

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The extensive use of social media has transformed the communication process in colleges, the way students learn and how they express themselves. But on the other hand, this digital transformation has also brought up burning issues of the effects of social media on the mental health of the students. The paper will consider three critical areas of this connection, including the interrelation between the utilization of social media on a daily basis and self-reporting anxiety levels, the impact of various platforms on sleep and self-esteem, and the defence mechanisms adopted by students to deal with mental pressure caused by the usage of online media. The sample of the research was composed of 60 college students whose data were collected in response to structured questionnaires dedicated to questions of social media use, emotional satisfaction, and digital coping capabilities. The first goal indicated a positive dependence between the augmented duration of using social media and augmented anxiety. The severe anxiety students averagely spent more than 6 hours on social media as opposed to more than 5 hours among the symptom-free students. The second goal demonstrated that Instagram and Tik Tok were most linked to sleeping disorders and self-image problems whereas WhatsApp and Twitter relatively had fewer mental effects. The third goal was aimed to coping mechanisms and the most frequently used coping mechanisms were apps that limit screen-time and unfollowing negative content. Still, 25 percent of respondents stated that they did not have any strategy. Conclusively, this research summarizes that although social media has its positive aspect, excessive use of social media may be the source of psychological distress in terms of anxiety, poor sleep, and low self-esteem. Characteristics of platform use and personal coping behaviors are also the major factors in relationship to mental health effects. The results demand more awareness, digital literacy skills learning, and healthier online behavior promotion among young adults who study at colleges to reduce such threats.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Health, College Students, Anxiety, Sleep Disturbance, Self-Esteem, Coping Strategies, Instagram, Digital Wellness, Screen Time

Introduction

Implementation of social media in the life of everyday students has resulted in a high cultural and psychological transition into the higher level settings. Apps like Instagram, Tik Tok, WhatsApp and Facebook have also become part and parcel of the way students communicate, learn and even socialize. Although these websites are associated with the capacity to network, express and share information, they are accompanied by non observable psychological costs. This research paper aims at exploring the influence of social media on the mental health of college students based on three objectives. The first goal will assess the relationship between the duration of exposure to social media and the level of anxiety perceived by the person. Due to the growing involvement in online interactions, there is a likelihood of constant comparisons, oversaturation, and emotional burnout, which might have led to or aggravated anxiety. The second goal further details where the study should be focused, as the interests lie in determining how the effects of different platforms affect sleep schedules and self-esteem. Apps such as Instagram and Tik Tok with a tendency to focus on the well-crafted content and

aesthetic appearance can be the contributor to feelings of incompetence and sleep disorders more so than the more utilitarian apps like WhatsApp or Twitter. These differences are notably important in determining which platforms pose a significant influence in experiencing these negative impacts and giving some insight into healthier usage patterns. The third goal examines the digital habits and coping mechanisms embraced by learners to deal with these adverse outcomes. Through the use of both quantitative data and behavior analysis, the proposed study reveals how social media is affecting the mental health of college students in a complex pattern. Some students undertake effective measures such as minimizing the screen time, unfollowing heavy accounts, or using mental health applications, and some do not get any particular strategy thus being more exposed to the effect of digital stress. The results are supposed to assist teachers, mental health specialists, and students themselves to create interventions, awareness campaigns, and healthier tools related to digital introduction. With digital connectivity increasing at rates that it does, education and public health have been put under some considerable pressure to know and manage its psychological effects.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the statistical relationship between the hours of using social media a day and the prevalence of anxiety as reported by college students.
2. To investigate the relationship between various social media (e.g., Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook) and their diverse effects on mental health in terms of organizing sleep and self-esteem.
3. To understand how the use of social media has impacted sleep and self-esteem parameters in college students and to develop a pattern of results relying on the willingness of students to use the platforms and their habit of using the social media.

Objective 1: To Analyze the Correlation Between the Number of Hours Spent on Social Media per Day and Reported Anxiety Levels Among College Students

In this study, the researcher is going to examine the relationship between the amount of time per day that college students spend on social media and the amount of anxiety they report to their study. The data set entails the answers of 60 college students divided by the four levels of anxiety, which are No Symptoms, Mild, Moderate, and Severe. The average social media usage per day was used to investigate this effect on each of the groups.

