

Psychological Therapies for Avoidant Personality Disorder Traits Resulting from Social Media Interaction among University Students in Nairobi City County, Kenya

Esther Muthoga, John Oteyo, Davis Gatua

School of Law, Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Kenyatta University, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore available psychological therapies for effective handling of avoidant personality disorder traits resulting from use of social media interaction among students within selected universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. To achieve this objective, the study interrogated the association between levels of social media interaction and avoidant personality disorder. The independent variable for this study was social media interaction measured using scale items based on extent, intensity, and patterns of interaction. The dependent variable, levels of AVPD traits, was measured on an adapted self-rating 7-item Scale. The target population was 237305 students in sampled universities in Nairobi City County. The study generated a sample size of 368 third-year students and further adopted proportionate, stratified, and random sampling to select respondents to participate in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to choose 9 university counsellors who served as informants for this study. Descriptive statistics used in this study included measures of frequency, percentage and the mean to summarize and describe data sets. From the data collected, the study established evidence of high levels of social media interaction among university students. The study further found evidence of varying levels of avoidant personality disorder features. Using the Pearson Correlation coefficient, the study recorded a statistically significant association between social media interaction and levels of avoidant personality disorder traits, $r(324) = .586, p < .05$ and $r(324) = .529, p < .05$ respectively. The study recommends that universities incorporate psychological therapies aimed at handling cases of social media-induced avoidance personality disorder traits.

Keywords: Psychological therapies, Avoidant personality disorder, social media interaction, University students, Nairobi City County

INTRODUCTION

Social media has undoubtedly become part of our daily interactions as a result of technological advancement that permeates every sphere of our lives. Social networking sites have become central channels of interaction, especially among the youth and especially those in universities and colleges (Kim & Bae, 2022). The youth use various digital platforms for academic collaboration, communication, socialization, and identity expression and negotiation. Internet based platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, X (formerly Twitter) have become sites of choice among young people in universities, determining how they maintain, regulate and form interpersonal relationships. Additionally, these social media platforms offer proper connection approaches and self-expression, raising concerns regarding their effects on the psychological functioning, mental health and personality development among young people (Akca et al., 2020).

Consequently, this study sought to interrogate the nexus between social media interaction and avoidant personality disorder and the available or necessary psychological therapies. It provides insights that can help in developing more inclusive and effective social media platforms and creating tailored content and features that cater to the distinct preferences and needs of different gender groups, therefore enhancing user experience and engagement globally, regionally, and locally.

Background to the Study

Studies conducted in various parts of the world have shown that patterns and intensity of social media interaction have significant effects on a person's social behaviors, self-worth perceptions, and emotional regulation. A study conducted in Australia found that social media enables supportive associations and identity formation, and encourages a sense of belonging and self-esteem (Demircioğlu & Köse, 2020). Social media sites such as Facebook have become useful tools for business advertising and for collecting feedback from consumers of products and services. Such uses of social media sites have established social media as an integral tool for both day-to-day communication and social interaction and as a hub for entrepreneurial marketing. Consequently, social media can fundamentally change the nature of an individual's social life at the community and interpersonal levels (Shahid et al., 2024).

In addition, SNS have educational value according to a study done in Nigeria among undergraduate students (Olajo et al., 2024). However, excessive use of social media in a maladaptive engagement manner has been associated with issues such as social comparison, loneliness, negative evaluation fears, and face-to-face interaction (Chen et al., 2020). These outcomes are relevant to personality vulnerabilities such that young people develop and reinforce issues like interpersonal avoidance, social inhibition, and heightened sensitivity to criticisms from others (Akdeniz, 2022). However, preoccupation with social media interaction is considered to stimulate some habitual inclinations that can lead to social isolation habits, lower educational performance, and negative self-esteem in students, as concluded in a Norwegian study (Vosoughi Motlagh et al., 2023). Although not classified by DSM-5 revised, these habitual inclinations and preoccupations have been considered to be Social Media Disorder by some studies. With the increased use of social media as a socialization platform has come increased pressure to live up to a specific image or lifestyle (Heffner, 2016). The internalization of idealized images and comments during social media interactions often results in many adverse psychological effects (Mojtabai, 2024).

