

How Do College Students Use Social Media?

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Introduction

Social media has massively grown within the past decade. The most common social media platform in 2021 was Facebook with over 1 billion monthly active users. Throughout this semester our class has conducted a research project examining: “How do college students use social media?”, through finding peer reviewed articles pertaining to the subject as well as sending out surveys and conducting interviews of current college students. We delved into several different peer reviewed articles in order to assist in narrowing scope of research as well as allowing us to identify a theory: Motivational Perspective Theory, which can be directly related to social media. On top of reviewing articles from databases, we followed protocols and procedures when creating surveys and interviews. After reviewing the surveys and interviews many people used social media for the sole purpose of connecting with friends and family.

Literature Review

The primary purpose of the study was to further understand the reasons as to how college students use social media and in what manners. This topic is of importance because as social media and technology are constantly changing and influencing our younger generations, it becomes apparent that we identify the ways in which it affects specific groups such as college students. Other researchers found the topic of how social media affects adolescents important as well conducted their own research for example *Social Media and Adolescent Health* by: Maggie R. Guinta and Rita M. John. The two researchers conducted an experiment in which they looked at how social media affects adolescents' brains. The conclusions they determined upon analyzing the data was that there are correlations between social media and negative mental well being in the forms of addiction, decreased self esteem, privacy issues, and educational challenges. This

article contributes to the importance of our topic of research through the increased knowledge of the mental effects of social media. In addition, our research aims to determine why college students use social media. In *Bored and online: Reasons for using social media, problematic social networking site use, and behavioral outcomes across the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood* by: Sarah M. Coyne and Laura A. Stockdale examines the reason why adolescents ages 17-19 use social media in the first place. They determined that the primary reason as to why those adolescents used social media was to cure themselves of boredom with between 21%-42% of participants in some form confirming this statement, the following reasons being to connect with others and seeking information (pg. 173-183). The importance of this article in our study lies in the newly identified reasoning for which students near college age use social media helping us to create questions for the survey and interview portion.

When analyzing the peer reviewed journals we identified one primary theory that applies to our research question being the Motivational Perspective Theory. This theory is defined as a human's internal drive to do something to meet a particular goal; an example being eating food to satisfy hunger or drinking liquid to satisfy thirst. When applied to our research, Yalin Sun and Zhang Yan provided excellent evidence in their article *A review of theories and models applied in studies of social media addiction and implications for future research*, which highlights how the Motivational Perspective Theory can be directly applied to social media usage. The three primary conclusions that the researchers came to were that users of social media are motivated by social gratification, information acquisition, and as means to entertain or relax. Furthermore, the researchers proceed to explain the obsessive nature of these motivations and the continued return for that instant gratification whether it may be maintaining friendships, for informational purposes, or simply to unwind. The quick gratification becomes addictive to the user as it

becomes a coping mechanism for some individuals though it negatively affects their self image. Social media as a coping mechanism is further researched in the article *College Students in Distress: Can Social Media Be a Source of Social Support* by: M. Drouin, L. Reining, M. Flanagan, M. Carpenter, and T. Toscos where social media is analyzed as either a positive or negative tool for relieving stress. The researchers concluded that 70% of social media users rarely attempt to utilize help via social media. In fact, a surprisingly high, 34% of users admit that social media causes stress which leads to anxiety and depression rather than being a tool to advance self esteem (pg. 494-504).

The variables used in this study were: GPA, gender, race, age, major and what year participants were in school. A cross-sectional questionnaire-based study was conducted to conclude there is a higher use of social media amongst low-performing students as well as a strong positive correlation between social media usage and a higher social media addiction score (Bhandarkar, A. M., Pandey, A. K., Nayak, R., Pujary, K., & Kumar, A., 2021, p. 38). The researchers also confirmed that social media has a negative impact on the academic performance of 21st-century undergraduate students. This demonstrates that social media does affect academic performance which affects a students GPA. Another study focused on the variable age and how age affects social media usage. The results showed that the main reason for adolescents entering adulthood's usage of social media was to cure boredom which recorded 21%-42% of the candidates. Additionally, the candidates reported that social media strongly affected their depression measuring up to 54% in some cases (Coyne, Sarah M and Stockdale Laura A, 2020, p.175). This demonstrates how social media affects adolescents' mental health. Both these studies have been focused on college students and emerging adulthood. Another study was conducted that focused on gender differences amongst students at the University of Sharjah for

