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Exploring the impact of social media usage on psychological well-being: A study on self-esteem, anxiety, and self-comparison

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Abstract
This study looks at how social media use affects mental well-being, focusing on factors like anxiety, self-esteem, self-comparison, and overall satisfaction. We surveyed 40 people and used Pearson's correlation to see if there were any relationships between how much time people spend on social media, how often they compare themselves to others, their self-esteem, and their mental health.
The results showed weak and mostly insignificant connections between social media use and mental well-being. However, some trends were observed: spending more time on social media might slightly reduce anxiety, while comparing oneself to others could make people less likely to take breaks from social media. There were also weak links between self-esteem, satisfaction with social media, and both anxiety and how often social media is used.
Although these findings were not strong or statistically significant, they suggest that the relationship between social media use and mental health is complex. The study suggests that more research with larger groups, longer study periods, and other factors is needed to fully understand these relationships. The results also point to the possibility of interventions to encourage healthier social media habits and improve users' well-being.

Keywords: Social media usage, psychological well-being, self-esteem, anxiety, self-comparison

Introduction
The rapid growth of social media has profoundly reshaped the way individuals communicate, share information, and perceive themselves. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter have become central to everyday life, offering opportunities for self-expression, social interaction, and access to a wide range of information (Chou & Edge, 2012) [2]. While these platforms can foster connectivity and a sense of community, they also pose significant challenges to mental health and self-perception.
Research has increasingly highlighted the dual effects of social media use. On one hand, it provides an avenue for creative expression, social support, and the formation of meaningful relationships (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020) [4]. On the other hand, the curated and often idealized nature of online content can lead to unrealistic beauty standards, self-comparison, and feelings of inadequacy, which in turn contribute to issues such as anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction (Fardouly *et al.*, 2017) [3]. This dichotomy underscores the need to examine not only the potential benefits but also the psychological risks associated with social media engagement.
The relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes is influenced by several factors, including time spent on platforms, the type of content consumed, and individual differences such as susceptibility to external validation (Twenge & Campbell, 2018) [5]. By exploring these dynamics, the present study aims to illuminate how social media usage patterns shape self-perception and contribute to mental well-being.
The findings of this research have implications for promoting mindful social media usage and developing interventions that maximize its positive aspects while mitigating its negative

effects. In an era where social media is deeply ingrained in personal and professional lives, understanding its impact on mental health is crucial for fostering psychological resilience and well-being.

Methodology

This study aims to explore the relationship between social media use and its impact on mental wellbeing. The research design is quantitative, using a survey-based approach to collect data from participants. The survey comprised a series of questions focused on various aspects of social media usage, self-perception, social comparison, mental wellbeing, and coping mechanisms.

Participants

The participants of the study were selected through a convenience sampling method. The sample included individuals from various age groups, and participants were asked to specify their age group in the survey. This demographic data helped contextualize the findings and determine patterns in social media use across different age groups.

Survey Instrument

The survey contained 9 questions that addressed various facets of social media engagement. These included frequency of use, emotional impacts of social media, social comparison tendencies, and coping strategies such as seeking online support when distressed. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements related to these themes using a Likert scale (ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree").

Data Collection

The survey was administered online and participants were given a set timeframe to complete the questionnaire. The responses were recorded and coded for analysis. In addition to descriptive statistics, correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between key variables, such as social media use frequency, social comparison, emotional impacts, and mental wellbeing.

Statistical Analysis

To analyze the data, we used Pearson's correlation coefficient to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationships between variables. Specifically, we examined the correlation between the frequency of social media use and its perceived impact on mental wellbeing, as well as the relationship between social media use and feelings of pressure to present a certain image. This approach allowed us to determine whether higher social media use was associated with negative emotional outcomes such as stress, anxiety, or sadness, and whether social comparison tendencies were linked to these outcomes. The results were further analyzed to identify any significant trends or patterns in how participants from different age groups experienced these relationships.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. All responses were anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Q1: Age Group	-	-	40
Q2: Frequency of Social Media Use	2.3750	0.95239	40
Q3: Social Media Makes Me Feel Good About Myself	3.2500	1.00639	40
Q4: I Feel Pressured to Present a Certain Image	3.0500	1.25983	40
Q5: I Often Compare Myself to Others on Social Media	3.5250	1.24009	40
Q6: Social Media Negatively Affects My Mental Wellbeing	2.5750	1.21713	40
Q7: Why Do I Use Social Media	2.5000	1.08604	40
Q8: I Seek Social Media Support When Distressed	3.1000	1.05733	40
Q9: Frequency of Taking Breaks or Detox from Social Media	2.5500	0.93233	40

Correlation Results

The Pearson Correlation values show the relationships between each of the questions, indicating how closely related the responses to each question are. The significance values (p-values) help determine whether the correlations are statistically significant.

