

**“A QUANTITATIVE STUDY TO ASSESS THE ASSOCIATION
BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND ANOREXIA NERVOSA
AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS”**

PROGRAM

(BS-PUBLIC HEALTH)



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2025



**Bahria University
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Dated: 24-11-25

Thesis Approval Form

The topic of Research " A Quantitative study to asses the association between anorexia nervosa and social media among university students "

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I am thankful to ALLAH Almighty for giving me the strength and knowledge to be able to conduct and complete this research. Secondly, I am grateful to my Supervisor, Dr. Asia Ashfaq, for her immense support and guidance throughout the research process. Her experience and insightful feedback helped me in writing the research and increased my knowledge of conducting research. I am thankful to the participants of this study, whose willingness to contribute to this research has made it possible to gain meaningful insights into the association between anorexia nervosa and social media among university students. I am also grateful to my family for always supporting and motivating me in conducting this research. Lastly, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my friends, whose help and immense support allowed me to complete this research. Without the help and support of the above-mentioned people, this research would not be possible.

ABSTRACT

Anorexia nervosa (AN) is an extreme and potentially fatal eating disorder with extreme fear of weight gain, distorted body image, and a restrictive eating pattern. Social media platforms have fundamentally changed how individuals, especially young adults, view their body image while carrying out self-comparisons. Although there are various studies on this, but on the western population, there is still limited research on the topic of anorexia nervosa in non-western populations that lack overwhelming gaps in the knowledge of its determinants. This research aims to investigate the association between social media platforms and anorexia nervosa development within Pakistani young adults. This research explores the relationship between content exposure on Instagram and TikTok, and Snapchat, and its effects on eating behaviours, combined with body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. This study has 2 objectives: To assess the usage of social media on the prevalence of anorexia nervosa among young adults and to determine the extent of social media contributes to the risks of developing anorexia nervosa. A quantitative cross-sectional approach was adopted for this study, having 134 participants between the ages of 18 and 25 years who were recruited from different universities in Islamabad. The validated questionnaires, such as EAT and SMAS, were used to collect data. Descriptive and correlational analysis was done. Results indicated that 85.1% of participants were at risk for anorexia nervosa, and 47.8% fell within high levels of social media addiction. Chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant association between social media addiction categories and anorexia risk ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that higher levels of social media addiction correspond to greater anorexia-related attitudes. These findings indicate that social media addiction is a meaningful predictor of anorexia nervosa risk among young adults, emphasizing the need for preventive strategies such as digital literacy training, responsible content regulation, and campus-based mental health interventions. The study contributes to the growing body of literature linking excessive social media use to eating disorders in developing countries. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and explore mediators such as self-esteem and body dissatisfaction.

Keywords: *Social media, Anorexia Nervosa, Young Adults, Eating Disorder, Social Media Platforms, University Students*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	4
CHAPTER ONE	8
INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Background of the Study	10
1.2 Problem Statement.....	12
1.3 Research Gap	13
1.4 Research Objectives.....	14
1.5 Hypothesis	14
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	14
CHAPTER TWO	16
LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2.1 The Relationship Between Social Media and the Risk of Developing Anorexia Nervosa	16
2.2 The Influence of Social Media on Body Image Issues	17
2.3 The Effects of Social Media Trends on Eating Habits.....	17
2.4 The Specific Factors Influencing Pakistani Youth.....	18
2.5 The Psychological Mechanisms Linking Social Media and Eating Disorders.....	19
2.6 Conceptual Framework.....	21
CHAPTER THREE	22
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	22
3.1 Research Design	22
3.2 Study Population.....	22
3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	22
3.4 Sample Size and Technique	23
3.5 Research Instrument	23

3.6 Operational Definitions	24
3.7 Data Collection and Analysis.....	25
3.8 Ethical Considerations	26
CHAPTER FOUR	27
DATA ANALYSIS/RESULTS	27
4.1 Univariate Analysis.....	27
4.2 Correlational Analysis	38
CHAPTER FIVE	39
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION	39
5.1 Discussion.....	39
5.2 Conclusion	40
REFERENCES	41
APPENDIX.....	45

LIST OF TABLES

S. No.	Description	Page No.
Table 1	Descriptive Analysis of Demographics (n=134)	26
Table 2	Descriptive Analysis of EAT (n=134)	29
Table 3	Descriptive Analysis of SMAS (n=134)	33
Table 4	Chi-Square Test between social media & Anorexia Nervosa	37

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Anorexia nervosa is one of the deadliest mental disorders in which people severely restrict their meal intake due to a severe fear of gaining weight. Although extreme dieting has existed for centuries, anorexia was officially recognized as a medical condition in the late 19th century (Mingoia et al., 2024). Through the years, changes in beauty standards, particularly the obsession with thinness, have contributed to the rise of issues faced globally. While this difficulty has been extensively studied in Western international locations, growing countries like Pakistan are also facing body image and other health-related issues due to unhealthy eating patterns (Perkins et al., 2024).

Nowadays, social media has a massive influence on the definition of beauty. Social media platforms, such as Tumblr and Twitter, played a crucial role in the promotion of the idea of anorexia nervosa, particularly at the beginning of the 2000s (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Tumblr, the site that was known as the home of the so-called pro-ana (pro-anorexia), in which users posted tips, personal stories, and photos that promoted unhealthy eating habits and extreme thinness as the ideal body shape. Communities regularly shared such hashtags as #thinspo (thin inspiration) or ana (anorexic) to encourage restrictive eating, purging, disrupted eating, and weight loss (Rodgers et al., 2020).

Likewise, Twitter was also the place where the pro-ana content thrived, as users who identify themselves using certain hashtags to become a part of the community in which they can exchange their experiences and motivations toward anorexia (Holland and Tiggemann, 2016). These space and time anonymities gave people struggling with body image a sense of connection, yet reinforced harmful ideologies, such as food, weight, and self-esteem (Rodgers et al., 2020).

