GROUP #1
SOCIAL SEARCH
WHITE PAPER



SOCIAL MEDIA SAFETY EDUCATION FOR YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the communication challenge of effectively educating students on the benefits of social media safety. As digital engagement amongst young adults rises and becomes central to their lives, its associated risks are also growing. Through a combination of secondary data analysis and conducting interviews and surveys, we better understand how social media affects young adults in four imperative subtopics: mental well-being, substance usage, self-esteem, and cognitive function. Unmonitored and excessive usage is linked to rising levels of anxiety and depression, increased risky behaviors, lower confidence levels, and reduced attention spans.

Analyzing other social media education programs, we have found many to be outdated in terms of relevancy and engagement amongst youth. We will be utilizing our research to curate more effective program strategies that will foster meaningful conversation around the importance of social media safety, especially during formative years. By incorporating our data with AI, interactive content, and hybrid and on-demand learning tools, we will be effectively communicating with our audience, resulting in a more successful and targeted campaign.

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Executive Summary

This paper aims to understand the effects of social media on college aged students and adolescents by considering four subtopics. We begin by analyzing how the use of social media correlates to a college student's mental wellbeing in a psychological and physical sense. Then, we examine if and how social media influencers impact body image and self esteem within young people. Next we explore if social media impacts the brain's cognitive functions, specifically sleep, focus and attention span. Finally, we investigate how social media can influence substance use behavior patterns among college students.

Through our research, we are able to better understand the communication challenge of understanding how young people interact with social media, and how it can in turn shape their mental and physical well-being. This discussion is highly important, as today's society is deeply entrenched in digital culture. To explore these connections, we conducted structured interviews and gathered data through survey responses. In addition, we gathered a comprehensive variety of existing information from peer reviewed sources including papers and studies.

Based on our findings, we recommend that students and all young people find community and support systems within their academic institutions. Doing this will provide understanding of the full implications that social media can have. We are not suggesting the absence of social media in an adolescent's life, but instead the appropriate use of it. Fulfilling these recommendations can improve mental and physical well-being, enhance sleep quality, improve attention capabilities, create healthy boundaries with drugs and alcohol, decrease feelings of anxiety and depression, and improve self-esteem. All in all, implementing our recommendations can lead to stronger mental health. Creating a more intentional relationship with social media can enhance academic performance as well as create stronger bonds with peers.

Introduction

Client's Challenge

One of the most important communication challenges is to effectively educate college students about the risks and consequences of social media while developing programs that address their most pressing concerns. Social media presents opportunities for interaction and self-expression, but it also poses significant risks to mental health, body image, cognitive function, and drug use. As these issues continue to develop, it is more important than ever to comprehend how social media affects students' mental health issues, body image issues, cognitive overload, and drug use habits. One of the numerous issues is figuring out what the kids care about the most and how to express their concerns in an effective manner.

Research Goals

We start by examining the psychological and physical relationships between social media use and college students' mental health. Following that, we investigate whether and how young people's self-esteem and body image are impacted by social media influencers. We then investigate if social media has an effect on the brain's cognitive processes, particularly attention span, focus, and sleep. Lastly, we look into how college students' substance use behavior patterns may be influenced by social media. By responding to these questions, we aimed to find out more about the advantages and disadvantages of social media, assess students' knowledge of these problems, and investigate the efficacy of existing remedies, such as awareness campaigns or digital cleanses.

Project Purpose

Our research will help the Organization for Social Search better understand the main issues college students have with social media. They can use this information to improve their instructional efforts, develop safer and more effective tools, and strengthen their advocacy actions. Our results are useful because they can be used to identify the issues that require the greatest care, such as substance misuse, mental health, body image, or cognitive function. College students will be able to concentrate on the most important elements and develop plans to spread more uplifting digital content if this issue is resolved. The organization may develop specific efforts that truly engage students and address the impact of social media on college-aged students by focusing on the most urgent issues.

Client & Industry Context

Our Client

Our client, the *Organization for Social Media Safety*, works within school systems, specifically at the collegiate level, to promote **social media safety**. They provide social media safety **skills**, advocate for stronger public **policies**, and develop protective **software**. Their key audiences are **students**, **parents**, and school/university **administrators**. They tailor each presentation to their different audience to appropriately convey relevant messages and tips. They are unique because they also offer **consulting** in which they work with parents and administrators to help develop and enhance policies and guidelines. Our research will help the client understand what resonates best with students, enabling them to further develop and **refine** their programs surrounding social media safety.

