


Social Media and Post-Relationship Distress Maintenance: A Narrative Analysis Based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

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INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, in the digital space, the phenomenon of post-relationship distress of young adult women appears in the form of stories about the loss of trust, withdrawal from the social environment, sleep disturbance, and reluctance to build new relationships after the end of a romantically significant relationship. In the present study, post-relationship distress was conceptualized as negative emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions following the end of a romantic relationship. These symptoms may manifest as persistent sadness, distrust, social withdrawal, and the development of negative attitudes toward oneself and others (Lembang & Gismin, 2025; Majid & Khoirunnisa, 2025). The relevance of young adult women to this study stems from their high intensity of social media use and relatively active engagement in romantic relationships during their phase of psychological development. Studies have shown that heavy usage of social media is positively correlated with subjective social isolation, psychological well-being, and negative self-appraisal among young adults (Nazari et al., 2023; Purnama et al., 2021; Sujarwoto et al., 2021). In such situations, social media provides not only a way to communicate feelings but also an atmosphere in which adverse experiences might psychologically continue to repeat themselves.

Behavioral changes that commonly occur after a relationship include avoiding social interactions, difficulties trusting other people, withdrawal from the surrounding environment, and the development of the assumption that romantic connections invariably lead to pain. This situation is then reinforced by various social media content, such as emotive quotes, personal experience videos, and distrustful tales, which are generated constantly and easily absorbed on a daily basis. This phenomenon is consistent with the studies of Sandra (2025) and Widiastuti et al. (2025), which

found that post-relationship behaviors such as avoidance, distrust, and withdrawal are further reinforced by emotional and repetitive social media content (Sandra, 2025; Widiastuti et al., 2025). Cognitive behavioral therapy links this condition to cognitive distortions like overgeneralization. This phenomenon is the tendency to draw broad inferences from one negative experience. Continuously maintaining negative automatic thoughts may contribute to the formation of maladaptive thought patterns that continuously impact an individual's emotional reactions (Beck, 1976; Sutanto et al., 2021). Thus, CBT influences people through their experiences and their interpretations of them. Relational misery is caused by both breakups and the digital world's constant confirmation of negative thoughts.

Personal emotional experiences become communal identities on social media, sustained by group approval and the consumption of recurrent emotional content. People continue to create these stories, receiving positive comments, likes, or emotional support online. Such stories include "better alone," "no one can be trusted," and "all relationships hurt." There is research connected to mental health that suggests that the repetition of unpleasant emotional content increases rumination and maintains psychological discomfort in emotionally fragile individuals (Jamila et al., 2021; Nalendra & Satwika, 2026; Silvanetri, 2021). Other studies also indicate a propensity for the medicalization of normal suffering, which is the medicalization of the everyday emotional experiences that are transformed into pathological labels through social media culture and online validation (Cataldo et al., 2021; Jamila et al., 2021; Medeiros et al., 2021). This work does not assume that emotional validation is all bad but rather considers the idea that some validations may become the reinforcement of maladaptive thought patterns and sustain individual unhappiness.

In CBT, longstanding negative emotions are not always sustained by the initiating experience but by cognitive interpretations that are reinforced over and over in daily life. According to Nickerson et al. (2022) and Putri & Kurniawan (2023), when a romantic relationship fails, individuals may experience distortions such as catastrophizing, emotional reasoning, and selective abstraction that result in a persistent perception of the social world as an unsafe place (Nickerson et al., 2022; Putri & Kurniawan, 2023). Repeated exposure to social media information about stories of betrayal, distrust, and emotional isolation can perpetuate these negative beliefs. As Burnette et al. (2021) found, regular exposure to digitally specific emotional material can solidify negative thoughts and extend psychological distress among people under emotional pressure (Inaltekin & Yağcı, 2024; Lugito et al., 2021; Pramukti et al., 2023) (Inaltekin & Yağcı, 2024; Lugito et al., 2021; Pramukti et al., 2023). Hence, social media can be perceived as a communication medium and as a cognitive reinforcement space to perpetuate the negative mindsets post-breakup.