predicting the impact of social media usage on their academic performance. The results of this study founded by a cross-sectional study were, “Males were more addicted to social media than females (49.6%) and (32%), respectively. Additionally females’ academic performance was more highly influenced by the usage of social media than that of males, although males were more addicted to social media networks” (Alnjadat, Hmaidi, Samha, Kilani, Hasswan, 2019, p.391). This article was also based on medical students and their influence by social media usage using another variable which was their major.

Variables are used to determine if changes to one variable results in a change to another. By adding more variables and cross-studying them, the more general trends you will see. Our variables were studied together to see how college students use social media. Our argument was the effects social media has on willingness to study, how social media allows for easier connection with family and friends and provides entertainment for students. Our reasoning for our variables of GPA, gender, race, age and major were our demographic would be bigger, allowing us to have a larger population to question. Several studies have identified a negative relationship between social media sites, (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and the students academic performance. (Stollak, Vandenberg, Burkland, Weiss, 2011, p.5). In particular Stollak, Vandenberg, Burkland, and Weiss demonstrated, “Those with a GPA of 3.5 or higher spent an average of 31 to 45 minutes a day, while those with a GPA of 2.50 to 3.000 and 3.00 to 3.50 spent an average of 46 to 60 minutes a day, and those with GPA below 2.5 spent an average of 61 to 90 minutes a day on Facebook.” This shows the negative relationship between GPA and Facebook usage. They also found out that, “No class was more likely to use social networking sites than another” (Stollak, Vandenberg, Burkland, Weiss, 2011, p.5). By comparing multiple

variables they are able to rule out who social media negatively affects the most. In review, research shows that social media use, such as Facebook, can decrease academic achievement.

Methods

Participants

Within the studies we conducted in this course, our target population included a wide range of college students that used social media. Since college campuses were a specific target population, we used purposive sampling along with convenience sampling when conducting our interviews and surveys. Each student was asked to send a survey link to about five or more of their friends who are students in college. This recruitment reached nearly 100 students of all different backgrounds. The ages ranged between 18-24, with the highest frequency being 21, which was 24% of participants. Of the respondents 68.1% were female, making up the majority of the survey answers. About 83% of the participants are white, making the other 17% a variety of Hispanic, African American, Asian American, Native American, or Multicultural. There was a very wide range of majors in college, the highest being six students majoring in Business Administration. And lastly, an important component of this research is that 95.7% of the participants are enrolled full time leaving only four participants that are either part-time students or not college students at all.

Procedures

To gather research about college students, two different procedures were used. The first procedure was a convenience survey, whereas the second was for each student to interview a peer. The survey was created by using a combination of questions that were taken from application assignment 3. The questions in the survey included basic nominal questions about

demographics and other short answer questions. The survey also included ordinal questions that asked about the personal usage of social media. And lastly, there were interval questions included that asked where the participants specifically fell on a scale about their usage and thoughts about social media. This survey was then used by students in the COME180 class to recruit at least five of their peers, reaching nearly 100 people by the end.

The second procedure this class conducted was an interview. Each student enrolled in the course interviewed a peer using a given series of questions. Each participant received the same set of questions and recorded the interview for transcript purposes. These questions used in the interview were pulled from student's application assignment 4. The interview began with the interviewer giving the interviewee a run down of what the procedure included, while asking their consent to record the interview. Following the opening statement the interviewer asks about the consent form and clarifies that the interviewee has consented and offers to answer any questions. The interview then begins and the interviewee answers the given questions honestly. When the interview has concluded the interviewer listens to the recording and creates a transcript to share with the other interviewers and find trends to build more research. Both of these procedures are a large part of the research process and do contain many different themes and trends.