ORGANIZATION FOR
SOCIAL MEDIA SAFETY

Main Competitors

The main competitors in the social media education space are *Common Sense Media*, *Cyberbullying Research Center*, and *The Family Online Safety Institute*. These organizations offer digital citizenship **curriculums**, digital parenting **programs**, **blogs**, and **presentations**. They organize their information by age range, resources, and media sources. Opportunities in the social media education industry include online **courses** and training programs, **coaching** and **consulting**, and educational **training** and workshops. Organizations improve their programs by incorporating data and research from external companies such as ours.

Current Situation

Current trends in the industry include **AI**, **interactive** content, and **hybrid** and **on-demand** learning tools (Yusuf et al., 2024). Learners crave a quick and easy way to absorb content and learn about the industry, especially through **social media** posts and short-form **videos**. People are also interested in interactive support such as personal **coaching** and AI messaging tools like **chatbots**.

Research Approach

Research Methods Used

Our research collection was centered around two methods: conducting one-on-one interviews and gathering survey responses. While surveying gave us the opportunity to collect quantitative data from a larger pool of participants, structured interviews provided qualitative data.

Information Gathering

We first created a Google Forms with 17 multiple choice and open ended questions. Questions include a rating of the participants' mental health self rating and other questions that we considered to be vital. The form was sent to 100 people, with 81 total responses received. In terms of interviews, we first created a structured interview outline with questions and conducted the session with transcription. The meetings took place between March 31 and April 11 of 2025, while the survey data was gathered from March 14 to April 14 of 2025. Both forms of data collection were completed by college aged students (18-22), including students from the University of Tampa and other institutions. Regarding our second hand sources of research, we pulled from studies, papers, and other forms of peer reviewed documents. This includes but is not limited to work published on Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, Wiley Online Library, Journal of Medical Internet Research, Cambridge University Press, and other similar organizations.

Analysis Process

To make sense of our findings, we reported on our initial findings by organizing survey data into recurring themes, common responses, and frequency of social media use. Regarding interviews, we arranged transcriptions to pull quotes from to allow for optimal analysis. We checked for patterns between responses and used that information to draw conclusions. For both methods we looked for patterns including: how participants rated their well-being in connection with time spent on social media, key-words provided in open-ended response questions, and other responses that would raise red flags. To ensure accuracy, we cross referenced information gathered from our first-hand and second-hand data, using both resources as a way to reinforce what we learned. In addition, we conducted critiques of each other's reporting to ensure complete accuracy and fair conclusions.

What We Learned: Subtopic #1
Social Media & Substance Use

Secondary Research



Research conducted online indicates a correlation between social media usage and substance use. Studies recorded behavior patterns of social media users ages 10-19, specifically alcohol use, binge drinking, drug use, and alcohol and drug dependence. These behaviors are shown to peak between the ages of 18 and 23 as adolescence is marked as a time for engaging in high-risk behavior (Ohannessian et al., 2017).

A study shows that negative experiences on social media can result in heightened stress and anxiety, increasing substance use. It shows that “alcohol-related posts heightened depression, anxiety, and the potential for risky drinking” (Ranganath et al., 2022). According to research, daily social media usage is directly related to “more alcohol consumption, more problematic alcohol use, and more frequent drug use,” with 16% of participants having severe alcohol problems (Ohannessian et al., 2017).

Another study shows that there is a lower risk of drinking when social media usage is 1-3 hours per day versus 4+ (Ng Fat et al., 2021). Instagram and Facebook aid in creating a social norm around drinking, leading to higher alcohol consumption amongst youths. The study shows that “among 10–15-year-olds, 18% drank at least monthly” (Ng Fat et al., 2021).

These findings show that there is a correlation between higher social media usage and higher substance usage, especially in adolescents and young adults.

What We Learned: Subtopic #1
Social Media & Substance Use

Secondary Research cont.

A final study analyzed data from substance-related posts on Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok and Weibo. Analyzing these posts “76.3% of all substance-related content was positive in its depiction of substance use, with 20.2% of content depicting use negatively” (Rutherford et al., 2023). This proves that attitudes surrounding these posts on social media are also related to the increased substance usage, targeting the most vulnerable- adolescents who spend around 8 hours per day on social media. This correlation is an extreme concern because “alcohol and drug use are attributable to 131 million disability-adjusted loss and substance use-related disorders continue to be the leading contributor to disease burden in adolescents and young adults” (Rutherford et al., 2023). The two largest contributors to this normalization on social media are commercial accounts and user-generated content, both pushing pro-substance use messaging. On the contrary, public health accounts spread awareness online; however, this content only makes up about 21.9% of substance-related posts (Rutherford et al., 2023).