Tumblr and Twitter were also criticized as permitting harmful content to thrive and failing to adequately moderate these communities, which had adverse effects on the mental health of these audiences, particularly teenagers (Hussain et al., 2023). Currently, Social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, which were initially based on communication and entertainment, have now turned into platforms where unrealistic standards of body are constantly advertised (Mingoia et al., 2024). The emergence of edited images, extreme health struggles, and trends of weight reduction plans affects the perceptions of people with regard to the bodies they have (Rodgers et al., 2020). Research indicates that too much information about these items may cause body dissatisfaction and poor eating habits, particularly in teenagers (Mingoia et al., 2024). Numerous people socialize in harsh weight loss programs or miss meals to achieve the so-called perfect body that is being marketed in these media (Perkins et al., 2024).

On a global level, researchers have found a connection between disordered eating behaviours and the use of social media (Holland and Tiggemann, 2016). According to Western Countries' research, the chances of developing anorexia nervosa are significantly high with prolonged exposure to media content that propagates unrealistic body ideals. It has been identified that the phenomenon of thinspiration content that glorifies excessive health and dieting leads to unhealthy behaviours, which are comprised of restrictive eating behaviours and compulsive exercising (Rodgers et al., 2020). Furthermore, research points to the fact that the most vulnerable ones are those adolescents, primarily girls, who are more likely to identify themselves with influencers and celebrities who demonstrate unattainable body images (Hussain et al., 2023).

Eating disorders are not discussed as they should be in the developing country, such as Pakistan, and where mental health awareness is also low (Aslam et al., 2024). Nevertheless, it is also because of the widespread use of social media that younger generations are now exposed to an

unrealistic idea of beauty (Iqbal and Ahmed, 2024). The pressurizing system of the westernized beauty ideology and the ignorance regarding eating disorders present an alarming scenario whereby most of the cases remain undiagnosed and untreated. The studies conducted in South Asia indicate that social media can significantly influence self-perception, and adolescents who discuss the content that supports thinness and weight loss are highly dissatisfied with their bodies (Hussain et al., 2023). Pakistan does not have any organised programs to deal with this rising problem, unlike Western countries, where there are eating disorder rehabilitation centres and awareness campaigns (Iqbal and Ahmed, 2024).

The problem should be taken seriously in an effort to establish the correlation between the use of social media and the onset of anorexia nervosa amongst adolescents in Pakistan (Aslam et al., 2024). Through the examination of the influence of social media patterns, healthy lifestyles, and problems with body transformation, the study will focus on the issue of whether exposure to digital technologies promotes disordered eating patterns within the Pakistani setting (Hussain et al., 2023). In addition, it is also going to emphasize the necessity of awareness and preventive measures to reduce the adverse impact of social media on body image and mental health (Aslam et al., 2024).

The study addresses this issue, thus contributing to a better understanding of the role played by social media in the eating behaviors of developing countries. Considering the increasing rate of social media use in Pakistan, it becomes imperative to examine the possible influence of this innovation on mental health and body image issues. Creating Awareness and the development of preventive strategies may contribute to a healthier attitude of young people towards their bodies and the use of social media.

1.1 Background of the Study

Anorexia nervosa, which is also known as the eating disorder, originates from body image problems that severely impact the mental and physical wellness of young adult patients (Allison

et al., 2014). The disease comes in the form of self-starvation, which contributes to excessive weight loss and irrational beliefs regarding the body (Perkins et al., 2024). Anorexia nervosa often manifests itself in young adulthood or the early years of adulthood, so such groups of patients are especially vulnerable (Allison et al., 2014). The rising use of social media in the past ten years has shown people ideal body images and fitness culture, and this has created a distorted perception of physical appearance (Dane and Bhatia, 2023). Social media networks used in networking are becoming more and more a platform where impossible beauty standards and fitness practices are promoted that are harmful to mental health status (Suhag & Rauniyar, 2024).

Social media has become a part of contemporary life, and it has influenced communication, self-perception, and interaction, especially among young adults. Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat platforms focus on visual content, and it is here that users often are exposed to idealized beauty, fitness, and life images. Such depictions tend to establish unrealistic expectations that affect body image and self-esteem (Perloff, 2014). The continuous comparison with these idealized images may lead to dissatisfaction with the body and maladaptive behaviors that are directed at attaining an ideal body image (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

Anorexia nervosa, a severe eating disorder in which a patient experiences a severe restriction in their food intake, a tremendous fear of weight gain, and a distorted body image (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). There is an argument that the more active the social media users (teenagers, young adults) are, the higher the probability that the individual has disordered eating (Holland and Tiggemann, 2017). The likes, comments, and the following functions of social media represent a cycle of attraction that advances the ideals of thinness and appearance-related verification (Fardouly et al., 2015). This puts the youths, especially females, in danger of

psychological disorders and the onset of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa (Sidani et al., 2016).

Although this issue is known worldwide, most of the research has been conducted in Western countries, whereas there are significant differences between the cultural understanding of beauty and media exposure compared to developing nations. There are very less quantitative studies that investigate the relationship between the use of social media and anorexia nervosa in non-Western contexts, and body image ideals are being transformed by modernization, globalization, and higher access to digital resources (Moussa et al., 2021). Moreover, although past studies have examined general disordered eating patterns, it is also important to determine how certain elements of social media, including hours spent online and exposure to appearance-related media, contribute to the development and vulnerability of anorexia nervosa among young adults.

This research aims to fill this gap by quantitatively assessing the impact of the use of social media on the prevalence and susceptibility of anorexia nervosa in young adults. This association is important in understanding how to design specific interventions, awareness, and digital literacy programs that will facilitate healthy media use and body image in the digital era.

1.2 Problem Statement

Anorexia nervosa is becoming a significant concern amongst young adults and is usually caused by dissatisfaction with the body as well as unhealthy food habits. The unrealistic beauty standards have become very popular through social media and have worsened the perception of young people towards their bodies. Although there is an extensive literature that examines the role of social media in eating disorders, most of these studies are based on the Western context. In Pakistan, mental health is stigmatized, and thus, there is little research into exploring

these issues, as there is a lack of awareness, and therefore, eating disorders are not given much thought or are not addressed. The purpose of the study is to understand the role of social media in the development of anorexia nervosa among young adults in Pakistan. It integrates several elements of body image and disordered eating behaviors and sets an essential research gap that utilizes the data relevant to Pakistani youth.

