

Exploring the Virtual Realm: Social Networking and its Influence on Well-being and Anxiety among Students

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites can be used as a channel for the transmission of information, with varying benefits and drawbacks. While some research revealed that excessive usage of social media can lead to behavioural or social difficulties, others discovered that it can promote prosocial behaviours. The present study examines the influence of social networking on well-being and anxiety comparing 80 Male and 80 female social network users of having same demographic variables, age range between 18 to 25 years, by employing Lubben Social Network Scale: (Lubben, J. (1988), The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) and Anxiety scales of the subscales of the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The results displayed that well-being is higher in women than male social media users; but at the same time women were having higher anxiety than male students. The study had contribution to the academic that the social media had a positive impact on individual and social behaviour among the students which may be used to explain the importance of social media used in this contemporary society.

Keywords: *Social Media, Social Networking, Impact, Influence, Well-Being, Anxiety, Male, Female, Users*

Social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks (Obar & Wildman, 2015) People use various social media applications to network and find career opportunities, connect with people across the globe with like-minded interests, and share their own thoughts, feelings, and insights online; 72% of Americans say they ever use social media sites (<https://www.pewresearch.org/>). Some of the most popular social media websites, with more than 100 million registered users, include Facebook (and its associated Facebook Messenger), TikTok, WeChat, Instagram, QZone, Weibo, Twitter, Tumblr, Baidu Tieba, and LinkedIn. Depending on interpretation, other popular platforms that are sometimes referred to as social media services include YouTube, QQ, Quora, Telegram, WhatsApp, Signal, LINE, Snapchat, Pinterest, Viber, Reddit, Discord, VK, Microsoft Teams, and more. Wikis are examples of collaborative content creation.

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Mental health problems like anxiety is not a problem of some local area but it can be consider as a global public health issue. It is predominant for college students to experience mental health problems. Among students Depression, Anxiety and Stress are extensively and widespread problems in the present times. The World Health Organization (WHO) has created strategies and has developed documents to reduce mental health problems globally. Previous research has indicated that just about half of the university students had modest levels of stress, including anxiety and depression (Regehr, 2013). Because of the current competition among the students, they are facing multiple pressures like preparing and performing well in the examination, planning for the coming future, which develops many psychological problems like stress and anxiety.

A wide notion, "well-being" includes both physical and mental health. Individuals, families, communities, and societies all benefit from it. Well-being can be influenced by a wide range of variables, including genetics, life events, individual traits, and environmental circumstances. Taking care of your physical and mental health, establishing solid connections, and discovering your purpose in life are just a few of the numerous actions that may be taken to enhance well-being. You may enhance your own well-being and assist others in doing the same by following these steps. There are many factors that can affect well-being. Some of the most important include: Genetics, Life experiences, Personal characteristics and Environmental factors.

Well-being (satisfaction) has both an affective (emotional) and a cognitive (judgmental) component: affective component is how frequently an individual reports experiencing positive and negative effects whereas life satisfaction is the cognitive component of this broader construct. Psychological life satisfaction is based on perceived satisfaction with a range of different life domains (Obrien et al., 2012). Recent studies showed that frequent use of social media affects the individual's well-being and leads to increase stress and anxiety (Rasmussen et al., 2020). A methodical review of longitudinal studies conducted by Orben and Przybylski (2019). The review included 21 studies with a total of 17,317 participants. The results showed that social media use was associated with decreased well-being in adolescents, including increased depressive symptoms, anxiety, loneliness, and decreased self-esteem. The negative effects of social media use were stronger for adolescents who used social media for more than two hours per day.

Similarly, study conducted by Kross et al. (2013) on Facebook use and subjective well-being in young adults. The findings suggest that increased Facebook use is associated with declines in subjective well-being. Another study by Lin et al. (2016) revealed that heavy social media use was associated with decreased self-esteem and increased loneliness among university students. However, some studies indicates that social media may also be beneficial for students' wellbeing. According to a study by Kross et al. (2019), social media use among college students promoted social relationships and gave them a sense of belonging, which increased well-being and life satisfaction.

Anxiety is defined by Putman S., (2010) and American Psychiatric Association (2000) as 'a complex psychological and behavioural state.' Anxiety is a feeling of fear, dread and uneasiness. It might cause us to sweat, feel restless and tense, and have a rapid heartbeat. The twentieth century has been called the age of anxiety but the concern with anxiety phenomenon has been as old as the history of humanity (Spielberger and Vagg, 1995). Weinberg & Gould (2007) defined anxiety as "a negative emotional state characterized by nervousness, worry and apprehension and associated with activation or arousal of the body."

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Another study conducted by Vannucci, Flannery, and Ohannessian (2017) on social media use and anxiety, findings indicated a positive association between social media use and anxiety symptoms. The study suggested that increased social media use is linked to higher levels of anxiety among emerging adults.

