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SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Introduction

This study aims to investigate the relationship between social media use and the psychological well-being of university students by examining factors such as social media addiction, fear of missing out FOMO, impulsiveness, self-esteem, anxiety, sleep patterns, academic performance, and related indicators.

Digital platforms, especially social media, have now basically changed the way people interact, communicate, and see themselves. They have created new opportunities for interaction and self-presentation for individuals all around the world. Digital devices and platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter have billions of users and are deeply embedded in daily life.

Social media not only transforms social relationships but also has a significant impact on mental health and psychological well-being. Although these platforms serve as a means of networking, sharing opinions, and spreading information, they have been associated with several negative psychological consequences such as anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, and addictive behaviors.

University students are part of a population group immersed in the digital world. Due to their academic responsibilities, developmental stage, and avid consumption of digital content, this demographic is particularly vulnerable to the psychological effects of social media. Therefore, the overall research question considers the impact of social media on social relationships and mental well-being, this study focuses specifically on college students in order to capture detailed understanding from primary data.

Rationale for the study.

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, particularly for college students. With more than 3.6 billion users worldwide, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Twitter have transformed communication, interaction and self-perception. While social media allows users to obtain information and make contact instantly, its constant availability raises concerns regarding its impact on psychological health and education. The increasing prevalence of social media addiction, anxiety, sadness and lower self-evaluation indicates that these platforms are having a negative impact on users' mental health.

This study aims to determine the effects of social media usage on psychological well-being, including factors such as FOMO, impulsivity, anxiety and self-esteem, and their link with academic achievement. University students are a particularly important age group in terms of growth, as they are exposed to social media much more in academic and social contexts. Understanding the role that social media plays in one's psychological well-being is vital for designing appropriate interventions to mitigate its negative consequences.

Research Question:

How does social media use impact on the psychological well-being of university students, and what role do psychological variables such as FOMO, impulsivity, anxiety and self-esteem play in this relationship?

Statement of the research objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore the influence of social media use on the psychological well-being of university students. The study will examine the various psychological variables associated with social media use, including the fear of missing out (FOMO), impulsivity, anxiety and self-esteem. By examining these relationships, the research will provide valuable

insights into the psychological impact of social media on this specific demographic, who are heavily immersed in digital platforms.

The research objectives are as follows:

Theme 1. Impact of social media on communication.

- How have social media platforms transformed the way people communicate?
- What positive and negative effects do these changes in communication have on personal relationships?

Theme 2. The effect of social media on psychological well-being

- How do college students use social media to seek and receive emotional support, and what impact does this have on their mental health?

Theme 3: Social media use and academic performance among university students.

- How does social media usage affect the academic performance of university students?
- What are the positive and negative effects of social media use on students' focus, concentration, and productivity?

Theme 4: Social media addiction and its psychological effects on university students.

- How does social media addiction show among university students, and what are its psychological effects?
- What psychological variables (e.g., anxiety, stress, depression) are most strongly associated with excessive social media use?

Theme 5: Time Spent on Social Media and Its Psychological Impact

- How does the amount of time spent on social media relate to students' psychological well-being?
- Does prolonged use of social media directly or indirectly influence students’ emotional states, including feelings of stress or satisfaction?

The research questions will inform the design of the questionnaire, which will also allow for the collection of quantitative data. The findings of this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media use and the psychological well-being of college students, which will help inform strategies to reduce its potential negative effects.

Expected Outcomes of the study

This study aims to investigate the relationship between social media usage and the psychological well-being of university students focusing on social media addiction, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), impulsiveness, self-esteem, and academic performance.

It is expected that the results will show a correlation between social media activity and negative psychological impacts such as high level of anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and poor academic performance. It is also expected that some psychological factors like impulsivity and FOMO will strongly contribute to these effects along with social media addiction contributing to these problems.

In addition, while the study hopes to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media usage and psychological well-being, it is recognized that some parts might only be superficially addressed. For example, while emotional well-being is expected to show distinct patterns of social media usage, numerous personal and social factors that impact these results may lie beyond the scope of the study. Furthermore, the study may not fully explore how different social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Instagram) affect users' psychological states.

Overall, the main goal is to understand the increasing effects of social media on university students' psychology deeply, identify potential risks, and evaluate ways to reduce their adverse impacts on the well-being and academic performance of the students. These findings will serve important scholarly as well as practical purposes, including informing future policies and initiatives, social media intervention strategies, and educational guidance frameworks for socially responsible media use within educational settings.

Chapter by chapter Overview.

Chapter 1: Introduction: In this chapter, it describes the background, rationale, and purpose of the study. It specifies the main research question and its components, states the study's importance, and explains the scope and limitations of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: In this part of the research, I will focus on analyzing existing studies that cover social media platforms and their affiliations with social media activity as a chronological factor of a person's psychological development. These ideas include the transformations of social networks, performance metrics of students, addictive behaviors regarding social media platforms, as well as the consequences of increased screen time. All these thoughts are critical for explaining the theoretical underpinning of this research.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology: This chapter details the research framework, including the design, methodology, and data instruments. It describes the sample population, ethical issues, and the reading, measurement, and analysis processes that describe the reliability and validity of the study.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data: In this chapter the survey data are presented, analyzed, and interpreted. Social media behavior is discussed in relation to psychological variables related to research questions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations: In this chapter, the main findings are discussed from the research question perspective and reflect on whether the expectations were met while outlining the contributions, limitations of the study and giving pragmatic recommendations to the students, educators, and other researchers.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

This literature review analyzes the available academic or empirical studies that are focused on the impact of social media on university students' social, psychological and academic standing. It examines recent work, primarily from recent years, that focuses on psychological factors such as fear of missing out (FOMO), self-esteem, and impulsivity and the impact of social media on academic performance.

This review aims to document existing research between social media usage and its impact on psychological well-being, as well as highlighting specific areas that the study intends to fill with primary data. It aids in shaping the sub-research questions and directly informs the design of the survey instrument.

The literature reviews are not only relevant to the theoretical aspects of the study but also serve as a basis for triangulating the findings presented in the later chapters. The evaluation seeks to construct an in-depth and reliable understanding of the issue by contrasting existing research with survey results.

The review is organized according to five central considerations.