Earlier studies have concentrated more on the association between breakups and depression, anxiety, sleep quality, or mental health in general. Research has indicated that breakups are linked to increased intrusive thoughts and difficulties with emotional control in young people (Anggraita & Witarso, 2022; Christie & Khoirunnisa, 2025; Rumondor, 2026). Other studies also suggest that social media can enhance rumination behavior, or the tendency to ruminate repeatedly and persistently about negative experiences (Nazari et al., 2023; Sandra, 2025; Sujarwoto et al., 2021; Yusainy et al., 2023). However, most research focuses on the immediate emotional impact of breakups (Davis et al., 2003; Sukma & Setiawati, 2025; Verhallen et al., 2019) and has not examined in depth how social media perpetuates suffering through constant cognitive confirmation. While prior research on romantic breakups has predominantly focused on the acute emotional consequences, this study addresses the mechanisms of distress maintenance through digital reinforcement and cognitive validation on social media.

In this sense, this research places social media as a venue for emotional expression but also as a possible location for sustaining post-relationship misery in young adult women. The originality of this research is the attempt to understand how negative attitudes are formed and sustained in the wake of romantic relationship failures through the lens of digital validation, consumption of emotional content, and repetition of relational narratives. This research adopts a narrative approach, as it tries not just to understand individual emotional symptoms but also how individuals develop and maintain stories of distrust, social retreat, and interpersonal ties through daily digital interactions. The narrative approach views human experiences as not merely psychological happenings but as stories constantly being constructed through social and digital cultural interactions (Crossley, 2000). Ultimately, the focus of the research is not on emotional symptoms per se, but rather on the process of maintaining distress and meaning-making in everyday life.

This research has to be conducted because the expanding discourse about relational misery on social media is beginning to impact how individuals see themselves, their relationships, and their emotional states after experiencing romantic relationship failure. If post-relationship suffering continues to be reinforced through digital reinforcement and cognitive distortion, then the counseling process risks becoming solely a space for validation without helping rebuild the individual's mindset in a more adaptive way. In the Islamic view, this condition is related to the significance of keeping the prejudices in proportion, managing the emotional reactions, and not making unfavorable generalizations about others owing to some unfortunate experiences. Research on spiritual coping by Exline et al. (2014) suggests that if not utilized as a means to evade reality or reject self-reflection, religious beliefs can assist individuals in constructing adaptive meaning toward suffering (Exline et al., 2014). Thus, this research aims to contribute conceptually to counseling based on CBT and to develop more critical counseling methods that address the emotional validation culture prevalent on social media.

METHOD

A qualitative design with a narrative inquiry technique was used in this study to investigate the mechanisms of maintaining post-relational distress in young adult women through digital contacts on social media. A narrative technique is taken since the research is concerned with how participants develop, repeat, and retain tales about their emotional experiences after relationships in their everyday lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Crossley, 2000). In this study, the perspective of cognitive behavioral therapy is used as an interpretative framework to analyze the processes of cognitive distortion, reinforcement, and maintenance of suffering following the termination of a romantic relationship.

The subjects of this research were four young adult women aged between 18 and 25 years and from diverse villages in the Siulak District, Kerinci Regency, Jambi Province. The participants were selected based on purposive sampling where the criteria included being in a meaningful romantic relationship for a period of time ranging from two years to seven years, experiencing post-relationship distress, being active users of TikTok and Instagram, and frequently accessing or sharing emotional content related to relational experiences. The demographic features of the participants are presented in the table below.

Participants	Age	Duration of Relationship	Duration of Breakup	Dominant Social Media
AN	22 years	6 years	1 year	TikTok, Instagram
SR	20 years	3 years	4 months	Instagram, TikTok
DF	24 years	7 years	2 years	Instagram, TikTok

NL	19 years	2 years	6 months	TikTok, Instagram
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Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations of participants' digital activities (e.g., reposts, emotional quote uploads, frequently accessed accounts, and other digital interactions related to distrust, emotional validation, and social withdrawal) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants gave their assent for observations of public internet activities about post-relational emotional feelings only. Occasionally what humans sustain is not only their melancholy but also the pattern of consuming stories that keeps making that sadness feel like an identity to be preserved.