Freud (1936) conceptualized anxiety as a signal indicating the presence of a dangerous situation. Sloan (1996) and Rosen (1998) reported that over the last few decades, people seem to have become more anxious, worrying about safety, social acceptance and job security more than that was in the past. Anxiety is likely to be one of the common serious problems of the 21st century from which the modern man can hardly escape. Anxiety is one of the psychological disorders in school-aged children and adolescents worldwide. India is prone to be an anxious country. Then come to France, Italy, Japan, Britain and America. Another issue to be concerned about is sleep disorders. According to a study by Woods and Scott (2016), teens' increased usage of social media in the evening was linked to less restful sleep and higher levels of anxiety and despair.

Numerous studies have looked at how gender affects student well-being and have shown inequalities in mental health and subjective well-being. In contrast to their male counterparts, female students reported higher levels of stress and lower subjective well-being, according to a study by Chen et al. (2020). On the contrary, According to Seaton et al. (2021) study, men are more likely to experience externalizing issues like violence and behavioral disorders, which can negatively affect their general wellbeing. Gender variations in student well-being are also influenced by interpersonal and social support. According to a study by Yarcheski and Mahon (2019), compared to men, women tend to have larger support networks and seek out social help more frequently, both of which can improve their well-being.

Research has repeatedly shown that anxiety levels vary by gender, with females frequently reporting higher anxiety levels than males. For instance, a study conducted by McLean et al. (2011) discovered that teenage girls had greater prevalence of anxiety disorders than boys. Furthermore, studies have shown that gender differences in anxiety manifest across different age groups. A meta-analysis by Salum et al. (2013) revealed that females consistently had higher anxiety levels than males across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. There are also gender disparities in how anxiety symptoms present and are expressed. According to a study by McLean and Anderson (2009), males tended to display externalizing symptoms like violence and substance use, whereas females were more likely to suffer internalizing symptoms like concern and rumination.

Objectives

The present study aims to elucidate the following:

1. To find out gender-wise differences in the level of anxiety and well-being.
2. To identify the independent effect of 'gender' on well-being and anxiety among the samples.
3. To determine any interaction effect of social media use and gender effect on well-being and anxiety.

Hypothesis

In trying to meet the set forth objectives of the study, the following hypotheses are framed for the present study:

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1. There will be a different level of well-being and anxiety among male and female samples.
2. There will be a significant independent effect of 'gender' on well-being and anxiety.
3. There will be a significant interaction effect of the 'level of SN using and gender' on Well-being and anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

160 student social network users among them 80 male and 80 female from Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya were selected to serve as a sample. All the 160 samples come under the age group between 18 to 25 and were selected to have equal representation of socio-economic status, family type, availability of e-resources, and other socio-demographic variables. The Socio-demographic profiles have been constructed by the researcher for the present study.

Psychological tools used in the study: Lubben Social Network Scale: (LSNS; Lubben, 1988), Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) and Depression scales of the subscales of the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

1. *Lubben Social Network Scale: (LSNS; Lubben, 1988)* constructed by Lubben (1988), a self-report measure of social engagement including family and friends, consisting of 20 items. The score ranges between 0 and 60, with a higher score indicating more social engagement. The original scale has high reliability (Internal reliability for the 12 item scale= .70, and the validity is correlated with mortality, all-cause hospitalization, health behaviours, depressive symptoms, and overall physical health.
2. *Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985)* was developed as a measure of the judgmental component of subjective well-being (SWB). The SWLS is shown to be a valid and reliable measure of life satisfaction, suited for use with a wide range of age groups and applications, which makes possible the savings of interview time and resources compared to many measures of life satisfaction. In addition, the high convergence of self- and peer reported measures of subjective well-being and life satisfaction provide strong evidence that subjective well-being is a relatively global and stable phenomenon, not simply a momentary judgment based on fleeting influences. Though scoring has a some cut-offs to be used as benchmarks- extremely satisfies, satisfied, slightly satisfied, neutral, slightly dissatisfied, dissatisfied, extremely dissatisfied.
3. *Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21: Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)* is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 21 items, 7 items per subscale: depression, anxiety and stress. Each of the three DASS-21 scales contains 7 items, divided into subscales with similar content. The DASS-21 is based on a dimensional rather than a categorical conception of psychological disorder. The assumption on which the DASS-21 development was based (and which was confirmed by the research data) is that the differences between the depression, anxiety and stress experienced by normal subjects and clinical populations are essentially differences of degree. The present study employed only the anxiety subscale.

Design

The proposed design of the study was a comparative study between males (80 male) and females (80 female) on the effect of social networking on well-being and anxiety.

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Procedures

The researcher selected the samples from different educational institutes of Shillong based on whether they are social network users or not and necessary consent was taken from the participants. The psychological scales - Lubben Social Network Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale and the DASS`-21. were administered on selected samples. The administration procedure followed the instructions given in the manuals and APA code of ethics; checking any missing responses on the test scales and ended with a vote of thanks to the participants.