- Impact of social media on Communication: how platforms shape interpersonal relationships and communication styles among students?
- Psychological Well-being and social media: the association between social media usage and mental well-being
- Social media and Academic Performance: the influence of social media habits on academic focus, productivity, and outcomes.
- Social Media Addiction and Psychological Effects on university students: exploring compulsive use, its triggers, and its consequences for psychological well-being.
- Time Spent on social media and Psychological Well-being: examining the role of usage frequency and screen time in contributing to psychological distress.

Within each theme, relevant studies are examined in detail to highlight areas of agreement and differing perspectives. Organizing the content thematically helps to maintain a clear and logical flow, ensuring that the discussion stays focused on the study's objectives and research methods.

Theme 1: Effects of Social Media on Communication

Social media has transformed the way people communicate, particularly among younger generations, such as university students. The shift from face-to-face interaction to digital communication, including texting, commenting and sharing content, has changed the way people engage with one another. This theme explores how social media has impacted on the quantity and quality of communication, examining both the positive and negative outcomes.

Positive aspects of social media communication

A problem that is often associated with digital communication is it appears superficial, but it has its good points. YouTube has grown into one of the most powerful educational mediums, enabling millions to access specialized tutorials and courses without charge or geographical and economic barriers. Similarly, LinkedIn has transformed online professional networking and connection. It is now much easier for employers and talent to connect, as well as for mentors and mentees regarding guidance and career development. (VOICE, 2025)

Through Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, one can remain connected to their friends and family, even if they are far apart, enabling people to remain connected globally. Research by (Valkenburg, 2017) indicates that for a great number of active social media users, social media has been beneficial in relationship maintenance and retention, especially for young adults who moved for schooling or jobs. The ability to share experiences is important. It fosters a sense of connection and community. This is something that might otherwise be lost.

Revolution in Communication:

Access to social media sites permits networking and real time interaction where users can communicate without physical barriers. As (Baym, 2015) suggest, social media guarantees efficiency and sociability in communication which makes it possible to have a contact with friends or even family members anytime. In addition, these platforms grant users the opportunity to express their opinions, concepts, and sentiments instantaneously, which helps them develop a sense of identity and belonging.

As noted, social media has decreased the frequency of in-person communication and silenced social and emotional interactions such as voice, body language, and facial expressions, (UNIVERSITY, 2024) The lack of verbal interactions encourages and allows the rapid spread of misinformation to occur without consequence. In addition to this, there is not a single person who has not undergone cyberbullying or social isolation, which depicts the reduced quality of conversation. All of this leads to protecting the use of social media. Now, social media has drastically reduced real-life communication, hence it requires very little emotional investment, which in turn leads to a heightened degree of misunderstandings. (GESTALT, n.d.)

Negative aspects of social media communication

Online platforms require little to no emotional investment when it comes to social interactions, which makes it easier for people to communicate on a digitized level. This exposes individuals to challenges such as socializing and achieving the right balance between face-to-face communication and online chat. Ehmke (2025) exemplifies the impact this has in the case of students, showing that excessive use of digital platforms has a negative effect on their ability to develop real-world concepts, limiting students from functioning in academic and vocational environments.

Furthermore, social media uses interactions. These interactions are based on guided social constructs. This means that the bonds formed may not be real.

Social media in the University: Among university students, social media functions both in academic domains and in social activities within a particular academic discipline. Students employ professional platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook Groups, and various academic applications to build professional relations and in some instances even participate in some teeming. The problem lies in the fact that social media may lead to overexertion, which may make students academically unproductive. Students multitasking because of chronic interruptions present in social media service makes the attainment of high concentration tasks relatively impossible. In addition, social comparison accompanied by the need to meet or exceed set expectations can increase stress, anxiety, and impact self-esteem negatively.

Theme 2: Psychological Well-Being and Social Media

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's emotional, cognitive and social functioning, and is a concept that is relevant to all people. Among university students, self-esteem, mood, stress level, and the sociability of maintaining meaningful relationships are all considered in the scope of well-being. Social media plays a substantial role in shaping these dimensions, either positively or negatively, through its interaction with psychological processes and neurochemical systems.

Advantages of social media

Social media helps students in keeping in contact with family, friends, and other schoolmates and peers during times when direct interaction is limited like the pandemic. These connections enhance feelings of belonging and trust, which are crucial for psychological well-being. (Hichang Cho , et al., 2023)

Interactions can be helpful to eliminate loneliness and facilitate well-being and an increase in positive mental health.

Inspiration and Personal Growth: The students' emotional, motivational, and flourishing development can be positively impacted by access to inspiring material as well as interests and

content available through social media. This improves hedonic or pleasure and eudaimonic or meaning well-being. (Marciano & Kasisomayajula Viswanath, 2023)

Academic and Career Development: There is some indication social media, in conjunction with self-regulation and goal-directed behavior, has a positive impact on psychological wellness and academic performance. (Jane Cooley Fruehwirth, et al., 2024)

Self-expression & emotional support:

According to (Dragana Ostic, et al., 2021), social networking platforms enable students to obtain emotional support, construct social networks, and foster a sense of belonging by bonding and developing social capital. It also mentions that social networking can help shy students connect more comfortably, and that emotional validation gained from social networking contacts enhances psychological well-being. However, it also emphasizes the risks of social isolation when using social media in conjunction with poor experiences or a lack of confidence.

A study conducted by (Ana María González-Martín, et al., 2023) demonstrated that online mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can effectively improve the mental health of university students. Substantial evidence supports the positive impact of MBIs on mitigating psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and stress, as well as improving sleep quality and overall well-being.

Theme 3: Social Media and Academic Performance

The growing popularity of social media among university students has raised concerns about its impact on academic performance. These digitals channels provide information through digital channels and facilitate peer interaction and academic networking, focusing on collaboration. However, straying too far from this approach can negatively affect attention span, productivity, and academic performance.

A study in Spain conducted by (Rosa. M.M Franco, et al., 2023) found a significant negative link between excessive usage of social media (especially recreational platforms such as Instagram and

TikTok) and attention fragmentation and procrastination. This shows that it is not the amount of time spent on social media that determines achievement, but how that time is spent.

(Jiang, 2021) found that 31% of students who frequently switch between social media and academic work lose focus in class when they check their mobile phones. This clearly demonstrates that social media is a distraction, making it more difficult to concentrate on academic work. Distractions from social media reduce attention, making it difficult to absorb or retain academic material.