1.3 Research Gap

Social media has evolved over the past few years into a platform for communication, selfexpression, and a tool for comparing body image among young adults. Various studies have discussed the overall impact of social media on body dissatisfaction and disordered eating patterns. Still, not many studies have examined the direct relationship between social media and the presence of clinically significant disorders like anorexia nervosa. Most of the current literature is based on the developed nations and does not consider the contextual differences in cultural ideals, exposure to media, and ideals of beauty that may affect the expression of anorexia in non-Western or developing nations.

In addition, most of the previous studies have been based on either qualitative or correlational data, and it has not quantitatively determined the extent to which exposure to social media has been a risk factor in the development of anorexia nervosa. A limited number of studies have comprehensively evaluated the relationship between individual patterns of social media use (including the duration of time spent on the internet, exposure to appearance-related material, exposure to idealized body images, etc.) and the extent of anorexia symptoms in young adults. Thus, even though there is a research gap in discovering the quantitative relationship between social media use and anorexia nervosa, especially in young adults in the new digital societies. This study seeks to fill this gap by evaluating the use of social media relative to the occurrence of anorexia nervosa and finding out to what extent social media has contributed to the threat of developing anorexia in this group of people. The study will fill this gap and provide evidence

to design preventive interventions, digital media controls, and mental health awareness efforts for young adults.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To assess the usage of social media on the prevalence of anorexia nervosa among young adults.
2. To determine the extent of social media contributes to the risks of developing anorexia nervosa.

1.5 Hypothesis

Null hypothesis: H₀

There is no association between social media and anorexia nervosa among university students.

Alternate hypothesis: H_a

There is a strong association between social media and anorexia nervosa among university students.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Social media has become a major aspect of life, particularly for the younger generation. It has a powerful influence in influencing public matters such as beauty standards, self-esteem, and health behaviour. Over the past few years, the growing concern regarding body dissatisfaction among the youth and disordered eating patterns has created the necessity to comprehend how digital platforms might be exacerbating the issue. The reason why the study is relevant is that it targets the youth who might be secretly struggling with eating disorders like anorexia nervosa. In Pakistan, the level of awareness regarding such disorders is low, and people do not get the needed support and attention. Through the discussion of the effects of social media on

body image and eating behaviors within this context, the research should help to provide a voice to those who are already affected and emphasize the necessity of paying attention to this increasing problem. The results of the study will not only be useful to individuals and families but also to health professionals and educators, as well as health policy makers. It can establish awareness campaigns, prevention strategies, and support in the development of policies aimed at improving the mental health of young people and creating healthier online spaces.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

A substantial growth has occurred in studies about social media effects on eating disorders, along with body image concerns, in recent years. Multiple studies demonstrate that social media use leads to significant harm to the mental health of young adult users. This literature review includes five essential themes that focus on social media effects on body image problems and anorexia nervosa risk factors, eating habits, and common risk factors among youth in Pakistan.

2.1 The Relationship Between Social Media and the Risk of Developing Anorexia Nervosa

Various studies have investigated whether using social media directly leads people to develop anorexia nervosa, which involves extreme eating limitations alongside deep weight concerns.

Perkins et al. (2024) claim that "thinspiration" content, which spreads across Tumblr and Twitter platforms, led to an increase in eating disorders, particularly among adolescent females. Pro-eating disorder communities thrive on these platforms to normalise extreme dieting behaviours and weight loss practices (Ramírez-Cifuentes et al., 2021). According to Fitzsimmons-Craft et al. (2020), young adults who consume pro-eating disorder content through social media tend to develop eating disorders along with concurrent psychopathological conditions that include depression and anxiety.

The study by Allison et al. (2014) provided additional evidence for how social media promotes eating disorder transmission among users. People exposed to weight-loss behaviours promoted by their peers or social media influencers will tend to develop these behaviours, leading to anorexia nervosa symptoms. Social media users find support for restrictive eating through popular hashtags including #ana and #thinspo that normalise these practices and weight preoccupation (Hussain et al., 2023).

2.2 The Influence of Social Media on Body Image Issues

The impact of social media platforms remains significant in forming how people perceive their bodies among young people and adolescents. The research consensus demonstrates that social media contact negatively affects how people evaluate their bodies. Holland and Tiggemann (2016) performed a systematic review that revealed that social media platforms, particularly Instagram and Facebook, produce unattainable visual beauty standards. Exposure to social media standards leads to body dissatisfaction and subsequently increases the risk of developing disordered eating behaviours (Mingoia et al., 2024).

Social media is critical in worsening body image concerns among female users because they typically perform more social comparisons (Sidani et al., 2016). People viewing endless images featuring slim or toned bodies develop negative self-image and start accepting the cultural preference for thinness (Dane & Bhatia, 2023). Young people face challenges in differentiating between actual appearances and modified images thanks to Instagram filters and editing tools, which alter reality according to Rodgers et al. (2020). Research by Iqbal and Ahmed (2024) demonstrates that social media portrays unattainable body types to the extent that body image dissatisfaction now affects South Asian young adults significantly.

2.3 The Effects of Social Media Trends on Eating Habits

The development of fitness and weight loss issues, and the fads of diets, has gained momentum over the last few years on social media platforms. These trends may seem harmless to the observer, but they have detrimental effects on eating habits, particularly to the people who are at risk. Fitness culture that has diffused via Instagram has been linked to the increased prevalence of poor dietary practices, including over-training and over-dieting, because young individuals are chasing unrealistic fitness ideals (Sidani et al. 2016). These trends are common and, as a result, make people adopt a restrictive approach to food, thus resulting in additional instances of eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa (Turner & Lefevre, 2017).

Studies have indicated that there are adverse mental health effects due to online advertisement of unsafe weight loss information using rapid dieting programs. As Mallik and Rathore (2025) reveal that young people having diet influencers through subscriptions to YouTube and Instagram platforms lead young adults to engage in disordered eating behaviors, such as missing meals and employing unsafe weight-reduction methods. When they accept some of the trends in society, they become societal norms, reinforcing the chase after unrealistic beauty standards (Dane and Bhatia, 2023).