According to Peng & Liao (2023), increased pressure to live up to a specific image or lifestyle, and internalization of comments during social media interaction have resulted in adverse psychological effects, including depression and anxiety. These effects are worse for those with active AVPD or latent AVPD than for those who are without AVPD because the former spend most of their time online and are isolated. During the college and graduate school years (roughly ages 18 to 25), individuals have left home for campus life. The capacity to remain sincerely connected, while at the same time setting up a level of independence and separateness, has commonly been a difficult formative achievement for some people (Ntumi et al., 2025). University students find themselves in an environment of pervasive social media networks occasioned by the exponential advancement of technology, which increases the propensity of adverse health outcomes, including AVPD.

In Africa, the number of people actively using social media has risen in recent years to 9% of the population, with South Africans being among the leading nations worldwide. In Africa, Facebook was used by 100 million people in 2014. Out of these, 15 million were Nigerian, 12 million were South African, and 4.5 million were Kenyan. More recent data show that 216 million people, representing 17% of the population of Africa, use social media (Lopes et al., 2022). South Africa is among the leading nations worldwide, with over 15 million users of social media. Facebook is the most utilized (49%), followed by YouTube (47%), WhatsApp (45%), Twitter (26%), and Instagram (25%). Over 40% of South Africans use social media at least once a day (Jane, 2021).

Locally in Kenya, social media usage among university students is deeply embedded and widespread for both social and academic life. Nairobi County is one of the country's regions that has major educational institutions and is an urban center. It hosts a diverse, large population of young people exposed to the high-intensity pressure of academic life, competitive social environment, and constant online connectivity (Jane, 2021). While social media plays a crucial role when it comes to academic networking, peer interaction, and support, it also contributes to social withdrawal, avoidance of direct personal connection, and increased self-consciousness among many students (Dodoo & Wen, 2021).

Another study in Kenya focused on social media usage patterns among Kenyan university students. The results showed that female students predominantly use social media for social interaction and relationship maintenance,

while male students are more inclined towards using it for gaming and informational purposes (Jane, 2021). The background studies point to the fact that AVPD is a significant concern among university students globally, in Africa, and in Kenya.

The cited studies have demonstrated that AVPD is understudied and needs to be recognized for better delineation and informing treatment. Most of these studies have focused mainly on the link between AVPD and Social Phobia, the effects of AVPD on self-image, the application of cognitive behavioral therapy, and the effects of AVPD on the prevalence of Generalized Social Anxiety Disorder in the general population.

Statement of the Problem

University students are faced with a new social environment with greater freedom and less adult supervision, a sense of isolation, pursuit of independence, exploration and adventure, an increased sense of responsibility, and interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, it is difficult to attribute their adverse health outcomes to either social media or relational problems, challenges of this new environment, or all of them. There is need to study the association between social media and AVPD among students who are in the university setting. Past studies have attempted to investigate the association between social media interaction and various other mental health disorders. From available literature, there is a paucity of studies on the association between social media interaction and AVPD. Avoidant Personality Disorder is associated with high impairment levels of academic participation, emotional well-being, and social relationships (Chang et al., 2022). However, avoidant personality traits among university students remain unnoticed due to the lack of mental health screening availability, access, and socially avoidant behavior normalization within the digital platform environments. Existing studies in Kenya have focused mainly on general mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression, with little emphasis on personality-related vulnerabilities. This lack of context-specific evidence limits the ability of universities, counsellors, and mental health practitioners to develop targeted interventions addressing emerging personality-related risks. The present study sought to address this gap by examining the association between social media interaction and avoidant personality disorder among students in selected universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Significance of the Study

This study explores the intersection between social media interaction and avoidant personality disorder. The findings will be helpful to students and professionals who work with students in the identification of warning signs of this disorder. The university management may use the results to initiate prevention or intervention programs that target students with AVPD.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical research studies indicate high social media interaction levels among university students globally, regionally, and locally. In North America, Asia, and Europe, a quantitative survey on this area of study indicates that 88% and 98% of university students access one social media platform daily (Wang et al., 2025). Additionally, the average usage among the students' daily ranges from 3 hours to 6 hours. The result of this study indicates that a significant number of students participating in the study reported engaging with social media platforms for more than 5 hours per day, especially during non-academic periods.

