

Cyber Gossip and Social Media Addiction in College Students: Mediating Roles of Social Anxiety and Experiential Avoidance

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between cyber-gossip and social media addiction among college students, with social anxiety and experiential avoidance as mediating variables. Data were collected from 300 college students (male = 109, female = 191, ages 17-20) using a purposive sampling strategy and four self-report measures assessing cyber gossip, social media addiction, social anxiety, and experiential avoidance. All measures showed acceptable to excellent reliability. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between cyber gossip, social anxiety, and social media addiction. Mediation analysis showed that cyber gossip predicted social media addiction both directly and indirectly through social anxiety and experiential avoidance, with experiential avoidance emerging as the comparatively stronger mediating pathway. These findings clarify the psychological mechanisms linking interpersonal online behavior to compulsive social media use and suggest that interventions targeting anxiety and avoidance may help reduce social media addiction among students.

Keywords: college students, cyber-gossip, experiential avoidance, mediation, social anxiety, social media addiction.

INTRODUCTION

The internet has transformed how people communicate. Cyber gossip, or making evaluative comments about absent individuals online, has become a common feature of digital life, while growing social media use has led many students toward addictive patterns of engagement (Kashdan et al., 2014). This study explores the psychology underlying these two behaviors and examines how social anxiety and experiential avoidance may explain the pathway connecting them, particularly among college students (Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022; Kim & Bae, 2022).

Cyber Gossip

Romera et al. (2018) defined cyber gossip as the act of producing evaluative comments positive, negative, or neutral about absent individuals through digital media. They noted that the online environment reshapes traditional gossip due to anonymity, altered or misunderstood information, absence of non-verbal cues, and exposure to larger audiences. Unlike traditional gossip, cyber gossip spreads quickly across networks and can have lasting effects on those involved (Garcia-Fernandez et al., 2022).

Types of Cyber Gossip

Malicious talk is nasty, hurtful gossip that can seriously affect mental health (Childline, n.d.). Positive gossip involves favorable remarks about others' conduct or standing (Spoelma & Hetrick, 2021). Negative gossip is a form of indirect aggression intended to damage someone's reputation, regardless of accuracy (Cruz et al., 2021). Neutral gossip conveys factual updates about a third party without positive or negative judgment (Bai et al., 2020). Rumors are unconfirmed information that spreads widely, often believed because they seem to explain an existing fear or doubt (Kelley, 2004). Slander (verbal) and libel (written) involve conveying false statements intended to damage another's reputation (Vaughan, 2025). Uncivil gossip refers to rude or disrespectful talk about someone behind their back (Kelley, 2004).

Factors of Cyber Gossip

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests people evaluate their worth by comparing themselves to others, which can drive cyber gossip regarding lifestyle, appearance, or achievement (Kayala et al., n.d.). Fake news, or fabricated information designed to appear credible, also fuels cyber gossip (eSafety Commissioner, n.d.). A need for belonging and social connection motivates gossip as a way to feel part of a community, particularly for those experiencing loneliness or weak social ties (McLoughlin & Hermens, 2018). Finally, people engage in gossip to express feelings, share information, and gain social support, with cyber gossip reaching far larger and more diffuse audiences than face-to-face gossip (Khanduja et al., 2023).

Emotional Impact of Cyber Gossip

Targets of cyber gossip often experience anxiety, sadness, anger, and shame (Adams, 1965). Those who gossip may feel momentary power or belonging but also fear becoming targets themselves if rumors prove false (Falla et al., 2021). Observers may develop curiosity or dependence on the gossip topic they witness online (Wikipedia contributors, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

The Social Information Processing (SIP) theory holds that online interactions can build meaningful impressions of others using digital cues such as text, images, and emojis, shaping perceptions of gossip targets over time (Walther et al., 2015). The Social Learning Theory (Bandura) proposes that people acquire social behaviors, including gossiping tendencies, through observation and modeling of others (Sutton, 2021). Cyber gossip can both strengthen group bonds and generate sadness, isolation, or depression in those targeted (Litman & Pezzo, 2005; Ellwardt et al., 2012).

Social Media Addiction

Social media addiction refers to compulsive use of social networking platforms that impairs functioning in relationships, academics, or physical health, marked by excessive preoccupation and time spent online (Hilliard, 2025; Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014).

