The Effect of Social Media Platforms on The Development of Students' Affective Variables

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Abstract
Students are increasingly using social media, owing to the globalization of communication and the post-pandemic rush to use diverse social media platforms for education in various disciplines of study. Though social media has given numerous opportunities for sharing thoughts and emotions, the type of social support it provides may fail to suit students' emotional requirements, or the apparent benefits may be fleeting. In recent years, various research has been undertaken to investigate the possible impacts of social media on students' emotional qualities, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. The current study examines the findings of excellent published studies to shed light on the possible positive and negative potential consequences of the widespread usage of social media on students' emotional well-being. This review might be useful for instructors who may overlook the potential psychological impacts of social media. They may wish to learn more about the real impacts of over-reliance and excessive (and even compulsive) social media usage on students' development of self-images and feelings that are not always favourable. This will have an impact on pre- and in-service teacher training and professional development programs, as well as everyone involved in student affairs.

Keywords: affective variables, education, emotions, social media, post-pandemic, emotional needs

I.   Introduction

In today's communication environment, social media has become a crucial part of many people's lives, including students. Its usage is increasing at a faster rate than ever before, particularly in the post-pandemic era, which has seen a massive upheaval in education. According to recent research, roughly 3 billion people globally are presently conversing using social media (Iwamoto and Chun, 2020). This growing population of social media users is spending an increasing amount of time on social network groups, as statistics show that people spend an average of two hours per day on a variety of social media applications, exchanging pictures and messages, updating status, tweeting, favouring, and commenting on many updated socially shared information (Abbott, 2017).

A researcher has initiated an investigation into the psychological impact of social media use on students' lives. According to Chukwuere and Chukwuere (2017), social media platforms are the most important source of changing people's moods because when someone is passively using a social media platform with no apparent purpose, s/he can eventually feel that his/her mood has changed because of the nature of the content overviewed. As a result, happy and bad moods may be readily transmitted across the community via social media networks (Chukwuere and Chukwuere, 2017). This may become increasingly significant as students use social media platforms more frequently and social networking becomes a vital part of their lives. According to Iwamoto and Chun (2020), when students are affected by social media posts, particularly given their increasing reliance on social media in their daily lives, they may be encouraged to begin comparing themselves to others or develop unrealistic expectations of themselves or others, which can have a variety of affective outcomes.

Given the growing effect of social media in education, the current study will focus on emotional variables such as sadness, stress, and anxiety, and how social media might raise or decrease these feelings in student life. The most outstanding studies on this issue from recent years will be examined here, with the goal of shedding light on the good and negative consequences of these ever-increasingly prominent platforms on student psychology.

Significance of the Study

Though social media, as the name implies, is intended to keep people linked, this social connection is most likely shallow and insufficiently deep and meaningful to help individuals feel emotionally attached to others. The psychological impacts of social media on student life require further investigation to determine whether social media truly serves as a social support system for students and whether students can utilise social media to cope with unpleasant emotions and create good sentiments. In other words, understanding the potential effects of increased social media use on students' emotional well-being can help bridge the gap between social media's alleged promises and what it has to offer students in terms of self-concept, self-respect, social role, and coping strategies (for stress, anxiety, and so on).

Exemplary general literature on psychological effects of social media

Before delving into the impact of social media on students' emotional well-being, some outstanding studies on the subject in general populations from recent years are discussed.

Aalbers et al. (2018) found that people who spent more time passively working with social media experienced higher degrees of despair, loneliness, sadness, and inferiority.

Tang et al. (2013) discovered that the methods for sharing information, commenting, expressing likes and dislikes, sending messages, and engaging in other popular social media activities are associated with increased stress.

According to Ley et al. (2014), persons who spend an average of 2 hours on social media apps will come across many distressing news, posts, and tales, which might increase the overall severity of their stress. Weng and Menczer (2015) also identified social media's stress-inducing influence, claiming that it becomes a major source of stress since individuals frequently share a wide range of posts, comments, and articles on topics ranging from politics and economics to personal and social issues. Anxiety and sadness, according to Iwamoto and Chun (2020), are undesirable feelings that a human may experience when faced with a stressful situation. In other words, when social media sources become stressful, there is a substantial risk that anxiety and sadness may emerge.