According to a 2025 study by Forbes, late-night social media use is associated with poor sleep quality, which indirectly impacts cognitive performance and memory consolidation.

However, it is important to recognize that not all social media use is harmful. Some networks, such as LinkedIn and YouTube, or study groups formed through WhatsApp or Facebook, can facilitate academic collaboration and knowledge exchange. For instance, Tartari (2015) found that using social media for academic purposes could boost learner engagement and foster collaborative study habits.

This theme, therefore, explored two guiding questions:

- How does social media usage influence academic focus, study habits, and productivity among university students?
- What role does the type and purpose of social media use play in supporting or hindering academic outcomes?

Understanding these interactions is critical to determining the influence of social media habits on students' educational experiences and identifying effective approaches to fostering healthy digital behaviors in academic settings.

Theme 4: Social Media Addiction and Psychological Effects on University Students

College students are increasingly concerned about their social media addiction. This is characterized by excessive and compulsive interaction with digital platforms. Despite these negative effects on daily life, this behavioral addiction has been linked to various psychological impacts, such as stress, anxiety, decreased self-control, and depressive symptoms.

(Jena Hilliard & Dr. Ashish Bhatt, MD, 2025) contend that social media addiction exhibits fundamental similarities to other behavioral addictions in terms of mood modulation, salience, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict and relapse. College students, who are frequent users of these platforms, are particularly vulnerable to these symptoms due to academic pressures and the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, which is typically characterized by identity exploration and peer influence.

A study by (Anne-Linda Camerini, et al., 2023) emphasizes that some students use social media as a maladaptive coping mechanism to escape negative emotions or boredom. This creates a cycle of temporary relief, followed by emotional depletion and guilt. In the long term, such patterns can impair self-esteem and increase vulnerability to anxiety and depression. Furthermore, addiction-like symptoms can manifest as difficulty disengaging from social platforms, leading to academic procrastination and reduced real-life interpersonal interactions.

Anxiety

The relationship between social media use and anxiety among university students is complicated. While positive social interactions on social media can reduce anxiety by increasing social connectivity and providing an escape but on the other hand an excessive or problematic use can often increase anxiety levels. This is driven by social comparison, fear of negative evaluations, and interpersonal stress encountered online.

Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a significant cause of anxiety, and this can be seen in several contexts. It causes a concern with the need to stay connected, which can lead to emotional

distress and increased anxiety symptoms. FOMO can lead to frequent checking of social media, which can increase stress and anxiety about social isolation or missed opportunities.

(Lawrence Robinson & Melinda Smith, M.A., n.d.)

Self Esteem

Social media commonly presents an idealized and filtered reality, which can have a negative impact on self-esteem. University students who see selected images and posts can get involved in upward social comparisons, making them feel inadequate in contrast to their peers or influencers.

Low self-esteem has been associated with a higher prevalence of depressive symptoms and feelings of loneliness. However, positive social feedback and helpful online communities might enhance self-esteem by offering emotional support and validation (AL-Asadi, et al., 2023)

Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO)

FOMO represents the psychological need to stay connected and updated on others. It drives social media consumption in order to fulfil the need for belonging and for emotional regulation.

High FOMO scores predict greater social media addiction, as well as depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts, particularly among students. FOMO also mediates the relationship between social media use and its negative impact on mental health, such as poor sleep and negative emotional states.

(Lawrence Robinson & Melinda Smith, M.A., n.d.)

To explain addiction to social media, I will mention some processes of neurochemistry from mental health experts, simply to grasp the impact they have on us.

Psychological processes and neurotransmitters

The influence of social media on the well-being of a person is closely connected with the chemical and neurobiological activities of the human body, particularly those that involve neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin, and the rest that control the reward system, mood, motivation, and emotions. The following is a summary of the five most relevant ones:

- **Dopamine: The Reward processing**

Dopamine is released during rewarding endeavors such as the consumption of food, having sex, and most importantly, social interactions which include receiving positive feedback through metrics such as likes, comments, and shares on social media platforms. It plays an integral role in the reward system, the mesolimbic pathway of the brain. The brain also uses this dopamine surge to encourage continued behaviors which in this case would motivate the individual to use these platforms even more. (MENTAL, 2024) (Goldman, 2021)

Addiction and Compulsive Use

Social media platforms take advantage of dopamine dependent reward systems by offering tailored unpredictable rewards based on the user's preferences, enabling them to remain on the system for longer. Its uses become compulsive as anticipation and the reward of social incentives (for instance notifications, approval from peers) floods dopamine neurotransmitters in the brain, creating a 'dopamine cycle'. In the long term, this can decrease the user's responsiveness to natural sensations of pleasure.

Psychologists within these fields of study have predicted that close to 5-10% of the American population may show signs of behavioral addiction.

The environments of social media networks reinforce these behaviors by inducing dopamine releases which activate parts of the brain's reward system in a similar way to addictive substances.

Given these factors, the compulsive use of social media may also contribute to lower life satisfaction, heightened anxiety levels, and increased depression. Understanding the addictive nature of these platforms is important to create effective digital interventions and promote healthier habits.

(Jena Hilliard & Dr. Ashish Bhatt, MD, 2025) (Goldman, 2021) (Healthcare, 2024)

- **Mood and Emotional Effects**

The anxiety-mood cycle can be exacerbated by the dopamine cycle. A lack of social media engagement can reduce dopamine levels below baseline, creating a craving known as a 'dopamine deficit', which can lead to negative emotions that may intensify anxiety and worsen depressive symptoms (Fernandez, 2024)

- **Serotonin: The Mood Regulator**

Serotonin is the modulation of mood, anxiety, and emotion which keeps them in check. Good feelings and happiness are associated with adequate serotonin levels. On the other hand, a deficiency brings in depression along with anxiety-related disorders.

Interaction with Dopamine: Serotonin controls the dopaminergic system; during limitations of dopamine, serotonin performs the protective function of capping impulsive and aggressive behavior. Problematic social media use can arise from the imbalance that exists between serotonin and dopamine about mood dysregulation.

Social networks and Serotonin: The use of social networks can lead to a momentary increase in serotonin production, positively affecting one's mood. However, chronic use may disrupt these serotonin pathways and could lead to irritation or mood volatility.

