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Beyond Screen Time: Violent and Risky Media Exposure, Impulsivity, and Sensation-Seeking Tendencies among Youth

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Abstract

The present study examined whether violent and risky media exposure and impulsivity predicted sensation-seeking tendencies among youth after controlling for demographic characteristics and daily social media use. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was used. The sample comprised 300 college and university youth from Pakistan, with ages ranging from 18 to 30 years. The Brief Version of the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale, the Content-Based Media Exposure Scale, the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale, and a demographic information sheet were all completed by the participants. Sensation-seeking tendencies were positively correlated with impulsivity and exposure to violent or risky media, according to Pearson correlations. According to hierarchical regression analysis, 5.7% of the variance in sensation-seeking tendencies was explained by media use and demographic controls. Impulsivity and exposure to violent and risky media significantly improved the model, accounting for 15.1% of the variance. Impulsivity was the next strongest positive predictor, after exposure to violent and risky media. The final model was non-significant with regard to daily use of SMM indicating that the type of exposure to social media may be more relevant than the amount of time spent on social media. The findings lend support to the use of sensation-seeking tendencies as the psychometrically appropriate outcome and highlight the importance of separating the amount of violent and risky media content from the amount of screen time. The study adds to the body of research on the effects of media on youth by demonstrating that sensation-seeking is linked to both self-regulatory tendencies and exposure to content-based media.

Keywords: Violent Media Exposure; Risky Media Exposure; Impulsivity; Sensation Seeking; Youth; Content-Based Media Exposure; Social Media Use

Introduction

Recent years have seen a substantial move in the media environments of young people, with exposure now extending to highly accessible social media platforms, short-form videos, streaming content, and interactive digital places rather than just TV, movies, or video games (Lahti et al., 2024; Hayes et al., 2025). This change has led Den Hamer et al. (2017) and Khurana et al. (2019) to suggest that it is important to explore young people's media consumption and the different types of content they encounter across screens, as exposure to content may have varying psychological effects compared to screen time. According to modern research, adolescents may be exposed to a range of risky or unfavorable online content, such as unsafe social media content, drug-related content, cyberbullying, and content that possibly will have an impact on their mental health (Lahti et al., 2024). As violent and risky media content commonly shows hostility, hazard, adventure, substance abuse, rule-breaking, or

other high-

arousal behaviors as pleasing or rewarding, it remains a relevant psychological concern within this broader media environment (Anderson et al., 2017; Anderson & Bushman, 2018; Khurana et al., 2019). The literature on media effects has long maintained that exposure to violent media can affect behavioral scripts, affect, arousal, cognition, and appraisal processes. According to the General Aggression Model, violent media can influence aggressive thoughts, emotional activation, physiological arousal, and social situation interpretations (Anderson & Bushman, 2018). The General Aggression Model's broader social-cognitive logic helps understand how risk-related psychological tendencies, such as attraction toward stimulation, novelty, and intense experiences, may be linked to repeated exposure to violent and risky scripts, even though its primary purpose is to explain aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2018; Anderson et al., 2017; Khurana et al., 2019). The relevance of violent media exposure is still supported by recent empirical research; Hayes, Anderson, and Swing (2025) found a positive correlation between violent media exposure and impulsivity and attention-related issues in college students. The frequent reliance on overall media-use frequency or screen time is a significant drawback of previous media research. These metrics do not distinguish between content that is neutral, prosocial, violent, antisocial or risk-related for youth. To tackle this issue, Den Hamer, Konijn, and Bushman (2017) created the content-based media exposure framework, which measures exposure to specific types of media content, not to media usage. The work is especially relevant for studies that take violent and risky media into account, as they distinguish antisocial content from neutral and prosocial content. This is significant because fighting, stealing, substance use, vandalism and other antisocial content might be related to different psychological factors than that of general media use or prosocial media content (Den Hamer et al., 2017; Khurana et al., 2019; Hayes et al., 2025).

