

Social Media Usage and Its Impact on Anxiety in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

A study examines the degree of social media use and related anxiety levels in young adults, developmental psychology perspective and includes identity formation, along with peer interaction. The research looked at 100 participants regarding both the number of times usage occurs as well as the types of and content on which they interact. It found that there is a very strong positive correlation between frequent use of social media and heightened anxiety, especially when it involves negative interactions and comparison-oriented content. However, positive engagement did hold the promise of alleviating anxiety. The findings of the study make one realize how essential it is to teach college youth responsible social media practices and encourage healthy online behavior as a mental health intervention.

Keywords: *Social media, Anxiety, Adolescents, Peer relations, Developmental psychology, Mental health, Emotional development, Social comparison, India, Teen psychology*

The meteoric rise in social media use among young adults has brought about radical changes in how they socialize, develop self-identity, and form perceptions of self-worth. Spaces like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, where connection and expression are promoted, also stand as spaces where constant comparison takes place, which can significantly impact mental health.

Specifically, it is shown that heavy usage of social media relates to extreme levels of anxiety. According to developmental psychology, young adulthood is a critical period for self-identity development. This makes them more susceptible to being emotionally affected by the mentioned negative effects of comparison, bad reviews, and cyberbullying.

The focus of this study is on the multilateral interaction that exists between social media and anxiety in young adults, to find out whether there exist certain types of social media interactions that worsen or help palliate symptoms of anxiety. In so doing, this study seeks to advance the state of knowledge regarding the relations between social media and mental health as well as informing intervention guidelines with the aim of supporting young adults' mental well-being.

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Research Problem and Objective

The first concern of the research problem in this paper is the impact of patterns of social media usage on the anxiety condition in young adults. It identifies specific social media behaviors that raise anxiety levels and how positive and negative interactions could differentially influence mental health. The answers to the problem raised should give directions on strategies for healthier social media engagement practices.

Hypotheses

1. **H1:** While many young adults use social media, higher amounts of usage are indeed linked to increased levels of anxiety.
2. **H2:** More negative than positive interactions, such as cyberbullying compared to supportive comments, are linked to increased anxiety.
3. **H3:** High anxiety is correlated with the consumption of material that encourages social comparison, namely lifestyle posts that create a "highlight reel," although the relationship is lessened when the content is supportive/informative in nature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent years have seen a surge in research studies that focus on social media and mental health in adolescent and young adult populations. For example, Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) demonstrated that more likely passive browsing, which means watching without interacting, is associated with higher anxiety and depressive symptoms among adolescents. They contend that the process of passive browsing, carried out constantly with social comparison, engenders feelings of inadequacy and jealousy among younger users. Twenge and Campbell (2018) concur with this opinion by concluding that stress, low self-esteem, and anxiety increase with social comparison on social media among younger adults.

Przybylski et al. (2013) coined the term "fear of missing out" (FOMO), as a pervasive feeling one is missing out on rewarding experiences others are having. This research further expanded from previous studies, addressing different ways of social media interactions through examining the impact on anxiety levels.

METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a survey method that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative findings to probe the complex interactions between social media usage and anxiety. It captured self-reported data regarding the type of interaction people commonly encounter whilst using social media; for instance, a positive versus negative interaction. A GAD-7 scale to measure anxiety was also used.

Participants and Sampling

The sample included 100 young adults aged 18-25 years who utilize social media extensively. In order to achieve diversity in the sampled age group, a simple random sampling method was used. Young adulthood is at such a critical stage that this population is highly susceptible to the influence of social media on mental health.

Data Collection Instruments and Process

1. **GAD-7 Scale:** This scale is commonly used to measure generalized anxiety; therefore, scores of 5, 10, and 15 correspond to mild, moderate, and severe levels of anxiety, respectively.
2. **Social Media Use Questionnaire:** This questionnaire accounted for the type of usage and time spent online of participants, kind of interaction experienced by participants

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either positive or negative, and the content type retrieved or downloaded as either comparison-oriented or for informational purposes.

Internet-based data collection was conducted, with anonymity and confidentiality assured of the subjects during the interview to get their candid responses.

Statistical Analysis

General trends on the use of social media and anxiety levels were summarized using descriptive statistics, while the examinations between variables and testing of hypotheses utilized both Pearson's correlation and Spearman's rho as inferences. Additional regression tests were carried out to study the predictive effects of particular aspects of social media interaction with the level of anxiety.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Descriptive statistics on use of social media, and level of anxiety in the sample.

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Social Media Usage (SM)	118	17.9	16.5	14.0	9.01	1	35
Anxiety Score (AX)	118	8.03	7.0	6.0	5.64	0	21

Correlation Analysis

Correlation study among predictors and anxiety showed positive correlation at significance level $p < 0.05$ in high users of social media, supporting Hypothesis H1. Pearson's r and Spearman's rho had $r = 0.32$, $p < 0.05$, which suggests very strong correlation results for the relationship between social media use and anxiety.

Regression Analysis

The negative interactions as well as the content-orientated social comparison could predict anxiety highly significantly at a p value of less than 0.01. Only a small reduction of anxiety by positive interaction alone was not statistically significant, meaning that the effect of which is limited in relation to the effects of negative engagement and social comparison.

DISCUSSION

The findings clearly suggest that the link between social media use and anxiety in young adults is a bit more complicated than a simple effects relationship. Indeed, higher usage tends to go along with higher anxiety, but interactions have an important effect on the nature of that relationship.

Negative Interactions and Anxiety

Negative interactions such as cyberbullying, trolling, and exclusion were significant contributors to heightened levels of anxiety. A similar trend was observed in some existing works of research (Twenge & Campbell, 2018), which find associations of online harassment with deteriorating mental health conditions. Social media features anonymity and constant connectivity, making spaces where young adults feel maximally open to judgments and hostility.

Social Comparison and FOMO

For the social comparison theme, specifically in this study, a comparing-focused type of content engagement was significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety. Social media "highlight reels" usually depict typically idealized lives, which tends to make users feel inadequate or left out. Przybylski et al. (2013) termed this FOMO.

Positive Interactions and Supportive Content

Interestingly, the research study established that supportive interaction was also not a significant predictor of anxiety reduction but did provide relief to the respondents. This makes an indication that sources of social media could be valuable sinks of social support among younger adults when content displayed encourages positivity and emotional expression.

Implications for Mental Health Interventions

The findings suggest that meaningful changes in the pattern of social media use could have a significant influence on interventions for anxiety among young adults. Education of young adults about good social media use and desirable online behavior may reduce risk or susceptibility to anxiety related to social media use.

This knowledge can be applied by mental health professionals in designing interventions targeting:

1. Awareness of Social Comparison Effects: Workshops and education programs that highlight the fact that most of the posts in social media are selective highlights of a person's life rather than real life would help young adults realize just how constructed social media content actually is.
2. Positive interaction practices can be promoted among the users; this will lead to environments wherein social media is a source of support, not stress.
3. Advancing Digital Well-being: Specifying the advantages of limited screen time and how to prevent empty scrolling can help consumers achieve digital equilibrium and reduce the risk of web-related anxiety.

Limitations and Future Research

This study had several limitations, one of which was reliance on self-reported data that may result in biases toward responses and data confined to only a single geographic area that can impact the generalizability of findings.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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