(Claire Chang, et al., 2018) (Jena Hilliard & Dr. Ashish Bhatt, MD, 2025)

In conclusion, the impact of social media on the psychological health of university students is both positive and negative. It provides social support, a sense of belonging, together with essential mental wellness, but the anxiety, self-esteem, FOMO, addiction, and sleep disruption raise concerns. The use of social media activates some of the most important neurotransmitter systems, primarily dopamine and serotonin, that control reward, mood, and emotional health. Moderate usage tends to foster social bonding and positive feelings, whereas excessive or compulsive use of them takes control of the pre-mentioned neurochemical pathways and leads to exacerbated anxiety, lowered self-esteem, FOMO, and sleep disruptions. Social awareness of the underlying biological factors can help foster appropriate social media practices and promote mental health policies and programs targeted at university students and other populations.

Theme 5: Time Spent on Social Media and Psychological Well-being

The psychological effects of social media on students become more significant the more time and attention they devote to these networks. While the amount and frequency of social media usage itself may not pose a problem, unchecked screen time, particularly among university students, has been linked to a decline in mental well-being.

As seen in Theme 2, research indicates that those who spend more time on social media, particularly those who check it frequently during the day, have higher levels of depressive symptoms. This is sometimes attributed to the way social media is created to be interesting and addictive, which can result in anxiety and sadness

(Lawrence Robinson & Melinda Smith, M.A., n.d.)

(Andreassen, C, et al., 2016) highlight one of the salient characteristics of problematic social media use as not just increasing rates of engagement, but also uncontrolled and unmonitored

time spent on social media platforms. Several university students have reported intending to log in for only a few minutes, yet subsequently losing hours of sleep, academic focus and overall productivity due to persistently scrolling.

Additionally, social media usage during nighttime is even worse. According to a study by (Dr Dagmara Dimitriou, et al., 2015), students who scroll through their phones and social media before sleeping have a lower quality of sleep, which affects their emotional regulation and academic performance. Lack of sleep leads to mood shifts, increased irritability, and has also been associated with difficulty managing academic stress.

As a rule, high frequency users are not subjected to negative effects. The impacts of internet usage differ based on the nature of participation. More passively engaging users (e.g. scrolling and not interacting) tend to exhibit more negative emotions while actively participating (e.g. chatting with friends or engaging in group chats) tend to experience more social support that reduces loneliness, thus actively participating may foster a sense of belonging.

This topic prompts considerations regarding:

- What is the impact of social media use on the emotional wellbeing of university students?
- Is there a direct/indirect relationship between excessive social media usage and feeling of stress, satisfaction, or sleep disruption?

Finding answers to these questions helps put social media overuse and negative psychological implications into the right context within proactive measures like time management.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methods procedures carried out for this research, which focus on the impact of social media on the psychological well-being of university students.

In this case, the aim of the chapter is to rationalize the chosen methodology concerning the research objectives, which intend to identify the implications of social media use, predominantly the addictive nature, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), impulsiveness, and self-esteem parameters on psychological and academic performance.

This study uses a constructive design framework along with quantitative research and a deductive-based epistemological approach.

In this sense, the approach starts from a theory that has been developed based on the review of literature and aims to confirm those theories, hypotheses, through empirical research obtained with basic but structured questionnaires that require closed answers.

In this case, the argument is that the large number of responses makes it possible to validate those consistent with theories, without having to meticulously document each experience. This approach is more useful for identifying global trends within populations with broad applications and for drawing population-based conclusions from statistical evaluations of samples.

Theoretical Paradigm / Philosophy Employed

This research follows a post-positivist paradigm that requires both the existence of the impact of social media on psychological well-being and the options for studying it through measurement and observation. However, while post-positivism focuses on measurement, it also emphasizes the idea that reality will always be subjective due to biases and systematic errors inherent in human research.

Considering these perspectives, the study infers that students' well-being is susceptible to and influenced by social media use.

As mentioned above, the absence of a certainty bias leads to the adoption of ontological critical realism.

This research focuses directly on the causal links with anxiety and various impulsive behaviors related to social media use. Using a deductive approach based on previously established theories, hypotheses were formulated, from which quantitative data were collected using a predefined threshold questionnaire to test the pre-established notions.

Because it allowed for the measurement of specific variables, the analysis of quantitative data, and the formulation of general conclusions from the results, this approach aligns perfectly with the quantitative survey method implemented in the research. However, this approach lacks the depth of personal experience examined by qualitative studies; nevertheless, it is useful for identifying connections within and between patterns in a larger sample of college students.

Justification for the Adoption of Method

One hundred surveys were created to receive responses on social media addiction, FOMO (fear of missing out), impulsiveness, self-esteem, anxiety, and academic performance. These themes were developed after conducting a thorough analysis of literature pertaining to social media use and mental health.

The questionnaire includes the following types of questions:

- Multiple choice (example: platform used, purpose of use),
- Dichotomous (Example: yes/no for deactivating an account),
- Likert-scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

A structured questionnaire was developed and divided into six thematic sections based on the research objectives:

- Demographic & General Use Habits and General Use Habits – to identify age, gender, platform preferences, and usage time.

- Social Media Addiction: examine the negative effects and consequences
- Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) – measured with statements reflecting emotional and behavioral FOMO patterns.
- Impulsivity – assessing the frequency and automaticity of social media behaviors.
- Self-Esteem: using self-assessment statements, some reverse-coded.
- Anxiety, Sleep, and Academic Impact: examining the consequences of overuse.
- Impact on Academic Performance: examining academic performance

This approach is mostly quantitative because:

Thematic Focus: Based on the number of participants, the results can be generalized to the rest of university students. This offers useful information about behaviors and attitudes that usually lie beyond specific demographics.

Objectivity and Measurement: Closed-ended questions and quantitative scales (e.g. Bergen scale of social media addiction) enable measurements of the variables of interest objectively providing dependable and comparable data.

The survey was designed with clear, concise questions that are easy for respondents to understand and answer, maximizing response rates and the reliability of the data collected.

To obtain a more representative scope of analysis for my research, I opted for a quantitative approach. Although qualitative interviews provide detailed information, they only cover a small percentage of the population. By contrast, the surveys enabled me to reach a sample of 100 participants, offering more scope for measuring and analyzing the main themes of my study. In this context, I felt that conducting only seven qualitative interviews would be insufficient to obtain relevant and generalizable results.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

For this study, participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. The sample included 100 university students, which was a targeted group to investigate the impact of social media on the psychological well-being of students within this age group.