In addition, recent evidence from outside of the West bolsters the ongoing usefulness of media-violence research with non-Western samples. A media violence exposure was correlated with aggression-related outcomes among adults in Lebanon, and psychological distress was found to mediate the associations between media violence exposure and aggression-related outcomes, according to Chabbouh et al. (2023). Although aggression is not the outcome of the present study, this evidence is useful because it shows that violent media exposure remains psychologically meaningful in non-Western sociocultural contexts as well. Similarly, Khurana et al. (2019) found that risky media exposure was associated with adolescent risk behaviors and that impulsivity and sensation seeking shaped young people’s exposure to and susceptibility to risky media. Together, these findings support the need to examine violent and risky media exposure in relation to risk-related traits among youth (Chabbouh et al., 2023; Khurana et al., 2019).

Sensation seeking is one such risk-related trait. It refers to the tendency to seek novel, varied, intense, and exciting experiences, including experiences that may involve some degree of risk (Zuckerman, 1994; Hoyle et al., 2002). Sensation seeking has been widely studied in relation to adolescent and young-adult risk behaviors, including substance use, aggression, and other high-arousal behaviors (Quinn & Harden, 2013; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2016; Wasserman et al., 2020). Sensation seeking does not necessarily imply direct risk-taking behavior. Instead, it is a motivational disposition to explore and seek out novelty and stimulation that can be either positive or negative in terms of the behavior, depending on the person's self-regulation, the context, the peer environment, and the opportunities provided (Yoneda et al., 2019; Hoyle et al., 2002; Zuckerman, 1994). Another significant factor to youth risk research is impulsivity, but which is conceptually distinct from sensation seeking. Impulsivity involves acting impulsively and sensation seeking involves attraction to novelty, reward, and intensity of stimulation (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Khurana et al., 2019; Wasserman et al., 2020). The developmental research indicates that there are different developmental paths for the facets of impulsivity and sensation seeking in adolescence/early adulthood. Impulsivity is typically understood to decline with age as cognitive control improves whereas sensation seeking is generally understood to increase as a developmental phenomenon in adolescence, linked to increases in incentive sensitivity (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Steinberg, 2008; Wasserman et al., 2020).

Therefore, both constructs may impact on risk-related leanings but should not be used interchangeably. The dual systems model offers a theoretical framework to explain this difference. This model holds that an imbalance between heightened socioemotional reward sensitivity and gradually developing cognitive control shapes youth risk tendencies (Steinberg, 2008; Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011). These gaps are defined as behavioral inhibition and planning and consequence evaluation, and sensation seeking is defined as responsivity to novelty and reward (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Wasserman et al., 2020). This difference is corroborated by contemporary longitudinal data, as well. impulsivity and sensation seeking were related but distinct developmental constructs, as reported by Wasserman et al. (2020). In the same way, Yoneda et al. (2019) reported the moderate sensation seeking combined with low impulsivity was associated with more favorable young-adult outcomes. These results hint that sensation seeking is more challenging when it coincides with environments that raise your risk-taking or poor impulse control (Yoneda et al., 2019; Wasserman et al., 2020). Differential susceptibility perspectives can also be used to understand the relationship between violent and risky media exposure, impulsivity, and sensation seeking. According to the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model, media effects vary according to dispositional, developmental, and social factors; therefore, young people may differ both in the content they select and in how they respond to that content (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013; Khurana et al., 2019). Youth with stronger sensation-seeking tendencies may be more attracted to exciting or risky media content, and repeated exposure to such content may also increase interest in stimulation and risk-compatible experiences (Khurana et al., 2019). Because cross-sectional studies cannot determine whether media exposure influences sensation seeking, whether sensation-seeking youth select more violent and risky content, or whether both processes occur simultaneously, this reciprocal possibility should be interpreted cautiously (Khurana et al., 2019; Lahti et al., 2024).

There are still gaps in our understanding of violent media, impulsivity, and risky behavior in adolescents. First, rather than sensation-seeking tendencies as a psychological outcome, a large portion of media-effects research has concentrated on aggression, ADHD-related behaviors, or particular risk behaviors (Anderson et al., 2017; Nikkelen et al., 2014; Chabbouh et al., 2023; Hayes et al., 2025). Second, although recent and foundational research indicates that the type of media content may be more psychologically informative than duration alone, studies frequently rely on general screen time rather than content-specific exposure (Den Hamer et al., 2017; Khurana et al., 2019; Hayes et al., 2025). Third, there is still limited evidence from Pakistani youth samples looking at impulsivity, sensation-seeking tendencies, and exposure to violent and risky media. It is crucial to close these gaps because young people in Pakistan are also enmeshed in quickly growing digital media environments, but there is still a dearth of local empirical research on media exposure specific to certain content and risk-related personality tendencies.