These findings show that there is a correlation between higher social media usage and higher substance usage, especially in adolescents and young adults.

What We Learned: Subtopic #1
Social Media & Substance Use

Primary Research- Survey

Through primary research, we have also found this data to be accurate. An 81-person survey was conducted, asking participants ages 17-23 to answer questions about social media and substance usage.

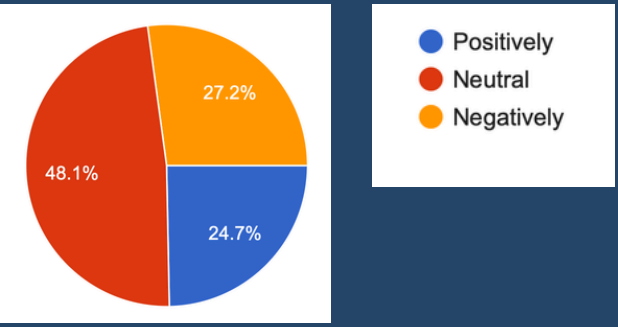
The first question asked, “How does social media portray substance abuse?” 48.1% said neutral, 24.7% said positive, and 27.2% said negative.

The second question asked, “If you have used alcohol, drugs, vaping, tobacco, etc., how has social media influenced this usage?” 8.6% said non applicable, 27.2% said not at all, 33.3% said a little, 23.5% said somewhat, and 8.6% said a lot. This means that 65.4% of participants relate at least some percentage of their substance usage to social media influence.

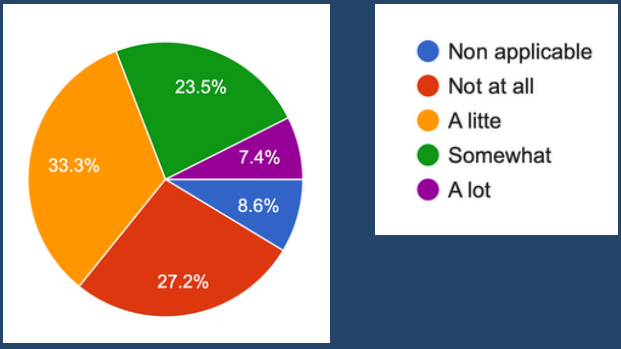
The third question asked, “Who do you see content related to alcohol, drugs, vaping, tobacco, etc. from most often?” 7.5% said non applicable, 33.8% said influencers, 28.7% said friends and family, 26.2% said memes, and 3.7% said through educational content (anti).

This shows the normalization of seeing this content online, typically in a destigmatized manner.

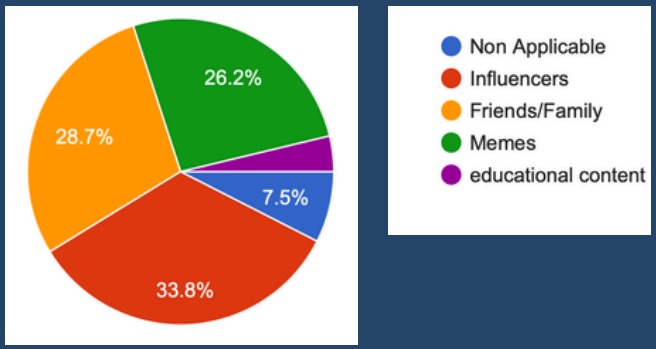
How do you think media portrays substance abuse?



If you have used substances, how has social media influenced this usage?



Who do you see content related to alcohol, drugs, vaping, tobacco, etc. from most often?



What We Learned: Subtopic #1 Social Media & Substance Use

Primary Research- Interview

An interview was also conducted to gather further research. The interviewee is an 18 year-old male. He spends an average of 6 hours per day on social media, specifically using Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. He typically sees this content through prevention ads on TikTok and Instagram, through videos of friends promoting it on Snapchat, and through its glorification on TikTok videos and Instagram Reels.



He says it is most prevalent on Snapchat, specifically on things like “Private Stories.” He also stated that it is most prevalent through memes and videos of people using these substances rather than through prevention advertisements. He believes that while this content is prevalent, its frequency is also heavily related to the user’s self-curated algorithm.



