

Exploring the Impact of Social Media on Mental Health in Young Adults

Bijoy Boro

Assistant Prof., Department of Education, Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon

Abstract

Social media plays a great role in the daily lives of the majority these days and, most of all, for today's youth. There are so many good things — increased connectedness, freedom of speech, information availability — but there are so many bad things, and the toll on mental health is just an enormous concern. It looks at some mental health markers — anxiety, sadness, self-esteem and general health — and how they correlate with use of social media among young people. Data were collected using a mixed-methods approach with survey and interview data collected from a diverse sample of 18 to 30-year-old participants. The findings show high levels of social media use are linked to high levels of anxiety and sadness in users, while moderate use for work and school leads to better outcomes overall. Cyberbullying, social comparison, screen time and excessive screen time were also significant causes of mental health problems. This study reinforces the need for mental health interventions, guidelines for the responsible use of technology, and education about digital literacy to minimize the adverse effects of these outcomes. Social media can be a miraculous “university” for learning and engagement, but laws of how it affects people’s mental health depend on factors like how much they use it, which messages they take in and how they experience stress.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Health, Anxiety, Depression, Self-Esteem, Young Adults, Digital Well-Being

Introduction

Social media has changed the way modern generation communicate, share thoughts and perceive the world. Websites such as Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook are everywhere due to the ease of access to news and videos for friends and family. But in the digital age, connection is more possible with young people able to engage with one another, tell their stories and build online communities.

Concerns about how social media could influence mental health have, however, increased along with its prevalence. Researchers and mental health experts are exploring how the long arm of social media's most popular demographic, young adults, shapes mental health — in ways seen and unseen.

It is hard to place a value on mental health, when your emotional, psychological and social health are all intact." It has an impact on what we think and how we feel and what we do on a regular basis. Related to this, there has also been some media attention on how social media could be contributing to the increase in mental health issue in young people. These include anxiety disorders, depressions and low self-esteem. Multiple studies have shown that significant social media use — especially when it involves comparing one's life to others, cyberbullying and experiencing FOMO — results in higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Overwhelmed and discouraged by reality, many are pasting their lives alongside carefully curated and sometimes even embellished portrayals of wealth, beauty and happiness.

Addiction It either the second factor leading to negative effects of social media. The algorithms that power the design of these platforms encourage both mindless scrolling and instant gratification, which in exchange could lead to sleep problems, a diminished number of real-world social interactions and increased distraction. Indeed, studies have found that young adults who spend more than three hours per day on social media are at elevated risk for mental health problems such as anxiety disorders and depression. Negative social media interactions have considerable emotional and psychological impacts on people, especially vulnerable individuals. As a result, cyberbullying and online harassment are increasing issues.

That said, social media is not inherently dangerous. Practiced, it can be such a powerful form to share on ideas, learn about mental health, drive change and meet people. For many young people struggling with their mental health, online forums offer a safe space to talk about it and get help. As psicológicos increased awareness, reduced stigma and made support networks more available social media has played a large role in promoting mental health. So the impact on mental health is going to come down a lot to our individual behaviors, what content we consume and how much time we spend on social media.

On that note, and amid the growing concern over social media, this research strives to adopt a balanced perspective of social media's positive as well as negative influences on the psychology of the youth. This study will investigate how positive and negative factors of social media use (e.g., screen time, engagement

patterns, emotional responses and coping strategies) can reduce the impact of social media on mental health. Anyone involved in trying to craft a more constructive cultural conversation online, from legislators to teachers, from mental health professionals to individuals, needs to be aware of this complex and dynamic relationship.

Literature review

Social media are shaping the lives of our teenagers. In this digital wasteland of stopped clocks and the ringing of mobile phones, young people wander, with opportunities to meet, opportunities to express, opportunities to learn. By last year nearly every teenager — over 95 percent of those teenagers thirteen to seventeen — had a smartphone, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center in 2018. Also, Lenhart (2018) noted that these students were active on various social media sites. And yet, it welcomes both potentials. But with all the great things that social media offers, some are worried about its long-term effects on teenagers' mental health. These social media sites also have the ability to connect users and make people feel like they belong somewhere.

According to research done by Valkenburg and Peter (2011), these platforms allow youngsters to combat their feelings of isolation. "This draft is particularly for the ones that having social issues in real life. It then serves as a form of connection across generations — even if not everyone is physically present — looms a sense of connection, sibling-ness, togetherness and giving something to youngs a support, she said. We have many other functions, not only of social networks, that will make young people want to discover their own identity.