Therefore, after adjusting for age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, location, and daily social media use, the current study investigated whether exposure to violent and risky media and impulsivity predicted sensation-seeking tendencies among youth. Two major contributions are made by the study. First, it takes a content-specific approach by emphasizing media exposure that is violent and risky rather than media use in general. Second, because the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale measures a personality tendency rather than observed risky acts, treating sensation-seeking tendencies as the outcome is more psychometrically accurate than classifying the outcome as direct risk-taking behavior (Hoyle et al., 2002; Stephenson et al., 2007). Based on prior literature, it was expected that violent and risky media exposure and impulsivity would be positively associated with sensation-seeking tendencies, and that both predictors would explain additional variance beyond demographic characteristics and daily social media use (Khurana et al., 2019; Hayes et al., 2025; Wasserman et al., 2020).

Method

Research Design

The present study used a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine whether violent and risky media exposure and impulsivity predicted sensation-seeking tendencies among youth. A cross-sectional survey design was appropriate because the study aimed to examine naturally occurring associations among media exposure, impulsivity, and sensation seeking at a single point in time, without manipulating any study variable. This approach is consistent with previous research examining risky media exposure, impulsivity, sensation seeking, and youth risk-related tendencies through self-report survey methods (Khurana et al., 2019; Nikkelen et al., 2014).

Participants and Sampling

The sample comprised 300 youth participants drawn from college and university settings in Pakistan. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 30 years. The mean age of participants was 22.74 years (SD = 2.90). The sample included 96 males (32.0%) and 204 females (68.0%). The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling which was based on the following criteria: participants were those who watched television, movies, video games, and/or used social media, and were regular users of media. Purposive sampling was appropriate as it was necessary to have participants with enough exposure to media to respond to the media exposure measure in a meaningful way. The participants were selected on the condition that they were attending a college or university, used the media regularly, could comprehend the language of the questionnaire, and gave their consent to participate. Those with a history of psychiatric/psychological disorders, taking medication for psychiatric illness, cognitive impairment, or limited contact with media content were excluded.

Measures

Demographic Information Sheet

A demographic information sheet was completed by all participants which included their age, gender, education, socio-economic status, residential area, and the frequency of social media usage. Given earlier research on media-effects which suggests that exposure to and risk tendencies in media might differ across demographic and developmental factors, these variables were thus used to describe the sample and to control for relevant developmental and demographic factors in the regression analysis (Khurana et al., 2019; Nikkelen et al., 2014).

Violent and Risky Media Exposure

The Content-based Media Exposure Scale (C-ME) was used to measure exposure to violent and risky media. As an alternative to just measuring overall screen time, the C-ME was designed to measure exposure to specific kinds of media content across media platforms. Eight of the original scale's seventeen items measure exposure to antisocial content, whereas nine measure neutral filler content. According to Den Hamer et al. (2017), the antisocial content items assess exposure to media portrayals of behaviors like fighting, shoplifting, drug use, vandalism, and other hazardous and antisocial behaviors. Only the antisocial/risk-content items were used to compute the violent and risky media exposure score in this study. The study focused on exposure to violent and risky media content rather than general or prosocial media exposure; thus, this scoring decision is conceptually justified. This distinction is further supported by Den Hamer, Konijn, and Bushman's extended C-ME2, which distinguishes between antisocial and prosocial media content, with prosocial items referring to actions like helping, comforting, and standing up for others (Den Hamer et al., 2017). Higher scores were associated with increased exposure to violent and risky media content. The eight-item violent and risky media exposure score in the current sample had good internal consistency (Cronbach's α =.880).

Impulsivity

The Brief Version of the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11) was used to gauge impulsivity (Patton et al., 1995). A popular tool for measuring trait impulsivity is the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale, which evaluates traits like impulsive behavior, poor planning, and trouble maintaining focus. Selected items that effectively measure general impulsive tendencies are included in the brief version used in this study. Higher scores indicated greater impulsivity. Participants answered questions on a Likert-type scale. Conceptually, impulsivity is the propensity to act hastily or without giving the consequences enough thought. It differs from sensation seeking in that the latter reflects an attraction to novelty, excitement, and stimulation, while impulsivity reflects a lack of behavioral control (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Khurana et al., 2019). The impulsivity scale in the current sample had marginal internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .606$).