Charoensukmongkol (2018) believes that the world population's mental health and well-being are at risk because of the uncontrolled widespread usage of social media. These studies also show that social media might have a detrimental emotional influence on teens by increasing jealousy and social comparison.

Fleck & Johnson-Migalski (2015) Though social media initially serves as a stress-coping mechanism, when people continue to view stressful situations (often experienced and shared by others in media), they tend to build tension over time.

Chukwuere & Chukwuere (2017) highlighted that social media platforms remain the primary cause of mood change among general audiences. For example, someone may be passively surfing a social networking platform, and s/he may eventually find himself/herself in a different mood based on the nature of the information encountered. Then, whether in a happy or poor mood, it is quickly shared with others via social media.

Alahmar (2016) states that social media exposes individuals, particularly the young generation, to new and interesting activities and events that may entice them and keep them engaged in various media settings for hours as they pass the time. It generally results in decreased productivity, worse academic accomplishment, and an addiction to continual media consumption.

There is more research on the possible psychological impacts of social media on individuals in general than the ones discussed here.

Review of the affective influences of social media on students

Vygotsky's mediational theory can be viewed as the primary theoretical foundation for the impact of social media on learners' emotional states. According to this idea, social media may serve as a medium of communication between learners and the actual world. The picture formed by social media can help learners grasp this environment. This picture might be like or different from reality. In the case of the former, students can improve their self-image and self-esteem. In the latter situation, learners may form unreasonable expectations of themselves by comparing themselves to others. Anxiety, stress, sadness, distress, rumination, and self-esteem are some of the emotional variables that have increased or decreased in students because of their extensive usage of social media. These impacts have been studied more in school pupils aged 13 to 18 than in university students (aged 18 and up), but some research has also been conducted in college. This article reviews exemplary research on these emotional characteristics.

O'Dea and Campbell (2011) conducted a cross-sectional study to investigate the influence of online social networking interactions on teenage students' psychological discomfort. These researchers discovered a negative relationship between social networking time and mental anguish.

Dumitrache et al. (2012) investigated the links between depression and identity related with the usage of the prominent social media platform Facebook. This study found a substantial relationship between sadness and the quantity of identity-related information items posted on this social network.

Neira and Barber (2014) investigated the link between social media use among teenagers and depression. There was no significant link established between the two factors.

Tsitsika et al. (2014) investigated the links between excessive usage of social media and internalising emotions. These researchers discovered a link between spending more than two hours each day on social media and feelings of worry and despair.

Hanprathet et al. (2015) found a statistically significant positive link between Facebook addiction and depression among almost a thousand high school students in Thailand's rich communities, and they cautioned about this psychological harm.

Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis (2015) investigated the links between social media use and psychological suffering. These researchers discovered that using social media for more than 2 hours per day was associated with a greater level of psychological discomfort.

Banjanin et al. (2015) investigated the link between excessive social networking use and depression, but found no statistically significant association between the two variables.

Frison and Eggermont (2016) investigated the links between different types of Facebook use, perceived social media support, and depressive mood in male and female students. These researchers discovered a favourable link between passive Facebook usage and depression and active Facebook use and depression. Furthermore, perceived social support from social media was shown to modulate this link. Gender was also identified as a factor mediating this association.

Vernon et al. (2017) investigated how changes in negative investment in social networking relate to changes in depression and externalising behaviour. These researchers discovered that increasing involvement in social media predicted higher depression in teenage pupils, which was because of more interrupted sleep.

Barry et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between teenagers' usage of social media and their psychological adjustment. Social media engagement was shown to be positively and marginally linked with sadness and anxiety.

Wang et al. (2018) found that addiction to social networking sites was positively connected with depression, which was mediated by rumination. These researchers also discovered that self-esteem influenced the mediation impact. It suggests that the effect of addiction on depression was exacerbated by poor self-esteem due to ruminating.

Keles et al. (2020) provided a systematic review of the effect of social media on young and teenage students' depression, psychological distress, and anxiety. They found that depression acted as the most frequent affective variable measured. The most salient risk factors of psychological distress, anxiety, and depression based on the systematic review were activities such as repeated checking for messages, personal investment, the time spent on social media, and problematic or addictive use.

Mathewson (2020) researched the impact of social media on college students' mental health. Participants reported anxiety, sadness, and suicidality. The findings revealed a substantial relationship between the types and frequency of social media use among students and their reported mental health.

