights that could help develop better strategies for healthier social media use.

Scope of the Study

This research intends to investigate not only the direct impacts of anxiety sensitivity on problematic social media use but also the possible mediating factors involved. Particular focus will be placed on variations based on gender, patterns of social media interaction, and the specific platforms individuals frequent most. By adopting a multidimensional approach, the study will analyze how psychological vulnerabilities, emotional reactions, and behavioral tendencies converge to shape social media practices. Identifying significant predictors and usage patterns will assist in informing strategies to prevent excessive social media engagement, especially among individuals aged 20 to 35 who may be more susceptible.

Furthermore, this study will take into account the effects of major life changes—such as job transitions, academic stress, and alterations in personal relationships—that may lead to problematic social media behaviors. It will also examine whether various categories of social media platforms, such as image-oriented, text-oriented, or video-centric apps, serve distinct functions in excessive usage.

In addition to recognizing the prevalence and psychological underpinnings of problematic social media use, the research will delve into how self-regulation, emotional coping strategies, and perceived social support might affect the connection between anxiety sensitivity and social media behaviors. By comprehending these dynamics, the study aims to enrich clinical practices, bolster digital well-being efforts, and encourage healthier online habits. The results could also contribute to wider discussions regarding mental health in the digital era, providing valuable insights for policymakers and mental health practitioners striving to mitigate the adverse effects of excessive social media usage on psychological well-being

Chapter II

Review of literature

Problematic Social Media Use

The increasing presence of social media in daily life has led researchers to examine its potential psychological effects, particularly among adolescents and young adults. One comprehensive review, conducted by Shannon et al. (2022) and published in *JMIR Mental Health*, explores the prevalence, risk factors, and psychological consequences of excessive social media use. The authors analyzed multiple studies and found a strong connection between problematic social media engagement and heightened anxiety, depressive symptoms, and lower life satisfaction. Their findings suggest that while social media can serve as a coping mechanism for emotional distress, it can also contribute to increased anxiety, especially for vulnerable individuals. The study emphasizes the importance of developing targeted interventions to reduce excessive social media use and improve mental well-being.

Similarly, Casale and Banchi (2021), in their review published in the *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, examined the link between narcissistic personality traits and problematic social media behaviors. Their analysis, which incorporated cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, highlighted how individuals with higher levels of narcissism tend to engage more excessively with social media. This behavior is often fueled by a strong need for validation, admiration, and attention. The study suggests that narcissistic tendencies may heighten dependence on social media, potentially leading to negative mental health outcomes. Addressing personality-related factors, such as narcissism, could be an essential part of interventions aimed at curbing problematic social media use.

Paakkari, Tynjälä, and Lahti (2020) conducted a cross-sectional survey to explore the connection between problematic social media use and overall health in adolescents. Their study,

published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, found that excessive social media use was associated with increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, and sleep disturbances. Additionally, adolescents who spent more time on social media reported poorer overall health outcomes. These findings underscore the need for educational programs and preventative strategies to promote healthier digital habits and mitigate the potential adverse effects of excessive online engagement.

In a study published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, Schivinski et al. (2020) investigated how psychological well-being, self-esteem, and emotional motives influence problematic social media use. The researchers surveyed 584 social media users and found that individuals who use social media as a coping mechanism for negative emotions were at a higher risk of developing problematic usage patterns. Their analysis revealed that factors such as low self-esteem, daily screen time, and emotional distress significantly contributed to problematic social media behaviors. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving self-esteem and emotional regulation may help reduce excessive social media use.

Kircaburun et al. (2020) explored the relationship between personality traits and social media use motivations in a study published in the *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. Surveying over 1,000 university students, they found that individuals with higher levels of neuroticism and lower levels of extraversion were more likely to use social media for escapism and entertainment, leading to a preference for highly visual platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. These usage patterns were linked to increased problematic social media behaviors. The study suggests that understanding personality-driven motivations for social media use can inform intervention strategies aimed at reducing excessive screen time among students.