Types of Social Media Addiction

Information-seeking/surveillance addiction involves constant monitoring of others' activity out of curiosity or social comparison, which can reduce self-esteem and heighten loneliness (Piko et al., 2024). Communication/contact addiction reflects a need for constant accessibility and instant responses, closely tied to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)-the anxious drive to stay continuously connected (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Broadcasting/production addiction involves a compulsive need to regularly update others about one's life to

gain attention and validation, connected to impression management, or shaping how others perceive oneself (Goffman, 1959; Nickerson, 2024).

Factors of Social Media Addiction

Each like, comment, or follower triggers dopamine release which reinforcing the continued use of social media (Wang & Wang, 2025). Variable reward schedules, similar to slot machines, keep users checking notifications unpredictably (Wang & Wang, 2025). FOMO drives anxious, continuous engagement (Piko et al., 2025). Likes and comments provide social validation, which especially affects those with low self-esteem (Voggenreiter et al., 2023). Endless-scroll design features on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook further extend usage time (Ruiz et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Griffiths' (2005) Component Model of Addiction describes salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse as six elements explaining addictive processes, including social media use. The Uses and Gratifications Theory explains excessive use through motivations such as entertainment, escapism, and connection with others (Katz et al., 1974).

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is a persistent fear of embarrassment, humiliation, or rejection during social interaction or performance, sufficient to impair functioning, sometimes accompanied by physical symptoms such as sweating or trembling (Cruz et al., 2021). It differs from ordinary shyness in intensity and its interference with daily life, relationships, and academic or occupational functioning (McKay & McKiernan, 2024; NHS, n.d.).

Types of Social Anxiety

These include Generalized Anxiety Disorder (excessive worry about routine matters), Panic Disorder (recurrent panic attacks), Social Anxiety Disorder (fear of social or performance situations), Specific Phobia (irrational fear of an object or situation), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (intrusive thoughts and compulsions), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (anxiety following trauma).

Theoretical Framework

Clark and Wells' (1995) Cognitive Theory of Social Anxiety proposes that distorted beliefs about being socially inadequate, combined with self-focused attention and safety behaviors, prevent disconfirmation of fears and sustain anxiety over time. Leary and Kowalski's (1990) Self-Presentation Theory holds that social anxiety stems from the fundamental desire for social approval and fear of being perceived as unworthy, driving excessive self-monitoring and worry about others' judgments (Tosi & Warmke, 2020).

Experiential Avoidance

Experiential avoidance is the unwillingness to remain in contact with uncomfortable internal experiences—thoughts, emotions, memories, or sensations—leading to persistent efforts to escape or suppress them, often worsening psychological distress over time (Hayes & Eustis, 2020). For example, a grieving person may avoid reminders of a loss, suppress related thoughts, or withdraw from friends and activities to prevent painful feelings, sometimes resorting to maladaptive strategies such as substance use (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007).

Ways of Avoidance

People may avoid unwanted thoughts (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000), suppress uncomfortable emotions (Gross & Levenson, 1993), deny somatic sensations, or avoid painful memories (Hayes et al., 1996). Common strategies include behavioral avoidance of triggering situations, cognitive avoidance through suppression or rumination, emotional suppression, substance use, and distraction through alternate activities (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007; Gross & John, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) model frames experiential avoidance as central to psychological inflexibility: rather than accepting difficult inner experiences, individuals attempt to eliminate them, worsening distress over time (Hayes et al., 2011). Gross's (1998) Emotion Regulation Theory notes that rigid reliance on avoidance or suppression, rather than flexible strategies like reappraisal, can backfire and intensify psychological difficulty.

Connection between the Variables

Social anxiety plays a central role linking cyber gossip and social media addiction among college students. Students who feel uncomfortable in face-to-face situations often find online spaces less threatening, since digital platforms offer anonymity and control over self presentation. Socially anxious students may use cyber gossip as a substitute for direct interaction, allowing them to feel socially connected and informed without the discomfort of face-to-face exchange (Kad et al., 2024). Over time, reliance on social media for this purpose can develop into compulsive use.

Experiential avoidance further explains this pattern: students who hold negative beliefs about themselves or fear judgment may use social media and cyber gossip to distract from these feelings rather than confront them (Kim & Bae, 2022). While this offers short-term relief, it fails to resolve the underlying distress and may deepen dependence on social media over time (Drazenovic et al., 2023). In this way, social anxiety and experiential avoidance function as mediators explaining how and why cyber gossip contributes to social media addiction among college students.