The data stated that:

- No Symptom Students: Number of hours on social media = 5.13/hrs per day.
- Individuals with Mild Anxiety averaged 4.78 hours/day of it.
- Moderate Anxiety reported 6.13 hours / day.

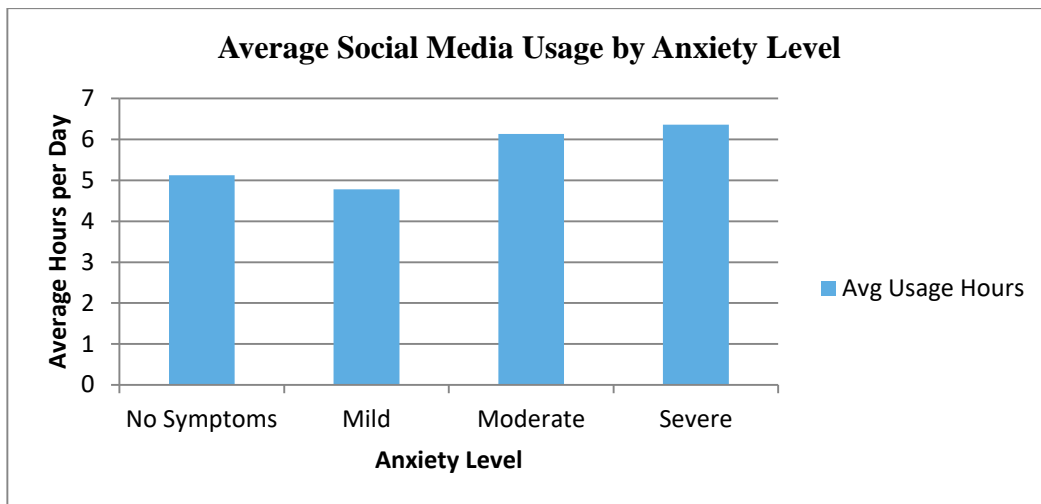
The highest usage was obtained by those with Severe Anxiety 6.36 hours/day.

Graph

1: Average Social Media Usage by Anxiety Level

Anxiety Level	Average Usage Hours Per Day
No Symptoms	5.125
Mild	4.777778
Moderate	6.130435
Severe	6.363636

Table 1: Average Social Media Usage by Anxiety Level



This tendency allows implying a positive relationship between the high usage of social media and the level of anxiety. Students who had mild anxiety were spending on average a little less time on social media than those who had no symptoms, but the time spent using such media is significantly greater at moderate and severe levels of anxiety. This can prove the theory that the overuse of social media daily is linked to increased psychiatric sufferings among college students.

There are a number of reasons that might lead to such an outcome. Excessive exposure to peers as idealized figures, chronic social comparison, and worst of all the fear of missing out (FOMO) are all documented as leading and causing anxiety on social media websites. A meta-analysis conducted by Huang (2020) on more than 60 articles concluded that the length of time spent on social networking sites is positively related to anxiety symptomology. Likewise, Vannucci, Flannery, and Ohannessian (2017) identified no difference in the levels of anxiety and low emotional control between emerging adults who used social media and those who did not, though there was a positive relationship between frequency of use and the level of anxiety. Interestingly enough, students with mild anxiety experience less usage than those without its symptoms, which may be considered an indication that academic pressure or other struggles in personal life are also contributing to developing anxiety in this cohort or that there is a self-conscious effort to curb screen time as an adaptation strategy. However, the sharp angle between moderate and severe anxiety groups is an indication of the ability of social media to be both a source and a means of coping that results in a cyclical form of dependence. These findings should be interpreted with a grain of salt. The data is presented in a fairly easy-to-see tendency, though correlation does not mean causation. Students with anxiety may use social media as a distraction or a platform to receive support and this may prolong their symptoms in the long term. Also platform-specific utilization, content type (entertainment, academic, or political), and personal temperament did not get looked into here but may be influential. The students should be taught to reflect on the amount of time they spend in front of the screens and realize the psychological consequences of over-exposure to technology. Educational activities concerning healthy social media habits should be implemented into mental health services, and schools and universities might provide some means or programs to manage time and peacefully deal with feelings and emotions.