Sensation-Seeking Tendencies

The Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS) was used to measure sensation-seeking tendencies. The BSSS is an eight-item self-report instrument that measures an individual's desire for exploration of new, exciting, intense and varied experiences, some of which are potentially dangerous. Each item is rated using a 5-point scale ranging from Strong Disagree to Strong Agree. Each of the 8 items is summed to arrive at the Final Score (8-40). Greater sensation-seeking tendencies are indicated by higher scores (Hoyle et al., 2002). There are two items on each of the four dimensions of sensation seeking in the BSSS: experience seeking, thrill and adventure seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility. The total BSSS score was used as the outcome variable in this study, however, as the article focused on general sensation-seeking tendencies and not on differences within the subscales. This is a measure of a personality disposition that is related to risk rather than of actual engagement in risky behaviors, and therefore is more appropriate than the term "risk-taking behavior. The Cronbach's α for the BSSS was satisfactory ($\alpha = .788$) in the present sample.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose and confidentiality of the study and they were also assured that their responses would be confidential and for research purpose only. Prior to administering the questionnaire informed consent was obtained. Participants then filled out the demographic information sheet followed by the Brief Barratt Impulsiveness Scale, Brief Sensation Seeking Scale, and the Content-based Media Exposure Scale. They were instructed to respond to all the questions honestly with the format supplied. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participants were made aware that participation was voluntary and that they could leave at any time without any penalty. The responses were encoded, and the data stored securely, ensuring that the data would be treated in a confidential and anonymous way. The study excluded those with known mental health problems or cognitive deficits to minimize potential suffering and allow study participants to complete questionnaires successfully. Institutional ethical approval was obtained before data collection.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics, reliability, normality and Pearson correlations were first calculated. Then, hierarchical regression was performed to see whether the effect of impulsivity and violent and risky media exposure was independent of the demographic and media-use factors in predicting sensation-seeking.

Results

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	*f* (%)
Age	≤20 years	57 (19.0)
	21–25 years	200 (66.7)
	≥26 years	43 (14.3)
Gender	Male	96 (32.0)
	Female	204 (68.0)
Education	Intermediate	59 (19.7)
	Undergraduate	133 (44.3)
	Postgraduate	108 (36.0)
Socioeconomic status	Low	25 (8.3)
	Middle	229 (76.3)
	High	46 (15.3)
Location	Urban	198 (66.0)
	Rural	102 (34.0)
Social media use/day	2–3 hours	104 (34.7)
	3–5 hours	121 (40.3)
	More than 5 hours	75 (25.0)

Note. $N = 300$. Age ranged from 18 to 30 years.

The internal consistency of the violent and risky media exposure measure was found to be good based on reliability analysis results with α = .880. The Brief Sensation Seeking Scale, which was also used, was found to have an acceptable reliability of α = .788. The marginal internal consistency for the impulsivity scale was α = .606. Results of descriptive statistics indicated moderate levels of impulsivity, sensation-seeking tendencies and violent and risky media exposure. Skewness and kurtosis values for all main study variables were acceptable and within acceptable limits, indicating that there was no serious violation of the normality assumptions for the correlation and regression analyses.

Table 2
Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	No. of items	α	*M*	*SD*	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis
Impulsivity	9	.606	22.04	4.12	9–35	0.13	0.19
Sensation-seeking tendencies	8	.788	26.45	6.84	8–40	-0.32	-0.16
Violent and risky media exposure	8	.880	19.26	7.39	8–39	0.21	-0.79

Note. $N = 300$. α = Cronbach's alpha.

Pearson correlation was used to explore the bivariate relationships between impulsivity, sensation-seeking tendencies, and violent and risky media exposure. Table 3 reveals that there was a weak but significant positive correlation between impulsivity and sensation-seeking tendencies ($r = .114$, $p = .048$). There was a stronger positive correlation between violent and risky media exposure and sensation-seeking tendencies, $r = .278$, $p < .001$. Impulsivity, on the other hand, was not significantly associated with violent and risky media exposure, $r = .016$, $p = .783$. These results showed that violent and risky media exposure, and higher impulsivity, correlated with higher sensation-seeking tendencies, with the bivariate correlation between violent and risky media exposure being clearer.