Wang et al. (2025), in their study among Chinese university students, employed a cross-sectional moderated mediation model using self-report scales to examine experiential avoidance, depression, and difficulty identifying emotions in social network site addiction. The findings indicated that experiential avoidance significantly predicted SNS addiction both directly and indirectly through depression and emotional identification difficulties. The authors concluded that maladaptive emotional regulation processes are central in problematic social media interaction. However, the reliance on self-report measures and the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation and reduces clinical applicability to personality disorders such as AVPD.

Adetayo (2025), in a cross-sectional survey examining social media usage patterns among university students, investigated the frequency and duration of engagement across different social networking platforms. The findings indicated that students frequently accessed social media platforms multiple times throughout the day,

with Facebook identified as one of the commonly used platforms among university students. The study concluded that social media platforms form an integral part of students' daily routines and patterns of social interaction. However, the study primarily focused on general patterns of social media usage rather than personality development, limiting its direct applicability to avoidant personality constructs.

In Kenya, empirical studies confirm that social media interaction is a central aspect of university students' daily experiences. Quantitative findings indicate that more than three-quarters of students in urban universities spend more than three hours per day on social media platforms, while approximately 40% report spending more than five hours daily on various social networking activities (Kinyua & Kinga, 2021; Kili et al., 2025). Inferential analyses from these studies demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between increased times spent on social media and reduced face-to-face social engagement. Correlation coefficients reported across studies range between $r = 0.30$ and $r = 0.55$, indicating a moderate relationship between high social media interaction and social withdrawal tendencies among university students.

Furthermore, empirical studies distinguish between passive and active forms of social media interaction (Godard & Holtzman, 2024). Passive social media interaction, which includes scrolling, observing others' content, and browsing without direct engagement, has been associated with increased feelings of inadequacy, heightened social comparison, and reduced interpersonal confidence. In contrast, active social media engagement, such as posting content, messaging, and commenting, has been linked to peer support and enhanced social connectedness when used in moderation (Li et al., 2024). Regression analyses from these studies indicate that passive social media interaction significantly predicts negative psychological outcomes even after controlling for the total time spent on social media, suggesting that the type of engagement plays a critical role in psychosocial adjustment.

The level and severity of Avoidant Personality Disorder (AVPD) among university students have become a focal point of psychological research, particularly as digital environments alter social interaction patterns. Duradoni et al. (2025), in a large-scale cross-sectional study, utilized psychometric screening tools to explore the intersection of personality pathology and digital behavior. While their findings established a significant association between general personality dysfunction and technological addiction, a critical gap remains in the literature regarding the specific levels of avoidant pathology. By failing to isolate AVPD from other Cluster C disorders, the study overlooks how the specific avoidant level characterized by hypersensitivity to negative evaluation drives students toward digital withdrawal as a primary defense mechanism. This suggests that for university learners, high levels of AVPD symptoms may not manifest as mere internet use, but as a pathological escape from the perceived judgment of the physical campus environment.

Young adults, who form the population of the current study, become excessively focused on their online popularity. Rather than measuring their popularity by the number of companions they have, they are progressively assessing their self-esteem by the number of individuals who follow them and like their posts via social media (Wang et al., 2025). They may get stressed, restless, and even depressed as they invest a lot of energy creating their online personalities so as to get favorable feedback from other social media users. For socio-emotional support, the youth are more dependent on social media than on conventional sources of encouragement, for example, an up-close and personal discussion or a call with a companion (Perugini & Solano, 2021).

Moreover, recent clinical assessments within the Kenyan healthcare system indicate a high prevalence of personality-related distress among young adults, though historical data primarily focused on severe inpatient cases. A comprehensive study by Waithira (2024) on the mental health of Kenyan university students revealed that approximately 30.9% of this population meets the criteria for significant psychological distress, with social withdrawal and interpersonal anxiety being leading symptoms. Unlike previous decades that prioritized dramatic Cluster B symptoms in hospital settings, current research at the University of Nairobi suggests that Cluster C traits, specifically social inhibition and fear of rejection are increasingly prevalent in student populations (Jane, 2021).