Measures

The survey that was emailed to the target population included nominal, ordinal, and interval questions. The beginning of the survey asked basic questions about the demographic of the participants. These questions included age, year in school, gender, major, and race. Following that set of nominal questions, participants were asked about their GPA and time spent on both social media and homework. These questions then led into more in-depth questions about their personal use of social media. This part of the survey included ordinal questions as participants

chose all that applied. The final section of the survey included Likert scales where participants were asked to honestly rank themselves on a scale between 1 and 5. Where 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agreeing. Using these different types of questions helped us researchers find a wide variety of information from each participant.

The interview procedure was used to gather information focused more on asking questions about participants' personal social media habits rather than their demographic and opinions on social media. The interview included about ten different questions. These questions were designed to explore people's reasoning for their opinion about social media and their backgrounds on why they see social media the way they do. The questions asked during the interview are not able to be answered by a multiple choice bubble or a Likert scale. Each answer to each question came with an explanation. Participants' explanations in the different transcripts were used to find trends and themes.

Results & Discussion

Since our research question was "How do college students use social media?" We took a look at how our interview transcripts connected with the given research question. While reading all the interview transcripts, one of the major things that stood out was that college students used social media the most to connect with other people. Some of those people are from different states or from different colleges. Another reason that college students use social media is to have a creative outlet for things like pictures and videos. While reading through the transcripts one of the interviewees said that the only reason he/she used social media like Instagram was because they could post whatever they wanted and edit those pictures/videos in whatever way they liked which gave them a fun way to create content for others to see. Another interviewee said that

social media can cause him/her to be more self conscious about themselves and it can cause them to stay away from social media and posting things that they like on different social sites.

When we took a look at the survey results, answers to the questions were a bit different. Looking at the survey results, about 47% of people used social media the most to connect with friends and family. In comparison to the interviews, only 21% of people use social media to share things like photos and videos. This number seems to be lower than expected because a lot of the interviewees said that they use social media for the sharing aspect. However, while looking at the survey, the three top reasons for using social media would be entertainment purposes, connecting with friends and family, and sharing their opinions. Another thing that was very interesting when looking at the surveys was that younger students in college used social media more than older students. This could be that older students need to focus more on their grades and school work, while younger students have more free time to do what they want, and they spend that time on social media.

Some things that are interesting about the information from the interviews would be that almost all of the interviewees talked about how they use social media the most to connect with friends and family while they are away at school. On the downside of social media, interviewees said that they find it very hard to study or do school work when they are distracted by social media.

On the other hand, some things that were interesting from the survey dealt with more of a correlation aspect. One correlation that came from the survey would be that females report that they compare themselves to others more than males do. That seems very interesting because in today's world, women seem to be focusing more on body positivity. Another thing that stood out on the survey that was interesting was that people who spend more time on social media tend to

have lower GPAs than those who spend less time on social media. This makes sense because if you are not on social media all the time, you have more time to focus on your studies which is really important for college students especially when older students have more to do than younger students.

When examining the results and the interviews, it is easily seen that these results can answer the research question. College students use social media for a variety of reasons but some of those major reasons being that they want to stay in contact with their family and friends while they are away from home. Another one of the major reasons would be because they want to have an outlet to share things and experiences with their friends, just by sharing a post on a site like instagram or twitter.

Conclusion

With social media usage increasing rapidly, it is important to know the effects it has on college students and what social media networks college students are using. Social media can be a great way to stay connected with family and friends but, too much time on social media can lead to a decrease of academic performance. Through no surprise a topic of interest for college students who use social media would be, “How do college students use social media?”, thus we intended to answer this research question in various ways. Originally, we compiled several reliable peer reviewed journals, which we analyzed for information that can contribute to our research as well as an overarching theory that could be applied to our research which we discovered was the Motivational Perspective Theory. We also gathered information from students themselves when we conducted our surveys and interviews. When reviewing those surveys and interviews, people used social media for connecting with friends and family, and having a creative outlet.

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