An investigation by Ramírez-Cifuentes et al. (2021) showed that social media users, influencers, and online communities frequently supported weight loss trends that demanded extreme body weight reductions. Unhealthy weight loss methods promoted through these trends cause severe health problems for both the mind and body of individuals.

2.4 The Specific Factors Influencing Pakistani Youth

Current research about social media effects on eating patterns and body image concerns predominantly assesses Western societies, but we lack sufficient understanding about Pakistani and other non-Western cultures. Research shows that social media provides comparable influence over the eating behaviours of Pakistani youth across different populations. The authors of Iqbal and Ahmed (2024) establish that social media is important in developing South Asian body concerns because young people encounter Western beauty ideals that demand thinness and perfection. The adoption of Western beauty standards among Pakistani youth results in increasing physical self-dissatisfaction, especially among young women, because they feel forced to comply with these standards, which contradict their cultural heritage.

The body image consequences of social media usage in Pakistan become urgent because the country lacks mental health education, combined with minimal open dialogue about eating disorders (Hussain et al., 2023). Social media body image problems force young Pakistani

adults to lack vital resources and support networks to deal with their issues. Young people in Pakistan become more susceptible to accepting online-promoted unhealthy beauty standards due to their rising usage of social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Suhag & Rauniyar, 2024). The insufficient psychological support services in Pakistan exacerbate eating disorders, so research must investigate the specific reasons behind this pattern of mental illness.

Different global communities face mental health degradation due to being exposed to fake beauty ideals and exercise fads on social networking sites. The chance of falling into anorexia nervosa remains to increase, and the level of body discontent grows through the abundance of pro-eating disorder posts on social media, such as Tumblr and Instagram, and YouTube. The information presented in this literature review indicates that further studies are required regarding the effects of social media on eating behaviours in non-Western countries like Pakistan, as there is a lack of knowledge on the topic. The results of this review indicate the role of social media in causing eating disorders in different cultural contexts, and this necessitates the prevention of such conditions using awareness and protective mechanisms.

2.5 The Psychological Mechanisms Linking Social Media and Eating Disorders

Social media not only affects physical behaviors, but also the psychological processes that cause eating disorders. Several theoretical models explain the impact of constant exposure to idealized images and comparisons with peers that result in disordered eating.

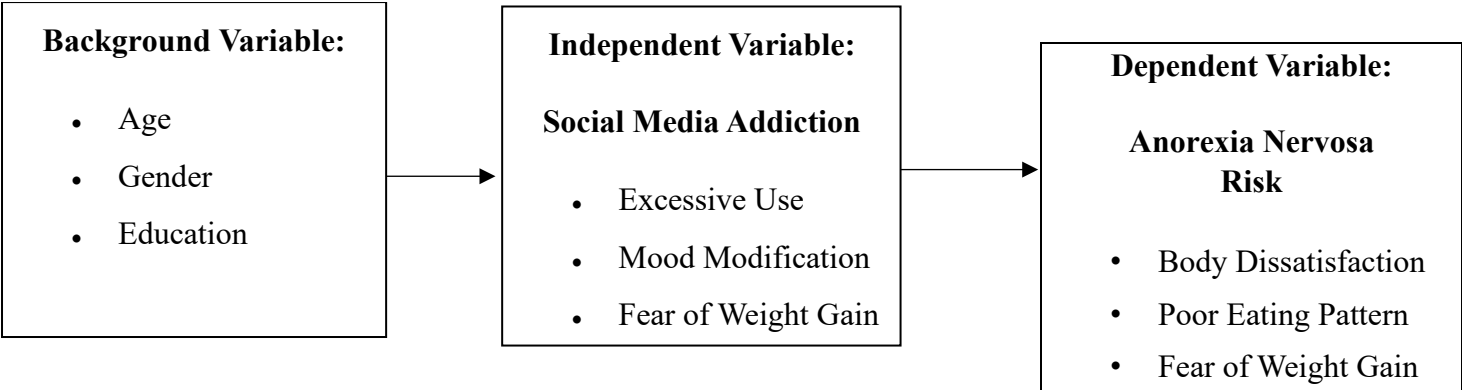
The Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) explains that through comparison with others, people form an evaluation about themselves. On visual media, such as Instagram, which is high in ideals of body image, users often engage in upward social comparison and experience reduced self-esteem and body satisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2015). Such comparisons have the potential of enhancing dissatisfaction with body, which results in restrictive eating habits typical of anorexia nervosa (Perloff, 2014).

On the same note, the Objectification Theory also holds that constant exposure to appearance-oriented materials leads people, especially women, to internalize the observer's view of their bodies (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). This assimilation will result in chronic body surveillance and shame, which can be empirically associated with disordered eating behaviors (Holland and Tiggemann, 2017).

Besides, cognitive-behavioral models emphasize that the maladaptive beliefs about weight/shape are strengthened via the mechanisms of social media validation, including likes, comments, and followers (Rodgers et al., 2020). Once they perceive social approval as the equivalent of thinness or attractiveness, people acquire distorted images of self-esteem, and they become even more vulnerable to anorexia nervosa (Imperator et al., 2022).

Thus, psychological processes that can explain the impact of social media are multidimensional, the ones that integrating social comparison, body surveillance, selfobjectification, and reward-seeking processes. The knowledge of these processes will allow for comprehending the reasons why young adults are highly susceptible to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating in the digital age.

2.6 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework describes that this study is based on the understanding that social media addiction influences young adults’ risk for anorexia nervosa through psychological mechanisms such as social comparison, internalization of thin-ideal standards, and exposure to body-centric media. Social media addiction is conceptualized as the independent variable, measured using the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS). Higher levels of addiction reflect increased preoccupation with online platforms, compulsive checking, and dependency-like behaviors. Anorexia nervosa risk is the dependent variable, measured using the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26). Higher scores indicate disordered eating attitudes, extreme dieting, fear of weight gain, and body dissatisfaction.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates how social media influences anorexia nervosa among young Pakistani adults using a quantitative approach. The study determined the impact of social media on body image perception and assessed the risks that students face in the development of unhealthy eating habits.

