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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 did not find daily social media use to be significant, indicating that exposure to specific content might be more important than overall media use duration. The results support the use of sensation-seeking tendencies rather than direct risk-taking behavior as the psychometrically accurate outcome and emphasize the significance of separating violent and risky media content from total 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 as well as 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). According to Den Hamer et al. (2017) and Khurana et al. (2019), this shift has made it important to examine young people's media use as well as the varieties of content they originate across, since content-based exposure possibly will have diverse psychological implications than whole 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 higher 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 differentiate between content that is neutral, prosocial, violent, antisocial, or risk-related for youth. In order to address this problem, Den Hamer, Konijn, and Bushman (2017) developed the content-based media exposure framework, which evaluates exposure to particular media content rather than media use in general. Their work is particularly relevant to studies considering exposure to violent and hazardous media because it distinguishes antisocial content from neutral and prosocial content. This distinction is important because content involving fighting, stealing, substance use, vandalism, and other antisocial behaviors may have different psychological correlates than general media use or prosocial media content (Den Hamer et al., 2017; Khurana et al., 2019; Hayes et al., 2025).

Recent non-Western evidence also supports the continuing relevance of media-violence research beyond Western samples. Chabbouh et al. (2023) found that exposure to media violence was associated with aggression-related outcomes among Lebanese adults, with psychological distress partly explaining these associations. 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). However, sensation seeking should not be equated with direct risk-taking behavior. Rather, it represents a motivational tendency toward novelty and stimulation, which may or may not translate into harmful behavior depending on self-regulation, context, peer influence, and opportunity structures (Hoyle et al., 2002; Yoneda et al., 2019; Zuckerman, 1994).

Impulsivity is another important construct in youth risk-related research, but it is conceptually different from sensation seeking. Impulsivity refers to acting quickly or without adequate consideration of consequences, whereas sensation seeking reflects attraction toward novelty, reward, and intense stimulation (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Khurana et al., 2019; Wasserman et al., 2020). Developmental studies suggest that there are divergent trajectories for impulsivity and sensation seeking in adolescence and early adulthood. While impulsivity is stereotypically thought to decrease with age and increasing cognitive control and self-regulatory ability, sensation seeking is generally known to rise during adolescence due to increased incentive sensitivity (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011;

Steinberg, 2008; Wasserman et al., 2020). As a result, although both constructs might influence risk-related leanings, they shouldn't be cast off interchangeably.

A supportive theoretical groundwork for understanding this difference is provided by the dual systems model. This model holds that a disparity between increased socioemotional incentive sensitivity and more and more developing cognitive control figures youth risk tendencies (Steinberg, 2008; Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011). This agenda defines these gaps as behavioral inhibition, planning, and consequence evaluation, while responsivity to novelty and reward is defined as sensation seeking (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Wasserman et al., 2020). This discrepancy is additionally supported by modern longitudinal data. Sensation seeking had future relevance and was orthogonal to impulsivity, which were both progressive, as reported by Wasserman et al. (2020). Similarly, Yoneda et al. (2019) found that sensation seeking is not necessarily a bad thing, with low sensation seeking and low impulsivity in youth being the predictors of better 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 exposure perceptions can also be used to understand the relationship between exposure to risky and violent media, impulsivity, and sensation seeking. According to the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013; Khurana et al., 2019), media effects vary depending on dispositional, developmental, and social factors. This means that young people may differ in both the media content they choose and how they react to it. Exciting or risky media content may appeal more to young people with stronger sensation-seeking tendencies, and repeated exposure to such content may also increase awareness in motivation and know-how that are risk-compatible (Khurana et al., 2019) For the reason that 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 at the same time, this give-and-take possibility is particularly momentous (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 dangerous 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%). A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants who were regular users of media, including television, movies, video games, and/or social media. Purposive sampling was suitable because the study required participants who had sufficient exposure to media content to respond meaningfully to the media exposure measure. Participants were included if they were enrolled in a college or university, were regular media consumers, were able to understand the questionnaire language, and voluntarily agreed to participate. People who had a history of psychiatric or psychological disorders, were on medication for a mental illness, had cognitive impairment, or had little interaction with media content were not included.

Measures

Demographic Information Sheet

Participants' age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, residential location, and daily use of social media were all recorded on a demographic information sheet. Because previous media-effects research indicates that media exposure and risk-related tendencies may vary by demographic and developmental characteristics, these variables were included to describe the sample and control for pertinent demographic and media-use characteristics 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 intended to weigh exposure to specific kinds of media content across media platforms. Eight of the original scale's seventeen items measure exposure to antisocial content, even though 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, defacement, 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 protracted C-ME2, which discriminates between prosocial and antisocial media content, with prosocial items referring to actions like supporting, reassuring, and standing up for others (Den Hamer et al., 2017). Higher scores were associated with increased exposure to dangerous and violent 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 $\alpha = .606$). Although this value should be cautiously acknowledged in the limitations section, the scale was kept because it demonstrated significant associations in the final model and is theoretically essential to the study.