Furthermore, Oriaso and Waithera (2025) highlight that the shift toward digital-first socialization in Nairobi has created a masking effect, where the functional impact of Avoidant Personality Disorder (AVPD) is often overlooked until it manifests in areas such as academic failure or extreme digital isolation among university

students. Since contemporary Kenyan data on personality disorders cannot be generalized from general clinical populations to the unique pressures of university life, the current investigation addresses this knowledge gap by evaluating the specific association between AVPD traits and social media interaction.

Individuals who have avoidant personality disorder (AVPD) report feeling deficient and socially inept, are distracted by fear of rejection, and want to be certain they will be liked before making social contact. The preoccupation with rejection causes individuals with AVPD to doubt anybody, including the therapist, at the start of the avoidant personality disorder treatment (Szczygieł & Podwalski, 2020). In this manner, it is significant for the therapist to move gradually first and foremost until the patient-therapist association is solid. In so doing, the focal point of avoidant character issue treatment shifts from the painful inner experience to building connections dependent on trust. However, the lack of systematic methodology reduces empirical strength.

Interventions for personality disorders in the digital age must be grounded in robust explanatory models. Sun and Zhang (2021) conducted a comprehensive theoretical review in China, analyzing the prevalent models used in social media addiction research. The researchers performed a systematic synthesis of behavioral addiction frameworks and social learning models, evaluating their efficacy in explaining compulsive digital behaviors among young adults. They concluded that these frameworks, particularly the "Expectancy-Value Theory", the approach provide essential explanatory mechanisms for why individuals with social deficits retreat to digital platforms for validation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Interpersonal Theory, developed by Sullivan posits that personality is shaped through recurring interpersonal interactions and relationships. According to this perspective, human behavior cannot be understood outside the context of social relationships, as individuals develop patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving based on their interactions with others (Adams et al., 2024). A key concept in this theory is interpersonal anxiety, which arises from fear of rejection, disapproval, or negative evaluation by others. To manage this anxiety, individuals develop security operations, such as avoidance, withdrawal, or emotional distancing. Over time, these coping mechanisms may become stable patterns, contributing to maladaptive personality traits, including avoidant personality disorder (Dunlop et al., 2023).

In the context of this study, social media platforms function as modern interpersonal environments where students seek connection, validation, and social approval. However, these platforms also expose individuals to social comparison, criticism, and perceived rejection. Repeated exposure to such negative interpersonal experiences may heighten anxiety and reinforce avoidance behaviors (Stuart et al., 2024). Interpersonal Theory also emphasizes the development of the self-system, which is formed as individuals attempt to maintain self-esteem and reduce anxiety. When students consistently experience negative evaluation or perceive themselves as socially inadequate within online interactions, their self-system may reinforce beliefs of inferiority and social incompetence (Stuart et al., 2024). These beliefs are central characteristics of avoidant personality disorder, including hypersensitivity to criticism, social inhibition, and feelings of inadequacy.

Albert Bandura developed the Social Cognitive Theory in 1986 which explains human behavior in terms of impact of dynamic interaction between behaviours, environmental influences and personal factors referred to as reciprocal determinism. Bandura emphasizes in this theory that people are active agents that learn behaviours and traits through imitation, cognitive processing and observation of the environmental experiences (de la Fuente et al., 2023). One of the key concepts of Social Cognitive Theory is observational learning, where individuals learn behaviors by observing others and the consequences of those behaviors. In the context of social media, students are constantly exposed to curated images, lifestyles, and social interactions of others. These observations shape their perceptions, expectations, and behaviors, particularly regarding social acceptance and self-worth.

Self-efficacy is another crucial concept that Bandura highlights in this theory which is defined as people's belief in having ability to succeed in a specific situation. In this case, students who perceive themselves to have low self-efficacy doubt their abilities to be able to engage in social interaction both offline and online (Nickerson,

2024). Therefore, negative social media experiences like criticism, social exclusion or lack of engagement can adversely impact their self-efficacy which can lead to avoidance behaviours. Additionally, this theory highlights the role of cognitive processes regarding interpretation of personal experiences. Individuals do not respond to situations objectively but based on their beliefs and perceptions. For instance, students with avoidant behaviors may interpret ambiguous or neutral online interactions as negative, hence reinforcing feelings of rejection and leading to increased withdrawal (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025).