He said that he understands this increasingly positive attitudes towards substance usage on social media as they do promote feelings of FOMO and the desire to be involved. This could be related to online challenges such as “shotgunning” videos, vaping videos, etc.

This data from our primary research further supports the data from our secondary research.

What We Learned: Subtopic #2
Social Media & Mental Well-Being

Secondary Research

The growing worry over social media's effects on college students' mental health, especially with relation to anxiety and depression, has been clarified by recent scholarly studies. A systematic evaluation of research on social media use and psychological discomfort is presented in the 2019 paper published in The International Journal of Adolescence and Youth. It comes to the conclusion that among teenagers and young adults, higher levels of social media use are substantially associated with higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A., 2019). According to the review, using social media frequently can exacerbate emotional distress, particularly when it involves comparison, exposure to idealized lifestyles, or social judgment.

The impacts vary depending on how people interact with the content, as the article also emphasizes. Poor mental health outcomes are more strongly correlated with passive scrolling, exposure to unfavorable comments, and time spent scrolling through posts that are popularity- or appearance-driven. This research casts doubt on the notion that social media use in general is bad, emphasizing the importance of engagement quality and context.

Researchers investigated the idea of Problematic Social Media Use (PSMU) among college students in a more recent study from 2023 that was published in Frontiers in Psychiatry. Based on their emotional and behavioral characteristics, the study created four user profiles, ranging from low-risk users to those deemed to be at high risk for problematic usage (Cui, J., Wang, Y., Liu, D., & Yang, H. , 2023). Crucially, the study discovered that children were more likely to be classified as high-risk if they had higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

What We Learned: Subtopic #2
Social Media & Mental Well-Being

Secondary Research cont.

In addition to using social media regularly, these students frequently used it as a coping mechanism for unpleasant feelings. According to the study's findings, excessive social media use can both contribute to and result from poor mental health, escalating psychiatric symptoms and fostering a vicious cycle of emotional dependence. These two studies collectively offer compelling proof that social media has a nuanced impact on college students' emotional wellbeing,

These platforms present serious mental health issues even though they provide chances for social interaction and self-expression. The main conclusions drawn from both articles are that social media usage is influenced by the kind of content a person consumes, their emotional state, and their motivations.

In conclusion, the scholarly sources under consideration stress the significance of comprehending not just how much time college students spend on social media but also the psychological causes of their usage and the emotional impacts it produces. These results point to the need for supporting interventions, mental health education, and more digital awareness in order to help students form better online habits and enhance their general wellbeing.

What We Learned: Subtopic #2
Social Media & Mental Well-Being

Primary Research- Survey

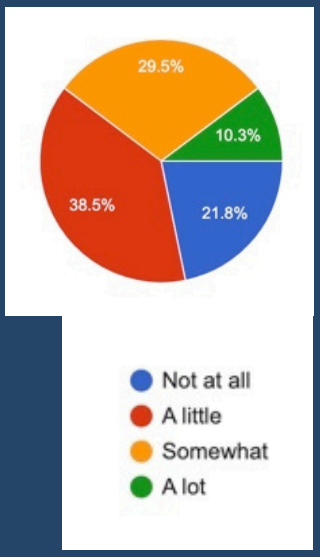
To better understand how social media affects the mental health of college students, a survey was conducted with 81 participants. The survey focused on two key questions related to the emotional and psychological effects of social media use, particularly during times of distress.

"When feeling anxious or depressed, do you turn to social media for distraction or comfort?" was the first question. A noteworthy 51.2% of the 81 respondents said they regularly use social media as a coping mechanism. Just 12.5% of respondents indicated they use it rarely or never, compared to another 36.3% who said they use it occasionally. This demonstrates that most students use social media as a coping strategy when they are feeling down, emphasizing its use as a short-term diversion or source of comfort.

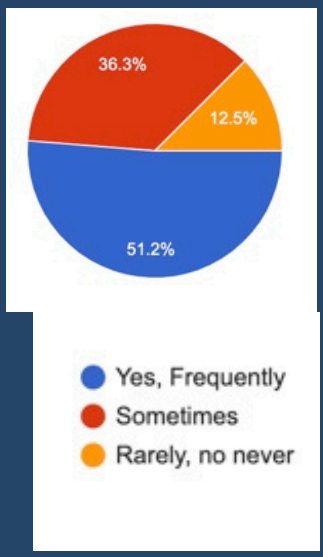
In the second question, "Do you think social media contributes to your feelings of depression or sadness?" students were asked if they felt that social media truly played a role in their emotional difficulties. Of the 81 responses, 38.5% selected "a little," 29.5% selected "somewhat," and 10.3% selected "a lot." Just 21.8% of those surveyed said social media had no role in their sadness or unhappiness. According to these findings, a significant percentage of students think that social media may be making their emotional condition worse, even if many use it as a source of comfort.

