

How do College Students use Social Media?
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Introduction

Have you ever wondered how college students use social media? The use of social media has grown rapidly among college students. After interviewing fellow college students and conducting a survey, there are many different variables. The results from our research were interesting as well as surprising. There are many possible arguments that contribute to college students' use of social media including their mental health, sleep schedules, and decision-making skills. This article will show you the relationship between social media and college students.

Literature Review

The usage of social media is a very interesting topic, especially for college students. College students use social media in many different forms. Social media surrounds us as college students, and most college students use it. The focus group of this study is our age group, and we are seeing these trends in the people we surround ourselves with. Usage of social media can have positive and negative effects on your academics and your life. This is the part that we are mainly focusing on, the relationship between academics and social media. By exploring the relationship between social media and academics we see if social media benefits students or if it makes it worse. Our survey showed that people who spend more time on social media have lower GPAs than people who spend less time on social media. Whereas a study we read said that social media use can lead to academic support.

When we chose this topic we were thinking especially about today's world and after the last year social media usage has been very popular. The pandemic made it so the only way to see people was through social media and phones. College students use social media for many reasons including connecting with friends and family. Social media can provide us with positive communication qualities that we can use with one. We can also use studies from the past and

compare them to the data that we collect to see if anything has changed throughout the year. College students who use social media can also be negatively harmed by it. The note of peer pressure into doing things that are wrong or illegal. Studying the behaviors of college students and the way they use social media can be beneficial for us and for future generations.

Comparing connections between college students and social media often can bring up a feeling in students that they have to act and be like other people they see on social media. After reading academic articles and journals one specific theory stood out to us. The Social Norm Theory is a theory that says our behavior is influenced by what we see others doing. An example of this theory can be if a person posts something on their social media page wearing certain clothes and then feels as if to fit in you also need to wear clothes like that or pose and post like that person.

Social media can put a visual of everything being perfect, without showing what life is really like. This especially is seen frequently when looking at college students. Almost every college student who has social media uses it to stay connected with people back home as well as meet new people on campus. Sometimes people will be “friends” on social media but not actually talk in person yet they still are strongly influenced by what that person posts or how they even act. If students see someone doing something ‘dangerous’ or ‘risky’ but getting a lot of attention from it they may do something similar to fit in or look cool even if it could potentially be harmful to them.

Social Norm Theory can usually show a negative effect on college students. If students spend too much time on social media comparing themselves to others it can affect their self-esteem. With low self-esteem or confidence, it can lead to some form of depression or even anxiety about not fitting in with society. All of these effects of social media can, unfortunately,

cause a decrease in grades and overall GPA for a student. The Social Norm Theory really does support the findings that social media usage can be a cause of lower grades in college students.

Our main concepts revolve around college students and their social media usage. When regarding college students we mean someone who is enrolled in a higher level education typically within the age range of 18-22 years of age. Social media usage “refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks” (redefine). Technology has been ever-increasing during the past few years along with how we communicate, with phones and social media being easy to use and universal platforms, we have to ask the question of whether or not it has been positively or negatively affecting students. These two variables work together to provide information on the relationship between How college students use social media and what the potential outcomes are from that use. For example, a study conducted in the article *The Effects of Social Media on College Students* provided evidence that students who use social media more than their peers are more likely to have lower grades due to a lack of balance using social media and focusing on school, showcasing the direct correlation between students social media use and its outcome effects.

When thinking about the connection between social media and college students, it may seem like they go well together because the majority of college students are mostly all Generation Z. Meaning, we are the first generation to have portable technological devices. There are many reasonable arguments that go with our research question: “How do college students use social media?” A few academic articles point out that social media usage among college students is more likely to lead to bad decisions, such as drug and alcohol usage. The number one reason behind that statement is that many people make their lives seem so great on

social media. Social media can put out the image that drinking and partying is the number one way to have fun. Which then creates a ripple effect of others wanting to try it for themselves. Many people also start unhealthy eating habits just to try and get the body of a supermodel. Another argument pertaining to social media and college students is the debate of whether or not social media is a distraction or if taking regular breaks leads to academic success. During our conducted interviews, my interviewee stated that social media is more of a distraction because she ends up staying on it longer than she anticipates, especially on Tik Tok. Two other arguments from these academic sources consist of research on how social media affects mental wellness and the sleep patterns of college students. *Investigation of the relationships between social network usage and sleep quality among university students* states, “Increase in time spent on daily social media has increased the risk of poor sleep quality and smartphone addiction...social media can cause anxiety and depression” (GÜNDOĞMUŞ, TAŞDELEN KUL, & ÇOBAN, p. 146). Looking back at the two main factors, college students and social media. They both add up to negative effects. Whether that be unhealthy decisions, poor sleep schedules, or bad mental health, social media seems to be doing more damage than anything.