Reinforcement processes of behaviors is also a fundamental element according to this theory as it plays a critical role. For instance, events on social media like positive comments, likes and social approval promotes engagement among students on social media (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). Conversely, negative reinforcement or lack of feedback may lead to anxiety and avoidance. Over time, these reinforcement patterns shape behavior and contribute to the development of stable personality traits. In relation to this study, Social Cognitive Theory explains how repeated social media experiences influence students' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Students who consistently experience negative or anxiety-provoking interactions may develop maladaptive cognitive patterns and avoidance behaviors, which are characteristic of avoidant personality disorder (Nickerson, 2024).

In summary, Interpersonal Theory and Social Cognitive Theory provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media interaction may influence avoidant personality disorder among university students. Interpersonal Theory explains how fear of rejection and interpersonal anxiety lead to avoidance behaviors, while Social Cognitive Theory explains how these behaviors are learned, reinforced, and maintained through observation, cognition, and environmental interaction. These theories collectively support the examination of social media as a critical social environment influencing personality development in the contemporary digital age.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional analytical design. A cross-sectional research design investigates the association between two related or unrelated parameters (Zilcha-Mano & Ramseyer, 2020). This design was selected for this study since it enabled the researcher to explore the link between social media activity and avoidant personality disorder traits and determine the association's intensity and course. Unlike other designs that are purely correlational or descriptive, this approach is both analytical and allows descriptive assessment of the variables and inferential relationship testing. The research design enabled the investigator to examine the direction and strength of association between the two variables, while ensuring that the moderation effects of variables like university classification and gender are statistically tested.

Research Variables

The independent and dependent variables for the study were social media interaction and avoidant personality disorder. Social media interaction was measured using the participant's extent of social media interaction indicated by membership in different types of social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Skype, and Snapchat) and active participation in interactive activities (posts, shares, like follows/followers, comments, reaches and impressions), intensity and the pattern of social media interaction. The key indicators for avoidant personality disorder features included; levels of social phobia, social reservations, thoughts and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, excess sensitivity to criticism, and avoidance of social contact are all symptoms of social anxiety, fear of rejection, and social withdrawal and were measured using a rating scale with items measuring low, moderate, high or extremely high levels of AVPD.

Location for the Study

The study was carried out in several selected universities whose main campus is located in Nairobi City County, with a total of 21 universities. Nairobi City County was purposively chosen because almost half of the universities in Kenya have their main campuses located in the County. In Nairobi City County, being the capital city, the internet connectivity and technological advancement are higher than in other counties, and the researcher assumed that there was high social media interaction among university students in this region.

Study population

The target population used for the study was obtained from 5 public chartered universities, 8 private universities with charters, and 8 universities having Letter of Interim Authority (LIA) located within Nairobi City County, with a population of 237305, which was the target population of this study.

Ethical Considerations

To safeguard the privacy and dignity of the respondents, the study process ensured rigorous measures implementation to promote anonymity and confidentiality. The study employed a system of data coding to replace the names of participants on all data collection instruments, thereby breaking the link between the data provided and the individual's identity. All physical data tools were stored in a secure, locked cabinet, while digital datasets were password protected only accessible to the researcher. Furthermore, the reporting of the findings was done in an aggregate format to prevent identification of any participant. These measures collectively ensured that the risk of social or psychological harm was minimized, fulfilling the researcher's obligation to protect the welfare of the research population.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A total of 326 participants answered the study questionnaire from the sampled 368 students, indicating an 88% response rate. This is above the threshold that Mugenda et al (2013) states that a response rate of 70% and above is considered sufficient in conducting data analysis and reporting of findings. Additionally, nine university counsellors from the sampled institutions took part in the study by responding to the interview schedules.