3.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design serves the purpose of research to collect data from a single point in time. The established research design enables researchers to determine the present conditions of social media usage, body dissatisfaction, and eating behaviours within young adult populations. This research requires a survey design to analyse the population through quantitative methods while avoiding continuous tracking.

The comparison of different groups within the sample becomes simpler through this approach between heavy social media users and those who avoid this platform. The study captured a current view of the relationship between social media consumption and the target population's body image and eating habits.

3.2 Study Population

University students within the age range of 18 to 25 represent the target demographic because they exhibit high susceptibility to social media effects and body image issues. The research investigates university students in Pakistan because this group demonstrates high social media usage on platforms including Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat Facebook.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- University students aged 18–25 years, as this group exhibits the highest social media engagement and vulnerability to body image concerns.
- Individuals currently enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs at recognized universities in Pakistan.

- Only students who willingly provided consent to participate after reading the informed consent form were included.

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals with a previously diagnosed psychiatric disorder (such as depression, anxiety, or eating disorders) to avoid bias in self-reported responses.
- Students who do not use any social media platform or have deactivated accounts for more than 6 months.
- Any questionnaire with missing or inconsistent data was excluded from the final analysis.
- The respondents younger than 18 or older than 25 years old were excluded.

3.4 Sample Size and Technique

OpenEPI was used to calculate the sample size of the study, as the prevalence of anorexia nervosa in young adults in a Pakistani university was estimated at 10%, the confidence level was set to 95% and the margin of error was estimated to be 5%. The calculated sample size was 139 participants. Additionally, a study on the prevalence of eating disorders among university students in Islamabad found that 22.75% of students were at high risk for eating disorders, with 87.9% of these individuals being female. These findings will help contextualize the data and provide a more localized understanding of the prevalence of eating disorders among university students.

To achieve representative sampling, the research employed a stratified random technique to select participants from different academic programs and geographic areas throughout Pakistan. The chosen sampling technique guarantees the selection of students who live in either urban or rural locations. A sufficient number of 300-400 participants were recruited to produce dependable statistical outputs through this study.

3.5 Research Instrument

The questionnaire that was used in this study is split into three major sections:

1. Demographic Information: This part included simple information about the participant, like his/her age, and gender. These variables assisted in categorizing and analyzing the data of the variables of different groups of the population.

2. Eating Disorder Screening (EAT-26): Screening of Eating disorders with the help of the chosen items of the standardized Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26). A commonly adopted screening instrument in the recognition of symptoms and issues that are typical of eating disorders, especially anorexia nervosa. Only 12 items were selected from this tool according to the objectives of the study to make it more relevant. The subjects are asked to give answers to statements regarding their attitudes, feelings, and behaviors concerning food and body image on a Likert scale.
3. Assessment of Social Media Addiction (SMAS): The patterns of social media use were measured using the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) to determine the frequency of the participants using social media, the level of emotional attachment to social media, and compulsive behaviour. Only 12 items were selected from this tool according to the objectives of the study to make it more relevant. It can be used to determine the degree of engagement and possible levels of addiction in the use of their social media.

3.6 Operational Definitions

Eating Disorder (Anorexia Nervosa)

Anorexia Nervosa is a serious eating disorder, which is characterized by fear of weight gain, body image distortions, and excessive restriction of food intake resulting in body weight significantly below normal and associated health problems (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Anorexia Nervosa was operationalized and measured in this study with the help of the Eating Attitudes Test-26 (EAT-26). It evaluates attitudes, behaviors, and symptoms related to disordered eating patterns in young adults. The EAT-26 is a popular standardized self-report assessment instrument that is used to detect patients who may develop eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa.

The Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) was developed by Garner, Olmsted, Bohr, and Garfinkel (1982). EAT-26 consists of 26 items, but only 12 items are used in this study. Scores are derived through the summation of responses to the 12 items.

The Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) was modified to include 12 items to make it more relevant to anorexia-related attitudes among university students. A 5-point Likert scale (Always = 4 to Never = 0) was used instead of the original 6-point format to enhance participant clarity. Total scores range from 0 to 48 (12 items x 4). A score of 24 or more indicates a high level of concern

about dieting, body weight, or eating behaviours, suggesting risk for an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa.

Interpretation: < **15**: No significant eating disorder symptoms, \geq **24**: At risk for an eating disorder (possibly anorexia nervosa or related pathology).

Social Media Addiction

Social Media Addiction is a behavioural addiction that is characterized by excessive use of social media platforms and neglecting personal, social, or academic duties because of using social media (Andreassen and Pallesen, 2014).

Social Media Addiction was assessed in this study through the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), which is used to measure the level of dependency, preoccupation, and behavioral effects because of the use of social media among young adults.

The Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) was created by Sahin (2018). The SMAS contains 41 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Similarly, the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) was shortened to 12 items, focusing on preoccupation, mood modification, withdrawal, and conflict due to social media use. Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (Always = 5 to Never = 1). Total scores range from 12 to 60, with scores \geq 49 indicating severe social media addiction. Higher scores indicate a higher level of social media addiction.

Interpretation is based on mean scores or total score distribution: 12–24: Low level of social media addiction, 25–36: Mild level of addiction, 37–48: High level of addiction, 49–60: Severe addiction

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected online using Google Forms. The questionnaire was self-administered and designed to ensure confidentiality and ease of access. The validated questionnaires, such as EAT and SMAS, were used to collect data. Data analysis was performed with the help of SPSS statistical software to analyze the collected data and assess the association between the use of social media and the symptoms of anorexia nervosa among young adults. Descriptive and Correlational Analysis were used to assess the usage of social media on the prevalence of anorexia nervosa and to determine the extent of social media contributes to the risks of developing anorexia nervosa.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The ethical guidelines were strictly followed before and during the research, which included informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the respondent's privacy. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights using an informed consent form before the survey began. According to the informed consent form, all the participants were involved in the study voluntarily, and, thus, they are free to drop the study at any point with no penalty. All responses were kept anonymous. The data stored in this study was safely secured and only accessible to the researchers who conducted this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS/RESULTS

The calculated sample size for this study was 139 using the Open Epi calculator. The response rate was 96%. Around 200 participants were approached for this research, but a few of the respondents chose not to take part in the study. However, the final responses that have been collected are 134. The research provides insights into demographic characteristics, eating attitudes, social media addiction, and the relationship between anorexia nervosa and social media among students.

