**Social Media Usage and its Effects on College Students**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the impact of social media on college students, and specifically focuses on how social media usage affects the students’ well-being in different ways. The study collected data from 81 college students, out of which the majority attend Whitworth University. The survey collected their age, daily social media usage, and their responses to questions about the impact of social media on their everyday lives. The results of the study suggest that social media usage has a significant impact on the well-being of college students. The data revealed that students who spend more time on social media reported a higher frequency of procrastinating on school work and other responsibilities compared to those who spend less time on social media, this was more prevalent for males than females. Additionally, the study also investigated and found that while some students reported positive effects of social media on their lives, a larger proportion reported negative effects. The study also compared relationships between factors like number of hours spent using social media and its effect on students experiencing FOMO, how it affected comparison among college students. However, there was not enough evidence to prove any significant relationship between these factors. Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the relationship between social media usage and the well-being of college students, and the findings suggest that while social media can have positive effects on the lives of some students, it can also have negative consequences, particularly for those who spend a significant amount of time on social media. The study also highlights the need for further research into the impact of social media on college students, and the development of interventions to mitigate any negative effects.

**Literature Review**

With the advancement in technology, social media platforms emerged and became an inevitable part of our daily lives, even college students are not exempt from this fact. Students now have more opportunities than ever to communicate with their friends and classmates and share knowledge because of the growth of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat and more. Social media can also benefit college students in many ways such as they can use it to discover friends with similar interests, join organizations and groups, and learn about activities and opportunities on campus. Moreover, it can also be used for networking and establishing contacts in the business world.

Social networking has numerous advantages, but it also has drawbacks, particularly for college students. The ability of social media to keep college students from studying is one of its most significant effects. It can be challenging for students to maintain concentration on their academics when there are so many messages and updates competing for their attention all the time. Lower grades, missing assignments, and even dropping out of school can result from this. Some of the more common negative effects of consuming too much social media content are its effects on a individual’s mental and emotional health.

According to various studies, using social media frequently is associated with higher levels of anxiety, despair, and loneliness. Students who spend a lot of time on social media may feel that they are losing out on the experiences that others are sharing online. The abbreviation FOMO which stands for “Fear of Missing Out” has become very popular these days. While the existence of the term itself was a result of social media, several studies and sources have found that FOMO is a real problem among young adults/ college students and can have severe impacts on them. In the article “Examining associations between university students' mobile social media use, online self-presentation, social support and sense of belonging,” Pang (2020) comprehensively examines how university students' online self-presentation, social support, and sense of belonging are impacted by the varied ways they use WeChat (social and leisure use). The information was gathered through a web-based poll of 485 mainland Chinese university students. To address the corresponding hypotheses, correlation analysis and structural equation modeling were used. The findings showed that while recreational usage of WeChat is unrelated to this behavior, social use of the app is positively connected to online self-presentation. The results also confirmed that online self-presentation has a substantial role in predicting social support and a sense of belonging. Online self-presentation may also act as a moderator in the relationship between WeChat social interaction and feelings of belonging and support.

Moreover, Horvath-Plyman (2018) in her article “Social Media and the College Student Journey: An Examination of How Social Media Use Impacts Social Capital and Affects College Choice, Access, and Transition” reveals that social media has a significant impact on college selection among teenagers and young adults. According to several other studies, social media may improve access and aid in the transition to college. This research study asked students how they utilized social media to explore and comprehend college opportunities, while transitioning to college, and while attending college in order to investigate the consequences or influence social media may have on college choice, access, and transition. The survey also looked at the social media information and sources that students valued and found most pertinent. An online survey, in-depth interviews, and narrative analysis were used in this study to gather data, which was built upon the conceptual frameworks of Social Capital and Perceptivity Framework. Furthermore, as per this study, social media has a moderate to strong influence on prospective students' college decisions, although not as much as some other studies have shown. Among the numerous extremely powerful influences on college decisions, such as parents, family members, college admissions counselors, websites, and campus visits, social media was mentioned. The viewpoints and real-world experiences of other students assist give insight into the real student life at each college, making them the most valuable social media content for students. Social media was discovered to be a helpful resource for transition, and many students kept in touch with friends and roommates through it between high school and college.

