Quest Journals
Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science
Volume 13 ~ Issue 11 (November 2025) pp: 251-257
ISSN(Online):2321-9467
www.questjournals.org

Research Paper

Social Media Engagement and Its Relation with Anxiety and Traumatic Responses Among Ahmedabad Residents After the Air Crash

Dr. Meenakshi Jindal[1], Soham Vaibhav Pore[2]
[1]*Lecturer Physics,* [2]*Student*

Abstract
Disasters often lead to significant psychological distress not only among direct victims but also among those indirectly exposed through media. The Ahmedabad air crash of June 12, 2025, which claimed many lives including doctors and medical students, left a lasting emotional impact on the residents of the city. This study examines the relationship between social media engagement, anxiety, and traumatic responses among Ahmedabad residents following the crash.A sample of 96 residents from different parts of the city was surveyed using researcher-constructed scales on Social Media Engagement, Anxiety, and Traumatic responses. Data were collected through Google forms and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation. The findings revealed a positive correlation between social media engagement and anxiety ($r = .260$, $p < .05$) and a strong correlation between social media engagement and traumatic responses ($r = .633$, $p < .01$).
The study highlights the dual role of social media during crises—it serves as an important source of information but can also amplify fear, anxiety, and vicarious trauma. The results underscore the need for responsible media consumption, crisis communication strategies, and psychological support systems to mitigate the adverse mental health effects of disaster-related media exposure.
Keywords: *Social Media Engagement, Anxiety, Traumatic responses, Ahmedabad Air Crash, Vicarious Exposure.*

*Received 14 Nov., 2025; **R**evised 28 Nov., 2025; **A**ccepted 30 Nov., 2025 © The author(s) 2025.*
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I. Introduction

Every type of disaster, whether natural or man-made, triggers emotional and psychological distress. Among the most common documented responses are increased anxiety, intrusive thoughts, sleep disturbances and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The magnitude of distress is often correlated with proximity of the event, personal loss or even with the panic created due to media coverage.According to Gokcen et al. (2021), the individuals who witness the traces of trauma after a disaster as well as those who are exposed indirectly to the trauma, experience the stress symptoms and this stress is defined as secondary stress. According to Sutton et al. (2022) secondary traumatic stress leads to behaviours and emotions as are seen in individuals exposed to trauma directly. The symptoms of such stress may include intrusive imagery, insomnia, chronic irritability and avoidant responses.

In today's world media channels spread disaster related information and may cause secondary stress symptoms among the users. In the past two decades due to the popularity of social media, the ways in which the information about the disaster is disseminated, consumed and spread has undergone a transformation. Social media platforms update the real time pictures, videos and other content at unprecedented speed. The information spreads far and wide.

The media communication is characterized by use of dramatic and emotionally charged language and images which give rise to very intense and emotional responses in the audience rather than fostering deeper understanding of the events. Continuous exposure to depressing social media content lead to onset of anxiety and post traumatic symptoms,(Regnoli,Tiano&Rosa, 2025).Researchers have studied the link between trauma related media exposure, anxiety and trauma in many different ways. Thompson et al. (2019) in their study hypothesedthat link between trauma related media exposure and distress is cyclic, i.e., distress increase trauma related media consumption which in turn increase distress related to later or future events.Thus trauma related

media exposure perpetuates a cycle of high distress and media use.Though social media serves some positive functions like social mobilization and crisis communication but it also leads to panic among the users.

On the faithful day of 12 June,2025 one such disaster hit Ahmedabad when a devastating air crash killed not only 241 people on board but number of doctors when the plane crashed on the building of hostel of a nearby medical College.The effect of such a catastrophic event was beyond physical destruction. For the residents– who witnessed it directly,those who lived nearby, family members of the victims and even those who saw the images of the crash,psychological and emotional effect were more pronounced. Especially for those who live nearby the crash site it was not only a momentary disaster but a profound rupture in their safety. Heanoy& Brown (2024) highlighted that a disaster affect the mental health of people both directly and indirectly, directly through the exposure to psychological trauma related to intensity and duration of the disaster and indirectly through injury,death, damage to property and social structure as a consequence of disaster. The physical devastation led to trauma that continues to haunt both individuals and communities.