Significance of Study

This research helps students, parents, and institutions recognize that cyber gossip or excessive phone use may reflect deeper psychological issues, encouraging open conversations about their causes. Findings can help counselors identify root problems such as social anxiety or experiential avoidance when addressing students' problematic online behavior, supporting more effective interventions and mental health support.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship between Cyber Gossip and Social Media Addiction

Garcia-Fernandez et al. (2022) examined parental perceptions of adolescent cyber gossip and found it associated with greater involvement in bullying and cyberbullying, especially among girls, though not with better social adjustment; general heavy social media use, rather than clinical addiction, appeared to drive this risk. Cebollero-Salinas et al. (2024) found a weak but significant positive relationship between social media addiction and cyber gossip, with men reporting higher levels of both addiction and online communication than women.

Relationship between Social Anxiety and Cyber Gossip

Kad et al. (2024) found that the link between social anxiety and cyber gossip was stronger among rural than urban adolescents, highlighting how limited social opportunity may increase reliance on cyber gossip. Bonetti et al. (2010) found that lonely and socially anxious children and adolescents were more likely to discuss personal topics online and use the internet to build friendships, meeting needs for identity exploration and socialization that were harder to fulfill offline.

Relationship between Experiential Avoidance and Cyber Gossip

Xiong et al. (2023) found a close relationship between exposure to negative school gossip and mobile phone addiction among adolescents, with anxiety and experiential avoidance serving as sequential mediators—meaning avoidance functioned as a coping strategy for the anxiety caused by gossip.

Relationship between Experiential Avoidance and Social Media Addiction

Several studies confirm experiential avoidance as a robust predictor of technology addiction. Qiu et al. (2025) found it independently predicted smartphone addiction in college students. Lin et al. (2023) found both depression and experiential avoidance positively predicted adolescent smartphone addiction. Gorday and Bardeen (2022) found that problematic smartphone use strengthened the relationship between anxiety and experiential avoidance. Cao et al. (2023), using longitudinal data, found experiential avoidance predicted later depression, which in turn predicted internet addiction, with this pathway consistent across genders. GarciaOliva and Piqueras (2016) found experiential avoidance predicted addictive use across internet, mobile phone, and video game use, with conscientiousness linked to lower addictive behavior overall.

Relationship between Experiential Avoidance and Social Anxiety

Kashdan et al. (2014) found avoidance and anxiety symptoms were stronger among individuals with social anxiety disorder during face-to-face interactions, particularly when conversations required self-disclosure. Mahaffey et al. (2012) found overlap between distorted cognitions linked to social anxiety and those linked to experiential avoidance, though avoidance did not outperform dysfunctional thoughts in predicting anxiety symptoms. Millis et al. (2024) found intolerance of uncertainty linked both anxiety and social media addiction, with highly addicted users preferring limited choices and making more impulsive decisions. Kim et al. (2022) found social anxiety did not directly predict social networking addiction; instead, experiential avoidance and interpersonal problems fully mediated this relationship in sequence. Nam et al. (2025) found internalized shame predicted social media addiction primarily through experiential avoidance, with a combined pathway through social interaction anxiety and avoidance also significant.

Rationale

Cyber gossip has become common among youth through social media use (Delgado, 2023), yet its connection to social media addiction among college students, and the psychological mechanisms explaining this link, remain underexplored. This study examines how social anxiety and experiential avoidance may explain the pathway between cyber gossip and social media addiction. Socially anxious students may prefer computer-mediated communication as a safer alternative to face-to-face interaction, but when online behavior becomes a means of avoiding difficult emotions, it can foster experiential avoidance and, over time, unhealthy or addictive social media use. This study aims to clarify these psychological pathways, informing interventions that universities and mental health practitioners can use to support student wellbeing and reduce problematic online behavior.

Objectives

- 1) To investigate the relationship between cyber gossip, social anxiety, experiential avoidance, and social media addiction in college students;
- 2) To investigate the mediating role of social anxiety and experiential avoidance in the relationship between cyber gossip and social media addiction in college students.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Cyber gossip will be positively correlated with social anxiety, experiential avoidance, and social media addiction in college students.
- **H2:** Social anxiety and experiential avoidance will mediate the relationship between cyber gossip and social media addiction in college students.