The participants in my study were exclusively Independent College students. The decision to select university students was motivated by the growing importance of social media in the academic and social lives of young people. The survey was made available online to make it easily accessible to participants.

Although the research used convenience sampling, which does not allow for the generalizability of the results beyond university students, the main purpose was to explore the relationship between social networks and psychological well-being. This provides valuable information for future research.

Analysis Method Employed

Considering that this is a quantitative study, the data was processed using descriptive statistics, such as response rate percentage distributions. This method was effective in summarizing data and detecting strong patterns for the participants' feelings and actions.

Each closed-ended question was evaluated according to the rate of respondents choosing each alternative. For example, responses to Likert items were rounded off and reported as proportions reflecting either agreement or disagreement. The responses covered a variety of topics, including social media addiction, the fear of missing out (FOMO), impulsivity, self-esteem, sleep issues and others.

The descriptive results were organized thematically in Chapter Four and discussed within the scope of available theories and literature. This approach was suitable considering the goal of the investigation which was to identify certain patterns as well as quantify the psychological and behavioral outcomes that were presumed to exist among university students.

Ethical Considerations

This research has been conducted in accordance with ethical principles established by academic institutions.

The following aspects pertain to ensuring validity, reliability, and bias avoidance.

- Informed consent: Participants received information explaining the purpose of the study, guaranteeing their rights and the confidentiality of their responses.
- Participation was 100% voluntary.
- Anonymity: Any personal data were collected. All responses were stored securely.
- In order to avoid bias: Neutral, validated survey questions were used.
- Reliability: The use of constructed questions from validated instruments strengthens response diversity among participants, enhancing reliability.
- Reflexivity: It was considered that an analysis could not be carried out without having all the expected responses. And finally, all findings will be presented with complete transparency.

Chapter 4. Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of a quantitative study of the impact of social media use and psychological well-being, with a particular focus on university students. The questionnaire utilized both validated and structured items divided into six thematic sections, each focusing on distinct psychological or behavioral components stemming from social media activity.

These include:

Demographics and General Activity include age, gender, platform preference, time spent on the platforms, and the purposes for engagement.

Social Media Addiction: Analyzing emotional dependence, signals of compulsive use and self-regulation and very briefly the neurological patterns that contribute to this addiction just to give a deeper understanding of this topic.

Fear of Missing Out assess emotional responses to social exclusion and the pressure or need to be constantly connected.

Impulsivity: the habitual or unplanned use of social media.

Self-esteem analysis: social comparison and the construction of an online identity.

Anxiety, sleep, and academic impact: effect of nighttime social media use on psychological well-being. Emotional regulation and academic performance.

The findings are presented using descriptive statistics and organized according to these main themes. Each part provides an evaluation of the findings in relation to the objectives of the study.

Section 0: Demographics and General Social Media Use Patterns

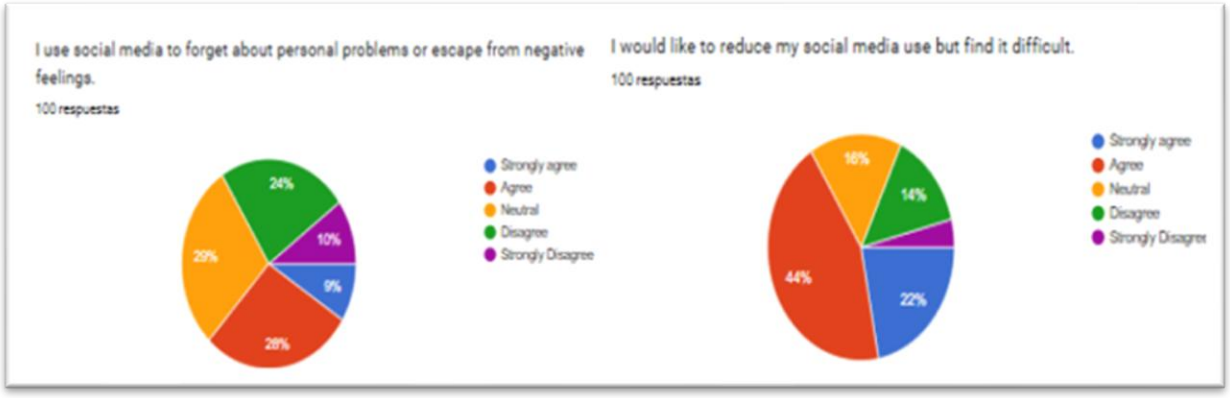
The sample consisted of 100 students from a university. Predominantly aged between 31 and 40 years old (58%) In terms of gender, the participants were relatively equally divided as well with females 56% and males 44%.

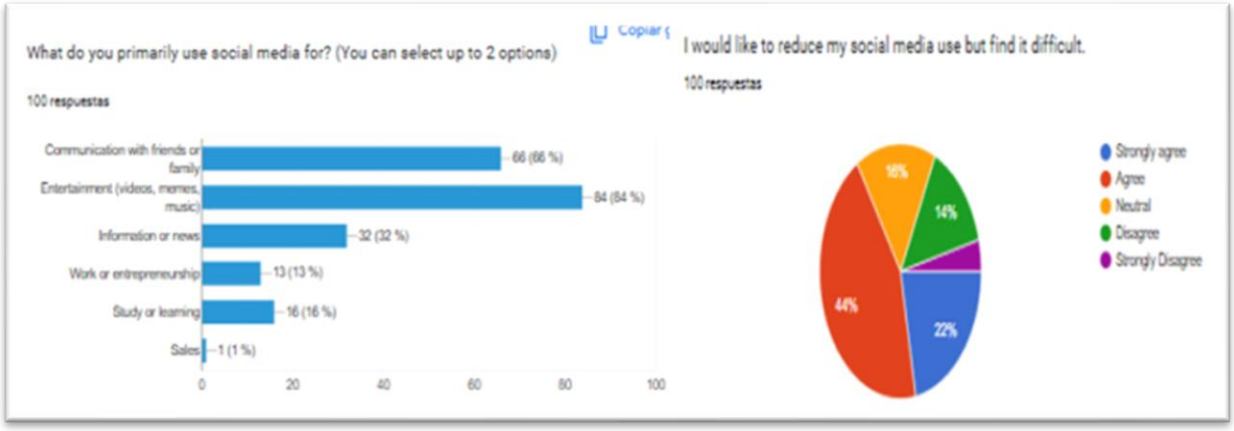
In terms of platforms preference, Instagram was used by a resounding 75% of the respondents followed by TikTok at 13%, while Facebook (6%) and others at 6% each. The main motivation of social media used: for entertainment purposes (84%), communication or social interactions (66%) with lower engagement for academic or professional purposes (16% and 13%, respectively).