A study by Worsley, Mansfield, and Corcoran (2018), published in *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, examined how attachment anxiety influences problematic social media use. Conducting an online survey with 915 young adults, they found that individuals with anxious attachment styles were more likely to engage in excessive social media use, often as a way to regulate emotions and maintain social connections. Their findings suggest that those with attachment-related insecurities may rely on social media to compensate for real-world social and emotional needs, making them more vulnerable to problematic use.

Lastly, research by Shensa et al. (2017), published in *Social Science & Medicine*, explored the relationship between problematic social media use and depressive symptoms among young adults in the United States. After controlling for various factors, their study found that excessive social media use was strongly associated with higher levels of depression. The authors suggest that the nature of social media engagement, including social comparison, cyberbullying, and exposure to unrealistic portrayals of life, may contribute to negative mental health outcomes. Their findings reinforce the importance of balancing online engagement with real-world social interactions and emotional well-being

Shensa et al. (2017), in a study published in *Social Science & Medicine*, explored the association between PSMU and depressive symptoms among U.S. young adults while controlling for overall time and frequency of social media use. Using data from the 2013 National Health Interview Survey, which included 1,787 young adults aged 18–29 years, the researchers assessed PSMU with a validated scale and depressive symptoms using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9. Their findings revealed a significant association between PSMU and depressive symptoms, suggesting that addressing problematic social media behaviors could play a crucial role in improving young adults' mental health.

Similarly, another study by Shensa et al. (2017), published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, examined the relationship between excessive social media engagement and depression in young adults aged 18–30 years. Using a nationally representative sample, the study found that individuals with high levels of problematic social media use, particularly those who engaged in negative emotional interactions online, were more likely to report depressive symptoms. The findings reinforce the need to address maladaptive social media behaviors as a strategy to mitigate depression risk.

Research on PSMU consistently highlights emotional and psychological factors—such as negative affect, poor psychological well-being, and attachment anxiety—as key predictors of excessive social media engagement. These factors may also be linked to anxiety sensitivity, which is characterized by a heightened fear of anxiety-related sensations. Given that individuals with high anxiety sensitivity often engage in maladaptive coping strategies, such as excessive social media use, these studies suggest that anxiety sensitivity could be an important factor influencing PSMU. Additionally, understanding the mediating roles of well-being and emotional distress may provide insight into how anxiety sensitivity exacerbates problematic social media behaviors, offering significant implications for intervention strategies.

Anxiety Sensitivity

Anxiety sensitivity has been widely studied for its role in various psychological disorders, including anxiety, depression, and problematic behaviors.

Allan et al. (2014), in a study published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, investigated the relationship between different dimensions of anxiety sensitivity—such as fear of physical sensations, cognitive dysregulation, and social concerns—and mental health outcomes.

Their findings suggested that individuals with high anxiety sensitivity, particularly concerning physical sensations, were at an increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation, emphasizing the importance of targeted interventions for specific anxiety sensitivity factors.

A meta-analysis by Ocañez et al. (2010), published in *Depression and Anxiety*, examined the link between anxiety sensitivity and pain perception. The review found that individuals with higher anxiety sensitivity experienced greater pain intensity and had lower pain tolerance, likely due to their tendency to interpret bodily sensations as threatening. These findings highlight the importance of addressing anxiety sensitivity in pain management interventions.

Keogh and Birkby (2004), in a study published in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, explored the interaction between anxiety sensitivity, gender, and pain perception. Their experimental findings indicated that individuals with high anxiety sensitivity reported greater pain intensity and lower pain tolerance. Moreover, women demonstrated heightened pain sensitivity compared to men, suggesting the need for gender-sensitive approaches in treating anxiety-related pain.

Smits et al. (2008), in a study published in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, investigated the role of exercise in reducing anxiety sensitivity. Their controlled experimental study found that individuals who engaged in regular physical activity experienced significant reductions in anxiety sensitivity. These findings highlight exercise as a non-pharmacological intervention that may help alleviate symptoms of anxiety disorders.

The heritability of anxiety sensitivity was examined by Stein et al. (2002) in a twin study published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*. Their research found that genetic factors played a significant role in the development of anxiety sensitivity, with environmental influences also

contributing to individual differences. This study underscores the need to consider both genetic predispositions and environmental factors when addressing anxiety sensitivity in clinical settings.