4.1 Univariate Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Demographics (N=134)

Demographic Variables		N	%
Gender	Male	46	34.3%
	Female	88	65.7%
	Total	134	
Age	18 to 20 years	46	34.3%
	21 to 23 years	57	42.5%
	24 to 25 years	31	23.1%
	Total	134	
Level of Education	Undergraduate (Bachelor's)	87	64.9%
	Graduate (Master's)	47	35.1%
	Total	134	

Typical time spent daily on social media (average, all platforms combined)	1–2 hours	14	10.4%
	3–4 hours	42	31.3%
	5–6 hours	31	23.1%
	More than 6 hours	47	35.1%
	Total	134	
The social media platform you use the most	Instagram	55	41.0
	TikTok	18	13.4
	Facebook	19	14.2
	Twitter/X	16	11.9
	Snapchat	7	5.2
	YouTube	19	14.2
	Total	134	
In the past 6 months, have you gone on eating binges where you feel that you may not have been able to stop?	Never	35	26.1%
	Once a day or more	24	17.9%
	Once a week	22	16.4%
	2-6 Times a week	20	14.9%
	Once a month or less	20	14.9%
	2-3 Times a month	13	9.7%
	Total	134	

The majority of the respondents, 65.7% were female. 42.5% were from the age group 21-23 years, a very critical period of development, during which the susceptibility to body dissatisfaction, peer comparison, and social media intervention is the highest. This age

distribution indicates that the sample is a good reflection of the population group that has had the most exposure to disordered eating habits brought about by social media.

On social media exposure, 35.1% spend over 6 hours per day on the internet, which is extremely high and depicts a digital life. This amount of exposure makes one more prone to experience appearance-seeking content, influences that promote thinness, diet culture, and algorithm-driven body comparisons.

The most used platform was Instagram (41.0%), which is significant since Instagram is an image-driven platform; therefore, it is more closely related to eating disorders than text apps. Facebook and YouTube (14.2%) are close competitors; the trends on YouTube frequently market dieting, thinspiration, fitness trends, and harmful comparison periods.

In general, the demographic characteristic indicates that the population is especially susceptible to social media addiction and body image-related psychopathology.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Eating Attitude Test- EAT (N=134)

Statements		N	%
I'm terrified about being overweight.	Always	32	23.9%
	Often	22	16.4%
	Sometimes	18	13.4%
	Rarely	23	17.2%
	Never	39	29.1%
Avoid eating when I am hungry.	Always	14	10.4%
	Often	29	21.6%
	Sometimes	41	30.6%
	Rarely	27	20.1%
	Never	23	17.2%
Have gone on eating binges where I feel that I may not be able to stop.	Always	24	17.9%
	Often	18	13.4%
	Sometimes	26	19.4%
	Rarely	28	20.9%
	Never	38	28.4%
I feel that others pressure me to eat.	Always	19	14.2%
	Often	20	14.9%
	Sometimes	30	22.4%
	Rarely	26	19.4%
	Never	39	29.1%
Enjoy trying new rich foods.	Always	38	28.4%
	Often	26	19.4%

	Sometimes	31	23.1%
	Rarely	22	16.4%
	Never	17	12.7%
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	Always	16	11.9%
	Often	20	14.9%
Engage in dieting behavior.	Sometimes	31	23.1%
	Rarely	32	23.9%
	Never	35	26.1%
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	Always	18	13.4%
	Often	16	11.9%
Feel extremely guilty after eating.	Sometimes	21	15.7%
	Rarely	30	22.4%
	Never	49	36.6%
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	Always	23	17.2%
	Often	18	13.4%
Feel uncomfortable after eating sweets.	Sometimes	25	18.7%
	Rarely	27	20.1%
	Never	41	30.6%
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	Always	26	19.4%
	Often	22	16.4%
I am preoccupied with a desire to be thinner.	Sometimes	21	15.7%
	Rarely	22	16.4%
	Never	43	32.1%
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Give too much time and thought to food.	Always	23	17.2%
	Often	17	12.7%
	Sometimes	26	19.4%
	Rarely	38	28.4%
	Never	30	22.4%
Take longer than others to eat my meals.	Always	24	17.9%
	Often	18	13.4%
	Sometimes	33	24.6%
	Rarely	23	17.2%
	Never	36	26.9%
Feel that food controls my life.	Always	27	20.1%
	Often	18	13.4%
	Sometimes	26	19.4%
	Rarely	26	19.4%
	Never	37	27.6%

Significance of Anorexia Nervosa			N	Percentage %
No significant symptoms	disorder	20		14.9
At risk of developing Anorexia Nervosa		114		85.1
Total		134		100

The Eating Attitude Test (EAT) was used to assess participants' eating attitudes, dieting concerns, preoccupation with body shape, and other behaviors associated with anorexia nervosa. The instrument consisted of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (Always, Often,

Sometimes, Rarely, and Never). The descriptive analysis provides insight into how frequently respondents endorsed anorexia-related thoughts and behaviors.

Results show that 23.9% of participants stated they “always” feel terrified of becoming overweight, while an additional 16.4% responded “often.” This indicates that approximately 40.3% of the respondents experience high levels of weight-related anxiety. Only 29.1% reported “never” having such fears. About 10.4% reported “always” avoiding food even when hungry, while 21.6% reported “often,” and 30.6% said “sometimes.” This suggests that more than 60% demonstrate some level of voluntary restriction of food intake behavior commonly associated with anorexia nervosa and dieting pressures. A total of 17.9% of respondents reported “always” having gone on eating binges where they felt unable to stop, and 13.4% reported the behavior “often.” These results suggest the presence of disinhibited eating behaviors in more than 30% of respondents.