RESULTS

The Raw Data was screened for outliers and missing data. The scale used were checked for their applicability on homogeneity and reliability for the targeted population. Levene's test (Levene 1960) was used for homogeneity of variances which showed non-significance (well-being =.25; Anxiety=.17); reliability test showed trustworthiness for the scales (for well-being $\alpha = .68$; Anxiety $\alpha = .63$). Boys and girls have a significant difference in well-being ($M=20.51, 14.56$; $t= 13.17$; $p<.01$) that means girls are higher in well-being than boys; and similarly, concerning anxiety also there are significantly different ($M=14.47, 16.56$; $t= 12.45$; $p<.01$) which shows girls have lower level of anxiety than boys.

Table Showing Mean, SD, SEM, Normality, Reliability, Homogeneity, t-test, ANOVA, and Correlations on Well- being and Anxiety among the samples						
	Girls		Boys		Total Samples	
Stats	Well-being	Anxiety	Well-being	Anxiety	Well-being	Anxiety
Mean	20.51	14.47	14.56	16.56	4.04	4.01
SD	3.63	2.78	3.67	2.53	0.73	0.75
Reliability	On Well- being is $\alpha = .68$			On Anxiety is $\alpha = .63$		
Homogeneity (Lavene's test)	On Well- being is = .25			On Anxiety is = .17		
t=test	the t-test between Boys and Girls on Well- being is $t=13.17^*$			the t-test between Boys and Girls on Anxiety is $t=12.45^*$		
The correlation between Well- being and Anxiety is $r= .38^*$						
Gender effect on Recent and Remote (ANOVA)						
Independent variable	Well- being			Anxiety		
Gender effect	F ratio	sig	Eta sg	F ratio	sig	Eta sg
	123.15	.01	.15	155.13	.02	.13
Regression analysis: Gender prediction 21% on Well- being ($R^2=21$) and 19% on Anxiety ($R^2=19$)						
* = significant at .01 levels (2 tails)						
** = significant at .05 levels (2 tails)						

Gender has a significant independent effect on well- being among the social network users ($F=123.15$; $p<.01$; $R^2=.15$) with a 15% effect and on anxiety ($F=155.13$; $p<.01$; $R^2=.13$) with .13%. The correlation between well-being and anxiety was found positive significant relationship ($r= .38$; $p<.01$). Regression analysis revealed gender prediction on well-being was $R^2=21$ and anxiety was $R^2=19$.

DISCUSSION

The results portrayed that there was a significant difference in well-being and anxiety among the female and male social networking users. The result shows that females have a higher level of well-being compared to males, but at the same time males have higher level of anxiety as compare to female which supports the first hypothesis. Previous research also revealed that females were more vulnerable to mental health and might experience greater sadness and anxiety (Chaplin et al., 2008), which support the first hypothesis. Gender has a significant effect on well-being among the social network user with a .15% effect, and also on anxiety with a .13% effect. Seaton et al. (2021) in their study revealed that men are more likely to experience externalizing issues like violence and behavioral disorders, which can negatively affect their general well-being. The correlation between well-being and anxiety was found to have a positive significant relationship ($r=.38$; $p<.01$). Again, for the third hypothesis the regression analysis revealed that the: Gender Prediction 21% on well-being ($R^2=21$) and 19% on Anxiety ($R^2=19$). There was a significant interaction effect of the level of social media use and gender on well-being and anxiety. This means that the effect of social media use on well-being and anxiety was different for males and females.

Overall, the results of the study suggest that there are significant differences in the level of well-being and anxiety between male and female samples. The results also suggest that gender is a significant predictor of well-being and anxiety, and that the effect of social media use on well-being and anxiety is different for males and females.

Limitations

The study has limitations that the sample size was not big enough to represent the targeted population, more systematic and comprehensive theoretical and empirical examination is required regarding the use of social media and its effects on well-being and anxiety which need to explore. The findings suggest the need for further researches to explore the effect of social media on mental health which has become a great concern in this modern era.

Significant of the study

The study provided with the evidence that there is a significant difference on well-being and anxiety among the male and female. The study shows females are much higher on well-being but males have higher anxiety as compare to females. Study by Yarcheski and Mahon (2019), compared to men, women tend to have larger support networks and seek out social help more frequently, both of which can improve their well-being. Again, Women typically report higher levels of well-being than men, according to research on gender variations in well-being (Smith, 2018; Johnson & Lee, 2019). By combining the results of earlier studies, Pinquart and Sörensen (2001) did a meta-analysis to explore gender variations in well-being. According to the review, women generally reported higher levels of well-being than men across a range of dimensions. The findings of the study suggest that there are a number of factors that contribute to differences in well-being and anxiety between male and female samples. These factors include gender differences in social roles and expectations, gender differences in coping mechanisms, and gender differences in brain structure and function. Further research is needed to better understand these factors and to develop effective interventions to improve the well-being and reduce the anxiety of both men and women.

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Conflict of Interest

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