The data were analyzed using narrative analysis, searching for patterns of stories, repetitions of meaning, the building of an emotional identity, and the relationship between relational experiences and the participants' digital activity. Using the CBT framework to explore cognitive distortions that develop in participants' narratives, the analysis was conducted through data reduction, theme categorization, narrative interpretation, and extraction of meanings among participants (Riessman, 2008). The validity of the data was ensured by source triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity. Ethical aspects of the research were applied through informed consent, masking participant identities, and limiting observations to public digital activities that had received participant permission.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study were discussed using the cognitive behavioral therapy developed by Aaron Beck in understanding how emotional experiences after a relationship can be maintained through negative thinking patterns, emotional repetition, avoidance behaviors, and reinforcement from social and digital environments (Beck, 1976). In CBT, people's daily lives are shaped by both events and their interpretations. The purpose of this research is not to pathologize the experiences of the participants as clinical diseases or pathological traumas, but to understand how emotional discomfort can emerge and be maintained through particular psychological processes following the termination of a significant love engagement.

The data research revealed numerous key trends regarding the post-relationship suffering experiences of the individuals. This study explores four key concepts: post-relationship suffering, cognitive distortion, digital validation and reinforcement, and withdrawal and coping. Researchers utilize these four categories to analyze the emotional transitions, cognitive patterns, digital behaviors, and social withdrawal that occur subsequent to a breakup. Moreover, this research also examines that social media is not only a place of emotional expression but also a place of validation, which may contribute to the repetition of distress through the continual consumption of emotional narratives. In certain cases, emotional pain appears to not only be caused by prior relational events but also by the process of revisiting such feelings through daily digital contacts.

Post-Relationship Distress

This notion explores the emotional experiences of individuals following the conclusion of a romantic engagement that held significant importance in their lives. In this research, we want to understand how distress emerges and continues in the daily lives of participants, whether in terms of emotional changes, disruptions in activities, sleep patterns, social interactions, or changes in the way people live their lives following the breakup. This concept is not only focused on the transient sadness following a breakup but also on how that event affects the psychological condition of the participants over a set period and yet continues to be felt until now. Cognitive behavioral therapy suggests that constant rumination on negative experiences, adverse interpretations, and their influence on daily behavior can prolong emotional distress.

How did you feel after the relationship ended, emotionally?

AN (22 years old): *"I had a difficult time sleeping at first. Occasionally I would stay awake until dawn, for I could not help contemplating it. It seems empty. I don't want to leave the house; I would rather not see others. I watch TikTok alone for longer, till late at night..."*

SR (20 years old): *"I got extremely mad after that. Sometimes folks are just talking, and it bothers me. If someone mentions relationships or dating, I instantly lose interest in listening..."*

DF (24 years old) said, *"I became quieter after the breakup... I enjoyed hanging out with my pals before, but now I typically avoid them. It is very tiresome to have to become close to people again."*

NL (19 years old): *"The feeling I experience the most is having a restless mind." Occasionally, I suddenly feel depressed without any apparent reason. During that time, eating was also irregular..."*

Were your day-to-day activities or social interactions altered after the breakup?

AN (22 years old): *"...I don't go out of the house much. I have friends who ask me out, and I often say no. "I'm more comfortable alone in my room . . ."*

SR (20 years old): *"I'm a lot more cautious now than I used to be. "If there is a problem, I often keep it to myself..."*

DF (24 years old): *"I've been avoiding new people. Sometimes I fear getting disappointed again as before."*

NL (19 years old): *"...I'm more comfortable being alone now. Sometimes, when it's packed, it just makes me feel more overwhelmed..."*

What is the biggest change you have noticed in yourself after that experience?