Overall, the survey's findings show that college students and social media have a complicated connection. Although many people use it as a coping mechanism, most people believe it to be a contributing factor to poor mental health. These findings underline the significance of addressing both the mental reliance on and the emotional hazards of social media use among young adults.

Do you think social media contributes to your feelings of depression or sadness?



When feeling anxious or depressed, do you turn to social media for distraction or comfort?





What We Learned: Subtopic #2
Social Media & Mental Well-Being

Primary Research- Interview

I conducted an interview with 21-year-old college student Samantha Peluso to find out more about the personal effects of social media on mental health. Samantha was honest about the conflicting effects social media has had on her health. She claims, "I don't care to track my followers or likes," thus she doesn't give much thought to follower or like counts, but she still experiences the emotional impact of some content. She specifically mentioned that "clothing try-on hauls or workout content" usually had the biggest impact on her. She frequently compares herself to other people as a result of these posts, particularly in regards to body image. "It can make me feel less confident when I compare myself to other people in bikinis or outfits," she said.

Samantha gave an honest response when asked if she uses social media as a diversion when she feels down or nervous: "I use social media as a diversion when I am depressed and anxious." To forget about my own life, I watch videos and read postings about other people's. This demonstrates how social media can be a coping strategy as well as a possible trap, offering short-term relief but occasionally increasing emotional difficulties over time. Her admission that "sometimes social media can decrease my self-confidence and decrease my ability to persevere" further demonstrates how the platform's effect may slowly undermine motivation.

It's interesting to note that Samantha hasn't stopped using social media, but she does find satisfaction in watching loved ones thrive. She described how being in touch with friends and relatives throughout the world lifts her up, saying, "It makes me happy seeing them thrive." Through comparison and emotional distraction, social media still affects mental health, even for users who aren't fixated on numbers or social approval, as this interview made clear to me. Samantha's experience served as more evidence that content awareness and thoughtful use are essential for safeguarding one's wellbeing in the digital era.

What We Learned: Subtopic #3
Social Media & Cognitive Functions

Secondary Research

Several studies and academic papers support the positive correlation between social media use and hindered cognitive capabilities. This includes sleep dysfunction, reduced attention abilities, information overload, decreased productivity, addiction- like social media use (ASMU), and shortened attention spans that appear as ADHD.

Spending more time on social media, especially before bed, causes the brain to be overloaded with information, which then negatively impacts sleep (Li et al., 2023). Data from 1899 Chinese college students who completed the Information Overload Scale, Social Fatigue Scale, Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) further prove this notion. The more overwhelmed the brain is from factors such as screen time/social media, the poorer sleep quality one can expect (Li et al., 2023). Gull and Sravani (2024) support this correlation saying, “The circadian rhythm is known to be disrupted by nighttime exposure to radiofrequency electromagnetic fields (...), Blue light emission from smartphones and tablets suppresses melatonin secretion” (Gull and Sravani, 2024). This is not new information in the science community, however can offer insight into exactly how sleep is affected by time spent on social media. Quality sleep is vital for young people/college students to receive, as it dictates behavior, emotions, attention abilities, depression symptoms, and poor daytime functioning (Gull and Sravani, 2024).

In regards to attention capabilities/disorders and addictive behaviors surrounding screens, research suggests that excess time spent on social media and screens can impact those categories as well. Experts debate whether ASMU can be considered a real addiction, however as it’s understood in pop culture, it can be better categorized as a loss of control regarding screen time, and effects such as mood changes and other daily issues (Flannery et al, 2024).

What We Learned: Subtopic #3
Social Media & Cognitive Functions

Secondary Research Cont.

