

The Effects of Social Media on Adolescents' Daily Lives

Honglian Wang*, Difei Wu

Guizhou University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Guiyang 550025, Guizhou Province, China

*Corresponding author: Honglian Wang, gzywhl@163.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: To investigate the effects of social media on adolescents' daily lives, the research recruited 50 students from a Chinese university and asked them to finish a carefully designed questionnaire. The research found that the overuse of social media will lead to spending less time communicating with others, causing harm to relationships. Moreover, this condition may be due to high pressure in school and frequent negative feelings.

Keywords: Effects; Social media; Adolescents

Online publication: September 27, 2024

1. Introduction

According to Nations, "Social media are web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by sharing and consuming information" ^[1]. The appearance of social media enables people to communicate with each other without delay easily. This access also allows communication with more strangers. Hence, this changes people's lives greatly. It has been acknowledged that social media came into being with the emergence of the first e-mail in 1971. After that, Blogger appeared in 1999. Then Facebook was founded in 2004. So far, all sorts of social media, from WeChat to Instagram, emerged one after another, which made social media an increasingly important part of people's social lives. About 5% of U.S. adults used some form of social media in 2005. This percentage changed to 72% in 2009 ^[2]. Social media plays a more and more important role in people's daily lives.

To work out the influence social media has on adolescents' daily lives, researchers have connected social media with different social phenomena. It has been found that teenagers spending lots of time on social media may result in a bad relationship with their parents and cause dissatisfaction between them ^[3]. However, the research conducted between adolescents and their friends found a contrary trend. When examining the inter-person relationship association between adolescents' social media use and friendship closeness, different researchers have found the same positive relation ^[4-5]. As to this subject, some researchers also stated that

“contrary to the stimulation hypothesis and our hypothesis (H1b), we found either nonsignificant or very small negative within-person associations. Thus, on average, adolescents did not experience higher levels of friendship closeness after using social media in the previous hour”^[6]. When relating social media with people’s emotions rather than relationships, researchers have conducted much research relevant to some specific feelings or phenomena, like loneliness, depressive disorder, and suicide^[7].

Previous researches mostly focus on a single form of relationship or emotion. Hence, this research will explore adolescents’ overall opinions on social media and its influence on their relationships to have the capability to represent the influence social media has on daily life.

2. Literature review

According to Cui, social media is a kind of online social network form, which is based on Web 2.0, depending on users’ information to produce and exchange social relationships^[8]. The relationships in real life are imitated on the internet. What makes social media different is that the way information spread in the real world has been transplanted and expanded on the internet. As a result, the information provided can be spread widely. Research has been done to investigate the motivation to use social media.

Garibaldi et al. found the following result^[9]. Placing high importance on affiliation (such as affiliation aspiration) almost always predicted higher self-reported use of SM for all three reasons: friendship, connection, and information. Based on previous research, they did not expect the use of information to have any direct effects, but the present results suggest that all three motives for use are influenced by the desire for affiliation, such that stronger affiliation goals were associated with stronger motives for using SM.

Although the aims of social media use are mostly about having social connections with others, it does not have any relation with a higher level of connection for any of the models.

Social media’s influence on people’s emotions has been stressed by many studies. Researchers have found that there is a positive correlation between loneliness and social media usage among college students. Apart from that, it is psychological adjustment rather than personality the key factor to predict one’s social media use. The study also associated social media use with dependency anxiety. The higher the level of dependency anxiety is, the higher the possibility of overusing social media. This indicates the fact that the phone has become an attachment object for compensation^[10]. Lower social and emotional skills are also considered to have a relation with social media use. This is supported both by positive correlations with narcissism and alexithymia (both typified by lower empathy) and negative correlations with measures of cognitive empathy^[11]. The close relationship social media has with people’s emotions also makes it possible to take advantage of it in the medical field. Fonceca stated that “Studies have consistently shown the capability of machine learning to distinguish users with schizophrenia through social media data, whether it be typed language or visual content”^[12]. From the moral perspective, social media will cause the emergence of different social groups, in which the moral concept may be different. They will cause conflict in society because of their difference.