Interpretation: As it can be seen that social media is mainly used for leisure instead of productivity. The high percentage of people who check social media first thing in the morning (68%) suggests habitual and potentially compulsive use. Nearly 42% of people use social media for over four hours a day, which reinforces patterns of heavy engagement that may affect well-being and academic focus.

SECTION 1: Social Media Addictiveness

The study measured social media addiction using four questionnaire items.





A total of 37% of students reported that they use social media to forget about personal problems or escape from negative feelings, suggesting that students are emotionally dependent. Further, 66% stated they are aware of the need to reduce their social media use which indicates that they are addicted to this behavior, even though they find it challenging to do so.

Surprisingly, 41% of respondents reported having deleted or deactivated a social media account because of overuse, suggesting some level of self-awareness and self-regulation. In addition, 38% reported that social media had a negative impact on their personal or academic responsibilities. All of this speaks of the growing patterns of digital addiction.

These results support the findings by Jena Hilliard & Dr. Ashish Bhatt, MD, 2025, and Goldman, 2021, who presented the concept of social media addiction. The high ambivalence – meaning many people are aware of the overuse but don't do anything to change it – captures dissonance along with poor self-regulation, two main addiction hallmarks. 38% who acknowledge the negative effect on academics indicate functional impairment.

SECTION 2: FOMO

The study employed four questionnaire items to evaluate social media addiction.

The response pattern suggests that there is a moderate level of FOMO. While 27% expressed that they don't need to be online constantly to not miss anything (friend's post, photos of events). The majority of 28% express they felt left out for not being connected. About 26% indicated they feel unreasonable pressure to be online all the time, and 19% admitted feeling pressured to post content about their activity in order to sustain social activity.

These findings imply FOMO isn't necessarily overwhelming, though the expectation to be socially online, particularly among peers, can be quite high.

SECTION 3: IMPULSIVITY

Social media addiction was assessed with three questionnaire items.

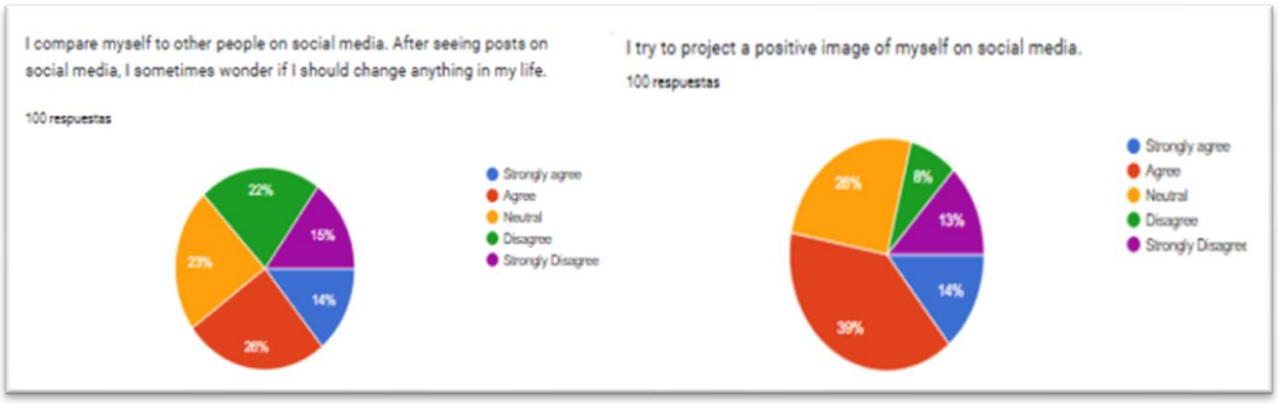


Impulsivity scores were remarkably high. As high as 72% of students reported that they check S.M even when they knew they should be doing something else. In addition, 75% reported using social media automatically or spending more time than intended to.

The results reflect impulsive tendencies and reduced self-control, possibly driven by habit formation and reward-seeking behaviors as discussed in Theme 4. These usage patterns are typical of research on technology related impulsivity. These behaviors are consistent with behavioral conditioning (dopamine reward cycles) and reflect the findings of studies on impulsive technology use.

Section 4: Self-Esteem

Social media addiction was assessed through its three distinctive items integrating questionnaires.

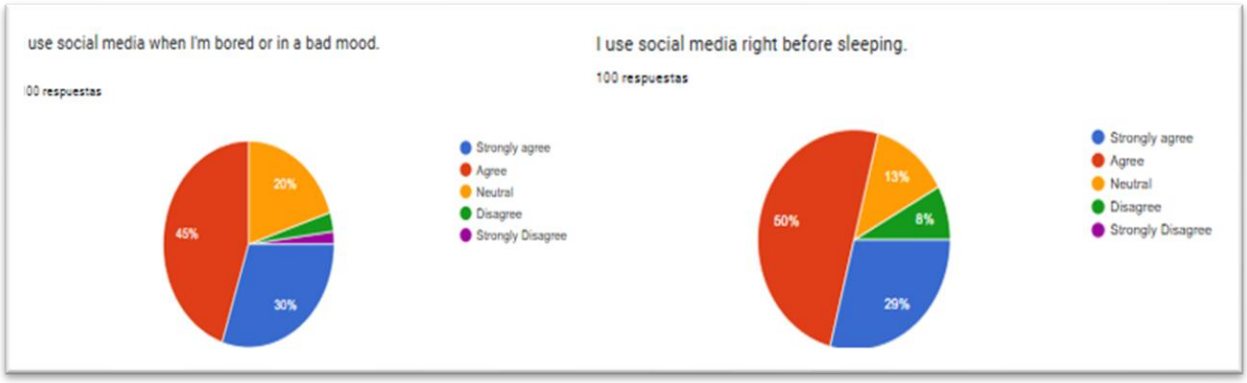


While 49% of students claimed self-affirmation irrespective of online content engagement, 40% compared themselves to others and questioned their own lives after seeing social media. Additionally, 53% admitted to projecting a positive image of themselves on social media

This reflects self-perception of peers: while some maintain a stable self-image, others are affected by social comparisons and image management, factors that can lower self-esteem and generate identity-related stress.