Objective 2: To Examine How Different Social Media Platforms Are Associated with Impacts on Sleep and Self-Esteem Among College Students

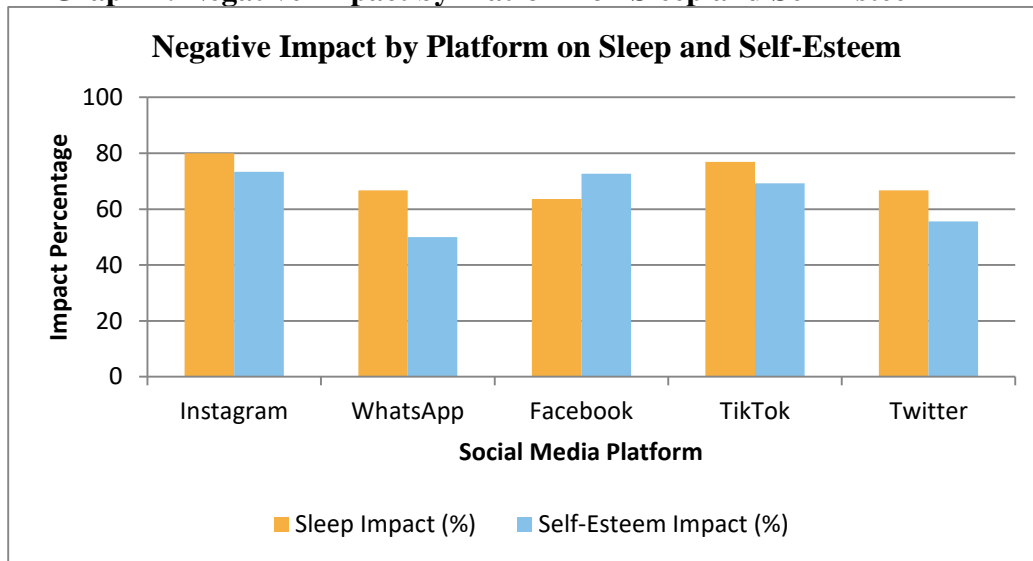
In a world where social media has taken over communication amongst the college students, issues of psychological impact of social media have become a central theme. The goal of this objective is to examine the determinants of two key predictors of mental well-being, namely, sleep quality and self-esteem on the platform level. Using the information of 60 students about

five key channels, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, this analysis reveals the correlation of various platforms with negative experiences.

Table 2: Negative Impact by Platform on Sleep and Self-Esteem

Platform	Total Users	Negative Sleep Impact	Negative SelfEsteem Impact	Sleep Impact_ %	SelfEsteem Impact_ %
Instagram	15	12	11	80	73.3
WhatsApp	12	8	6	66.7	50
Facebook	11	7	8	63.6	72.7
TikTok	13	10	9	76.9	69.2
Twitter	9	6	5	66.7	55.6

Graph 2: Negative Impact by Platform on Sleep and Self-Esteem



Based on the table, the Instagram has the greatest effect on sleep (80%) as well as self-esteem (73.3%). There is a close following by TikTok (76.9 percent recorded to be having disrupted sleep, and 69.2 percent were having issues regarding their self-esteem). WhatsApp and Twitter, on the other hand, have relatively less psychological effects although the impact here is also significant.

Sleep Disruption

The use of social media has led to sleep deprivation which is an emerging problem among students who tend to scroll at late hours. A study by Carter, Rees, Hale, Bhattacharjee and Paradkar (2016) affirms that the exposure to the screen at night disrupts the melatonin secretion, sleeping latency, and poor sleep. Application such as Instagram or Tik Tok promote infinite scrolling, and algorithm-based content consumption, which may result in developing a doomscrolling behavior, prompting students to forfeit their sleep to consume more content (Robinson et al., 2021).

The short videos on TikTok and Instagram, which are image-centered, evoke the need to have instant gratification and create the compulsive consumption of content, particularly in the late evening hours. The main finding in the data is that over 75 percent of the users on both of the platforms experienced broken sleep. This confirms the studies by Scott et al. (2019), which pointed to a direct relationship between social media consumption in the high-frequency category and the decrease in total sleep duration in young adults.