Stewart et al. (2001), in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, explored gender differences in anxiety sensitivity. They found that women tend to report higher anxiety sensitivity levels, particularly concerning physical symptoms, which may contribute to the higher prevalence of anxiety disorders among women. Their findings emphasize the importance of gender-specific approaches in anxiety disorder assessments and interventions.

Taylor et al. (1996), in a study published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, examined the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and depression. Their research indicated that individuals with high anxiety sensitivity were more vulnerable to developing depression, particularly when they perceived bodily sensations as threatening. These findings highlight the need for interventions targeting anxiety sensitivity to help reduce depressive symptoms.

McNally and Lorenz (1987), in a study published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, investigated anxiety sensitivity in individuals with agoraphobia. Their findings showed that those with agoraphobia exhibited higher levels of anxiety sensitivity, contributing to their avoidance behaviors. This study underscores the importance of addressing anxiety sensitivity in agoraphobia treatment to improve therapeutic outcomes.

The body of research on anxiety sensitivity offers valuable insights into its potential role in problematic social media use. Studies indicate that individuals with high anxiety sensitivity often engage in maladaptive coping behaviors, such as excessive social media use, as a means of

escaping emotional distress or anxiety. This suggests that anxiety sensitivity could be a key factor contributing to problematic social media habits.

Furthermore, research on anxiety sensitivity interventions—such as exercise, cognitive restructuring, and targeted therapy—suggests potential strategies for mitigating problematic social media use. By addressing the underlying anxiety sensitivity, interventions could help individuals develop healthier coping mechanisms and reduce excessive online engagement. Understanding these connections can inform future research and intervention programs aimed at improving mental health outcomes for individuals struggling with both anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use.

Rationale of the study

The relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use (PSMU) is a compelling topic due to the increasing prevalence of social media use and its associated negative impacts on mental health. Anxiety sensitivity, defined as the fear of anxiety-related sensations, has been linked to various psychological disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder. However, its role in contributing to problematic behaviors, such as excessive social media use, remains underexplored.

Social media platforms, while facilitating communication and connectivity, have been found to contribute to increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. Individuals who are more sensitive to anxiety may be more susceptible to developing maladaptive coping strategies, such as excessive social media use, in an attempt to manage their fears or negative emotions. This excessive engagement with social media can be a way of seeking validation, escaping distress, or distracting oneself from anxiety-related sensations.

The proposed study seeks to investigate the potential link between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use. By understanding this relationship, the study aims to inform interventions and psychological treatments that address both the underlying anxiety sensitivity and unhealthy social media habits. Exploring this relationship also has practical implications for clinicians who may encounter individuals with high anxiety sensitivity presenting with issues related to excessive social media engagement. The findings from this study can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how anxiety-related traits can exacerbate problematic behaviors and suggest pathways for preventative and therapeutic interventions.

Current study

The current study aims to explore the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use (PSMU). Anxiety sensitivity, which refers to the fear of anxiety-related sensations and their potential negative consequences, has been linked to a variety of mental health issues, but its connection to behaviors like excessive social media use is not well understood.

Social media platforms are increasingly associated with anxiety, depression, and other psychological challenges. Individuals with high anxiety sensitivity may turn to social media as a way to manage or escape their distress, potentially leading to problematic use. This study seeks to determine whether individuals with higher anxiety sensitivity are more likely to engage in excessive social media use and how this may influence their mental health. The results could help guide interventions and provide a deeper understanding of how anxiety sensitivity contributes to maladaptive social media habits.

Chapter III

Methodology

Problem Statement

This study aims to examine the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use in adults, exploring how individuals with heightened sensitivity to anxiety symptoms may engage in excessive or maladaptive social media behaviors.

Objectives

- To assess whether people with higher anxiety sensitivity tend to use social media more frequently or excessively.
- To assess the difference in anxiety sensitivity and social media use among males and females.

Hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use

H_{01} : There is no significant difference in anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use among males and females.

Operational Definitions

Anxiety Sensitivity: The tendency to fear anxiety-related sensations due to beliefs that they may lead to negative physical, cognitive, or social outcomes, as measured by standardized scales such as the Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI).