AN (22 years old): *"I'm someone who overthinks a lot. Sometimes I keep thinking of little things..."*

SR (20 years old): *"...I used to be more open to people; now I'm more wary and have difficulty trusting..."*

DF (24 years old): *"I feel colder now." Not like earlier when I could easily get close to people..."*

NL (19 years old): *"What has changed is the way I look at life. Sometimes things feel so weighty..."*

What part of that do you still contemplate or feel the most up until now?

AN (22 years old): *"...Why I used to trust too much is what I still think about often..."*

SR (20 years old): *"I still often think about how he changed after a long time spent together..."*

DF (24 years old): *"Every now and again I think about the disappointment..."*

NL (19 years old): *"What I feel the most is the fear of doing the same thing again..."*

The four participants found that the discomfort that occurs after the termination of a romantic relationship does not cease with a momentary grief after the breakup but turns into rather lasting emotional and behavioral alterations in daily life. Distress is expressed through sleep problems, rumination, changes in eating habits, irritability, social isolation, and the development of anxiety about re-entering relationships. Negative relational experiences seem to influence the way participants engage in their everyday activities and connect with their social surroundings. Some participants also exhibited a propensity to select social isolation, as they felt safer alone than confronting the risk of disappointment again.

Furthermore, participants' responses indicate that they often reflect on the experience of a breakup, even after a significant period of time. Frequent thoughts of disappointment, lost trust, and remorse about past relationships still fill participants' daily lives. In terms of CBT, this condition suggests that emotional discomfort is not only affected by the relational event itself but also by the process of building up negative ideas that are kept constantly in the individual's psychological experience. Occasionally, the relationship does not last the longest; rather, the emotional meaning continues to exist in someone's thoughts.

Cognitive Distortion

This idea investigates how the mindsets of participants change following a romantic relationship failure with specific attention to the development of negative beliefs about themselves, others, and interpersonal interactions. In the world of cognitive behavioral therapy, difficult emotional events can cause cognitive distortions. These patterns of thought tend to be imbalanced, excessive, and negative toward an experience. This study seeks to examine the influence of certain relational events on the participants' interpretation of relationships, their trust in others, and their self-image after the breakup. This idea is not only about the

fleeting unpleasant thoughts but also the repetitive belief patterns that start to influence the perception of the social world around the participants.

Does that experience change the way you see relationships or other people? Did that experience impact how you perceive relationships or people?

AN (22 years old): *"...Now I feel that men tend to become quite similar in the end. At first they are kind. Occasionally, when someone is polite, I immediately become skeptical. Initially, men are kind and compassionate, but over time, they tend to change. So I don't really trust anymore."*

SR (20 years old): *"I have a difficult time trusting people. Occasionally, when someone is polite, I immediately become skeptical."*

DF (24 years old): *"I used to think that a long relationship indicated seriousness." But it turned out to be false. ...I think now partnerships are sometimes untrustworthy."*

NL (19 years old): *"...I often ponder about why I should hope too much in individuals. I am dissatisfied again in the end."*

Have you ever found it difficult to trust people again after a relationship ended?

AN (age 22): *"Yes... now if someone comes close to me, I immediately become cautious. I am frightened that it may be just another game."*

SR (20 years old): *"Sometimes I feel like everyone can change anytime..."*

DF (24 years old): *"I stay away now...not as easy to trust as it was before..."*

NL (19 years old): *"... I feel like I'm scared to get lied to again. So it's best not to get too near..."*

When you think back on that relationship, what do you think of?

AN (22 years old): *"...What often comes to mind is why I trusted too much back then..."*

SR (20 years old): *"Sometimes I just feel like I'm not good enough..."*

DF (24 years old): *"...I'm more disappointed in myself for holding on for too long back then..."*

NL (19 years old): *"Sometimes I think there is no one who is really sincere..."*

Do you think that experience changes the way you see yourself or the future of your relationships?