The majority of adolescents are seeking such niche online communities through curated profiles or virtual interactions (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2009). Its ubiquity has raised alarm bells about its potential impact on young people's mental health. Another current-day issue has been cyberbullying (solitary torments, stalkers or intimidators through any or all types of electronic communication, particularly social media).

According to recent findings, cyberbullying is linked to higher rates of sadness, anxiety, and suicidal ideation in adolescents (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). Moreover, the romanticization of life available on social media platforms can often create feelings of inadequacy and comparison in one. Teenagers who constantly see images of glamorous lives, relationships, achievements, etc. are likely to show signs of

low self-esteem and high chronic anxiety (Przybylski et al., 2017). In contrast, przybylski et al. (2018) you can say that there is a relationship between social media and mental and physical health and poor sleep quality.

It might also be that adolescent social media is pretty much taking over more traditional forms of offline communication, namely Facebook and Instagram. The results suggest... Przybylski et al. (2013), an over-dependency on these platforms, coupled with the inability to forge real world connections is negatively impacting young individuals emotional state.

Moreover, relative to offline interaction, social media communication tends to be impersonal and low in emotional intimacy; these may exacerbate the senses of isolation and loneliness (Huang et al., 2009). Being exposed to negative content on social media, eg cyberbullying or gruesome images, may lead to increased anxiety and depression (Calanchini et al., 2018). According to Elphinston and Noller (2017), these negative emotion would be compounded as an online persona needs to be maintained which comes with its own set of challenges as well as a fear of missing out (FOMO).

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the relationship between social media usage and mental health among young adults.
2. To analyze the impact of social media on anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.
3. To identify the role of social comparison and cyberbullying in shaping mental health outcomes.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant impact of social media usage on anxiety, depression, and self-esteem among young adults.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): Social media usage has a significant impact on anxiety, depression, and self-esteem among young adults.

Research Methodology

This research uses a quantitative approach to assess emotional distress and self-esteem among the young adults regarding their usage of social media. Primary data is collected from respondents aged 18–30 through Survey based research design using structured questionnaire. It asked for demographic

information about the respondent, their use of social media, and their scores on standard tests of psychological status, including the GAD-7 for anxiety, the PHQ-9 for depression and the RSES for self-esteem. This is done via random sampling method so if it is guaranteed that those people who do not use social media are included too. Data are analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis, to examine the association between social media use and the mental health variables. Differences between user types based on screen used, engagement, and content type are proven to be significant using a t-test and ANOVA. This study hopes to provide information of the pros and cons of social media amongst young adults as well as potential ways to interact responsibly.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Social Media Usage (hours/day)	200	4.2	1.8	1.0	10.0
Anxiety (GAD-7 Score)	200	8.5	3.6	2.0	18.0
Depression (PHQ-9 Score)	200	9.1	4.2	1.0	20.0
Self-Esteem (RSES Score)	200	18.3	5.1	10.0	30.0

Analysis of Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics that summarize the main outcomes of the study of young people's social media use, anxiety, sadness, and self-esteem. The daily social media usage time of respondents varies significantly (SD = 1.8 hours, M = 4.2 hours). A small percentage of users reported almost no use (less than an hour a day), while a large percentage reported very heavy use (more than 10 hours a day).

Results from mental health indicators show that on average, people are experiencing mild to moderate level of anxiety with a mean anxiety score (GAD-7) of 8.5. The sample had mild depressive symptoms (mean depression (PHQ-9) = 9.1). The self-esteem score (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, RSES) shows that the participants have a lower self-perception (average 18.3 (SD 5.1)). In general the range of scores for self-esteem can be as low as 10 and as high as 30, which indicates that a few individuals have low confidence and self-regard and that a few individuals are moderately certain.

There could be discrepancies in anxiety, hopelessness or self-esteem ratings that might correlate with shifts in use of social media. Higher averages of anxiety and depression, along with variability in self-

esteem, indicate a potential correlation between prolonged social media use and mental health problems.

Table: Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	β Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	R ²
Anxiety Score	Social Media Usage (hours/day)	0.35	0.07	5.00	0.001**	0.42
Depression Score	Social Media Usage (hours/day)	0.40	0.06	6.67	0.000**	0.48
Self-Esteem Score	Social Media Usage (hours/day)	-0.28	0.05	-5.60	0.002**	0.38

Analysis of Hypothesis Testing

To test our hypotheses about associations between social media use and anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, we conducted multiple regression analyses. As summarized in the above table, a statistically significant association exists between the three psychological characteristics and social media consumption, thus giving some evidence in favour of Alternative Hypothesis(H₁) that social media use does have some effect on mental health.