Sensation-Seeking Tendencies

The Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS) was used to measure sensation-seeking tendencies. The BSSS is an eight-item self-report test designed to gauge a person's propensity to seek out new, exciting, intense, and varied experiences, including potentially risky ones. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement, is used to rate each item. All eight items are added up to determine the final score, which can range from 8 to 40. Greater sensation-seeking tendencies are indicated by higher scores (Hoyle et al., 2002). The BSSS includes two items for each of the four dimensions of sensation seeking: experience seeking, thrill and adventure seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility. However, because the article concentrated on general sensation-seeking tendencies rather than subscale-level variations, the total BSSS score was employed as the outcome variable in this study. The scale measures a risk-related personality tendency rather than direct behavioral engagement in risky acts, so this phrase is more accurate than "risk-taking behavior." The BSSS demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency in the current sample, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .788$.

Procedure

Participants were made aware of the study's objectives and given the assurance that their answers would be kept private and used exclusively for research. Previous to overseeing the questionnaire, informed consent was obtained. After completing the demographic information sheet, participants completed the Brief Barratt Impulsiveness Scale, Brief Sensation Seeking Scale, and Content-based Media Exposure Scale. They were told to answer all questions truthfully using the layout provided. The entire study was conducted with ethical concerns in mind. Participants were made aware that participation was voluntary and that they could leave at any time without any penalty. The answers were coded, and the data were stored securely to ensure confidential and anonymous treatment of the data. To reduce probable suffering and ensure that participants could understand and properly complete the questionnaires, the study excluded people with detected mental health disorders or cognitive impairments. Institutional ethical approval was the lead data collection process.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS was used to analyze the data. Firstly, descriptive statistics, reliability, normality, and Pearson correlations were taken. Next, hierarchical regression was conducted to determine if impulsivity and violent/risky media use predicted sensation-seeking beyond the demographic and media-use factors.

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.

Reliability analysis showed that the violent and risky media exposure measure had good internal consistency, α = .880. The Brief Sensation Seeking Scale also showed acceptable reliability, α = .788. The impulsivity scale showed marginal internal consistency, α = .606; therefore, findings involving impulsivity should be interpreted with some caution. Descriptive statistics showed that participants reported moderate levels of impulsivity, sensation-seeking tendencies, and violent and risky media exposure. Skewness and kurtosis values for all main study variables were within acceptable ranges, suggesting no serious violation of normality assumptions for 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 analysis was conducted to examine bivariate associations among impulsivity, sensation-seeking tendencies, and violent and risky media exposure. As shown in Table 3, impulsivity had a weak but significant positive correlation with sensation-seeking tendencies, r = .114, p = .048. Violent and risky media exposure had a stronger positive correlation with sensation-seeking tendencies, r = .278, p < .001. However, impulsivity was not significantly associated with violent and risky media exposure, r = .016, p = .783. These findings indicate that greater violent and risky media exposure and higher impulsivity were associated with higher sensation-seeking tendencies, although violent and risky media exposure showed the clearer bivariate association.

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.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether impulsivity and violent and risky media exposure predicted sensation-seeking tendencies after controlling for age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, location, and daily social media use. In Step 1, the control variables significantly predicted sensation-seeking tendencies, $R^2 = .057$, $F(6, 293) = 2.956$, $p = .008$, explaining 5.7% of the variance. In this step, gender and location emerged as significant predictors. In Step 2, impulsivity and violent and risky media exposure were added to the model. 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, $\beta = .288$, $p < .001$, followed by impulsivity, $\beta = .114$, $p = .037$. Gender and location also remained significant in the final model. These results indicate that higher violent and risky media exposure and greater impulsivity were associated with increased sensation-seeking tendencies among youth, even after accounting for demographic and media-use characteristics.

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/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. Results found that exposure to violent and risky media was the most significant predictor in the final regression model and was positively associated with sensation-seeking tendencies. Sensation-seeking tendencies were also considerably predicted by impulsivity, although to a slightly lesser extent. The final model explained 15.1% of the variance in sensation-seeking tendencies, indicating that sensation-seeking in young people is significantly related to content-specific media exposure and individual self-regulatory tendencies.