AN (22 years old): *"...Now I feel it's harder to open my heart again..."*

SR (20 years old): *"I am afraid to start a new relationship..."*

mentally exhaust me..." DF (24 years old): *"Sometimes I feel like relationships mentally exhaust me..."*

NL (19 years old): *"I think it's better to be alone than to be hurt again..."*

The replies of the participants suggested that a romantic relationship breakdown can cause a marked change of perspective. Negative relational experiences are beginning to translate into general views about interpersonal relationships, such as trouble trusting people, believing that connections are untrustworthy, and the rise of the concept that emotional closeness would only end in disappointment. Some individuals demonstrated a tendency of overgeneralization, where they extended broad inferences from a particular relational experience to a general perspective of all relationships or the opposite sex. In some circumstances personal experiences are no longer viewed as discrete events but rather a framework of thinking that shapes how participants understand the social world around them.

In addition, habitual negative thoughts are self-blame, inadequacy, remorse about previous actions, and dread of restoring interpersonal ties. These thoughts seem recurrent in the daily life of the participants and have an impact on their social behavior, such as keeping their distance, being more suspicious of people, and avoiding new interactions. From the CBT perspective, this state shows that the distress is caused by both the breakup and the individual's negative, recurring interpretations. Sometimes a person does not live in the finished event but in the erroneous conclusions drawn from that incident.

Digital Validation and Reinforcement

This topic studies the social media use of individuals following a breakup and how this online behavior is related to the persistence of their emotional pain. The study seeks to investigate how individuals seek emotional validation through content on TikTok and Instagram, including heartache quotes, distrust, loneliness, emotions of unappreciation, and stories of emotional challenges. From a cognitive behavioral

therapy perspective, the ongoing consumption of particular emotional inputs without adaptive cognitive restructuring might promote negative thought patterns and feelings. This idea does not only see social media as a venue for pleasure or self-expression but also as a digital arena in which suffering can be constantly recalled, affirmed, and sustained through the recurrent consumption of emotional narratives.

What social media stuff do you see or re-post the most after a breakup?

AN (22 years old): "...Usually videos about feeling disillusioned in relationships, bored of fighting alone, or having low expectations of people..."

SR (20 years old): "I repost quotes about trust issues, strong women standing alone, or faking happiness..."

DF (24 years old): "I see mostly content about heartbreak, failed relationships, and people changing after being together for a long time..."

NL (19 years old): "Occasionally, I come across videos of individuals expressing their emotions through tears and confusion, or messages that convey a sense of constant loneliness..."

How do you normally feel after watching anything involving loss or betrayal?

AN (22 years old): "Sometimes I feel like someone knows what I'm going through..."

SR (20 years old): "... feels relatable. Like I'm the only one going through this..." **DF (24 years old):** "Initially I feel calm as it turns out many people have experienced this too..."

NL (19 years old): "After watching those kinds of videos, I sometimes get sad again..."

Why do you want to see or save such content?

AN (22 years old): "... Because I believe the content of the videos reflects my own feelings and experiences in its relationships..."

DF (24 years old): "If I consume that type of content excessively, it seems to evoke those feelings again..."

SR (20 years old): "I feel more relieved when I see content that is in line with my situation..."

DF (24 years old): "Sometimes I feel like I'm looking for a place to vent my thoughts..."

NL (19 years old): "...I don't know why it keeps coming up and I watch it again..."

Do you think social media makes you feel better or makes those feelings last longer?

AN (22 years old): "Sometimes I feel understood, but sometimes it just reminds me of more..."

SR (20 years old): "...At first I thought it helped, but the more I see it, the harder it is to forget..."

DF (24 years old): "If I watch that kind of content too much, it feels like those feelings come back..."

NL (19 years old): "At times, I wish to stop searching, yet I discover myself seeking it out once more..."