Social media is home to addicting properties that can trigger reward systems in the brain. This includes interactive features such as likes, follows, and other social feedback. Overtime, teens who once responded strongly to these interactions can become desensitized, causing the urge to seek out higher levels of interactions to feel the same reward sensation (Flannery et al, 2024). Humans only have so much capacity for stimuli absorption, and an overabundance of that stimuli can be damaging to attention. This overabundance is associated with reduced gray matter, which influences sustained attention and the ability to ignore distracting stimuli (Bulut, 2023). This source goes further to prove the link saying, “Studies show a strong link between ADHD and Internet Use Disorder (IUD), also known as internet addiction” (Bulut, 2023). A fact sheet by the Pew Research Center notes that about 58% of U.S. teens (age 13-17) use Tik Tok on a daily basis, about 71% use Youtube everyday, and 51% use Snapchat daily. This is a massive number of young people absorbing large amounts of digital stimuli throughout the week.

These findings highlight the correlation between screen use/social media use with attention issues, sleep dysfunction, and general cognitive function. In addition, unofficial conditions such as ASMU and IUD develop and can create additional problems in vulnerable brains.

What We Learned: Subtopic #3
Social Media & Cognitive Functions

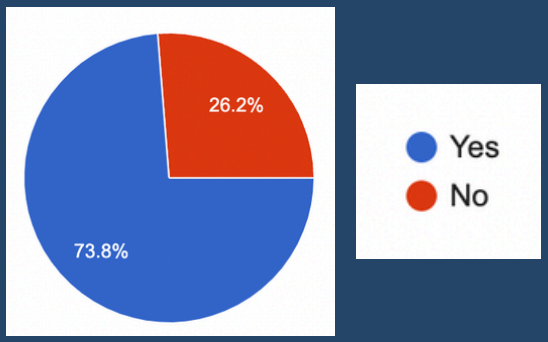
Primary Research- Survey



A survey was created and distributed to 100 college aged students, with 81 responses collected. This survey can help us understand the habits of social media use for young people.

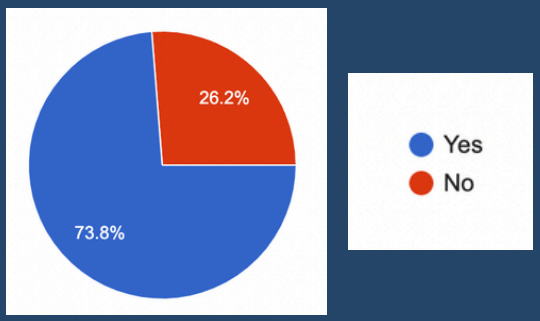
The first question is, “Have you ever tried limiting your screen time/social media? (deleting a platform, setting screen time restrictions, etc)”. This question was asked in hopes of understanding how young people restrict their own usage, with programs that set bed time limits on certain apps. 73.8% of survey participants answered yes, they have tried to control their intake.

Have you ever tried limiting screen time/social media?



The second question asked, “Do you notice mood changes after spending prolonged periods on your phone or other device?” This question was asked to better understand how social media can affect a person’s short term mood, which can then impact general well-being. 73.8% of answers responded yes, they do in fact notice mood changes.

Do you notice mood changes after spending prolonged periods on your phone or other device?



Responses gathered from both questions show that a significant amount of young people are not only aware of the implications social media may have on them, but also taking steps to diminish them. The majority of participants show a willingness for improved habits, and a seeking of change.

What We Learned: Subtopic #3
Social Media & Cognitive Functions

Primary Research- Interview

An interview was conducted to support research collected from secondary data and survey data. The interviewee is a 21 year old female. She spends an average of 4.5 hours on social media today, primarily on TikTok, Instagram, and youtube. She receives an average of 7 hours of sleep per night, waking up once most nights in the middle of her sleep. She doesn't note any issues with attention, and adds that she has never been diagnosed with ADHD or another attention disorder. She adds that she struggles more with motivation than with attention issues.

When asked if she feels as if her phone interrupts her sleep, she says, "I think it does for sure". She then mentions how as a child she had a habit of reading books before sleeping, and as she's matured, it's shifted toward phone use instead.

In terms of ASMU (addiction like social media use) mentioned in secondary research, my interviewee can relate. She notes that she has a hard time putting her phone down especially if she's "doom scrolling". I asked her what she meant by this term, and she said, "I guess it's when you're scrolling and scrolling with no purpose. You're just scrolling to scroll." She adds that when she has pressing school assignments, she has to force herself to put her phone down because of how engaged she is.

Overall, this participant showed evidence of a positive correlation between social media use and affected cognitive functions, such as sleep and addictive use. It's important to note that she is very aware of her habits, and is committed to creating a healthier relationship with her phone and other smart devices.