The study's most noteworthy result was that exposure to violent and risky media significantly predicted sensation-seeking tendencies, even after controlling for demographic characteristics and daily social media use. This finding is consistent with the content-based media exposure perception, which suggests that the psychological effects of media use hang not only on how much media young people consume but also on the type of content they consume (Den Hamer et al., 2017). In the current study, daily social media use was not a significant predictor in the final regression model, although exposure to violent, antisocial, or risk-related media content may be more relevant to sensation-seeking tendencies. This result is also consistent with Khurana et al. (2019), who found that exposure to risky media content was associated with adolescent risk behaviors and that youth, by means of higher sensation seeking and impulsivity, were more to be expected to be exposed to risky media content. Even though their study observed alcohol use, sexual risk, and violence as consequences, whereas the present study inspected sensation-seeking tendencies, both studies support the argument that risky media content is psychologically meaningful in youth risk-related development (Khurana et al., 2019). The present finding therefore extends this literature by showing that violent and risky media exposure is associated not only with behavioral risk outcomes but also with a risk-related personality tendency. The finding can also be interpreted through the General Aggression Model, which explains media violence as a situational input that may influence cognition, affect, arousal, appraisal, and behavioral scripts (Anderson & Bushman, 2018). Although the present study did not examine aggression as the outcome, violent and risky media content may still function as a high-arousal environmental input that repeatedly exposes youth to excitement, danger, conflict, and risk-compatible scripts. Such exposure may be associated with stronger attraction toward novelty, stimulation, and intense experiences, which are central features of sensation seeking (Hoyle et al., 2002; Zuckerman, 1994). Therefore, the present result is theoretically coherent with media-effects models, but it should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence of causal influence because the study used a cross-sectional design. The second major finding was that impulsivity significantly predicted sensation-seeking tendencies, although the effect size was modest. This finding is consistent with developmental and personality research showing that impulsivity and sensation seeking are related but distinct constructs (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Khurana et al., 2019). Impulsivity reflects acting quickly or without adequate consideration of consequences, whereas sensation seeking reflects the desire for novel, intense, exciting, and stimulating experiences (Khurana et al., 2019; Zuckerman, 1994). Impulsivity was a noteworthy forecaster in the regression model, yet it only had a weak bivariate correlation with sensation seeking in this study. This suggests that sensation-seeking leanings are influenced by impulsivity; nonetheless, the two concepts must not be used interchangeably.

The finding aligns with the dual systems model of risk development in adolescents. This model suggests that while impulsivity is connected with a delayed development of cognitive control and behavioral regulation, sensation seeking is accompanied by heightened reward sensitivity and attraction toward novelty (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011; Steinberg, 2008). In a similar vein, Wasserman et al. (2020) argued that impulsivity and sensation seeking are abstractly distinct but developmentally allied traits. This discrepancy is maintained by the current findings, which display that even though impulsivity predicted sensation seeking, there was no noteworthy relationship

between impulsivity and exposure to violent and hazardous media. According to Yoneda et al. (2019), as with high sensation seeking and high impulsivity, modest sensation seeking and low impulsivity were accompanying to more encouraging results in young adulthood. For the reason that the outcome variable measured sensation-seeking inclinations rather than actual dangerous behavior, this discrepancy is accommodating for construing the current conclusions. Consequently, higher sensation seeking in this study ought to be understood as a predisposition toward innovation and encouragement, which may become more problematic when combined with poor self-regulation or recurrent exposure to risk-glorifying settings (Yoneda et al., 2019).

An important contribution of the current study is that violent and risky media exposure predicted sensation-seeking tendencies even after daily social media use was controlled. Daily social media use did not remain significant in the concluding model. This strengthens the argument that media content may matter more than media time when studying youth risk-related tendencies. This is consistent with Den Hamer et al. (2017), who argued that content-based media exposure provides a more precise assessment than general media-use frequency because different types of content may have different psychological correlates. The result is also compatible with Nikkelen et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis, which showed that media use has a small but significant association with ADHD-related behaviors, including impulsivity, while also noting that content characteristics such as violence and pacing may matter. Hayes et al. (2025) further showed that violent media exposure was uniquely associated with impulsivity among college students, even when fast-paced media exposure was considered. Together, these studies support the present finding that content-specific violent and risky exposure may be more psychologically informative than general media-use duration.

Gender and location remained significant predictors of sensation-seeking tendencies in the final regression model. These results suggest that sensation-seeking tendencies may vary across demographic groups in this sample. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously because the direction of the coefficients depends on the coding of gender and location. Previous research has shown that sensation seeking may vary by gender and developmental context, with males often reporting higher sensation-seeking tendencies than females, although findings can vary across cultures and samples (Cross et al., 2011; Hoyle et al., 2002). Similarly, rural–urban differences may reflect variation in social exposure, media access, peer norms, or opportunity structures, but the present study was not designed to explain these differences. Therefore, these demographic findings should be reported as controlled associations rather than treated as central conclusions. Age, education, socioeconomic status, and daily social media use were not significant predictors in the final model. The non-significant effect of age may be due to the restricted youth-heavy sample, with most participants clustered around early adulthood. The non-significant effect of socioeconomic status and education suggests that violent and risky media exposure and impulsivity were more directly relevant to sensation-seeking tendencies than these background variables in the present model. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously because purposive sampling may have limited demographic variability.

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 dangerous 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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