The participants' comments suggest that social media is a crucial part of the post-relationship emotional experiences they go through. Participants consumed the most common content, which included narratives of mistrust, heartache, loneliness, emotional problems, and disappointment in interpersonal relationships. Its participants are more likely to select or continue viewing content that coincides with their present emotional state. In certain cases, social media seems to serve as an emotional validation area that makes individuals feel understood, accompanied, and not alone in the face of traumatic relational encounters. Some participants even intentionally repost or keep some content because they feel that it's consistent with their emotional condition.

Yet on the other side, the participants' reactions also demonstrated a repeat of unpleasant emotions after continuous consumption of that content. When people witness the same emotional story multiple times on social media, grief, disappointment, and suspicion return. From the standpoint of CBT, this condition is the intensification of emotional distress due to the constant exposure to digital media. Social media is not only a platform to watch content but also the location where people relive their emotional experiences every day. Occasionally a person not only recalls prior hurts but also unwittingly continues to feed them with things that they ingest over and over again.

Withdrawal and Coping

The notion addresses the ways of social withdrawal and how individuals handle post-relationship misery in their daily lives. The purpose of the present study is to examine the effects of negative relational experiences on social interactions, the avoidance of interpersonal relationships, and the coping techniques

employed by the participants to manage the remaining emotions. From a cognitive behavioral therapy perspective, people suffering emotional discomfort often show avoidance as a way to protect themselves from the chance of feeling the same pain again. But occasionally, this behavior can continue to create suffering as people become more and more distanced from healthy social interactions and stuck in a loop of negative thought. This idea highlights not just the participants' avoidance of social surroundings but also their quest for safety and tranquility after failure in romantic relationships.

Since that encounter, have you started to shun any activities or social interactions?

AN (22 years old): *"...I'm not much into meeting new people now. " When someone starts coming up near, I frequently retreat..."*

SR (20 years old): *"I don't meet up with pals as often anymore. "Sometimes I feel more comfortable being alone than I do having to share a lot ..."*

DF (24 years old): *"...I don't really talk about relationships or the future..."*

NL (19 years old): *"I sometimes feel uncomfortable when someone is too attentive..."*

How's your relationship with your environment post-breakup?

AN (22 years old): *"I am more closed off than I was before..."*

SR (20 years old): *"... Sometimes I feel that others don't really understand what I am feeling..."*

DF (24 years old): *"I like to keep quiet in crowded places..."*

NL (19 years old): *"Now I like to be alone rather than getting close to people..."*

What do you typically do when you begin to feel sad or reflect on that relationship?

AN (22 years old): *"Most of the time I scroll through TikTok till late at night while listening to music..."*

SR (20 years old): *"...I usually stay quiet alone or browse through posts that are relevant to my case..."*

DF (24 years old): *"Sometimes I sleep or I don't talk to people..."*

NL (19 years old): *"I usually cry by myself and then sleep..."*

Anything that helps you feel more calm or slowly get out of that condition?

AN (22 years old): *"Sometimes when I'm busy I can forget a bit..."*

SR (20 years old): *"...I feel a bit calmer when I'm close to family..."*

DF (24 years old): *"I started to try to limit watching sad stuff..."*

NL (19 years old): *"Sometimes I try to pray more or keep myself busy..."*

The answers of the participants show a predisposition to retreat or to social isolation after experiencing a romantic relationship failure. This withdrawal can be expressed in behaviors such as avoiding new relationships, reducing social contacts, feeling more comfortable in solitude, and avoiding conversations about the topic of interpersonal relationships. The emotional trauma seems to impair the participants' feeling of social security and to make them more hesitant in establishing intimacy with others. Some individuals also exhibit a tendency toward emotional avoidance, such as silence, withdrawal, or avoiding specific topics, to decrease the emotional pain they still experience.

Additionally, the coping mechanisms utilized by the participants are passive and emotional, e.g., using social media, listening to sad songs, isolating themselves, napping, or crying alone when they are distressed again. In certain cases, social media seems to be a coping space and one that fosters discomfort through the recurrence of identical emotional storylines. However, some individuals have started to make adaptive measures to move out of that condition, such as restricting the consumption of emotional content, becoming closer to family, keeping themselves busy, and increasing religious activities. In CBT terms, this phenomenon means that post-relational distress is perpetuated not just by negative thoughts but also by patterns of avoidance behavior and coping mechanisms that continually guide people toward the same emotional experiences.