Variables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Q1	1	-0.097	-0.008	0.034	-0.073	-0.303	-0.252	-0.040	0.202
Sig. (2-tailed)	-	0.551	0.961	0.833	0.653	0.057	0.117	0.809	0.212
Q2	-0.097	1	-0.181	-0.208	-0.062	-0.124	-0.062	-0.293	0.224
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.551	-	0.265	0.197	0.702	0.444	0.704	0.067	0.165
Q3	-0.008	-0.181	1	0.111	-0.005	-0.078	-0.094	0.024	0.041
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.961	0.265	-	0.494	0.975	0.630	0.565	0.883	0.802
Q4	0.034	-0.208	0.111	1	0.081	-0.203	0.056	-0.042	0.107
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.833	0.197	0.494	-	0.618	0.209	0.730	0.795	0.511
Q5	-0.073	-0.062	-0.005	0.081	1	0.118	0.067	0.057	0.010
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.653	0.702	0.975	0.618	-	0.470	0.683	0.728	0.951
Q6	-0.303	-0.124	-0.078	-0.203	0.118	1	0.029	0.094	-0.150
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.057	0.444	0.630	0.209	0.470	-	0.859	0.565	0.355
Q7	-0.252	-0.062	-0.094	0.056	0.067	0.029	1	-0.156	-0.025
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.117	0.704	0.565	0.730	0.683	0.859	-	0.335	0.877
Q8	-0.040	-0.293	0.024	-0.042	0.057	0.094	-0.156	1	-0.083
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.809	0.067	0.883	0.795	0.728	0.565	0.335	-	0.610
Q9	0.202	0.224	0.041	0.107	0.010	-0.150	-0.025	-0.083	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.212	0.165	0.802	0.511	0.951	0.355	0.877	0.610	-

Interpretation

- **Descriptive Statistics:** The means for the questions range from 2.375 to 3.525, with "I often compare myself to others based on what I see on social media" (Q5) having the highest mean, indicating that participants often feel this way. On the other hand, the statement "I feel pressured to present a certain image of myself on social media" (Q4) had a mean of 3.0500, suggesting a moderate level of agreement with the statement.
- **Correlations:** The correlations show no strong relationships between the variables, as most correlation values are near 0, and many p-values are greater than 0.05. This suggests that there is no significant linear relationship between the responses to the different questions. For instance, the correlation between Q1 (Age Group) and Q5 (I often compare myself to others on social media) is -0.073, which is negligible and not statistically significant ($p = 0.653$). Similarly, the correlation between Q6 (Social media negatively affects my mental wellbeing) and Q7 (Why do I use social media) is 0.118, indicating a very weak positive relationship, but it is not significant ($p = 0.470$).

These results suggest that while respondents may have varying opinions on the impact of social media on their mental wellbeing and self-image, there is little evidence of a strong, direct correlation between the different aspects of social media use and their effects.

Discussion

1) Specify your age group

Discussion: The age group data typically helps contextualize how different age groups interact with social media. This question serves as a demographic filter for the rest of the survey. Age plays a significant role in determining social media habits, as younger age groups tend to engage more frequently with social media platforms. In our sample, the age group distribution was not explicitly detailed, but it could help explain the responses to later questions. For example, younger individuals might feel more pressure to present a certain image on social media or compare themselves to others more frequently than older age groups. Additionally, the way social media impacts mental well-being may vary based on age, with younger users being more susceptible to social comparisons and image-related pressures.

2) How often do you use social media?

Discussion: The mean value for this question was 2.3750, which indicates that, on average, respondents use social media a few times a week. This is consistent with findings in social media usage studies, which show that users generally check social media at least a few times a week but may not be as frequent as daily users. The moderate frequency suggests that social media plays a significant but not dominant role in the participants' daily lives. This also implies that while social media is a regular part of their routines, it's not necessarily something they engage with every moment of their day, which could influence how it affects their mental health and self-perception.