Hypothesized Model

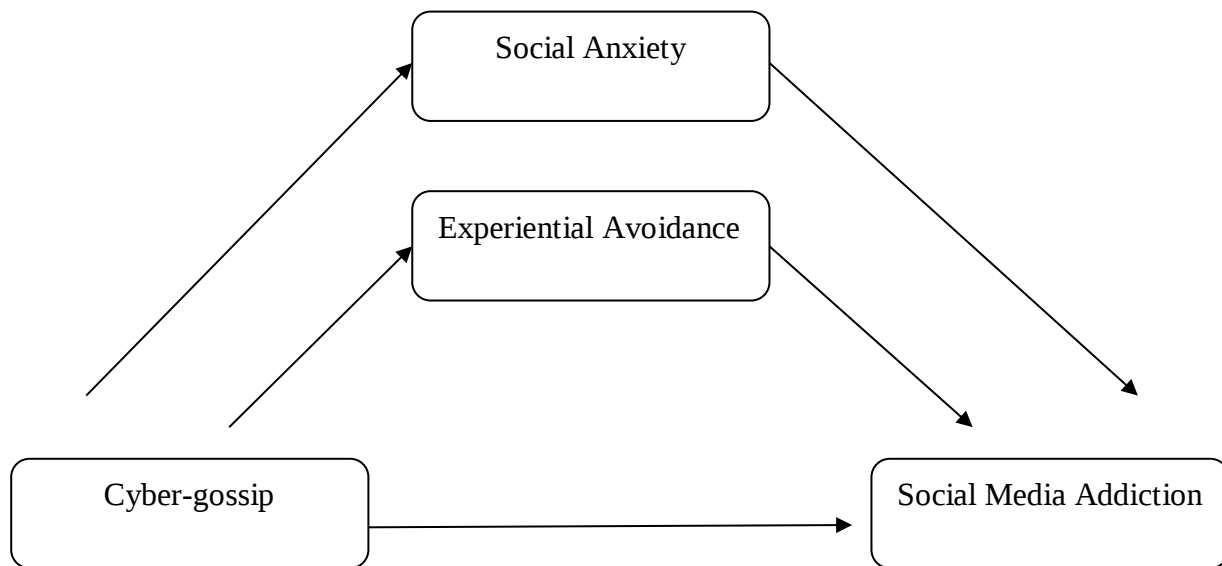


Figure 1. Hypothesized model of cyber gossip, social anxiety, experiential avoidance, and social media addiction

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was used to collect data at a single point in time to determine the correlation between cyber gossip, social media addiction, social anxiety, and experiential avoidance (Levin, 2006).

Sample

A purposive sampling strategy was used (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample consisted of 300 college students (male = 109, female = 191), aged 17-20 years, with a 100% response rate. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were students enrolled in intermediate or higher secondary education who owned a personal smartphone and had used social media platforms regularly for at least the past six months.

Exclusion Criteria

Students with any diagnosed mental health condition, or those identified as content creators, were excluded from the study.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 300)

Characteristic	F	%
Age:17years	52	17.3
Age:18years	77	25.6
Age:19years	65	21.6
Age:20years	107	35.5
Gender: Male	109	36.2
Gender: Female	191	63.5
Education: 1styear	102	33.9
Education: 2ndyear	199	66.1
Social media $\geq$ 5hrs/day: Yes	261	86.7
Social media $\geq$ 5hrs/day: No	40	13.3
Living: Day Scholar	234	77.7
Living: Hostelite	67	22.3
SES: Upper Class	66	21.9
SES: Middle Class	217	72.1
SES: Lower Class	18	6.0

Note. N = 300; f = frequency; % = percentage, SES= socioeconomic status

Operational Definitions

Cyber Gossip

The online expression of value judgments-positive, negative, or neutral-about an absent third party through digital devices and platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and messaging apps.

Social Media Addiction

Excessive preoccupation with, and motivation to use, social networking services to an extent that affects social life, academic work, or psychological wellbeing (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014).

Social Anxiety

A marked, persistent fear of social or performance situations involving possible scrutiny by others, and fear of acting in an embarrassing or humiliating way (Liebowitz, 1987).