Discussion

The results of the research suggest that participants' anguish after a breakup is reflected in sleep difficulties, social isolation, rumination, suspicion, and changes in social interaction patterns after the termination of a romantic engagement. Previous research has indicated that the dissolution of a romantic engagement might result in emotional discomfort, behavioral alterations, and challenges in emotion

regulation among young adults (Danasasmita et al., 2024; Shulman & Yonatan-Leus, 2024; Verhallen et al., 2019). From the perspective of cognitive behavioral therapy, negative emotional experiences may endure when individuals continue to repeat negative interpretations of the experiences they have had (Beck, 1976; Nickerson et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2025). This study demonstrated that the relational experience itself is related to suffering in participants and also to how the relational experience is continued to be thought about and understood in daily life. Sometimes, individuals give emotional room in their imagination to situations that have truly ended, making them feel alive.

Research results reveal that experiences of breakup do not always progress into clinical trauma, but individuals use words such as "numb," "trauma," or "unable to trust anyone anymore" to characterize their situation. Relational suffering can trigger emotional discomfort that does not qualify as a pathological trauma condition, as documented by Cook et al. (2022) and Ho et al. (2022) (Cook et al., 2022; Ho et al., 2022). In contemporary digital culture, the use of popular psychological terms such as "trauma," "toxic," or "trust issue" in everyday conversations has increased so that ordinary emotional experiences are often understood as permanent psychological identities (Fauziah et al., 2025; Malsya et al., 2025; Mudjiyanto et al., 2025). From a cognitive standpoint, people suffering emotional discomfort are likely to develop unfavorable interpretations of life experiences, particularly when emotions are repeatedly encountered without adaptive cognitive re-evaluation. As a result, some participants tend to start regarding themselves as part of a group. Over time, the breakup not only causes distress but also perpetuates negative beliefs that participants form and repeat in their daily lives. They may experience transient pain but also begin to see themselves as "damaged," untrusting, or unlikely to heal from those relational experiences.

This syndrome is evidenced by the formation of cognitive distortions in participants, especially in the form of overgeneralization, distrust, self-blaming, and automatic negative beliefs after suffering a romantic relationship failure. Cognitive distortions can make people interpret experiences adversely and excessively, which can affect their emotions and social behavior (Hikmat et al., 2025; Purnawati et al., 2024; Sastra et al., 2025). This is the position of the CBT approach. Previous research also suggests that traumatic relational experiences could alter individuals' perceptions of themselves, interpersonal relationships, and future relational potentials (Gehl et al., 2024; Kalsum & Laksmiwati, 2023; Surijah et al., 2021). In this study, the participants again started to see partnerships as something draining, insecure, and possibly disappointing. Over time, the distress is caused not just by the breakup but also by the negative beliefs formed and repeated in daily life. Maintaining this approach is crucial. To comprehend the outcomes of the investigation, we should address some limitations of this research.

This mentality is then further cemented by participants' digital activities on social media, in particular through consumption of emotional content about heartbreak, distrust, loneliness, and emotional problems. The findings of Purboningsih et al. (2023) and Zainita et al. (2025) suggest that social media can serve as an emotional validation space because it provides a sense of being understood and emotional experiences that are perceived as similar to the user's situation (Purboningsih et al., 2023; Zainita et al., 2025). Other findings further clarify that social media algorithms are inclined to present content that corresponds with the prior interactions and emotions of users, hence reinforcing the recurrence of particular emotional exposures (Rahmania et al., 2025; Sandra, 2025). This study's participants found the content "relatable" to their circumstances; nevertheless, it also brought negative feelings to the surface constantly. Ultimately, social media becomes not only a venue for emotional expression but also a reinforcement area that permits distress to be perpetuated through the everyday consumption of emotional narratives.