Table 3
Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Impulsivity	—		
2. Sensation-seeking tendencies	.114*	—	
3. Violent and risky media exposure	.016	.278**	—

Note. $N = 300$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

To investigate the effects of impulsivity and violent and risky media use on sensation-seeking tendencies after controlling for age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, location, daily social media use, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used. For Step 1, sensation-seeking tendencies were significantly predicted by the control variables, $R^2 = .057$, $F(6, 293) = 2.956$, $p = .008$. The variance accounted for by the control variables in Step 1 was 5.7%. For this step, the variables of gender and location were important predictors. The model was expanded to include impulsivity and violent and risky media exposure in Step 2. The model significantly improved, $\Delta R^2 = .094$, $\Delta F(2, 291) = 16.131$, $p < .001$. The final model explained 15.1% of the variance in sensation-seeking tendencies, $R^2 = .151$, adjusted $R^2 = .128$, $F(8, 291) = 6.479$, $p < .001$. Violent and risky media exposure was the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .288$, $p < .001$), and impulsivity was the next ($\beta = .114$, $p = .037$). Gender and location also remained significant in the final model. The findings show that the more youth were exposed to violent and risky media content and the more impulsive they were, the higher their sensation-seeking tendencies were, regardless of the demographic and media use factors.

Table 4
Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Sensation-Seeking Tendencies

Predictor	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*t*	*p*	95% CI for *B*
Step 1: Control variables						
Age	0.004	0.177	.002	0.024	.981	[-0.343, 0.352]
Gender	-2.495	0.858	-.170	-2.908	.004	[-4.184, -0.807]
Education	-0.441	0.536	-.065	-0.824	.411	[-1.496, 0.613]
Socioeconomic status	0.759	0.861	.054	0.882	.378	[-0.935, 2.453]
Location	-1.641	0.824	-.114	-1.990	.047	[-3.263, -0.018]
Social media use/day	0.618	0.511	.069	1.210	.227	[-0.387, 1.624]
Step 2: Main predictors						
Age	-0.045	0.169	-.019	-0.263	.792	[-0.377, 0.288]
Gender	-2.555	0.819	-.175	-3.121	.002	[-4.166, -0.944]
Education	-0.663	0.513	-.097	-1.292	.197	[-1.672, 0.347]
Socioeconomic status	0.856	0.822	.060	1.042	.298	[-0.761, 2.474]
Location	-1.683	0.785	-.117	-2.144	.033	[-3.228, -0.138]
Social media use/day	0.334	0.489	.037	0.682	.496	[-0.629, 1.296]
Impulsivity	0.189	0.090	.114	2.092	.037	[0.011, 0.366]
Violent and risky media exposure	0.266	0.051	.288	5.248	< .001	[0.167, 0.366]

Note. $N = 300$. Dependent variable = sensation-seeking tendencies. Step 1 included age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, location, and daily social media use. Step 2 added impulsivity and violent and risky media exposure. Step 1: $R^2 = .057$, adjusted $R^2 = .038$, $F(6, 293) = 2.956$, $p = .008$. Step 2: $R^2 = .151$, adjusted $R^2 = .128$, $F(8, 291) = 6.479$, $p < .001$. $\Delta R^2 = .094$, $\Delta F(2, 291) = 16.131$, $p <$
.001. VIF values ranged from 1.015 to 1.938, indicating no serious multicollinearity.

Discussion

In this study, age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, location, and the amount of time spent using social media were controlled for to determine if violent and risky media exposure and impulsivity predicted sensation-seeking among youth. The regression model showed that the exposure to violent and risky media was the strongest predictor among all predictors, and was positively related to sensation-seeking tendencies. Impulsivity also significantly predicted sensation-seeking tendencies, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent. The final model accounted for 15.1% of the variance of the sensation-seeking tendencies, suggesting that sensation-seeking is significantly related with the content-specific media exposure and individual self-regulatory tendencies of young people.