Problematic Social Media Use: Excessive or maladaptive use of social media characterized by compulsive engagement, withdrawal symptoms, and negative impact on daily

life, as assessed through validated tools like the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) or Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS).

Research design

This study employs correlation research to assess the objectives of this study.

Sampling

This study employed a convenience sampling method, a type of non-probability sampling, to recruit participants. Indian citizens aged 20 to 35 were invited to participate voluntarily through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was shared across various online platforms, including social media, WhatsApp groups, and email networks, to reach a diverse range of individuals.

A minimum sample size of 200 participants was targeted to ensure adequate data for statistical analysis and meaningful interpretation of results. While convenience sampling allowed for efficient data collection, it may have introduced selection bias, limiting the generalizability of findings.

Inclusion criteria

- Age: Participants must be between the age group of 20 to 35.
- Nationality: Participants must be Indian nationals.
- Language: Participants must be able to read and understand the survey language

which is English

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-Indian Nationals: Participants who are not Indian nationals will be excluded.

- **Medical or Psychological Conditions:** Participants with severe mental health disorders or physical disabilities that may interfere with completing the survey will be excluded.
- **Language Barrier:** Participants who cannot understand the language of the survey which is English will be excluded.

Measures

1) **The Anxiety Sensitivity Index-3 (Taylor et al. (2007))** is an 18-item self-report measure used to assess anxiety sensitivity or the fear of anxiety-related sensations based on beliefs about their harmful consequences. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("very little") to 4 ("very much"). The ASI-3 has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including high internal consistency and construct validity, and it comprises three subscales: physical, cognitive, and social concerns. The total scale and subscales of the ASI3 showed excellent or good indices of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .81 – .91), and adequate indices of test-retest reliability at two months.

2) **The Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (Jelenchick et al. 2014)**, is an 18-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess problematic and risky Internet use among adolescents and young adults. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("never") to 4 ("always"). The scale evaluates three subscales: social impairment, emotional impairment, and risky/impulsive internet use. It has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.86 to 0.93, indicating excellent internal consistency. The PRIUSS is a reliable and valid tool for identifying individuals at risk of internet use disorders, making it valuable for both research and clinical applications.

Table 1*Reliability of variables*

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Anxiety sensitivity	0.767
Problematic social media use	0.916

Cronbach Alpha reliability was conducted to check the reliability of the variables anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use and the value was found to be 0.767 and 0.916 respectively.

Procedure

A structured online questionnaire will be developed, including standardized scales to measure anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use, along with demographic details such as age and gender. Participants will first be provided with an informed consent form explaining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Only those who provide consent will proceed with the questionnaire. Data collection will be conducted through Google Forms, with the questionnaire distributed via online platforms such as social media, WhatsApp groups, and email. Participants will be instructed to complete the questionnaire at their convenience, with an estimated completion time of approximately 10–15 minutes. A minimum of 200 responses will be collected to ensure sufficient data for analysis.

Ethical Consideration

1. **Informed Consent** Participants were provided with a detailed informed consent form explaining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality.
2. **Voluntary Participation** Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time without consequences.
3. **Confidentiality and Anonymity** All data were kept confidential, and no personally identifiable information was recorded to ensure privacy.
4. **No Harm or Discomfort** The study was designed to minimize harm, using non-invasive questionnaires focused on psychological and behavioral aspects.
5. **Ethical Approval** The study adhered to ethical guidelines and received approval from the relevant institutional review board or ethics committee.
6. **Transparency** Participants were informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential outcomes before participation.
7. **Data Security** Data were stored securely, with access limited to authorized researchers to prevent unauthorized use or breaches.
8. **Respect for Participants** The study respected participants' rights, dignity, and cultural values throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using Jamovi, an open-source statistical software. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution were used to summarize demographic details and key variables. To examine the relationship between anxiety

sensitivity and problematic social media use, spearman's correlation analysis was conducted. All statistical tests were conducted at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) to ensure significance.

Table 2

Summary of normality test conducted on the variables anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use

Variables	Shapiro-Wilk	P-value
Anxiety sensitivity	0.973	<0.001
Problematic social media use	0.958	<0.001

Since the p-values are < 0.05 , the data is not normally distributed, meaning non-parametric tests Mann-Whitney U test was used.