Section 5: Anxiety and Sleep

The emotional and social effects caused by using social media platforms were evident in the research. A total of 37% reported feeling anxious because of spending more than the usual time on social media, and 75% resorted to the use of social media platforms when they feel bored or in a bad mood. In addition, 59% reported having lost sleep because of scrolling through social media late at night while 79% reported using social media right before bedtime.



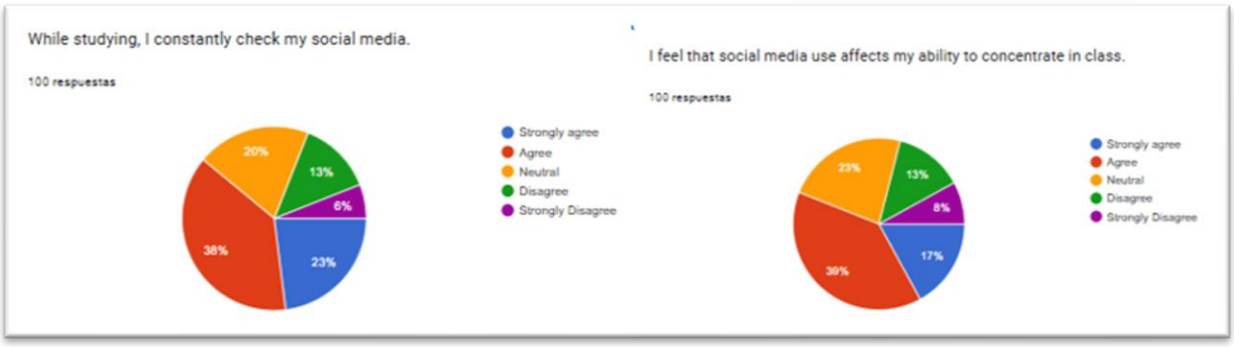
These findings indicate that a high number of students turn to social media when they are bored or in a bad mood. This can especially become problematic if it interferes with sleep. During late hours, social media activities can turn the brain on and slow down the ability to fall asleep. Quality sleep is important for feeling relaxed and for academic performance.

Some students might be using social media as a way to distract themselves from their problems. This can create a cycle: poor sleep makes students feel more tired and have mor stress the next day and next day the use S.M again to try to feel better. This can gradually lead to more anxiety and depressed feelings.

In addition to this, the screen phone before bed is not good, and one of the reasons is the blue light from screens.

Section 6: Impact on Academic Performance

Social media distractions were common: 61% frequently checked their phones while studying, and 35% admitted skipping assignments to use social media. Over half (56%) felt their concentration in class was negatively affected.



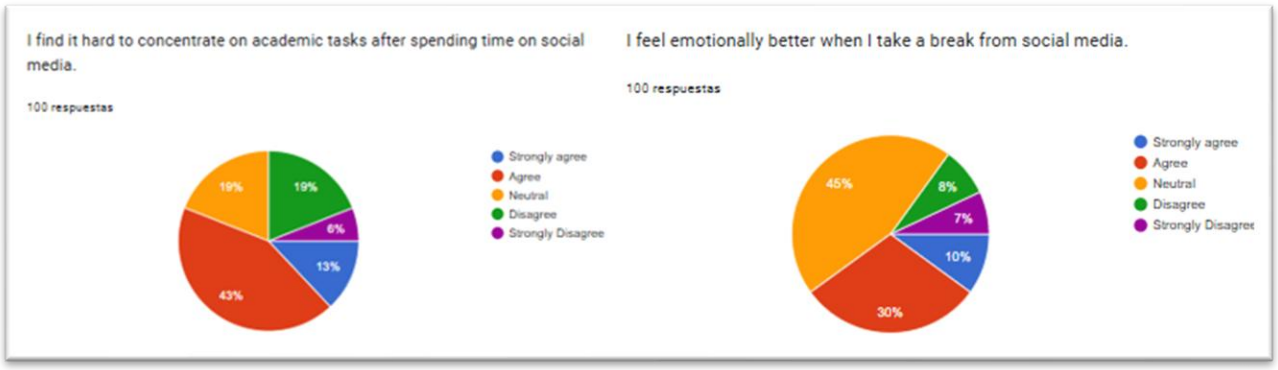
The findings reveal that social media serves as a major source of distraction for many students. A significant number of students (61%) said that they frequently check their phones during study sessions, disrupting their concentration. Furthermore, 35% of them admitted they stopped doing homework or assignments because they were occupied with social media. This indicates that social media platforms is taking time away from academic activities.

Social media use is associated with negative behavioral outcomes, even during classroom hours. The majority of respondents (over half) reported increased difficulty concentrating during classes due to their phone usage (56 %). This indicates that students are not fully engaged with their academic task, which has consequences for memory retention, and overall academic achievement.

This kind of behavior can lead to a gradual decline in academic performance alongside increased stress levels. Additionally, the data indicates that students are struggling with managing their time and balancing schedule, avoiding social media distractions during study sessions and lessons which can be detrimental to their performances.

Section 7: Perceived Impact on Student Well-being

A huge number of students recognized the negative effects of social media on their psychological well-being. While only 9% strongly agreed and 26% agreed that social media negatively affects their mental well-being, on the other hand (33%) remained neutral and can suggest that many students may not be fully aware or unsure of how social media can affect their emotional state.



However, when asked if they feel emotionally better after taking a break from social media, 40% agreed or strongly agreed. This indicates that digital breaks could help students feel more emotionally stable or relaxed. The high percentage of neutral responses (45%) could indicate that students have not paid attention to how social media affects their mood.

Finally, 56% of students admitted that they find it difficult to concentrate on academic tasks after using social media. This confirms that high use of these platforms can not only affect emotional well-being but also interfere with concentration and academic performance.

While some students are aware of the negative emotional effects of social media, many may be underestimating its full impact. Taking breaks from digital platforms can be a useful strategy for improving emotional balance and concentration.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Interpretation

This chapter discusses the findings of Chapter 4 as they relate to prior research literature. Focus will be placed on how the obtained data aims to answer the primary research problem: In what way does the use of social media impact the psychological well-being of university students, and how do psychological factors like FOMO, impulsivity, anxiety, and self-esteem mediate this relationship?