II.   Discussion

The amount of research on the impact of social media on students' affective and emotional states has shown varied results. The present literature demonstrates that there are both good and negative emotional consequences. Nonetheless, it appears that the latter is predominant. Mathewson (2020) ascribed the diverse positive and negative impacts to the various theoretical frameworks used in different research, as well as the distinct settings (different nations with completely different educational systems). On the other hand, it should be emphasised that by feeling happy, learners may be able to fully use the benefits of social media and, as a result, strategically pursue their learning objectives.

It should be noted that the relationship between the usage of social media and emotional states is bidirectional. As a result, students' strategic or addictive usage of social media can lead to good or negative experiences such as delight, anxiety, and sadness. In addition, the mixed positive and negative impacts are consistent with the findings of various other relevant research on the psychological and emotional health of general populations. Several studies (with general study populations, not necessarily students) found that social networks made it easier to remain in touch with relatives and friends who live far away, as well as boost social support.

Given the positive and negative emotional effects of social media, it can either scaffold students' emotional repertoire, resulting in the development of positive emotions, or induce negative provokers in them, causing learners to experience negative emotions such as anxiety and depression. However, social media has created a realm that fosters the act of comparing lives and seeking acceptance, therefore establishing and internalising erroneous notions.

It should be noted that the responsiveness of emotional variables to social media should be seen through a dynamic lens. This suggests that the ecology of social media can influence learners' emotional experiences. More precisely, pupils' emotional variables may self-organise into various moods because of social media exposure. Regarding the positive correlation found in many studies between the use of social media and such

negative effects as anxiety, depression, and stress, it can be hypothesised that this correlation is caused by the individual's constant comparison and the perception that others are doing better than him/her, which is influenced by the posts that appear on social media.

Social media use can have a greater impact on the psychological well-being of university students than previously thought. Though most of these studies were correlational, and correlation is not the same as causation, given that the number of participants experiencing these negative emotions as a result of social media is significantly high, more extensive research is strongly recommended to investigate causal effects (Mathewson, 2020).

According to a survey of example research, some feel that social media boosts students' comparisons of themselves to others. This conclusion supports the significance of the Interpretation Comparison Model. Concerning the detrimental impacts of social media on students' psychology, it may be stated that individuals may fail to see that the information offered on social media is typically altered to only depict the most appealing elements of people's lives, creating a false impression of reality. This argument also supports the significance of the Social Comparison Theory and the Interpretation Comparison Model, since social media establishes norms against which students believe they should measure themselves.

Constantly seeing how other students or classmates demonstrate their achievements leads to greater self-evaluations. It is hypothesised that the omnipresent social media in student life creates unreasonable expectations and encourages continual comparison, as identified in the Interpretation Comparison Model.

Implications of the study

Students are increasingly using social media, both at school and at university, due to the promises of technological advancements in communication services, as well as the increased use of social networks for educational purposes in recent years following the pandemic. This frequent use of social media is unlikely to have no impact on students' psychological, affective, and emotional states. Thus, it is critical to understand how the increasing use of social networks affects students' mental health in a variety of ways. As a result, we felt it beneficial to summarise current study findings in this area. If individuals in charge of student affairs in educational settings are aware of the possible beneficial or bad consequences of social media usage on students, they will be able to better comprehend and satisfy the intricacies of their demands.

Psychological counselling programs can be implemented at schools or universities to assess the current state of students' mental and emotional health, which is impacted by the widespread usage of social media. Counsellors can be made aware of the possible negative consequences of social networking and tailor the substance of their enquiries accordingly. Knowledge of the probable causes of student anxiety, despair, and stress might assist school or university counsellors in developing individualised coping techniques when diagnosing any sign of distress in students impacted by excessive social networking.

It is not feasible to eliminate the use of social media in today's academic life, nor to completely supervise students' usage of social networks. Certainly, the educational environment today cannot function without social media, which has become an essential element of everyone's life. However, pupils should be taught how to use the media effectively and avoid being negatively impacted by its sometimes shallow and unrepresentative content. Compensatory measures may be required at schools or colleges to educate pupils to avoid drawing unrealistic and biased comparisons between themselves and the flashy pictures of others posted on social media. Students may be taught to appreciate and care for themselves while using the media for their benefit.