In another article “Social Media and Self-Evaluation: The Examination of Social Media Use on Identity, Social Comparison, and Self-Esteem in Young Female Adults,” Solomon (2016) found that social media has had a major influence on our society and the global community and that it is critical to comprehend the manner in which this virtual social phenomenon is affecting how we think and feel about other people and about ourselves. Social media websites have transformed how individuals communicate and socialize. This study aimed to analyze the impact of comparing oneself to others when one integrates and reacts to other people's online identities by looking at the social media usage experiences of young adult females. This study looked at the effects that social media use and exposure to media images have on people, and how it can alter how they perceive themselves.

Apart from that, in the article “Relationship between Social Media Use and Social Anxiety in College Students: Mediation Effect of Communication Capacity,” Lai (2023) conveys that in a time of pervasive social networking, more college students are reporting symptoms of social anxiety. Social media use among college students may be connected to their social anxiety. This study aims to explore the links between various social media usage and social anxiety in college students, as well as the role of communication skills as mediators in this situation. The analysis involved a sizable sample of 1740 students from seven Chinese colleges. Social anxiety and passive use of social media were found to be positively associated by bivariate correlation and structural equations analysis. Social anxiety was adversely connected with active social media use. The connection between social media use (passive/active) and social anxiety was partially mediated by communication capacity. Social anxiety was inversely correlated with active social media use. The relationship between social media use (passive/active) and social anxiety was partly mediated by communication capacity. By favorably mediating communication capacity, active social media use may lessen social anxiety, whereas increased communication capacity may lessen the contribution of passive use to social anxiety. Teachers need to pay attention to the variations in how various social media usage affects social anxiety. Increasing speaking skills among college students may help them feel less socially anxious.

Moreover, the purpose of the research conducted in the article “The Connection between problematic internet use, social media use and academic procrastination: case studies,” was to qualitatively investigate the relationship between problematic Internet use and academic procrastination in adolescents as well as the impact of social media. The research was conducted based on an examination of a five-participant interview. The participants' ages varied from 17 to 20. The Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale and the Procrastination Scale for Student Population (PSS) were the two surveys used in the study (PRIUSS). On the basis of a semi-structured discussion, case studies were also used. According to the findings, social media use may not cause academic procrastination until it becomes a serious issue. The conclusion was that each instance explains the relationship between the variables under consideration. The research focused on how the subjects used the Internet to avoid doing their academic work and suggested that students' procrastination in their academic work is related to problematic Internet use (Kurajda and Doktorova, 2022).

It is evident that a thorough research on the topic “Social Media usage and its effect on college students,” is needed and holds the potential of examining some vital factors that link social media usage to social comparisons and academic procrastination among college students. Therefore, this paper attempts to pay particular attention to these important factors and is dedicated to analyzing them. While other impacts of social media on college students’ lives are also very significant, social comparisons, academic procrastination and experiencing FOMO are some of the biggest ones and need more attention and an in-depth analysis using statistical tests and distributions on a sample of data collected and thus a sample of data was collected for this study and was analyzed thoroughly in R.