As for interpersonal relationships, many researchers emphasize the relationship among family members, and most of the findings indicate social media has a negative effect. According to Etienne, “Considering important confounding variables, results of a path analysis model show that the level of social media addiction is related to high conflict, low satisfaction and low equality with father, and high conflict and low equality with mother. Moreover, social media addiction is positively linked to symptoms of anxiety and depression”

^[13]. Reports also revealed that spending too much time on social media will cause the instability of marriages. The study also found that people tend to interact with those who are similar to them. Researchers stated that “Participants were more trusting of and felt closer to peers who provided more positive versus negative feedback” ^[14]. Besides, the use of social media may cause pressure owing to the effect of comparison ^[15].

There are a lot of factors that influence social media use. For example, the age and geographical differences can make a difference. American adults have been found to have less cognitive empathy if they use social media a lot, but the results are contrary for people under 18 in Europe. Apart from that, the different platforms being used such as Facebook, Twitter, and so on along with the geographical differences will lead to differences ^[16-17].

Previous research explored social media’s influence on specific emotions and relationships. So, this study will investigate the overall influence of social media to better review its effect on adolescents’ daily lives. The subject will be explored in the following two questions: “How do participants view their experiences on social networks?” and “How do social networks affect their relationships?”

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Fifty participants were recruited from a Chinese university who were either undergraduate students or graduate students. Participants varied from checking social media every few minutes to never having used social media, and most of them check social media at least once a week or more.

3.2. Procedure

Questionnaires with 45 items were prepared and it would take about 30 minutes to finish. Each item had a 5-point Likert scale. Then online links to the questionnaires were distributed to the participants for them to answer at any time they like. After collecting the responses, the data was evaluated statistically.

4. Results

4.1. Effects on relationship

The information obtained from the questionnaires concerning social media’s effects on interpersonal relationships was collected and organized in **Figure 1**.

Most of the participants used social media multiple times an hour and the number of them was 14. 4 participants used social media once a week to once a month, which was the least. Compared with those who spent less time on social media, people tended to have less quality time with relationships. 9 Participants had the highest frequency of social media use but the least quality time spent with relationships. On the contrary, those who used it with the lowest frequency had the most. Although people spending lots of time on social media tend to have the most friends, they spend less time chatting with them.

Average time spent on social media					
Average quality time spent with relationships	Once a month or less	Once a week to once a month	Once a day to once a week	Once every hour to once a day	Multiple times an hour
Once a year or less	1		1	3	9
Once every few months			5	4	5
Once a month	2	1	3		
Once a week	4	2	2	4	
Everyday	3	1			
Number of friends on social media					
Less than 50	3	2			
50-100	4		1	2	2
2100-500	3	1	2		1
500-1000		1	5	4	3
1000+			3	5	7
Majority of time spent on social media					
Checking out friends stories/updates		1	3	5	6
Messaging friends	6	2	3		1
Making new connections		1		1	
Checking the news or official company pages	4	1	2	3	1
Updating content on your own page			3	2	6

Figure 1. Interpersonal relationships with different social media using frequency

4.2. Effects on experiences

The information obtained from the questionnaires concerning social media's effects on participants' experience was collected and organized as in Figure 2.

Within the group of participants who had the highest frequency of social media use, 6 experienced more than 200 depressive symptoms, 9 felt lonely once a week to every day, and 13 of them always felt anxious. On the contrary, though no one has ever experienced loneliness and anxiety, those who spent less time tended to have a lower frequency of having these negative feelings. Apart from that, Frequent social media users also reported experiencing more stress in school.

Average time spent on social media					
Average quality time spent with relationships	Once a month or less	Once a week to once a month	Once a day to once a week	Once every hour to once a day	Multiple times an hour
Once a year or less	1		1	3	9
Once every few months			5	4	5
Once a month	2	1	3		
Once a week	4	2	2	4	
Everyday	3	1			
Number of friends on social media					
Less than 50	3	2			
50-100	4		1	2	2
2100-500	3	1	2		1
500-1000		1	5	4	3
1000+			3	5	7
Majority of time spent on social media					
Checking out friends stories/updates		1	3	5	6
Messaging friends	6	2	3		1
Making new connections		1		1	
Checking the news or official company pages	4	1	2	3	1
Updating content on your own page			3	2	6