Also social media played a pivotal role in shaping these experiences in much more amplified and sometimes distorted form. Alarming images, videos and narratives were circulating at high speed with the reach increasing every moment. Information and misinformation were mixed and people were not able to comprehend what was true or correct. Within minutes of the incident, platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, X (Twitter), and YouTube were flooded with alarming images, short video clips, live eyewitness recordings, and emotionally charged narratives. Thecirculation of the posts was amplified by continuous reposting, algorithmic boosting, and the public's urgent need for information. As the reach expanded every second, the volume of content created an overwhelming digital environment that intensified fear, shock, and feelings of uncertainty.

The simultaneous appearance of accurate information and misinformationmade it difficult for peopleto differentiate facts from rumors. Many users shared unverified updates, speculative comments, and sensationalized content, which contributed to heightened anxiety and confusion. Fake news about additional explosions, exaggerated casualty numbers, and misleading visuals from unrelated events were widely circulated.

For residents who were geographically close to the site of crash or had friends and relatives in the affected areas, the constant exposure to graphic visuals and emotionally intense narratives fueled the feelings of helplessness, fear, grief, and intrusive worrying. Due to rapid digital circulation of traumatic imagery those who not even physically present near the crash site felt psychologically "close" to the disaster. Many reported compulsively refreshing their feeds, driven by the fear of missing updates—a behaviour that inadvertently increased their exposure to distressing content. This continuous loop of viewing, reacting, and re-exposure amplified their traumatic responses, making the event feel immediate, personal, and ongoing. Finally all of this digital exposure as a secondary source of trauma compounded the distress caused by the actual incident.

Turnbull etal. (2020) sound and images of adverse events circulated on social media channels increase individuals stress and anxiety. This can also be described as emotional contagion spreading through constantly updated images, videos and stories shared repeatedly on social media.

The present study aims to explore the anxiety and traumatic responses experienced by residents of Ahmedabad after the air crash and also the role of social media in amplifying the symptoms of anxietyand trauma.

II. Previous literature

Bahk (2006) conducted a study to understand the perceived risk of victimization in case of an air crash by college students some were given stories to read about an air crash and the others were given story irrelevant to the crash it was found that those who read story about the crash perceived more risk of victimization than the others. Also they showed more willingness to drive rather than flying.

Chung, Chung and Easthope (2010) explored the relation between traumatic stress and death anxiety among residents who lived near the site of plane crash in Conventry, England. 82 residents participated in the study through impact of event scale, general health questionnaire and death anxiety scale. The results showed that residents experienced intrusive thoughts and journal health issues and there was found to be the positive correlation between impact of event and death anxiety.

Wang & Cole (2014) studied the impact of media especially video reports on public anxiety and physiological reactions towards air travel. 260 participants were divided in control and experimental groups. The control group was exposed to collection of airline commercials of different carriers whereas the experimental group was exposed to TV reporting of Trans World airline's aircraft explosion in 1996. Then they were asked to imagine taking a flight themselves and the data was collected regarding the anxiety levels and physiological reactions using a questionnaire. It was found that the experimental group reported increase in anxiety and showed physiological symptoms regarding flying in general or safety threatened due to turbulence, losing control or crash after watching the disaster video.

Woo et al. (2015) analysed the Twitter data to understand the public mood after Sewol disaster of South Korea which occurred on 16th April 2014 killing 476 people including 325 high school students. The Twitter

posts from January 1, 2011 to December 2013 and then from March 1 2014 to 30 June 2014 were investigated regarding the emotional utterance in reaction to the disaster. The study found that emotional reactions related to anger and sadness increased substantially after the disaster. Also the disaster led to reactions in terms of suicide related postings showing immediate increase in suicidal preoccupation of general public.

Jeronimus et al. (2018) examined the effect of indirect exposure via social media, TV and radio to MH 17 airplane crash in Ukraine on Dutch adults living 2600 km away from the crash site. There were 196 Dutch people among those who killed in the crash. The participants of the study showed increase in levels of somatic symptoms. Also there was increase in within person changes negative effect and decrease in the positive effect. The personality moderated the decrease in positive effects but did not influence rise in the negative effects.