**Methods**

To examine the impacts of using different social media sites on college students, this research surveyed a total of 81 students and recent college graduates. The majority of the students surveyed attend Whitworth University and came from varied backgrounds in terms of majors, grade levels, age category, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and so on. The survey was also posted on social media platforms such as Instagram story and WhatsApp group chats to gather more data. This method of collecting data promoted gathering information that came from diverse perspectives and eliminated biases. The survey consisted of 9 questions in a google doc form, they are as follows: the participant’s age category, gender, the number of hours spent using social media every day, how often the participant found themselves comparing their life to others, how often they felt social media had a positive impact on their social life, how often they felt that social media had a negative impact on their mental health, how often they used social media to procrastinate on school work and other responsibilities, how often did they experience FOMO after seeing others’ social media stories/ posts, and lastly what social media platform they use the most. Some of the main areas of interest for this paper were to deeply analyze the relationship between the number of hours a student spends using social media everyday and how often do they compare the quality of their life to other people on social media. Another key area of focus was examining the relationship between the amount of time spent using social media per day and how often does a student procrastinate on school work and other activities as well as how often they experienced FOMO. Other factors considered were age, gender and the social media platform used the most by the majority of the students who participated in the survey.

**Results**

After collecting the data, the data was modified into numerical values so that the analysis could be performed in R. The mean and standard deviation of the responses from the first eight questions in the survey were calculated and to analyze the relationship between two specific factors of interest, Welch Two sample t-tests and linear regression models were performed. The t-test for gender and how that affects the frequency of comparison with other people on social media resulted in t = 1.677, df = 59.369, p-value = 0.0988 which implies that there is not a significant difference in the frequency of comparison with other people on social media that college students go through based on their gender. Another t-test for gender and the frequency of procrastination resulted in t = 2.5531, df = 59.258, p-value = 0.01327 which implies that there is a significant difference in procrastination level of the two groups based on their gender. Male students had a higher mean procrastination score of 0.9705882 whereas female students had a lower mean procrastination score of 0.5744681.

Moreover, the linear regression models to test the relationship between number of hours spent using social media and FOMO and comparison revealed that there is not enough evidence to conclude that more time spent on social media results in experiencing more FOMO or comparison among college students. However, if a significance level of 0.1 is taken into consideration, the linear model to test the relationship between hours spent on social media and procrastination revealed that the two factors were related to each other, and greater number of hours spent on social media resulted in more procrastination on school work by college students.

Furthermore, 63% of the students who participated in the survey chose Instagram as their most used social media platform which raised curiosity in this study to test if factors like comparison and procrastination were more common among students who used social media compared to the ones who did not use Instagram. However, the tests revealed that there was not enough evidence to support that these claims were true.

**Discussion**

The study aimed to focus on some very important factors around the theme of social media usage and how it impacts the lives and well-being of college students. The statistical tests and models performed were relevant to the data collected as well. However, there were several shortcomings in this project. One of the limitations was the sample size, a larger sample size would have provided results that would have been more significant and insightful. The survey was extended to recent college graduates which could have affected the data because college graduates do not necessarily have school work that they can procrastinate on. While the survey and the study was inclusive of people of all genders, people of only male and female genders participated which eliminated the possibility of studying how social media usage affects college students who identify as non-binary. Moreover, the majority of the participants were females which implies that there was not an equal proportion of gender which could have affected the data and test results. Below is the percentage representation of the participants by their gender:

A close-up of a pie chart

Description automatically generated with low confidence

For the majority of the questions on the survey, the options to choose from were always, sometimes and never which can be very vague and thus proper definition of what always, sometimes and never mean could have affected the results. For example, always is 100% of the time, sometimes is 50% of the time, and never is 0 % and so on. Because of this style of data collection, majority of people chose sometimes for all questions, the only question where other options were significantly chosen is represented below:

A picture containing text, screenshot, font, diagram

Description automatically generated

Taking all of these factors into consideration could prove to be very beneficial for further research on this topic and could help with better data collection and analysis.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study strongly suggests that social media usage has both positive and negative impacts on college students. While it can be a great way to connect with others and stay informed about campus events, it can also be a distraction from schoolwork and negatively impact students’ well-being and academic performance. Procrastinating on school work and other responsibilities is one of the biggest drawbacks of social media usage among college students (as revealed by this study). To minimize the negative impacts of social media usage, it is very important for college students to develop good time management habits and use social media in moderation.

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