The study revealed that violent- and risky-media exposure had a significant effect on the sensation-seeking tendencies after controlling for daily social media usage and demographic factors. This is in line with the perception of content-based media exposure, which states that the psychological implications of media use depend not only on the amount consumed by young people, but also the types of content consumed by young people (Den Hamer et al., 2017). Daily social media use in this study did not contribute significantly to the final regression model, but exposure to content on social media that contains violence, antisocial behavior, or risk-taking may be more appropriate for predicting sensation-seeking tendencies. Similarly, the results are aligned with Khurana et al. (2019) who suggested that exposure to risky media content was related to adolescent risk behaviors, and that youth were more likely to be exposed to risky media content because of their higher sensation seeking and impulsivity. Despite the differences in the consequences measured in both studies (alcohol use, sexual risk, violence in the past studies; and sensation seeking in the present study), both studies support the notion that risky media content is psychologically meaningful in youth risk-related development (Khurana et al., 2019). The current finding thus builds on previous research by demonstrating a relationship between violent and risky exposure to media and a risk-related personality disposition, as well as behavioral risk outcomes. The finding may also be explained in terms of the General Aggression Model (GAM) which proposes that media violence is a situational construct that can be a source for changes in cognition, affect, arousal, evaluations, and behavioral scripts (Anderson & Bushman, 2018). The present study did not focus on aggression as the outcome, but violent and risky media could act as a high arousing environmental stimulus that exposes youth to excitement, danger, conflict and risk compatible scripts repeatedly. This exposure may be linked to higher tendency to seek novelty, stimulation and intense experience, characteristic components of sensation seeking (Hoyle et al., 2002; Zuckerman, 1994). Thus, the present finding is theoretically consistent with the media-effects models, but should be understood as a correlation and not as a causal effect, because the design of the study was cross-sectional. The second major finding was that impulsivity was significantly associated with sensations seeking tendencies, although the effect size was rather small. This result aligns with developmental and personality studies that revealed that impulsivity and sensation seeking are two separate constructs (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Khurana et al., 2019). Impulsivity is the tendency to act instinctively without thinking of the consequences, while sensation seeking is a desire for novel, intense, exciting and stimulating experiences (Zuckerman, 1994; Khurana et al., 2019). In this study, impulsivity was a significant predictor of sensation seeking in the regression model, but had only a modest bivariate correlation with sensation seeking. This indicates that impulsivity affects the sensation seeking tendencies; however, the two should not be confused.

This finding is in line with the "dual systems model" of adolescent risk development. This model proposes that impulsivity is related to a delayed maturation of cognitive control and behavioral regulation while sensation seeking is associated with increased reward sensitivity and novelty-seeking (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Steinberg, 2008). Similarly, Wasserman et al. (2020) suggested that impulsivity and sensation seeking are conceptually distinct and developmentally related. This discrepancy is maintained by the current findings, which display that even though impulsivity predicted sensation seeking, there was no significant relationship between impulsivity and exposure to violent and risky media. As in the case of high sensation seeking and low impulsivity, modest

sensation seeking and low impulsivity were accompanying to more positive outcomes in early adulthood (Yoneda et al., 2019). For the reason that the outcome variable measured sensation-seeking inclinations rather than actual dangerous behavior, this distinction is useful for interpreting the present findings. Therefore, elevated sensation seeking in this research should be seen as a tendency toward novelty and stimulation, which can be problematic if linked with weakened self-regulatory skills or when encountered in contexts where risks are glorified (Yoneda et al., 2019).

One key finding of the present study is that exposure to violent and risky media is related to sensation-seeking tendencies even after controlling for daily social media use. In the final model, there was daily social media use was no longer significant. This reinforces the idea that the media's contents can be more important than the time spent using the medium in a study of youth's risk tendencies. This aligns with Den Hamer et al. (2017), who hypothesized that content-based media exposure offers a more accurate measure than the general media-use frequency, as this may be correlated to different aspects of content. This finding also aligns with Nikkelen et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis of the relationship between media use and ADHD-related behaviors that found that media use had a small, significant association with ADHD-related behaviors, including impulsivity, while also highlighting that content-specific factors like violence and pacing may be important. Hayes et al. (2025) also found that violent media exposure was uniquely correlated with impulsivity among college students, while accounting for fast paced exposure to media. Combining these study results, the present study concludes that content-specific violent and risky exposure might be more psychologically informative than the general media use duration.