Xia et al. (2022) studied the mental health symptoms like anxiety, insomnia and depression among flight attendant students and the general public. The study was conducted with focus on China Eastern airplane crash which occurred on March 21, 2022. All the 132 people on board were killed. 494 participated in the study, out of which 183 were flight attendants. The students reported higher depressive and anxiety and insomnia symptoms. And even after 2 weeks of crash students as well and the general public showed these mental health symptoms. The study indicated that people experience significant and complex psychological distress responses after traumatic events.

Li.et al. (2024) examined how social media usage influences vicarious traumatization among users. The study, conducted among 1,317 college students in China, focused on the MU5735 air crash, which claimed the lives of 123 passengers and 9 crew members. Findings revealed that using social media to seek information about the accident, frequent exposure to accident-related updates through recommendation systems, and repeated discussions about the incident during sudden crises collectively contributed to higher levels of vicarious traumatization.

Significance of the Study

Catastrophic events not only affect the individuals directly involved but also have a profound psychological impact on people living nearby. The Ahmedabad air crash was one such tragic incident that claimed many lives, including medical students and doctors in the hostel where the plane crashed. Beyond the victims and their families, the entire community experienced collective distress. Many Ahmedabad residents reported heightened anxiety and trauma, even if they were not directly affected, largely due to continuous exposure to distressing images and discussions on social media.

There is limited research on mental health consequences of the people affected directly and indirectly by aviation disasters (Kar,Kar&Arafat, 2025).Recognizing this limitation of research on the psychological impact of such incidents, especially in the Indian context, the researchers undertook this study to examine anxiety and traumatic responses among Ahmedabad residents post–air crash and to understand the role of social media engagement in shaping these emotional responses. The findings aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of media-related psychological effects and support the development of strategies for promoting mental well-being during crises.

Objectives

1. To study the social media engagement among the people residing in Ahmadabad in relation to the Ahmadabad air crash.
2. To study the relationship between social media engagement and anxiety among the people residing in Ahmadabad in relation to the Ahmadabad air crash
3. To study the relationship between social media engagement and traumatic responses amongthe people residing in Ahmadabad in relation to the Ahmadabad air crash.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant correlation between social media engagement and anxiety among the people residing in Ahmadabad in relation to the Ahmadabad air crash.
2. There is no significant correlation between social media engagement and traumatic responses amongthe people residing in Ahmadabad in relation to the air crash.

Sample

The population of the study is all the people residing in Ahmedabad. A Sample of 96 people from different blocks of Ahmedabad was taken for the study. A Google form was prepared and mailed to the said sample for collection of data.

Tools used

Following tools were used to collect the data:

1. Social Media Engagement scale constructed by the investigators.

2. Anxiety scale constructed by the investigators.
3. Traumatic responses Scaleconstructed by the investigators.

Procedure and collection of data

The research was conducted to study the relationship between social media engagement, anxiety and traumatic responses among the people residing in Ahmedabad in relation to air crash. A sample of 96 people of Ahmedabad was taken to study the problem at hand. Social media engagement, anxiety and traumatic responses scales were constructed by the investigators. The scales were administered to the said sample for collection of the data. Google forms were prepared for the said scales and administered to the sample. Further the data was tabulated and subjected to statistical analysis. The results and conclusions were drawn out from there.

Statistical tools used

Descriptive statistics and Pearson's coefficient of correlation technique was used to analyse the data.

III. Data Analysis

Descriptive

Table 1: Social Media Engagement among the people residing in Ahmedabad in relation to Ahmedabad air-crash

S.no.	Items	Components	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I used social media to stay updated about the Ahmedabad air crash.	**Usage**	28.1	47.9	15.6	4.2	4.2
2.	I spent more time on social media than I normally do.		8.3	32.3	20.8	21.9	16.7
3.	I followed multiple sources/accounts to stay informed.		20.8	40.6	20.8	11.5	6.3
4.	Social media helped me understand the crash faster than TV or print news		9.4	39.6	29.2	16.7	5.2
	Total		16.65	40.1	21.6	13.56	8.1
5.	I posted stories, comments, or videos related to the crash.	**Content engagement**	3.1	19.8	14.6	33.3	29.2
6.	I refreshed my self repeatedly to check for new developments.		8.3	37.5	22.9	17.7	13.5
7.	I shared, forwarded, or discussed crash-related posts with others.		5.2	31.3	20.8	25	17.7
8.	I learned useful or credible information about the crash through social media.		7.3	39.6	34.4	13.5	5.2
	Total		5.97	32.05	23.18	22.37	16.4
9.	I felt emotionally overwhelmed by the crash-related content on social media.	**Psychological engagement**	8.3	49	25	13.5	4.2
10.	I empathized with the stories and images of crash victims online.		17.7	46.9	25	9.4	1
11.	I kept checking updates even when it made me uncomfortable.		5.2	33.3	29.2	26	6.3
12.	I avoided social media because the content became too distressing.		8.3	25	30.2	28.1	8.3
	Total		9.87	38.55	27.35	19.25	4.95