Experiential Avoidance

The tendency to avoid uncomfortable internal experiences-unwanted thoughts, feelings, memories, or bodily sensations-through cognitive and behavioral strategies (Gamez et al., 2011).

Assessment Measures

The Cyber Gossip Questionnaire-Adolescents (CGQ-A)

The Cyber Gossip Questionnaire-Adolescents (CGQ-A) is a nine-item self-report scale measuring cyber gossip perpetration on a 0-4 Likert scale, developed by Romera et al. (2018), with good psychometric properties ($\alpha = .85$ in the original validation).

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is a six-item self-report scale developed by Andreassen and colleagues, measuring core addiction elements (e.g., salience, conflict) on a 5-point Likert scale, with Cronbach's alpha typically ranging between .82 and .87 (Andreassen et al., 2016).

Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (BEAQ)

The Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (BEAQ) is a 15-item self-report scale developed by Gamez et al. (2014), measuring the tendency to avoid unpleasant internal experiences on a 6-point Likert scale, with generally high internal consistency (reported as low as .75 in some samples) and strong test-retest reliability.

Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS)

The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS), developed by Liebowitz (1987), contains 24 items across social interaction and performance situations, each rated for fear (0-3) and avoidance (0-3), yielding total fear and avoidance scores. The scale shows excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > .90$) and strong validity (Fresco et al., 2001).

Procedure

Permission to use the assessment measures was obtained from the respective authors, and approval for data collection was secured from participating colleges. Data were collected using an online Google Form after obtaining informed consent. Participants were informed of their right to withdrawal, anonymity, and confidentiality, given adequate time to complete the questionnaire, and thanked upon completion. Data were then coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained for all measures used, along with permission from the supervisor for data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality, informed there were no right or wrong answers, protected from psychological or emotional harm, and informed they could withdraw at any time without consequence.

RESULTS

This section presents findings on the relationship between cyber gossip and social media addiction among college students, and the mediating roles of social anxiety and experiential avoidance. All statistical assumptions, including normality, independence of observations, absence of outliers, homogeneity of variance, homo-scedasticity, and multi-collinearity, were tested and met, confirming the validity of the results.

Summary of Findings

Table 2: Psychometric Properties of Study Scales

Scale	M	SD	Range	Cronbach's α
LSAS	58.57	24.00	0-144	.95
BEAQ	49.92	10.59	14-90	.75
CGQ-A	14.74	7.72	9-45	.82
BSMAS	14.76	4.12	6-30	.69

Note. LSAS = Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale; BEAQ = Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire; CGQ-A = Cyber Gossip Questionnaire-Adolescents; BSMAS = Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale.

Reliability analysis (Table 2) showed the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) had a mean of 58.57 (SD = 24.00) and excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .95$). The Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (BEAQ) had a mean of 49.92 (SD = 10.59) and acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .75$). The Cyber Gossip Questionnaire (CGQ-A) showed strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$), and the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) had a mean of 14.76 (SD = 4.12) with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .69$).

Table 3: Pearson Correlations among Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1.LSAS	-			
2.BEAQ	.006	-		
3.CGQ-A	.193**	-.117*	-	
4.BSMAS	.201**	.158**	.272**	-

Note. LSAS = Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale; BEAQ = Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire; CGQ-A = Cyber Gossip Questionnaire-Adolescents; BSMAS = Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Pearson correlation analysis (Table 3) showed social anxiety was significantly positively correlated with cyber gossip, $r(298) = .193$, $p < .001$, and with social media addiction, $r(298) = .201$, $p < .001$. The correlation between social anxiety and experiential avoidance was not significant, $r(298) = .006$, $p > .05$. Experiential avoidance was significantly negatively correlated with cyber gossip, $r(298) = -.117$, $p < .05$, but significantly positively correlated with social media addiction, $r(298) = .158$, $p < .001$. Cyber gossip was moderately and positively correlated with social media addiction, $r(298) = .272$, $p < .001$.

Table 4: Mediation Model 1: Experiential Avoidance as Mediator

Path	B	SE	p
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CGQ→BEAQ (a)	.03	.08	.05
BEAQ→BSMAS(b)	.29	.03	<.001
CGQ→BSMAS, direct(c')	.176	.03	<.001

Note. $R^2 = .06$, $F(1, 295) = .20$, $p = .05$ for the CGQ→BEAQ model; $R^2 = .08$, $F(1, 295) = 27.08$, $p = .001$ for the BEAQ→BSMAS model.