Uptake of Social Media Interaction

Table 1 Uptake of Social Media

Past Use		Frequency	Percent
	No response	1	0.3
	Yes	308	94.5
	No	17	5.2
	Total	326	100.0
Current Use		Frequency	Percent
	No response	14	4.3
	Yes	291	89.3
	No	21	6.4
	Total	326	100.0

As shown in the table, 94.5% of the students indicated that they have previously used social media, while 89.3% of the students noted that they currently use social media. These findings indicate a high level of social interaction from the social media uptake among university students. The findings concur with past studies that have discovered high levels of social media uptake among university students across the globe. For example, Wang et al. (2025) in their survey conducted in North America, Asia, and Europe established that 88% and 98% of university students accessed at least one social media platform daily. Another study by Langat and Alfred (2017) assessed the impact of social network on academic performance of university students in Kenya among 250 of students from Kenyatta University; the findings indicated that out of the fully completed and returned 222 questionnaires, 100% of the participants confirmed that they utilized social medial platforms. These findings point to the fact that there is a high uptake of social media among university students.

Table 2 Type of Social Media Application

Social Media Application	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	218	66.9

LinkedIn	67	20.6
YouTube	241	73.9
Twitter	147	45.1
Instagram	215	66.0
Snap Chat	148	45.4
WhatsApp	287	88.0
Telegram	86	26.4

To further establish the level of social media interaction, the study aimed at determining the intensity of social media interaction. The students were provided with a list of 6 statements assessing the extent of their interactions on social media. The students were required to rate the statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly agree). The scale was further transformed to determine the level of intensity. The 6 statements on the measurement tool meant that the highest attainable score was 30 (6x5) whereas the least attainable score was 6 (6x1). The respondent's total score was calculated by adding the scores for each statement in the tool. Thereafter, 3 levels were made as categories for the scores where those ranging between 6 to 15 indicated low intensity of social media interaction, scores between 16 to 21 indicated moderate intensity of social media interaction and scores between 22 to 30 indicated high intensity of social media interaction.

Table 3 Intensity of Social Media Interaction

Intensity	Frequency	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low Intensity	27	9.3	6	30	21.70	5.414
Moderate Intensity	100	34.4				
High Intensity	164	56.4				
Total	291	100.0				

Levels of Avoidant Personality Disorder Traits among Students

This study sought to interrogate levels of avoidant personality disorder traits among students in sampled Universities in Nairobi City County. To determine the levels of avoidant personality disorder, students were provided with a scale adapted from Rogge & Kirkland (2014) with 7 items. The students were supposed to rate the statements on a 4-point Likert scale (1- Low, 2- Moderate, 3- High, 4- Extremely High). The scale was further transformed to determine the level of avoidant personality disorder. The 7 statements on the tool meant that the highest attainable result was 28 (7x4) and the least attainable result was 7 (7x1). 3 levels were established as the categories for the results where scores ranging between 7 to 14 indicated low avoidant personality disorder tendencies, scores between 15 to 21 indicated moderate avoidant personality disorder and scores between 22 to 28 indicated high avoidant personality disorder.

Table 4 Levels of Avoidant Personality Disorder Traits

Avoidant Personality	Frequency	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Low Level	73	25.1	7	28	17.69	5.551
Moderate Level	145	49.8				
High Level	73	25.1				
Total	291	100.0				

From the table, 49.8% of the students had a moderate level of avoidant personality disorder traits, 25.1% had a low and high level of avoidant personality disorder traits respectively. The least results attained was 7, while the highest attained result was 28. The average of the scores was 17.69 (SD = 5.551), indicating that on average the students had a moderate level of avoidant personality disorder features.

The qualitative findings from the University counselors further highlighted social withdrawal as a key aspect of avoidant personality disorder.

“Avoidant personality disorder entails secluding oneself from social spaces.” (Counselor, University with Letter of Interim Authority).

“AVPD is where individuals avoid socializing with others.” (Counselor, Public University).

“Avoidant personality disorder deals with individuals who avoid others socially.” (Counselor, Private University)

The counselors’ perspective from the qualitative data is further supported by findings conducted in the Kenyan context. For instance, a comprehensive study by Waithira (2024) on the mental health of Kenyan university students revealed that approximately 30.9% of this population meets the criteria for significant psychological distress, with social withdrawal and interpersonal anxiety being leading symptoms. Unlike previous decades that prioritized dramatic Cluster B symptoms in hospital settings, current research at the University of Nairobi suggests that Cluster C traits, specifically social inhibition and fear of rejection are increasingly prevalent in student populations (Jane, 2021).