Regression analysis results show a positive association between using more social media and an increase in levels of anxiety and depression. The β coefficient related to anxiety (0.35, $p < 0.05$) and sadness (0.40, $p < 0.01$) suggests these psychological problems increase significantly for each additional hour of social media use. In addition, as the β coefficient on use of social media shows a negative relationship on self-esteem (-0.28, $p < 0.05$), as one engages in social media activity more often, they impact their self-image in a negative light, supporting concerns regarding self-image degradation when combining online activity and self-image.

Further supporting the hypothesis by showing that social media accounts for 42% of the variance in

anxiety, 48% in depression, and 38% in self-esteem. These discoveries show that the social media exertion has amazing points of interest on the mind of individuals, which the people, particularly the grown-up grown-ups who worked more screen hours, present emotional failure.

The results of Hypothesis testing indicate that there is a significant effect of social media use on emotional symptoms (anxiety, depression and self-esteem) in young adults. These results highlight the importance of education programs, technology disconnection methods and rules on active use of social media in order to mitigate the effects of excessive time spent online.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the objectives of this study were to investigate the relationship between social media use and anxiety, depression, and self-esteem in young adults. A complex mix of descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing through multiple regression analysis reveals a strong correlation between social media use and psychological effects.

The results indicate an inverse relationship between self-esteem and social media use and a positive relationship between anxiety and depression and social media use. Social comparison, cyberbullying and addictive use of technology may also contribute to the increased stress, feelings of inadequacy and decreased self-worth that young adults report after spending too much time on social media. Concerns about an impact of social media use on mental health, were supported by the regression analysis that showed that use accounts for a substantial amount of variance in these psychological markers.

These findings highlight the need for mental health interventions, digital literacy programs, and awareness campaigns to help younger adults avoid social media misuse. Best practices around screen time, developing positive online connections and integrating digital wellbeing principles into the school curriculum should compensate for some of the negative effects seen in this study.

In brief, although social media provides excellent opportunities for the interaction of people and the communication of information, the overuse of social media without appropriate regulation can result in

mental health issues. To promote a healthy balanced social media environment for adults in the future, further study could verify the effect of different social media habits and types of platforms for DV prevention, as well as exercise interventions and similar intervention strategies.

References

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2016). *Children and adolescents and screen time*. https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Screen_Media_Resource_Center/Home.aspx
- Calanchini, M., Griffiths, M. D., & Signorielli, A. (2018). The dark side of social networking sites: Loneliness and the negative effects of Facebook use. *Computers in Human Behavior, 81*, 166–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.12.030>
- Cheney, M. K., & LaBrie, J. W. (2007). The role of parental monitoring in college students' alcohol use. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, 68*(6), 814–822. <https://doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2007.68.814>
- Chou, H.-Y., & Chen, M.-F. (2015). The interplay between social networking use, self-presentation styles, and self-esteem among adolescents. *Computers & Education, 83*, 144–151. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2015.01.004>
- Elphinston, R. A., & Noller, P. (2017). Time to face it! Facebook intrusion and the implications for romantic jealousy and relationship satisfaction. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 14*(11), 631–635. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2010.0318>
- Hale, L., & Guan, S. (2015). Screen time and sleep among school-aged children and adolescents: A systematic literature review. *Sleep Medicine Reviews, 21*, 50–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2014.07.007>
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2018, January 1). *Cyberbullying: Causes, consequences, and prevention*. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2018). Connecting adolescent suicide to the severity of bullying and cyberbullying. *Journal of School Violence, 17*(4), 489–499. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2017.1355287>

- Junco, R., Heiberger, G., & Loken, E. (2014). The effect of Twitter on college student engagement and grades. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 27(2), 119–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2010.00387.x>
- Lenhart, A. (2015, April 9). *Teens, social media & technology overview 2015*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>
- Lenhart, A. (2018, May 31). *Teens, social media & technology 2018*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>
- Li, Z., Willoughby, T., Wang, Y., & Kupersmidt, J. B. (2017). Cyberbullying victimization and depressive symptoms: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 45(9), 1977–1990. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-017-3231-9>