Table 5: Indirect Effect of Cyber Gossip on Social Media Addiction through Experiential Avoidance

Indirect Path	B	SE	95%CI
CGQ→BEAQ→BSMAS	-.005	.014	[-.03, -.02]

Mediation analysis (Tables 4-5) showed cyber gossip significantly predicted experiential avoidance ($\beta = -.03$, $SE = .08$, $p = .05$; $R^2 = .06$), and experiential avoidance significantly predicted social media addiction ($\beta = .29$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .08$). The indirect effect of cyber gossip on social media addiction through experiential avoidance was small ($\beta = -.005$, $SE = .014$) but statistically significant, with a 95% confidence interval of [-.03, -.02].

Table 6: Mediation Model 2: Social Anxiety as Mediator

Path	B	SE	P
CGQ→LSAS(a)	.195	.179	<.001
LSAS→BSMAS(b)	.28	.03	<.001
CGQ→BSMAS, direct(c')	.154	.03	<.001

Note. $R^2 = .03$, $F(1, 288) = 11.46$, $p = .001$ for the CGQ→LSAS model; $R^2 = .07$, $F(1, 288) = 24.60$, $p = .001$ for the LSAS→BSMAS model.

Table 7: Indirect Effect of Cyber Gossip on Social Media Addiction through Social Anxiety

Indirect Path	B	SE	95%CI
CGQ→LSAS→BSMAS	.027	.014	[.004, .059]

A second mediation model (Tables 6-7) showed cyber gossip significantly predicted social anxiety ($a = .195$, $SE = .179$, $p = .001$; $R^2 = .03$), and social anxiety significantly predicted social media addiction ($b = .28$, $SE = .03$, $p = .001$; $R^2 = .07$). The direct effect of cyber gossip on social media addiction remained significant after controlling for social anxiety ($c' = .154$, $SE = .03$, $p = .001$), indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect of cyber gossip on social media addiction through social anxiety was small but significant ($\beta = .027$, $SE = .014$, 95% CI [.004, .059]).

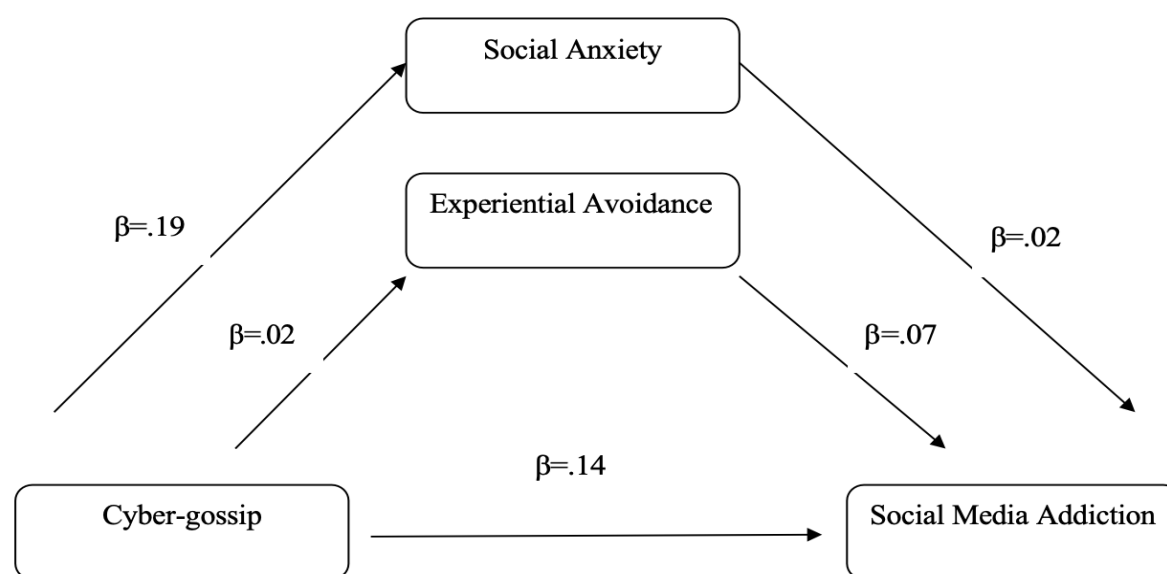


Figure 2. The model shows relationships of cyber gossip, social anxiety, experiential avoidance, and social media addiction

DISCUSSION

This study explored the mediating roles of social anxiety and experiential avoidance in the relationship between cyber gossip and social media addiction among college students. Findings showed cyber gossip was positively associated with social media addiction, and this relationship was significantly mediated by both social anxiety and experiential avoidance, offering strong support for the proposed model.