Only 14.2% of respondents indicated “always” feeling pressured by others to eat, and 14.9% indicated “often.” However, the majority fell in the middle category (“sometimes,” 22.4%). The distribution suggests that social pressure around eating exists but is not universal. The data show mixed patterns: 28.4% of participants “always” enjoy eating rich foods, while 19.4% responded “often,” and 22.4% indicated “sometimes.” Only 22.4% stated “never.” Dieting appears to be embedded in respondents’ lifestyles, with 11.9% “always” and 14.9% “often” engaging in dieting. Another 23.1% reported dieting “sometimes.” This means nearly half of the participants consciously follow restrictive diets at least occasionally. Feelings of guilt following eating were also prevalent. While 36.6% “never felt guilty, nearly 48% reported experiencing guilt at least occasionally. Specifically, 13.4% always felt guilty and 11.9% often did. 17.2% of respondents “always” feel uncomfortable after eating sweets, and another 13.4% “often” do. Fifty-nine percent reported some level of discomfort, signaling a strong association between sweet foods and feelings of self-judgment, fear of calorie intake, or dieting conflicts.

19.4% of participants reported “always” being preoccupied with wanting to be thinner. An additional 16.4% reported “often,” and 15.7% responded “sometimes.” About 17.2% indicated that they “always” give too much time and thought to food, and 12.7% responded “often.” This means nearly one-third of respondents experience cognitive over-involvement with eating. Eating slowly was endorsed by a substantial proportion of respondents, with 17.9% “always” taking longer than others to eat, and another 13.4% “often.” About 20.1% of respondents “always” feel that food controls their life, while 13.4% stated “often,” and 19.4% “sometimes.”

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Social Media Addiction Scale- SMAS (N=134)

Statements		N	%
I pretty much think about what's going on social media recently.	Always	28	20.9%
	Often	20	14.9%
	Sometimes	30	22.4%
	Rarely	27	20.1%
	Never	29	21.6%
If there's anything I have to do, first I check social media.	Always	28	20.9%
	Often	33	24.6%
	Sometimes	35	26.1%
	Rarely	14	10.4%
	Never	24	17.9%
When I don't check social media for a while, the thought of checking it occupies my mind.	Always	29	21.6%
	Often	33	24.6%
	Sometimes	23	17.2%
	Rarely	28	20.9%
	Never	21	15.7%
I think that my life would be boring, blank, and tasteless without social media.	Always	31	23.1%
	Often	20	14.9%
	Sometimes	27	20.1%
	Rarely	22	16.4%
	Never	34	25.4%

When I'm not connected to the internet, I intensely think of checking social media	Always	28	20.9%
	Often	20	14.9%
	Sometimes	33	24.6%
	Rarely	27	20.1%
	Never	26	19.4%
Each time I decide to cut my connection with social media, I tell myself, "A few more minutes".	Always	29	21.6%
	Often	32	23.9%
	Sometimes	29	21.6%
	Rarely	23	17.2%
	Never	21	15.7%
There are times when I spend more time on social media than I think.	Always	29	21.6%
	Often	32	23.9%
	Sometimes	32	23.9%
	Rarely	19	14.2%
	Never	22	16.4%
I can't give up using social media for a long while.	Always	27	20.1%
	Often	30	22.4%
	Sometimes	38	28.4%
	Rarely	20	14.9%
	Never	19	14.2%
I use social media in order to forget my personal problems.	Always	37	27.6%
	Often	24	17.9%
	Sometimes	24	17.9%

	Rarely	14	10.4%
	Never	35	26.1%
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There happen to be times that I neglect my friends due to social media.	Always	21	15.7%
	Often	15	11.2%
	Sometimes	37	27.6%
	Rarely	26	19.4%
	Never	35	26.1%
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Alterations/disturbances occur in my sleeping order due to social media use.	Always	27	20.1%
	Often	23	17.2%
	Sometimes	29	21.6%
	Rarely	31	23.1%
	Never	24	17.9%
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My productivity decreases due to social media.	Always	30	22.4%
	Often	33	24.6%
	Sometimes	26	19.4%
	Rarely	17	12.7%
	Never	28	20.9%
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Social Media Addiction Level	N	Percentage %
Low Level	20	14.9
Mild Level	40	29.9
High Level	64	47.8

The descriptive findings of the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) indicate a high level of preoccupation, dependency, and psychological attachment to social media among participants.

The first item showed that 20.9% of respondents always think about what is happening on social media, while 14.9% reported this often, and another 22.4% sometimes. This means that approximately 58% of participants experience frequent cognitive involvement with social media. Similarly, 20.9% of respondents reported that when they have something to do, they always check social media first, with an additional 24.6% doing so often and 26.1% sometimes. Thus, over 70% of the sample indicates a habit of prioritizing social media before attending to other responsibilities. Withdrawal-like symptoms were also evident. When unable to check social media for some time, 21.6% of participants stated that the thought of checking always occupied their mind, and 24.6% reported this often. Another 17.2% experienced similar thoughts sometimes, meaning that nearly two-thirds of the sample (63.4%) face intrusive thoughts related to social media when not using it. Emotional dependency on social media was reflected in participants' feelings about their lives without online access. Approximately 23.1% of respondents believed that their life would be boring, blank, or tasteless without social media always, while another 14.9% endorsed this often. A further 20.1% indicated experiencing this sometimes, meaning that over half of the sample perceives social media as necessary for emotional stimulation. Overall, the Majority (47.8%) are highly addicted to social media as shown in the above table. SMAS results demonstrate that the majority of participants exhibit cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns consistent with problematic or addictive social media use.

4.2 Correlational Analysis

Table 4: Chi-Square between social media and anorexia nervosa

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	39.224 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	31.658	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	28.795	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	134		

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.49.

The chi-square test revealed that there was a significant correlation between the levels of social media addiction and the risk of anorexia nervosa ($p < 0.05$). It implies that those with a high level of addiction were much more susceptible, whereas no addiction was related to any cases of anorexia risk. Therefore, this rejects the null hypothesis, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis Testing

Null hypothesis: H₀	Rejected
Alternate hypothesis: H_a	Accepted

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

This study revealed that 85.1% of the study participants were at risk of being diagnosed with anorexia nervosa according to their EAT-26 scores. This is significantly greater than the nonclinical prevalence rates in the world, which are usually between 4 and 18% (Mitchison et al., 2020). This high rate coincides with the more recent studies that suggest an increase in symptoms of eating disorders amongst adolescents and young adults, especially in groups that are highly active on social media (Holland and Tiggemann, 2017; Fardouly and Holland, 2018).