In the final regression model, gender and location remained significant predictors of the sensation seeking tendencies. These findings indicate that there may be differences among demographic groups in this sample in terms of sensation seeking profiles. However, the results have to be interpreted cautiously as the direction of the coefficients is sensitive to the coding of gender and location. Sensation seeking has been demonstrated in previous studies to have gender differences, and sometimes males are more likely to score high on sensation seeking than females, but this is not always the case (Cross et al., 2011; Hoyle et al., 2002). Likewise, the rural-urban differences might be a function of differences in social exposure, media access, peer norms or opportunity structures, but the present study was not designed to explain these differences. These demographic results should thus be presented as an association controlled rather than a central conclusion. Neither age, education, socioeconomic status nor daily social media use were significant in the final model. The non-significant effect of age could be attributed to the limited sample of young people as the age range was mostly composed of young adults. The lack of a significant association between background variables and sensation-seeking tendencies implies that exposure to violent and risky media and impulsivity were more directly associated with sensation-seeking tendencies in the present model. The results must however be viewed with some caution, as purposive sampling might limit representativeness representativeness of its demographic profile.

Conclusion

The study found that violent and risky media exposure and impulsivity significantly predicted sensation-seeking tendencies among youth. Violent and risky media exposure was the stronger predictor, suggesting that exposure to antisocial, violent, and risk-related media content may be especially relevant to youth attraction toward novelty, stimulation, and intense experiences. Sensation seeking was also influenced by impulsivity, which supports the idea that self-regulatory tendencies are still crucial for comprehending risk-related characteristics in young people. Crucially, when content-specific exposure was taken into account, daily social media use did not predict sensation seeking, suggesting that what young people consume may be more important than how long they use media.

Overall, the results underline the significance of differentiating direct risk-taking behavior from sensation-seeking tendencies and support a content-based media exposure strategy.

Implications

The results have various ramifications for prevention, education, and research. First, the study recommends that content-specific measures of exposure be included in youth media research, in addition to general screen-time indicators. This is especially crucial because, even when daily social media use was regulated, exposure to violent and risky media predicted sensation-seeking tendencies. Second, media literacy programs for young people should assist students in critically analyzing violent, antisocial, and risk-glorifying content in addition to limiting media consumption. Third, the discovery that impulsivity predicted sensation seeking implies that youth who are more drawn to high-arousal or risk-related experiences may benefit from interventions targeted at enhancing self-regulation, planning, and thoughtful decision-making. Lastly, by redefining the result as sensation-seeking tendencies rather than direct risk-taking behavior, the study enhances conceptual and measurement accuracy and adds to the body of psychological literature.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to the study that should be noted. First, it is impossible to determine causality due to the cross-sectional design. Whether sensation-seeking youth choose more violent and risky content, whether exposure to violent and risky media increases sensation seeking, or whether both processes take place simultaneously cannot be determined. Second, the use of self-report questionnaires may result in response bias, such as erroneous memories of media exposure or social desirability. Third, results about impulsivity should be interpreted cautiously since the impulsivity scale demonstrated marginal reliability in the current sample. Fourth, the sample's generalizability to non-student youth or larger community populations is limited because it was drawn from college and university youth using purposive sampling. Lastly, results shouldn't be overstated as proof of behavioral risk because the study measured sensation-seeking tendencies rather than actual risk-taking behaviors.

Suggestions for Future Research

To determine the direction of the relationship between exposure to violent and risky media and sensation-seeking tendencies, future research should employ longitudinal designs. Sensation-seeking youth may selectively seek out more violent and risky content over time, or exposure to risky media may be a predictor of later increases in sensation-seeking. To differentiate personality tendency from actual behavioral engagement, future research should also take into account behavioral indicators of risk-taking, such as substance abuse, careless driving, risky sexual behavior, or aggressive behavior. Short-term effects of exposure to particular media content may also be captured by experimental or diary-based research. Furthermore, more accurate and culturally validated measures of impulsivity in Pakistani youth samples should be used in future research. Lastly, researchers should investigate whether the association between exposure to violent and risky media and youth risk-related tendencies is moderated by elements like parental supervision, peer pressure, emotion control, and media literacy.

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