Cyber gossip's positive association with social media addiction is consistent with reinforcement theory, wherein gossip functions as a socially rewarding behavior that reinforces frequent social media use. This aligns with Cebollero-Salinas et al. (2024), who noted that habitual gossiping can develop into problematic use over time, and Garcia-Fernandez et al. (2022), who found gossip used for validation or social standing may foster compulsive engagement. Gossip itself is not inherently maladaptive—it can serve social bonding functions—but its context, frequency, and underlying motivation determine whether it fosters maladaptive digital behavior.

Social anxiety mediated the cyber gossip-social media addiction link, suggesting socially anxious students may use cyber gossip as a compensatory strategy for navigating social interaction in a less threatening online environment. This aligns with Kad et al. (2024), who found socially anxious rural adolescents especially prone to cyber gossip and subsequent digital dependency, and Bonetti et al. (2010), who found anxious and lonely individuals prefer controllable online communication. Mahaffey et al. (2012) similarly linked social anxiety to fear of self-disclosure, for which digital communication offers a safer alternative.

Notably, the mediating effect of social anxiety was weaker than that of experiential avoidance, suggesting that while anxiety may initiate online coping, it is avoidance of distressing internal experiences that sustains addictive behavior. This is consistent with Xiong et al. (2023), who linked gossip-related distress to avoidance behaviors like excessive phone use, and with Qiu et al. (2025) and Lin et al. (2023), who found experiential avoidance a strong predictor of smartphone and social media addiction. This pattern aligns with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy's view that avoiding rather than accepting negative internal experiences fosters psychological inflexibility and maladaptive technology use, echoed in Kim et al.'s (2022) sequential mediation

model linking anxiety, avoidance, interpersonal difficulty, and networking addiction. The interdependence of social anxiety and experiential avoidance observed here—students high in one tending toward the other—supports the view that these vulnerabilities rarely act in isolation but compound one another's effects, consistent with Kashdan et al. (2014) and Millis et al. (2024), who linked avoidance and intolerance of uncertainty to impulsive online behavior such as excessive notification-checking and scrolling.

CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence for the mediating roles of social anxiety and experiential avoidance in the relationship between cyber gossip and social media addiction among college students. As digital platforms become increasingly embedded in daily life, understanding the emotional drivers behind problematic use is essential for developing effective interventions that support students' mental well-being and healthier digital habits.

Strengths of the Study

This study clarifies the psychological mechanisms underlying cyber gossip and social media addiction by incorporating social anxiety and experiential avoidance as mediators, offering a richer picture than prior single-variable approaches. Methodological rigor was strengthened through psychometrically sound instruments (LSAS, BEAQ, BSMAS, CGQ-A) with strong internal consistency. Findings carry practical value for counseling and digital well-being interventions, and the college-student sample is especially relevant given this population's heightened identity development and peer-pressure sensitivity.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The relationship between experiential avoidance and social media addiction, while significant, was comparatively weaker, suggesting unmeasured factors such as personality traits, coping styles, or digital habits may play a role. Future research should employ larger, more heterogeneous samples and longitudinal designs, and examine whether emotion regulation or impulsivity moderate these relationships.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, this study supports integrative behavioral-addiction models incorporating emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities, adding empirical depth to frameworks linking internal psychological mechanisms to compulsive social media use. Practically, counselors and university support staff should consider screening for experiential avoidance and social anxiety among students showing problematic social media behavior. Evidence-based interventions such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can help address these vulnerabilities, with ACT in particular fostering acceptance of internal experiences over avoidance. Universities can also implement digital literacy and mindfulness programs, assertiveness and emotion-regulation workshops, and wellness initiatives that normalize discussion of anxiety and avoidance, helping students build healthier relationships with digital technology while addressing deeper psychological needs.

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