Figure 2. Students' experiences with different social media using frequency

5. Discussion

Previous research has revealed that one of the motivations for people to use social media is to build connections with others. However, this study finds that people who use social media most often tend to have less time to actually communicate with others, resulting in less quality time spent in relationships. All of the participants using social media several times an hour have no higher frequency of quality time spent on relationships than once every few months. The result shows the finding that a high frequency of social media use may harm interpersonal relationships. This finding is consistent with findings done by previous research concerning parent-child relationships and conjugal relationships. The study also finds that most of the participants use social media multiple times an hour. This may have represented the possible addiction students have on social media. As for people's experience of social media use, this study finds the more social media use is, the higher the possibility for people to have some negative emotions, like passive symptoms, loneliness, and anxiety. Participants with a higher frequency of social media use have a higher ratio of negative emotional feelings. Also, the study finds that those who tend to use social media a lot are likely to suffer more stress at school, the same as the previous research finding.

The findings of this study are restricted to the sample of university students. Hence, it is likely that it cannot be applied to everyone. Further studies can recruit participants from all walks of life to test this theory.

6. Conclusion

The results of this research on university students show that the overuse of social media will lead to spending less time communicating with others, causing harm to relationships. Moreover, this condition may be due to high pressure in school and frequent negative feelings.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Nations D, 2021, What Is Social Media? <https://www.lifewire.com>
- [2] Gaysynsky A, Chou WYS, 2021, How are Americans using Social Media for Health? <https://publichealthpost.org/health-equity/social-media-health/>
- [3] Qiu Y, 2024, Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Suicide and Countermeasures. *Chinese Journal of School Health*, 2024(06): 150–153
- [4] Antheunis ML, Chouten AP, Kraemer E, 2014, The Role of Social Networking Sites in Early Adolescents' Social Lives. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 36(3): 348–371.
- [5] Rousseau A, Frison E, Eggermont S, 2019, The Reciprocal Relations between Facebook Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Adolescents' Closeness to Friends. *Journal of Adolescence*, 2019(76): 173–184.
- [6] Pouwels JL, Valkenburg PM, Beyens I, et al., 2021, Social Media Use and Friendship Closeness in Adolescents' Daily Lives: An Experience Sampling Study. *Developmental Psychology*, 57(2): 309–323.
- [7] Virginia T, Brandon BC, 2021, Alone and Online: Understanding the Relationships Between Social Media, Solitude, and Psychological Adjustment. *American Psychological Association*, 2021(2): 201–211.

- [8] Cui P, 2022, The Moral Life of People in Social Media. *Chinese Social Sciences Weekly*, 2022(1): 5.
- [9] Garibaldi AE, Waldfogle GE, Szalma JR, 2022, Motivational Underpinnings of Social Media Use. *American Psychological Association*, 2022(7): 2689–6567.
- [10] Ding C, Meng H, 2022, Analysis on Relationship between Attachment Anxiety, Loneliness and Conflicting Use of Mobile Social Media among College Students. *Vocation and Health*, 2022(38): 2703–2707.
- [11] Martingano AJ, Konrath S, Zarins S, et al., 2022, Empathy, Narcissism, Alexithymia, and Social Media Use. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 11(4): 413–422.
- [12] Fonseka LN, Woo BKP, 2022, Social Media and Schizophrenia: An Update on Clinical Applications. *World Journal of Psychiatry*, 12(7): 897–903.
- [13] Etienne C, Gosselin W, Poulin F, 2022, Associations Between Young Adults' Social Media Addiction, Relationship Quality with Parents, and Internalizing Problems: A Path Analysis Model. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 56(1): 61–69.
- [14] Brudner EG, Fareri DS, Shehata SG, et al., 2022, Social Feedback Promotes Positive Social Sharing, Trust, and Closeness. *Emotion*, 23(6): 1536–1548.
- [15] Zhu J, Liu Y, 2022, Social Media Presentation of Intimacy on the Subjective Well-being of Young Bystanders. *Journal of Chongqing University of Arts and Sciences (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2022(135): 16738004.
- [16] Delle FA, Clayton RB, Jackson FJ, et al., 2022, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram: Simultaneously Examining the Association between Three Social Networking Sites and Relationship Stress and Satisfaction. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 12(3): 335–343
- [17] Chen L, Kang C, Yang C, 2022, Understanding Citizens' Emotion States under the Urban Livability Environment through Social Media Data: A Case Study of Wuhan. *Journal of Geodesy and Geoinformation Science*, 2022(57): 49–59.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.