Impact on Self-Esteem

There was a slight variation in percentages in the fields of Instagram and Facebook (73.3 and 72.7 respectively), with Instagram receiving the least number of points in positive effects of the media on self esteem. Those sites are visual and comparative in nature, and the audience is often shown carefully constructed, idealistic images of the lives of others. Understanding the impact of exposure to such media on the users, as explained by Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, and Halliwell (2015), body dissatisfaction is rose significantly, and self-esteem of females significantly decreases because of such media exposure.

Less curated TikTok had also a strong negative impact (69.2%). These are interactive platforms whose nature enhances pressure of performing and the need to get validation by likes, comments, and views which tend to affect the way the user measures their self-worth (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). These experiences are heightened by algorithmics feed posts that favor contentious, sleek contents.

WhatsApp and Twitter, on the other hand, were low in self-esteem impact (50.0% and 55.6%) despite having more text-based platforms and less aesthetic-based ones. They are characterized by a more talk rather than look-based platform, potentially decreasing the possibility of damaging social comparisons.

Platform-Specific Patterns

The results reveal that the design of social media platforms is extremely important with regard to the impact on student mental health. The ones that use filters and stories, trending and algorithmically boosted videos are more likely to cause anxiety and disturbances in sleep than the messaging app or microblogging platforms.

That is in accordance with the social comparison orientation theory, as users actively assess themselves in contrast to other parties on the net (Vogel et al., 2014). The closer the environments are to being visual and highlight-reel, the closer the relationship is to psychological distress.

This goal shows that not every social media environment influences students in the same way. The greatest associative factor with negative mental health outcomes is linked to Instagram and TikTok and more particularly, to sleep and self-esteem. The results support the notion of platform literacy, in which students could be taught the context in which the elements of a given platform can be used in the manipulation of emotions and temptation to overuse and bend reality.

Mental wellness education and social media awareness programs need to be implemented in educational institutions with a focus on even use and offline well-being. Research in this area can be conducted in more detail on the longitudinal effects of screen time and how the harms can be mitigated through interventions (such as screen time tracking and filtering).

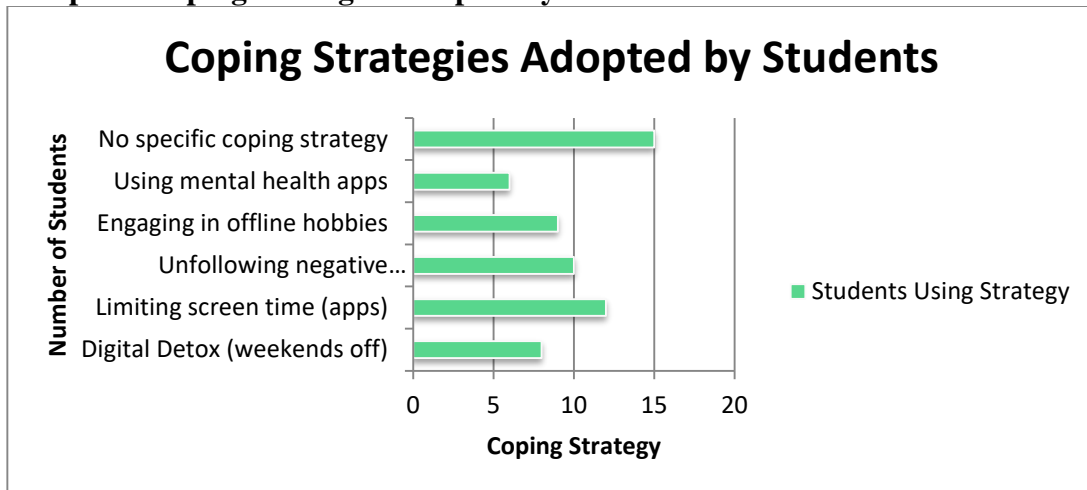
Objective 3: Evaluating Coping Mechanisms and Digital Habits Among College Students

With the growing use of social media in the everyday life of college students, the issue regarding the influence of social media on mental health, including anxiety, self-esteem, and sleep disturbance, has become more serious. This would aim at determining and comparing the coping methods that the students have used to counter and balance the adverse psychological impacts of high exposure to social media.