Chapter IV

Result and Discussion

Result

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis that were utilized to define the sample and answer the research questions, as well as the associated hypotheses.

Table 3

Mean and standard deviation of all the variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Anxiety sensitivity	33.6	13.6
Problematic social media use	31.2	13.3

Table 4 indicates that the mean of the variables; anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use are 33.6 and 31.2. The standard deviation of the variables; anxiety and insomnia are 13.6 and 13.3 respectively.

The first hypothesis suggests that there is a significant relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use.

Table 4

Spearman's correlation between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use.

Spearman's rho	Variable	Problematic social media use
	Correlation coefficient	
Anxiety sensitivity	0.592**	<0.001

To check the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use. Spearman's Rank Correlation was conducted. The correlation coefficient between anxiety and insomnia was found to be 0.592 ($p > 0.01$), significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 5

Gender differences in the variables

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	U	p
Anxiety sensitivity	Male	96	33.3	4381	0.088
	Female	106	29.4		
Problematic social media use	Male	96	33.6	4758	0.426
	Female	106	32.4		

Table 6 indicates that there is no significant gender difference across anxiety sensitivity ($p = .088$) and problematic social media use ($p = .426$).

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to explore the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use in adults, particularly focusing on how individuals who are more sensitive to anxiety symptoms may develop excessive or maladaptive social media habits. Additionally, the study examined whether gender differences played a role in this relationship.

The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use, suggesting that individuals with heightened sensitivity to anxiety symptoms are more likely to engage in excessive or maladaptive social media behaviors. However, no significant gender differences were observed, indicating that the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use appears to be consistent across genders.

These results support the idea that anxiety sensitivity—defined as the tendency to fear anxiety-related sensations—may be a key factor driving maladaptive social media behaviors. This aligns with previous research, such as a study by John et al. (2023), which found that individuals with elevated anxiety levels tend to engage in compulsive behaviors, including excessive internet use, as a means of coping. Similarly, Elhai et al. (2017) investigated the link between anxiety sensitivity and problematic smartphone use, highlighting the mediating roles of mindfulness and repetitive negative thinking. Their findings indicated that individuals with high anxiety sensitivity were more likely to use their smartphones excessively as a maladaptive coping strategy for managing anxiety symptoms, which parallels the present study's findings on social media use. Another relevant study by Lee and Stapinski (2012) examined the role of anxiety sensitivity in digital engagement and found that individuals with heightened anxiety

sensitivity were more prone to problematic online behaviors, reinforcing the connection between anxiety and digital dependence.

Another key finding of this study was that individuals with high anxiety sensitivity were more likely to use social media as a means of emotional escape or avoidance, suggesting that problematic social media use may function as a maladaptive coping strategy for anxiety-related distress. This is consistent with research by Holman et al. (2020), which found that individuals with heightened anxiety sensitivity tend to engage in digital escapism, using online platforms to temporarily avoid negative emotions and stressors.

The practical significance of these findings lies in their potential application to interventions aimed at reducing problematic social media use, particularly among individuals with high anxiety sensitivity. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques targeting anxiety sensitivity could be adapted to help individuals develop healthier digital habits. Additionally, educational programs could raise awareness about the risks of excessive social media use and encourage more balanced online engagement.

Future research should investigate the specific mechanisms linking anxiety sensitivity to problematic social media use, such as the role of coping strategies or emotional regulation. Longitudinal studies would also provide insights into how these relationships evolve over time. Furthermore, expanding the sample to include individuals from diverse cultural and age groups could enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Key Findings

- There is a significant positive correlation was found between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use.
- No significant gender differences were observed in anxiety sensitivity ($p = 0.088$) or problematic social media suggesting that these relationships are consistent across males and females.

Implications

- The findings highlight the need for interventions targeting individuals with high anxiety sensitivity to reduce problematic social media use. Cognitive-behavioral therapy or mindfulness-based interventions could be adapted to address maladaptive social media behaviors.
- The study supports the idea that anxiety sensitivity is a significant predictor of problematic digital behaviors, contributing to the growing body of research on the psychological factors influencing social media use.
- Educational programs and public health campaigns could be developed to raise awareness about the risks of excessive social media use, particularly for individuals with high anxiety sensitivity.