Psychological Interventions That Can Mitigate the Effects of the Association between Level of Social Media Interaction and Avoidant Personality Disorder Traits among Students

This study sought to explore appropriate psychological intervening strategies that can be used to mitigate the effects of the association between social media interaction and avoidant personality disorder traits among students in selected universities in Nairobi City County. To answer the objective, the students were required to indicate the best mitigating strategy from a list of provided interventions. The summary of findings is presented in the following table.

Table 5 Psychological Interventions

Interventions	Frequency	Percent
Stop avoiding social activities	49	15.0
Increase socialization	114	35.0
Show more affection	82	25.2
Assurance of uncritical acceptance	63	19.3
Become less sensitive to rejection	57	17.5
Become less inhibited in new social situations	88	27.0
Stop feeling socially inept or inferior to others	60	18.4
Overcome fear of embarrassment	69	21.2

As shown in the table, 35% of the students indicated that increasing socialization was an effective psychological intervention in mitigating avoidant personality disorder characteristics as a result of social media interaction, 27% observed that learning to become less inhibited in new social situations was an effective strategy, 25.2% noted receiving more affection was effective, while 21.2% indicated that overcoming the fear of embarrassment was an effective psychological intervention. These findings on intervention indicate that increasing or encouraging physical socialization and motivating young people to reduce the time they spent on social media can help decline social media addiction and its adverse effects on personality. These findings are consistent with Fink et al. (2022) longitudinal study in the United States, examining the protective factors that mitigate psychological distress among a sample of 1,154 young adults.

Qualitative findings from the University counsellors outlined the emphasized on the importance of peer led interventions, as follows:

“Training peer counsellors as youths tend to listen to each other more.” (Counsellor, University with interim letter of authority).

“Peers can learn from one another on better ways of socializing and networking on social media.” (Counsellor, Private University).

The qualitative findings are supported by a previous study conducted in Kenya by Kutto et al. (2023) who conducted a pilot study across three major public universities in Kenya, examining the impact of a Peer-Led Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (P-CBT) intervention on student mental health. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the researchers trained 40 peer counselors to deliver structured CBT modules to 250 students who screened high for psychological distress. Success was measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) scale, with data analyzed through ANCOVA to adjust for baseline differences. The findings showed that the peer-led model significantly reduced symptoms of social anxiety and depression.

CONCLUSION

Multiple regression mediation findings established that patterns of social media interaction and intensity of social media interaction significantly and positively contributed to avoidant personality disorder traits ($\beta=1.811$, $p=0.000$) and ($\beta=2.990$, $p=0.000$). However, the association between patterns of social media interaction and intensity of social media interaction and avoidant personality disorder traits did not differ statistically by gender ($p=.469$).

The results show that 35% of the students indicated that increasing socialization was an effective psychological intervention in mitigating avoidant personality disorder features as a result of social media interaction, 27% observed that learning to become less inhibited in new social situations was an effective strategy, 25.2% noted receiving more affection was effective, while 21.2% indicated that overcoming the fear of embarrassment was an effective psychological intervention.

Quantitative study findings established that increasing socialization, learning to become less inhibited in new social situations, and receiving more affection were effective psychological intervention in mitigating avoidant personality disorder characteristics as a result of social media interaction from the student perspectives, while qualitative findings from the university counsellors indicated that peer support training was an effective strategy. The intervention strategies were also backed by related literature, and the study therefore concludes that social skills trainings and peer support are effective interventions for mitigating avoidant personality disorder traits among the university students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The study established a positive association between level of social media interaction and levels of avoidant personality disorder traits. The study therefore recommends that the universities incorporate social media-based interventions aimed at mitigating the association between social media interaction and avoidance personality disorder.
2. Based on the findings, the study recommends incorporation of social skills training and peer support programs in the university curriculum as intervention strategies in mitigating the association between levels of social media interaction and avoidance personality disorder traits among the university students.

Abbreviations And Acronyms

SNS:	Social Networking Sites
AVPD:	Avoidant Personality Disorder
PD:	Personality Disorder
LIA:	Letter of Interim Authority

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