The data set of 60 students provided different types of coping mechanisms, which showed that there is a difference in the awareness and control of behaviors of social media use (Kloc, 2021). The responses were identified in six major strategies:

Table 3: Coping Strategies Adopted by Students

Coping Strategy	Number of Students
Digital Detox (weekends off)	8
Limiting screen time (apps)	12
Unfollowing negative accounts	10
Engaging in offline hobbies	9
Using mental health apps	6
No specific coping strategy	15

Graph 3: Coping Strategies Adopted by Students

The app use to control screen time was the most popular proactive thought (e.g., Digital Wellbeing, Screen Time, Forest), and it was used by 12 students (20%). This direction demonstrates increased control among children to limit their time on the Internet, usually by creating daily restrictions or prohibiting distracting services. Such tools provide people with control over their digital practices and have been proven helpful in enhancing attention and diminishing worrying (Dabbous et al., 2022).

The next common strategy, shared by 10 of the students, was unfollowing negative accounts or blocking the contents that make someone feel the pressure to compare, feel insecure, or stressed. The move can bolster previous work conducted by Fardouly et al. (2015) stating that when people are less exposed to idealized or unrealistic content on the internet, their self-esteem can greatly boost and the level of anxiety can go down.

Spending time on offline activities (e.g., reading, sports, music) was one of the hobbies performed by 9 students and it was a deliberate attempt to offset the amount of time spent on-screen with real-life and mentally stimulating activities. This corresponds to the results of Przybylski and Weinstein (2017), who implied that a physical or creative activity instead of screen-based activities leads to better emotional regulation.

Digital detoxification, particularly at weekends, has been implemented in 8 students, which means attempts to disengage periodically. As temporary as they can be, detoxes can make you less dependent and pay more attention (Syvertsen, 2020). They are however effective depending on the follow up and motivation.

Remarkably, 6 students only said they use mental health applications (e.g., Calm, Headspace, Woebot). These tools are much available, but the fact that they are not used much indicates that there is a lack of awareness or issue around the level of trust towards the digital therapeutic intervention.

The most distressing observation is that 25 percent (15 students) of the students did not have any coping strategy. This outlines that there is a great chance of several students not reviewing

its contents actively, but in a passive manner, without regulating or controlling their implications on mental health.

This discussion has shown that as much as the college students are currently adopting the digital tools and other behavioural tactics to minimize the negative consequences of social media, some of them are yet to be aware or lack interest to self-regulate. One can foster more healthy digital habits by promoting coping strategies, such as app-based screen limits, mindful unfollowing, offline hobbies. To assist in finding coping solutions that will be beneficial to a particular student, organizations must incorporate digital wellness education during new student orientation and mental health services.

Conclusion

The paper gives a vivid analysis of the connection between mental health and social media use among university students in three major aspects which include; time-anxiety rates relation, the effect of social media platform on sleep and self-esteem, and coping mechanisms by students. Based on the 60 student sample, the research results provide a more detailed image of digital behavior impacts on psychological well-being.

The positive relationship between the high levels of anxiety and social media usage was revealed in the work of the first objective. The usage was even higher in the moderately and significantly anxious students with the latter setting the highest average daily usage, which is why long-term exposure to digital platforms can be considered a symptom and a cause of emotional distress.

The second objective found that platform design and the type of content are important in the determination of mental health. It was discovered that the most harmful visual-heavy and algorithm-based social networking sites, such as Instagram and TikTok, produce more than 75 percent of users who experience sleep issues and even self-esteem problems. Conversely, communications apps, such as WhatsApp and Twitter which are more text-based, influenced psychologically a bit less.

Question three addressed the coping mechanism used by students to deal with their online conduct. Although the majority of researchers (to the extent of monitoring screen time, unfollowing harmful content, and offline hobbies), a relatively large percentage (25%) of researchers employed no coping mechanism or strategy, which is where more awareness and institutional level needs to be created.

Collectively, the research highlights the fact that the impact of social media on mental health is two-way and very complicated in nature. Although such platforms allow and provide connectivity and convenience, they also subject students to psychological stress, which needs straightforward balancing and management. The results will lead to the creation of digital literacy courses and mental health interventions and platform-specific awareness initiatives at learning institutions.

Colleges can assist in ensuring healthier relationships with digital media by enabling students to learn how to control their online conduct with the right knowledge and tools. Future studies not only need to elaborate on individual differences, long-run impacts, but also on how new technologies can impact student mental health as social media continues to develop further.

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