Limitations

- The study used a convenience sampling method, which may limit the generalizability of the findings due to potential selection bias.

- The sample was restricted to Indian citizens aged 20–35, which may not represent the broader population or other cultural contexts.
- The cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use.
- The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as participants may underreport or overreport their behaviors.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Conduct longitudinal studies to explore the causal relationships between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use over time.
- Expand the sample to include diverse age groups, cultural backgrounds, and nationalities to improve the generalizability of the findings.
- Investigate the underlying mechanisms linking anxiety sensitivity to problematic social media use, such as coping strategies, emotional regulation, or social support.
- Explore the role of other psychological factors, such as depression or self-esteem, in influencing problematic social media behaviors.
- Use mixed-methods approaches (e.g., combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews) to gain deeper insights into the experiences of individuals with high anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use.

Conclusion

This study found a significant relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use, with no notable gender differences. The findings contribute to the understanding of how anxiety sensitivity may drive maladaptive digital behaviors and highlight

the need for targeted interventions to promote healthier social media habits. While the study has limitations, such as its reliance on convenience sampling and self-reported data, it provides a foundation for future research to explore the complex interplay between psychological factors and digital behaviors. By addressing these limitations and building on the current findings, future studies can further advance our understanding of problematic social media use and its implications for mental health.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant information and consent form

Hello, I am sreelakshmi raju , final year B.Sc. Psychology students from St. Teresa's College. As part of my final year research, I'm conducting a study on the topic “relationship between anxiety sensitivity and problematic social media use”, under the guidance of Assistant Professor Sabu. I would truly appreciate it if you take some time out to fill out the questionnaires. All information collected will be kept confidential and will solely be used for academic purposes. The questionnaire will only take 5 to 7 minutes to complete, please provide sincere answers. You can withdraw from the study at any time if you wish to.

Appendix B

Socio-demographic data sheet

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Appendix C

Anxiety Sensitivity Index -3

Please rate each item by selecting one of the five answers for each question. Please answer each statement by circling the number that best applies to you.

1. very little
2. a little
3. some
4. much very much

1. It is important not to appear nervous.
2. When I cannot keep my mind on a task, I worry that I might be going crazy.
3. It scares me when I feel shaky.
4. It scares me when I feel faint.
5. It is important to me to stay in control of my emotions.
6. It scares me when my heart beats rapidly.
7. It embarrasses me when my stomach growls.
8. It scares me when I am nauseous (sick stomach)
9. When I notice my heart beating rapidly, I worry that I might be having a heart attack.
10. It scares me when I become short of breath
11. When my stomach is upset, I worry that I might be seriously ill.
12. It scares me when I am unable to keep my mind on a task
13. Other people notice when I feel shaky.
14. Unusual body sensations scare me.

15. When I am nervous, I worry that I might be mentally ill.

16. It scares me when I am nervous

Appendix D

Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS)

Please answer the questions below based on how you have felt and conducted yourself regarding your Internet use over the past 6 months. Please do your best to interpret these questions as they apply to your own experiences and feelings.

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Very Often

1. do you choose to socialize online instead of in person?
2. do you have problems with face-to-face communication due to your internet use?
3. do you experience increased social anxiety due to your internet use?
4. do you fail to create real-life relationships because of the internet?
5. do you skip out on social events to spend time online?
6. do your offline relationships suffer due to your internet use?
7. do you feel irritated when you're not able to use the internet?
8. do you feel angry because you are away from the internet?
9. do you feel anxious because you are away from the internet?
10. do you feel vulnerable when the internet isn't available?
11. do you experience feelings of withdrawal from not using the internet?

12. do you put internet use in front of important, everyday activities?
13. do you avoid other activities in order to stay online?
14. do you neglect your responsibilities because of the internet?
15. Do you lose motivation to do other things that need to be done because of the internet?
16. do you lose sleep due to nighttime internet use?
17. does time on the internet negatively affect your school performance?
18. do you feel you use the internet excessively?