Methods

Participants

For this study, we had a very specific target population when collecting data. The target population was students enrolled in a college or university. Participants were chosen through a convenience and or purposive sampling technique. This means that we sent our research questionnaire to our college friends who we knew and who were easy to reach out to, especially for the interview.

From the research survey, we were able to gather quite a bit of demographic information. After reviewing the survey results most of the respondents were between 19 and 21 years old. About 64% of the respondents were female and 30% male with some missing statistics. 83% of students were white/caucasian and the second highest percentage was 5% Hispanic/Latino. When taking a look at our four interviewees all of them were 19 and 20-year-old females.

Procedures

The survey consisted of a series of questions pulled from a sample interview each student in COME 180 wrote. The selected questions were then put into a survey that was sent to each student in the class, asking them to send the link to their social network to gather anonymous data. That data from the survey was then interpreted and shared with the class.

The interview also consisted of a series of questions pulled from a sample interview each student in COME 180 wrote. Each student in the class was asked to conduct an interview with one individual enrolled in college, led by the shared consent form for interviewees. After the interview students were asked to provide a complete transcript and send the information back to Dr. Smith for interpretation.

Measures

For our survey, we used a range of different questions. Starting out we asked some demographic questions such as age, grade, gender, and race. Collecting this data we can use it to correlate with our other data. We also used Likert Scales such as comparing how college students believe that social media is affecting their studies. This kind of questioning helps us judge how they agree or disagree with the statement. We also asked them general questions about their usage of social media to get some data to compare with the other students to see what is popular among college students.

For the interviews, we asked nine questions about the general knowledge of social media and its usage. These questions are important to us because we are getting a general understanding of how they use it as college students. The questions were open-ended questions allowing them to freely express their opinions.

Results & Discussion

Through our survey we found a correlation between students who spend more time on their social media platform end up having lower/worse grades than students who spend less time on social media. Our data shows that 58 % of students are on their social media platforms for two to four hours a day. With 41% of students getting distracted by social media, it makes sense that they are receiving lower grades. 66% of students surveyed said that they use social media as an entertainment source or connecting friends. This makes sense because the most popular platforms used are Snapchat, Instagram, Tic Tok, and texting. All these apps allow students to have entertainment as well as a chance to connect with friends. We also found a correlation between females and how they compare themselves to others on social media, but also that females believe that social media doesn't influence their self-esteem. Meaning there is a line between the fact of how females compare themselves to others but to a certain extent considering it doesn't influence their self-esteem.

After examining the interviews we constructed, the research showed the interviewees stated that they use TikTok most often out of their social media apps. One interviewee stated, "I use Tik Tok too often because, well since they're all videos, it makes time go by faster and you don't need any long attention span." Many also said how they used social media as an escape or for a short break from homework, which eventually turns into a longer break than anticipated. The interviewees stated how they believe using social media is helpful to communicate and stay

connected with others. Everything is right at the touch of our fingertips. A few interviewees brought up the point that there are many hateful comments about body image on social media. One interviewee said, "...seeing others tear people down with the same body as you. I just don't like when people judge other people on social media." It is terrible to shame people in public, and it is even worse on social media due to the fact everyone can see it, plus once something is on the internet it is hard to erase.

The findings of the interview and survey help provide an answer to our research question, How do college students use social media? From the survey and interview data, we can conclude that college students use social media as a main source of entertainment and also primarily as a way to connect with friends. Students who spend more time on social media were proven to have lower GPAs than those who are less frequent. Many students had stated that they use social media as a source to distract themselves, providing a correlation between productivity being reduced by social media distraction resulting in a lower grade. Finally, with the distraction of social media, we found young students are more distracted than older students, and that younger students believe their relationships are stronger with friends due to social media.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media use among college students continues to increase. Looking through the data we collected, it has been proven that social media affects students' mental health, sleep schedules, and decision-making skills. Many social media posts that include body positivity or edited images, make people feel less of themselves. Social media helps people stay connected, yet can also bring them down. After coming to these conclusions, college students should set limits for social media apps and screen time. This will help cut down on social media

usage and hopefully will help improve grades over time. The overall relationship between social media and college students has highs and lows, just like life.

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