What We Learned: Subtopic #4
Social Media & Body Image/ Self-Esteem

Secondary Research

Social media offers users the opportunity to connect with others and self-expression. Research from various peer-reviewed articles show a **correlation between the use of social media platforms and users self-esteem and body image perceptions**. As users engage with idealized beauty standards and curated lifestyles, they are likely to compare themselves to unrealistic standards. This may lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and negative thoughts on body image.

The American Psychological Association (**APA**) published an article that examined this correlation with two studies. The second study examined the impact of temporary exposure to social media profiles on state self-esteem and relative self-evaluations (Vogel et al., 2014). The APA found that **upward social comparison** was present among participants who frequently used social media platforms. According to the article, their findings "are consistent with those of past research showing that upward social comparisons can be detrimental" (Vogel et al., 2014). Based on this source, the findings suggest that while there are both positive and negative aspects to using social media, posts from social media influencers can have real implications to viewers, often resulting in upward social comparisons.

A study in the Current Opinion in Psychology Journal focused on **trends in social media and body image**. It highlighted trends relating to different social media platforms, features unique to social media, and the effects of 'positive' social media content. A main point of this study was that **unique factors of social media**, such as the number of likes or shares and the comments on a post, "help elucidate the link between social media use and negative body image" (Vandenbosch et al., 2021). The study's research showed that **body-positive (BoPo) content** can have a positive impact on people, especially young women, who engage with those posts.

What We Learned: Subtopic #4
Social Media & Body Image/ Self-Esteem

Secondary Research Cont.

A journal on Body Image published an article that analyzed social media's contribution to poor body image and appearance-focused behavior, highlighting the instance of users accidentally coming across content instead of actively seeking it out . The article discussed how accidentally viewing social media posts allows users to interact with a wider range of representation within the content they consume (Rousseau & Rodgers, 2024). Over time, this may lead to more positive attitudes towards body image, lessening harmful cycles of seeking out content to reaffirm negative ideas.

An article by the Cambridge University Press used a sample of 585 adults, ages 18 to 40, to study the relationship between the use of Instagram and users' self-esteem and body image. According to the article, "a positive correlation was observed between the frequency of use of the social network and dissatisfaction with body image and low self-esteem" (Ruiz et al., 2022). The article also discussed the connection between the content observation time of influencer's posts and negative body image. Based on the results, the article suggests that implementing policies regarding what users share on social media may be able to reduce, or even prevent, the negative impact on a user's body image and self-esteem.

What We Learned: Subtopic #4
Social Media & Body Image/ Self-Esteem

Primary Research- Survey

The data collected through secondary research was backed up by the primary research conducted. 81 participants, ranging from 17 to 23 years old, responded to questions about how social media may affect body image and self-esteem.

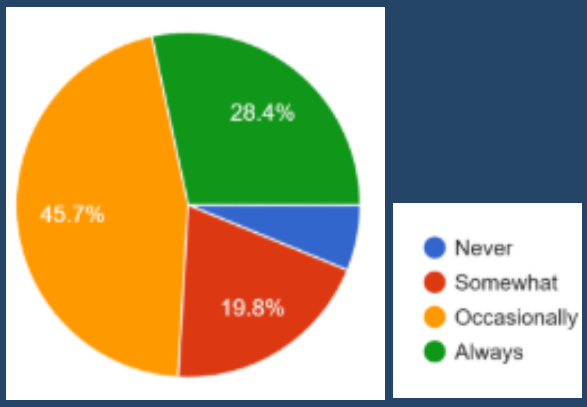
Participants were initially asked about the number of influencers they follow. To this question, 31.3% of participants reported that they follow more than 20 influencers, 26.2% reported to follow between 5 to 9, 21.3% reported to follow less than 5, and another 21.3% reported to follow between 10 to 19 influencers.

Participants were then asked if a social media post has ever influenced how they view their physical appearance. 45.7% said that this has happened 'occasionally', 28.4% said 'always', 19.8% said 'somewhat', and 6.2% said 'never'.