Usage

Table 1 shows social media engagement among people residing in Ahmedabad. Social media engagement has been described in terms of usage of social media, content engagement and psychological engagement. 16.65% people of Ahmedabad strongly agree and around 40% agree that they remained engaged with social media in terms of usage for Ahmedabad crash information whereas around 5% strongly disagree and 19.25 % disagree to the same. Around 27% were not sure. Around 28% strongly agree and 48% agree to use social media to remain updated about the disaster whereas 8% (4.2+4.2) disagreed. Almost equal percentage of people agreed and disagreed to spend more time on social media to remain updated about the incident whereas

20.8% were not sure about it.More than 60% (20.8+40.6) agreed to use multiple sources/ accounts for the information about the disaster. 21% were not sure and 17% (6.3+11.5) disagreed to use multiple sources to remain informed about the incident. Around 50% people agreed that social media helped them understand about the crash better than TV/ print media. Around 22% disagreed to this statement. 29% were not sure.

Content Engagement

Table 1 also shows that 38% agreed to remain engaged with the content related to Ahmedabad air crash whereas around 28% disagreed to it and 23% were not sure. Further going in detail, around 62% people disagreed to posting stories, comments or videos related to the crash on social media whereas only 23% agreed to it and 14.6% were neutral. Almost 46% (8.3+37.5) agreed to refresh their feeds repeatedly for new developments about the crash whereas nearly 31% (17.7+13.5) disagreed to it and around 23% were not sure. Almost 42% (25+17.7) people disagreed to share, forward or discuss crash related information with others whereas around 36% agreed, 20.8% were neutral or not sure. 47% (7.3+39.6) agreed to get useful or credible information about the crash through social media, around 18% (5.2+13.5) disagreed to it and 34.4 were not sure.

Psychological engagement

Table 1 further highlights that around one half of the sample (9.87+38.55) were psychologically engaged with the incidents of Ahmedabad air crash whereas around one fourth disagreed to remain psychologically engaged and another 27.35% were neutral to it. Further going into detail, around 60% (8.3+49) felt emotionally overwhelmed by the crash-related content on social media whereas 17.7% disagreed to it and 25% were neutral. Majority of around 65% (17.7+46.9) agreed to empathize with the stories and images of crash victims online whereas 25% were neutral or not sure about this. 38.5% (5.2+33.3) agreed that they kept checking updates even if it made them uncomfortable, 29.3 % (26 + 6.3) disagreedto it and 29.2% were unsure. Around 1/3rd agreed that they avoided social media because the content became too distressing, 36.4% disagreed to it and 30.2% were neutral.

Correlation

Table 2: Correlation between Social Media engagement and Anxiety

Variable	N	M	SD	R	Level of significance
Social Media engagement	96	38.47	7.461	.260	.05
Anxiety	96	18.39	6.711		

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation values of social media engagement and anxiety for the people residing in Ahmadabad in relation to the Ahmadabad air crash. The mean values for these variables are 38.47 and 18.39, respectively, whereas the standard deviation values are 7.461 and 6.711, respectively. The coefficient of correlation value is .260, which is significant at the .05 level. Hence, the hypothesis,' there is no significant correlation between social media engagement and anxiety,' may not be accepted. Since the coefficient of correlation value is positive, the increased social media engagement related to the Ahmadabad air crash led to increased anxiety among the people of Ahmadabad.