This condition is associated with the onset of withdrawal and passive coping in participants following the termination of a romantic relationship. It was shown that individuals started to minimize social contact, shun new acquaintances, avoid talking about relationships, and like being alone more than previously. From the CBT perspective, avoidance behavior can be a self-protecting strategy to alleviate emotional discomfort, but it can maintain distress in the long term as people continue to avoid more adaptive social experiences (Dobson & Dobson, 2018; Piccirillo et al., 2016; Zech et al., 2023). Furthermore, additional research also indicated that social disengagement is related to more rumination and difficulty in emotion regulation in young adults (Danasasmita et al., 2024; Fauzi & Selian, 2025; Syakarofath et al., 2021). The coping

mechanisms utilized by participants tend to be ephemeral as a result since they are primarily about avoiding emotional discomfort rather than addressing the thought habits that perpetuate the distress.

More generally, the findings of this study suggest that post-relational discomfort in young adults should not be regarded solely as a personal emotional response but rather as a lived experience shaped by the digital environment and recurring cognitive interpretative patterns. Therefore, counseling services should assist clients to identify the relationship between ideas, feelings, behaviors, and digital media usage in the maintenance of post-relationship suffering. The cognitive behavioral therapy technique can be used to help clients to recognize cognitive distortions, establish cognitive restructuring, and diminish emotional reinforcement from social media (Ayubi et al., 2025; Dobson & Dobson, 2018; Sofianisa et al., 2025). Furthermore, the Islamic view can be applied in a careful manner by strengthening self-regulation, controlling negative preconceptions, and shaping the meaning of patience as an emotional management process, not only passively enduring misery. Counseling must sometimes help people stop seeing themselves as part of a group, not just relieve their emotional pain. This approach involves maintaining misery as a continual aspect of one's psychological identity.

To comprehend the outcomes of the investigation, we should address some limitations of this research. The small number of participants and social context of the research location mean that the research results cannot be widely generalized to all young adult groups experiencing post-relational distress. In addition, data collection was also problematic because some participants preferred to retreat from social engagement and were difficult to meet during the research time. The withdrawal characteristics observed in the study were not confined to the findings of the research but also impacted the process of data collection in the field. For instance, two participants rejected or deferred the interview process several times before finally accepting it after the researcher gradually approached them. This research is also limited to observing public social media activity and has not yet studied the long-term changes in distress or the deeper influence of digital algorithms on participants.

Implication

The results of this study have substantial implications for counseling services, particularly in helping clients understand the relationship between thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and digital activities in maintaining post-relationship suffering. The CBT technique can be used to assist clients in discovering cognitive distortions, establishing cognitive restructuring, and lessening the emotional reinforcement from social media that perpetuates misery. Counseling also has to build digital emotional literacy so that individuals can distinguish between healthy emotional validation and the consumption of emotional narratives that actually perpetuate a wounded identity. The Islamic view can be cautiously applied by reinforcing self-regulation, controlling negative biases, and creating the meaning of patience as a more adaptive technique of emotional management. Future study will likely explore experiences of suffering following relationships in wider social contexts across genders and the role of social media algorithms in sustaining emotional misery in young adults.

CONCLUSIONS

This research reveals that young adults' post-breakup suffering is not merely an emotional response to the loss of a romantic relationship but is also maintained by negative thinking, social isolation, and persistent consumption of emotional digital narratives. Participants described changes in their self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and social surroundings following the failure of a relationship they considered meaningful. In terms of cognitive behavioral therapy, this condition is associated with the establishment of cognitive distortions of overgeneralization, distrust, and automatic negative ideas that are supported daily. The study further indicates that social media is not just a space for emotional validation but also a reinforcement environment that

perpetuates discomfort through ongoing exposure to emotional content. Thus, post-relationship pain in the contemporary digital scenario seems to be determined not only by the relational experience as such, but also by the ongoing maintenance of emotional meaning cognitively and digitally.

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