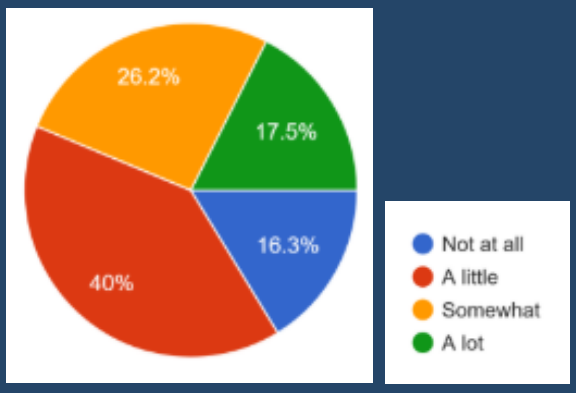
The question, "Do you feel that social media affects your self-esteem?" was posed to participants. While 40% of participants said 'a little', 26.2% said 'somewhat', 17.5% said 'a lot', and 16.3% said 'not at all'.

The survey responses highlighted that social media users are likely to be influenced, in terms of how they see themselves, by the type of content they interact with.

Has a social media post ever influenced how you viewed your physical appearance?



Do you feel that social media affects your self -esteem?



What We Learned: Subtopic #4
Social Media & Body Image/ Self-Esteem

Primary Research- Interview

To gather more detailed information, an interview with a 22 year old female college student was conducted. On average, she spends approximately 6 hours on various social media platforms daily. Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat were among her most frequented social media platforms.

She follows many influencers, somewhere between 30 to 40, whose content covers a range of topics including comedy, beauty, and travel. While she doesn't remember following any particular influencer specifically because of their body image or self-esteem content, she does notice that most of the beauty or lifestyle influencers occasionally touch on the topic in some capacity.

She discussed how, when she was younger, she frequently compared herself to the content she saw from influencers. Though there wasn't a particular instance that stood out to her, she said that 'get ready with me' or 'outfit of the day' posts sometimes included discourse on why the influencer is choosing certain pieces based on the influencer's size or body shape. This led to comparing her body type to the influencers and internalizing their judgements.

While she does think that influencers may have a significant impact on beauty standards and should therefore be mindful of the content they produce, she said that it's important to remember that they are also human and may have a difficult time promoting body positivity if they're dealing with a moment of low self-esteem.

Recommendations for Action

Communication Strategy

There are a variety of strategies that can be used to emphasize our findings. Based on our research, it can be said that social media poses a risk to the mental wellbeing of users. However, one key message to reinforce is that social media platforms can also create communities and foster connections for users to discuss these risks. Another key message would be that students should have established support systems that encourage open discussions on their experiences with social media. Our clients can reach their audiences in many ways. For instance, students may be best reached through the use of campus events, school emails, and social media while parents and administrators may be met through school correspondence, group meetings, social media groups, and websites. It's important that our clients schedule campaigns before anticipated periods of increased stress. Therefore, they should be held before the start of semesters and during pre-exam periods.

Implementation Ideas

To implement educational campaigns, our clients should consider some specific steps. These may include collaborating with universities, developing targeted workshops with peer mentor programs, integrating technology and creating a platform to host all available resources, and advocating for policy change. To effectively accomplish these, our clients may need to secure the necessary funding, build relationships with universities that allow for future partnerships, and consult experts to develop impactful ways of communicating with students. Clients should be mindful of the timeline of events that will need to occur before campaigns are carried out. Sufficient time should be allocated to planning and developing before a basic version of their campaigns are slowly introduced. There should be a tentative timeline for their resources to be added until more detailed campaigns are rolled out.

Recommendations for Action Cont.

Successs Measures

Clients can track the progress of their campaigns through a variety of measures. They may keep tabs on participation and other engagement metrics, collect survey data from different universities, and observe the number of universities adopting their guidelines or policies. Some results that our clients may expect include increased awareness of risks and benefits associated with social media leading to the use of the advised wellness strategies, better communication between students and their support systems, and reports of improved mental health from participants. Our clients can strive to improve by regularly collecting feedback and adjusting the campaigns so that they are effective for the most participants as possible. They may also update their campaigns based on current events to remain relevant and reallocate resources at different universities depending on what would be most useful for the students.

Conclusion

Understanding the effects of social media on college-aged students and adolescents is a growing challenge with the increasing popularity of certain platforms. Through the use of interviews, surveys, and peer-reviewed research, we found that social media can have a significant impact on students' well-being. These impacts may relate to the psychological effects of social media, its influence on body image and self-esteem, cognitive function, and patterns of substance use behaviors. To educate students on these issues, we encourage our clients to create detailed campaigns, tailored to their target audiences, with clear messages and relevant initiatives and resources. By utilizing these findings, our clients have the opportunity to enact real change and ensure social media platforms are used positively instead of causing harm to users.



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