This prevalence could be explained by the fact that we are exposed to thin-ideal content and diet-related trends more than before due to the common use of social media. The influence of Western beauty ideals and the celebrity culture on body dissatisfaction is becoming more significant in Pakistan and other collectivistic cultures, which are shared mostly via Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat (Rizwan et al., 2021). The existing results validate the hypothesis that the digital environment can increase the pace of imitation of unrealistic body ideals, which contributes to a higher level of susceptibility to eating habits and body image distortion.

The research established that 47.8% of respondents were under high social media addiction. It is consistent with the prior studies indicating that social media addiction is now rampant among university students, and many of them show dependence-like symptoms such as withdrawal, preoccupation, and mood alteration (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017; Andreassen et al., 2016).

The proportion of participants who scored in the moderate-high addiction range indicates a transformation of social behavior where internet presence is a major part of the personal identity, entertainment, and confirmation of social identity. These data are in line with the studies conducted in Pakistan and South Asia that show the same growing trends in digital dependence (Iqbal & Jahan, 2022). The results are consistent with the research that reported that image-based sites produce the strongest correlation with body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms (Saiphoo and Vahedi, 2019). Since Instagram is the most used platform (53.7%), the findings are analogous.

The chi-square test revealed that there was a significant correlation between the levels of social media addiction and the risk of anorexia nervosa ($p < 0.05$). It implies that those with a high

level of addiction were much more susceptible, whereas no addiction was related to any cases of anorexia risk. These results confirm existing research that suggests a correlation between increased exposure to appearance-oriented media and higher internalization of thin ideals, upward social comparison, and body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018).

There are a few limitations of this study: The cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences. Self-report scales could also be affected by social desirability bias. Sampling is restricted to one demographic group (university students), which reduces the generalizability. Psychometric purity is minimized by modified versions of EAT-26 and SMAS.

There are a few recommendations for future research: The use of longitudinal designs to determine causality. Qualitative interviews should be carried out to understand the background mechanisms. More universities or provinces should be added to have a wider range of representation.

5.2 Conclusion

This research established a correlation between social media addiction and the possibility of developing anorexia nervosa in young adults. The degree of social media addiction was highly linked to the increased risk of anorexia, with the scores of addiction being significant predictors of the symptoms of eating disorders. This data demonstrates the necessity of preventive measures, awareness, and interventions in the mental health of social media psychological effects.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to collect data for academic research purposes. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for analysis in this study. Kindly answer all the questions appropriately.

Regards,

Alishba Imran

Section A: Demographic Information

Gender:

•Male

•Female **Age:**

•18 to 20 years

•21 to 23 years

•24 to 25 years

Academic Background:

•Undergraduate (Bachelor's)

•Graduate (Master's)

Typical daily time spent on social media (average, all platforms combined):

•1–2 hours

•3–4 hours

•5–6 hours

•More than 6 hours

The social media platform you use the most:

- Instagram
- TikTok
- Facebook
- Twitter/X
- Snapchat
- YouTube

In the past 6 months, have you gone on eating binges where you feel that you may not have been able to stop?

- Never
- Once a day or more
- Once a week
- 2-6 Times a week
- Once a month or less
- 2-3 Times a month

Section B: Eating Disorder Screening (EAT-26)

Below is a Likert-scale table of 12 selected items from the Eating Disorder Screening Questionnaire.

No.	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I'm terrified about being overweight.					
2	Avoid eating when I am hungry.					
3	Have gone on eating binges where I feel that I may not be able to stop.					
4	Feel extremely guilty after eating.					
5	I am preoccupied with a desire to be thinner.					
6	Take longer than others to eat my meals					
7	Feel that food controls my life.					
8	Give too much time and thought to food					
9	Feel uncomfortable after eating sweets.					
10	Engage in dieting behavior.					
11	Enjoy trying new rich foods.					
12	Feel that others pressure me to eat					

Section C: Assessment of Social Media Addiction (SMAS)

No.	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I pretty much think about what's going on at social media recently.					
2	If there's anything I have to do, first I check social media.					
3	When I don't check social media for a while, the thought of checking it occupies my mind.					
4	I think that my life would be boring, blank and tasteless without social media.					
5	When I'm not connected to the internet, I intensely think of checking social media.					
6	Each time I decide to cut my connection with social media, I tell myself "a few more minutes".					
7	There are times that I spent more time at social media than I think.					
8	I can't give up using social media for a long while.					
9	I use social media in order to forget my personal problems.					
10	There happen to be times that I neglect my friends due to social media.					
11	Alterations/disturbances occur in my sleeping order due to social media use					
12	My productivity decreases due to social media.					

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The percentage shown in the AI writing report is the amount of qualifying text within the submission that Turnitin's AI writing detection model determines was either likely AI-generated text from a large-language model or likely AI-generated text that was likely revised using an AI paraphrase tool or word spinner.

False positives (incorrectly flagging human-written text as AI-generated) are a possibility in AI models.

AI detection scores under 20%, which we do not surface in new reports, have a higher likelihood of false positives. To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, no score or highlights are attributed and are indicated with an asterisk in the report (*%).

The AI writing percentage should not be the sole basis to determine whether misconduct has occurred. The reviewer/instructor should use the percentage as a means to start a formative conversation with their student and/or use it to examine the submitted assignment in accordance with their school's policies.

What does 'qualifying text' mean?

Our model only processes qualifying text in the form of long-form writing. Long-form writing means individual sentences contained in paragraphs that make up a longer piece of written work, such as an essay, a dissertation, or an article, etc. Qualifying text that has been determined to be likely AI-generated will be highlighted in cyan in the submission, and likely AI-generated and then likely AI-paraphrased will be highlighted purple.

Non-qualifying text, such as bullet points, annotated bibliographies, etc., will not be processed and can create disparity between the submission highlights and the percentage shown.