The involvement of teachers and curriculum creators is becoming increasingly crucial since they may greatly help to mitigate the negative impacts of widespread social media use on students' mental and emotional health. Teachers may take extra care when creating groupings for instructional reasons, such as on social media, to ensure that the group members are homogenous and that the assignments and activities offered in the groups are relevant and realistic. Teachers cannot always have complete control over their students' usage of social media, and students do not always utilise social media only for educational purposes.

Teachers may not have complete control over their students' usage of social media, but they have always played an active role in inspiring or discouraging students to perform certain actions in their academic life. If instructors are aware of recent study results on the possible impacts of widespread social media usage on students, they may be able to identify solutions to lessen students' distraction or confusion in class because of excessive or over-reliance on these networks. Educators may be increasingly captivated by the promises of technology-, computer-, and mobile-based learning. They may encourage students to utilise social media in the hopes of improving their social and interpersonal skills, self-esteem, stress management, and so on.

However, they may be ignorant of the possible negative consequences on students' emotional well-being and hence, may find a review of current relevant study findings useful. Teachers can also mediate between students and social media to control how much time they spend on it. According to research, students' emotional experiences are mostly influenced by their instructors' instructional approaches. They should discourage students from excessive usage or dependency on social media. Raising learners' awareness of the fact that they should develop their learning path rather than base it on unrealistic comparisons of their competencies with those of

others can help them consider positive values for their social media activities and, as a result, experience positive emotions.

In higher education, students' requirements are more realistic. For example, their desire for the job may drive people to register profiles on many social media platforms in the hopes of a better future. However, membership in many of these networks may result in a waste of time that may be better spent on genuine on-campus cooperative initiatives. Universities can provide more on-campus resources for research and job experience, benefiting students more than cyberspace, which may be challenging in many instances. Over-stimulation and under-stimulation are two major ideas that explain various undesirable feelings, such as boredom or worry. As a result of the stimulating atmosphere provided by social media, what students experience because of their participation in it may be unpleasant feelings.

This dynamic atmosphere causes students to rely on social media excessively or compulsively. As a result, individuals may experience anxiety or depression. Given the prevalence of social media, these negative feelings may be changed into good emotions if students are aware of the psychological impacts of it. In terms of social media affordances for learners, they can use them to improve their literacy, increase their communication abilities, or expand their distance learning prospects.

III.   Conclusion

An examination of study data on the association between social media and students' emotional qualities yielded both good and negative results. However, cases of the latter were more prevalent, and negative psychological symptoms such as sadness, worry, and tension were far from insignificant. These findings were discussed considering more relevant theories, such as the social comparison theory, which predicted that most of the potential problems with the young generation's excessive use of social media were caused by unfair comparisons between their own lives and the unrealistic portrayal of others on social media. Teachers, education officials, curriculum creators, and all those in charge of student affairs at schools and universities should be made aware of the psychological consequences of social media's widespread use on students, as well as possible hazards.

It should be noted that the purported socially supportive and communicative benefits of the widespread usage of social networking in student life may not be completely realised in practice. When students compare their current circumstances to those of others or classmates, they may lose self-esteem and gratitude. A melancholy or stressed-out state may result. Students in schools or colleges must develop self-esteem to withstand the negative impacts of the superficial support they receive from social media. Along the journey, students should be supported by their families and those in control at schools or colleges, particularly the professors. As previously indicated, counseling programs might aid in enhancing students' understanding of the possible psychological risks of social media to their health. Given the prevalence of social media in everyone's life, especially student life globally, it appears that additional coping and compensating measures should be developed to mitigate the negative psychological impacts of social media use on students. Furthermore, the affective effects of social media should not be generalised but rather evaluated within an ecological or contextual framework. This means that learners' emotions may vary depending on the time or environment in which they engage in social media.

More precisely, given the stative approach to learners' emotions, what learners feel emotionally when using social media may be linked to their intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences. This means that the same learner at various periods in time may experience different emotions. Furthermore, learners' emotional states because they participate in social media cannot be generalised to all students in a class. Because the bulk of studies on the psychological impacts of social media on student life have been done on school students rather than those in higher education, it appears that it is too early to draw any definitive conclusions about this demographic alone. Further research into the psychological intricacies of higher education students, as well as a greater understanding of their demands, would most likely pave the way for more informed findings on the effects of social media on their affective moods.

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