Table 3: Correlation between Social Media engagement and Traumatic responses

Variable	N	M	SD	R	Level of significance
Social Media engagement	96	38.47	7.461	.633	.01
Traumatic responses	96	29.63	7.979		

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation values of social media engagement and Trauma for the people residing in Ahmadabad in relation to the air crash. The mean values for these variables are 38.47 and 29.63, respectively, whereas the standard deviation values are 7.461 and 7.979, respectively. The coefficient of correlation value is .633, which is significant at the .01 level. Hence, the hypothesis,' there is no significant correlation between social media engagement and traumatic responses for the people residing in Ahmadabad in relation to the Ahmadabad air crash,' may not be accepted. Since the coefficient of correlation value is positive, the increased social media engagementrelated to Ahmadabad air crash led to increased Trauma among the people of Ahmadabad.

IV. Discussion

In the present study, social media engagement was conceptualized through three core dimensions—Usage, Content Engagement, and Psychological Engagement—to understand how individuals interacted with social media after the Ahmedabad Air Crash of June 2025.

The *usage* dimension involved the time spent on social media to obtain real time updates about the air crash. The *content engagement* dimension included activities such as posting stories, sharing information or videos related to the crash, and participating in online discussions. The third dimension, *psychological engagement*, focused on the emotional involvement and reactions of users to traumatic visuals, narratives, and continuous flow of information.

The results indicated that a substantial proportion-over three-fourths of the respondents used social media as their primary source of information regarding the air crash. A majority also reported following multiple accounts or pages to stay updated, reflecting a high level of informational dependency on social media during the crisis. Although social media acted as the fastest and most accessible source of updates for most individuals, the reliability of the information was questioned by some respondents. About 40.6% reported spending significantly more time than usual on social media to seek updates, possibly due to anxiety and the desire to receive the latest information instantly—given the rapid spread of content across digital platforms.

However, the level of *content engagement* appeared moderate, with only 22.9% actively posting or sharing crash related stories or videos. This suggests that while individuals consumed large volumes of information, fewer felt compelled to redistribute or publicly comment on traumatic material—possibly due to emotional discomfort, fear of spreading misinformation, or a preference for passive consumption over active participation during crises.

The *psychological engagement* dimension, on the other hand, revealed a stronger emotional involvement. More than half of the participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the crash-related content, while an even higher proportion empathized with the stories and images of the victims and affected families. These findings underscore the emotional contagion effect of social media, where distressing visuals and repetitive stories amplified users' emotional responses. Repeated checking for updates reflects a state of anxiety and curiosity among users, which ultimately contributed to information overload and psychological distress.

The correlation between social media engagement and anxietyis found to be significant at the 0.05 level, indicating a positive and statistically significant relationship between the two variables. This suggests that individuals who engaged more actively with social media during the crisis reported higher levels of anxiety. The finding implies that increased exposure to crash-related content—such as distressing visuals, continuous news updates, and emotionally charged posts—may have heightened feelings of worry, restlessness, and emotional strain. This supports the growing body of evidence in researches like(Li.et.al(2024) andXia.et.al(2022)indicating that heavy social media engagement during disasters or crises often can contribute to elevated psychological distress, often resulting from the overwhelming flow of information and emotional contagion effects.

The correlation between social media engagement and traumatic responses was strong and significant at the 0.01 level ($r = .633$) demonstrating a pronounced association between higher social media engagement and more intense trauma-related responses.

Respondents who were more deeply involved in viewing, sharing, or emotionally reacting to crash-related content reported stronger symptoms of trauma, including intrusive thoughts, lingering distress, and emotional numbness. The strength of this correlation highlights the deep psychological impact that continuous exposure to traumatic imagery and narratives can have, particularly when social media becomes the central conduit for crisis information.

V. Conclusion

The study revealed thathigher levels of social media engagement at the time of crisis or disaster can lead to both elevated anxiety and traumatic responses. The resultsof the study underscores the dual-edged nature of social media use in crisis contexts: it facilitates rapid information dissemination but can also amplify fear, anxiety, and trauma through constant exposure to distressing content. So there is need to promote responsible digital consumption, media literacy, and emotional regulation strategies during crisis events to mitigate the negative psychological consequences of excessive online engagement. Future research may further explore interventions and long-term psychological outcomes associated with crisis-driven digital engagement.

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