Social Media Use Patterns and Behavioral Trends

The findings support literature that students do spend a considerable amount of time on social media platforms. 68% of the students reported checking their accounts as the first activity right after waking up and more than 40% of students reported spending over four hours daily on social media platforms. This further supports literature proposing the need for social identity or social inclusion catalyzing identity formation among young adults (Baym, 2015)

The supporting motivation for social media usage was predominantly expressed as emotional and social needs for entertainment or communication. The low fraction of students engaging in the academic related usage of social media, which stands at 16%, suggests there is little sans productivity gap between digital engagement and learning, corroborating (Holly Scott, et al., 2019) assertion regarding the negative academic impact of ubiquitous social media usage.

Addiction and Impulsivity: Emotional Regulation and Self-Control

Over half of participants reported emotional dependence on social media and an inability to moderate its usage, in line with the behavioral addiction framework (Andreassen, C, et al., 2016) The impulsivity metrics—where 88% reported greater duration of social media engagement than intended—narrowly enhances the hypothesis that social networking sites are strongly addictive and provoke compulsive use.

These trends indicate that students might turn to social media to cope with negative emotions, especially in times of stress or boredom. This is consistent with (Health, 2023) observation that students tend to turn to the digital world as a form of emotional self-regulation, which alleviates stress in the short-term but can be damaging in the long run.

FOMO and Self-Esteem: Social Comparison and Identity Performance

Although the levels of FOMO reported were moderate, the need to remain social and connected and the necessity to share personal information highlight deeper issues around social validation. (Lawrence Robinson & Melinda Smith, M.A., n.d.) and (Health, 2023) note that constant prompter exposure to other users' curated content creates feelings of inadequacy and exclusion. This was, to an extent, validated by the 40% of students who admitted to questioning the value of their own existence after viewing online posts.

About self-esteem, the data told two stories: nearly half reported self-worth, yet a substantial portion noted self-evaluation against peers and intricate management of their online personas. This reinforces social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) where it can be assumed that continuous comparison on tailored platforms is emotionally detrimental.

Anxiety, Sleep Disruption, and Academic Impact

The link between social media activity past bedtime and sleep loss (59%) is alarming. (Xinhong Zhu, et al., 2023), for example, has previously connected exposure to screens with irregular biological rhythms and diminished sleep. Social media users among students and the general public look at social media platforms and use them online for fun before going to bed (79%), thereby aggravating father's, mothers and their own problems while sleep disorders such as insomnia emerged which would lead to oversleeping, extreme sleepiness, emotional imbalance or dysregulation, irritability, heightened anxiety and cognitive fatigue which is slowed-thinking.

Academically, more than half the participants reported self-imposed restrictions in concentration with focus on the learning activity and divided attention to the lecture. These findings corroborate with (Heliyon, 2024) in that students who frequently engage in online social networking are less academically inclined.

General Perceptions of Well-Being and the Role of Digital Breaks

Despite 35 percent citing social media's negative effects on their psychological well-being, an encouraging 40 percent reported feeling improved after taking breaks. This suggests emerging support for digital detox strategies as targeted treatments for mental and emotional equilibrium. Students seem to understand the liabilities of overexposure to screens and seem ready to make changes to usage.

Summary of Key Insights

In general, the evidence indicates that social media use impacts users' psychological health through various channels: emotional reliance, impulsivity, sleep disruption, academic diversion, and identity tension. Although not all students bear the brunt of the damage, the presence of moderate to high impact indicators across numerous domains consolidates the case for universities to consider offering programs on social media use and digital literacy, bolstered by mental health resources, and supportive frameworks for awareness initiatives.

This evidence is important in the context of growing concerns about the sociopsychological consequences of social media, which is both a means of connecting and a potential psychological burden within student groups who are undergoing educational and emotional development

Chapter 6: Conclusions Limitations Recommendations

Conclusion

This study focused on social media's effect on university students' psychological well-being evaluating addictions, impulsivity, FOMO, self-esteem, anxiety, and their academic performance.

Social media deeply roots itself in a student's daily life and is often utilized for communication and entertainment. Some students however display problematic usage patterns. Many participants had difficulty controlling their use and frequently accessed social media impulsively or as a form of distraction. These behaviors led to diminished concentration and an increase in academic disruption.

FOMO was not a prominent trend; however, some students were pressured into being dominated by the need to be online all the time. Responses from self-esteem tended to be mixed; while some students didn't care about the social media content, others felt the need to compare themselves to others or control their online image.

Social media usage impacts sleep and emotional regulation greatly. Students turned to it during boredom or anxiety and reported loss of sleep due to late-night scrolling. Many concede that prolonged use makes concentrating afterwards difficult.

The study depicts the correlation between social media use and the average student's well-being to be a perplexing one. Social media offers ample opportunities for communication and entertainment, but its chronic overuse can decrease one's mental focus, sleep, and emotional equilibrium.

Limitations

This research is subject to multiple limitations that may affect the interpretation and generalization of the findings. First, the study relied on a self-report mechanism, which could be affected by reporting biases related to social desirability and self-image. Participants may have inaccurately reported their social media activity and its effects on their mental health.

Second, the sample was limited to individual students at one university, which limits the use of the study's findings to other demographic groups or age categories. Different social and educational settings may be more productive.

Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which involves collecting data at a single point in time. This data cannot be analyzed to determine direct causal relationships between social media use and aspects of mental health.

Finally, and most importantly, the survey focused on general actions and did not analyze the type of content, if any, with which users interacted, or the sentiment expressed in the attributed online interactions. These qualitative factors are crucial in determining the extent to which users' psychological responses are shaped. These factors deserve further attention.

Recommendations

After the initial research, there is room for an expansion through longitudinal studies which concern changes in the use of social media and the psychological well-being of an individual over a certain period. This would help in clarifying causal relationships and identifying trends or patterns of user behavior over an extended period of time.

Other quantitative findings can be enhanced by deep qualitative research such as interviews or focus groups which delve into the intricate meanings behind social media usage and emotions.

In addition, future studies could investigate other factors such as consuming content, the general tone of the interactions, and underlying features such as personality and coping mechanisms and how they moderate the impact of social media.

Institutions of higher learning should advocate for the implementation of programs aimed at encouraging responsible use of digital devices and social media, while providing help and guidance to those affected by social media related stress and distractions. Classroom

engagements should focus on fostering proactive support around mindful usage and promoting digital well-being.

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