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CSE 300 - Research Proposal

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A Proposal for Further Research into Social Media's Effects on Student Performance

Social media refers to the myriad of social networking technologies that permeate the internet today. Sites range from "friend-networking" sites like Facebook and MySpace, where users connect with other users by adding them to a friends list, to feed driven sites like Reddit and Twitter, where users post content to independent message boards. Since its inception in the early 2000's, the social media scene has grown to around 2.5 billion users today. Thus, it is inarguable that social media has become an everyday utility for most people thus has become a dominant force in the populace's lives, particularly those of school age people. Clearly, it is of paramount importance to understand the relationship between students' social media use and their academic performance, as claims have been made since the birth of social media that it is ruining the lives and futures of students by distracting them and taking their focus away from their studies. Although in reality, researchers are still trying to discover relationships between different measures of social media use and academic performance, with little to no definitive results. Through analysis and meta-studies done on this subject, many researchers are suggesting further inspection of the relationship between social media use and academic performance through the lens of a student's pre existing attitude towards their education.

Research into the effect of social media on student performance is largely inconclusive as many studies find weak and differing results (Huang). While some researchers concluded that social media use has a negative effect on student performance, others found that students used it as a tool to organize, and had an overall positive affect. For example, a study involving 108 students in a Saudi Arabian tertiary school attempted to relate changes in GPA with hours spent on social media. The researchers found that the relationship was positive (more time spent on social media meant a larger drop in GPA) but statistically was extremely weak. In fact, the relationship was too weak to draw any definitive conclusions. In affirment to this study, a meta analysis of around thirty different studies in this area done by Taiwanese researchers suggested that a positive relationship exists between time spent on social media and loss in academic performance, although the results should be viewed with skepticism. Since a meta analysis is a compilation and analysis of different publicated works, it is prone to a "publication bias." A publication bias is a term describing the statistical phenomenon that publicated works are more likely to have positive results. This is purely due to the fact that "successful" research is more likely to attract funding and be published. Other studies, like those done at Koforidua Polytechnic in Ghana (Achaew) and a high school in Turkey (Kaya) found that students were using social media as a tool for communication and organization, instead of letting it distract them and be a general detriment to their success. By examining all of the data gathered in these studies, each of the researchers found that there was some "clustering" in the results, meaning that there may be some natural grouping in the results. This leads to the research that is being proposed.

The clustering found in the examined studies suggests that a student's pre existing attitude toward their education is a key factor in the effects of social media on their academic performance. For example, if a student were already prone to being distracted, falling GPAs, or non participatory nature, social media could act as a catalyst for further non constructive behavior. But, if a student is already focused on their education, like involvement in student organizations or maintaining a high GPA, they may be more likely to use social media as a tool to organize and further increase their performance. The proposed research involves analyzing the student's disposition towards their education before collecting data on their academic performance and social media usage. Now, while most of the analyzed studies use a single survey to collect all the information they need from a student, the proposed research suggests multiple surveys over the course of several weeks. This would be done in an attempt to solve the problem of students giving bias answers. If a student were to figure out the goal of the survey (by identifying the connections between different questions in the survey) they may give dishonest answers that reflect better upon themselves out of a point of pride. Also, the analysis of a student's disposition toward their education should be done indirectly, either by analyzing the student's involvement in campus affairs or their academic standing. By collecting data indirectly and over the course of a sizable period of time, the integrity of the data would be improved.

This research aims to help further the discussion of social media's place in academia, as it is a hotly debated issue. Should professors and administrators encourage the integration of social media platforms into the classroom, or should they reject its credentials as a learning tool in entirety? By analysing the effects of social media through the scope of a student's academic

motivation, this research would help fill the gaps between the current and confusing results put forth by existing studies.

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