3) Using social media makes me feel good about myself.

Discussion: The mean for this question was 3.25, suggesting a mild to moderate agreement among respondents that social media makes them feel good about themselves. This indicates that while some users may find social media affirming (through likes, shares, or positive feedback), others may not experience as much self-validation. It is important to note that social media's impact on self-esteem can be both positive and negative. The positive feelings could arise from social interactions and recognition, but for others, social media might lead to feelings of inadequacy or anxiety, especially if comparisons to others are frequent. This result aligns with studies suggesting that social media has mixed effects on users' mental health, where some individuals experience positive reinforcement while others feel more isolated or stressed.

4) I feel pressured to present a certain image of myself on social media

Discussion: The average score of 3.05 indicates moderate agreement with the statement that users feel pressured to present a certain image on social media. This result suggests that a significant portion of the respondents feel some level of social pressure to curate a specific persona online. This pressure can be attributed to social norms, peer influence, or the desire to gain social validation. The feeling of needing to present a perfect image is often linked to the concept of "social comparison," where individuals measure their own worth by comparing themselves to others online. The slight pressure perceived by participants may reflect a balance between authenticity and the desire to conform to online expectations.

5) I often compare myself to others based on what I see on social media

Discussion: With a mean score of 3.5250, this question had the highest average agreement among the respondents. This suggests that social comparison is a significant issue for many social media users. Social comparison theory posits that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others. In the case of social media, platforms tend to highlight curated, often idealized versions of others' lives, which can lead to frequent comparisons. These comparisons may result in feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, or dissatisfaction with one's own life, leading to negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression.

6) Social media negatively affects my mental wellbeing (e.g., anxiety, stress or sadness).

Discussion: The mean score for this question was 2.5750, suggesting a mild to moderate agreement that social media negatively affects mental wellbeing. While some users may report feeling stressed, anxious, or sad due to their social media use, others might not experience such adverse effects. This could depend on several factors, such as the type of content consumed, personal susceptibility to social comparisons, or the amount of time spent online. Negative mental health impacts are often linked to the consumption of distressing content, cyberbullying, or the pressure to maintain a curated online persona. However, not all users experience these effects equally, and the impact of social media on mental health is highly individual.

7) Why do I use social media?

Discussion: The mean of 2.5 indicates a fairly neutral response to the reasons for using social media. Participants may use social media for a variety of purposes, including connecting with others, entertainment, information, or seeking validation. The diversity of reasons reflects the multifaceted

nature of social media. Some users might prioritize social interaction or staying informed, while others might use social media as a means of escapism or to satisfy emotional needs, such as seeking support when distressed. Understanding the motivation behind social media use is crucial, as it can shape how it impacts individuals' mental health and sense of self.

8) I seek social media support online when distressed.

Discussion: The mean of 3.1 shows that, on average, respondents moderately agree with seeking social media support when distressed. This suggests that social media serves as a platform for emotional support, where users may turn to friends, family, or even online communities when dealing with stress or personal difficulties. The availability of instant connection and the perceived anonymity of online spaces can encourage people to seek help, whether through direct messages or engagement in support groups. However, the effectiveness of this support varies, and for some, online support may not provide the same level of comfort or problem-solving as in-person support.

9) How often do you take a break or detox from social media?

Discussion: With a mean of 2.55, indicating a mild to moderate frequency of taking breaks from social media, respondents suggest that while many feel the need to step away from social media periodically, it is not a universal practice. Social media detoxes can be beneficial for mental health, as they provide a break from the constant flow of information and the pressures of online interactions. Detoxing can help reduce stress, anxiety, and the negative effects of social comparison. However, the lack of a strong consensus in the data (as indicated by the mean score) may suggest that while some participants engage in detoxes, others may not feel the need to take breaks frequently, either due to habit or a strong desire to stay connected.

Conclusion

In summary, the responses show that social media is widely used by participants, but it affects people in different ways. Some feel good about themselves because of it, while many feel pressure to present a certain image and often compare themselves to others. This can lead to negative feelings like stress or anxiety. However, many also find social media helpful for support. On the other hand, taking breaks from social media is not something that everyone does regularly. Overall, the data suggests that social media has both positive and negative effects, and its impact varies depending on the person.

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