

Social Media Effects on High School Students

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Introduction

Social media can be a great tool. It can help us stay connected with family, make new friends, and share the exciting news. When one thinks of social media, it is often thought of as a positive thing. Social media has given us a way to keep in touch with family and friends around the world, share our exciting news with friends and family, and read up on news that those around us found noteworthy, all at the click of a button.

Social media can also have some adverse effects, however. It has been shown that those who use Facebook excessively saw a detriment in their academic performance, professional life, and interpersonal relationships (Banyai et al, 2017). While the full effect of social media on our mental health has not yet been determined, research has found that social media lowers self-esteem in both men and women, and social media can sometimes lead to eating disorders or other illnesses such as anxiety and depression. Many people are not aware of this issue, so it is essential to bring it into the light and start a conversation.

As we begin this conversation, it is essential to remember that social media can have a positive effect on people. According to Velozo (2018), social media can have benefits, including, increased quality in friendships, and an increased sense of bonding. These are things that would undoubtedly have a positive impact on our mental health. Essentially, the question remains, does social media have a negative or positive impact on our mental health overall? One way in which social media use has positively impacted mental health is by making information and resources regarding mental illness and health more easily accessible. Social media also created a more natural way to access support groups due to it being anonymous, being accessible twenty-four/seven, and it having no geographic limitations (Pros and Cons of Social Media and Internet Addiction). For people struggling with any illness that impacts their emotional well being, having an outlet to talk about it with others going through a similar issue has been proven helpful. However, physical and mental illnesses sometimes come with a stigma that stops people from seeking help. Social media platforms make that stigma a moot point.

With all of this research pointing towards social media use helping instead of harming our mental health, it would be easy to close the argument here and go about life thinking that there is no negative impact being done as our society idly scrolls through Facebook and Twitter, but that would be naive. There are a myriad of ways that social media can have a negative impact on people. One of the most well understood adverse effects that social media usage causes is cyber-bullying. Where social media gives a chance for people to seek help and gain support anonymously, it can also give people a chance to bully others anonymously. This bullying can cause psychosocial distress, which can then affect their peer relationships, family life, and interactions with others (Hong et al, 2016). Another way that social media harms our mental well being is through the ever-growing, ever-popular “fitspiration” that occurs on newsfeeds. Disguised as healthy inspiration for weight loss and working out, these “fitspiration” posts often display unhealthy themes. These posts often glamorize an unrealistic body type- a hyper thin, athletic female body type and a hyper muscular male body type- instead of real health (Raggat et al, 2018). It promotes the idea that these body types are the only ones that are worthy and have been found to drive people to unhealthy and obsessive dieting. Another way that social media has a negative effect on people is that it can be highly addictive. As anyone who has ever played an online game or found themselves months deep in BuzzFeed articles can tell you, the internet is highly addictive. As with anything with highly addictive qualities, it can be abused. Internet addiction looks similar to other addictions in the fact that it can cause psychological as well as physiological dependence, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms. It is also accompanied by psychological, family, and social stress (Yoo, Cho, & Cha, 2014).

In conclusion, the growth of social media has caused men and women to feel more insecure about their appearance. We should be more concerned for the generation that is growing up with social media and these images during their crucial times of development. We hypothesize that this younger generation may develop with lower self-esteem. This is why it is essential to be aware of this issue and what social media has done to our self-esteem and how we perceive ourselves.

Aim, Research Question & Hypothesis

Aim- The aim of this study is to examine if high social media use is correlated with self-esteem levels in young adults.

RQ- How does social media affect high school students' self-esteem?

Hypothesis 1: When a young adult uses social media frequently, they will report low self-esteem levels.

Hypothesis 2: When a young adult does not use social media frequently, they will report higher self-esteem levels.

Null-Hypothesis 1: When a young adult uses social media frequently, they will not report low self-esteem levels.

Null-Hypothesis 2: When a young adult does not use social media frequently, they will not report higher self-esteem levels.

Methods

The sample that was a part of this study included high school students of all genders. We targeted high schools in Northwest Indiana, but through word of mouth also got some responses from schools in Illinois as well. The survey asked questions about social media usage, and the student's perceived mental health and self-esteem. It also asked questions regarding how the student felt after spending time on social media, in hopes to compare those who use social media regularly with those who do not and whether or not we can see a trend in self-esteem and mental well-being based on those factors.

We sent out a survey (Appendix A) to ten high schools in Northwest Indiana via an online link. Out of the ten schools only one responded back, three said it wasn't the right time for their students, and six schools never responded. We gave the schools an option to use a paper format, but all who participated opted to use the link to Qualtrics. The data we gathered has been run through SPSS for analysis.

Implications

The intention of the research study is to make people more aware that social media affects them. This study should encourage people to use social media less and be more alert when they are using it. This study should encourage people to take a break from social media. Social media is affecting our daily lives and interrupting the time we should be spending with our families/friends.

One specific goal is to make parents more aware of this issue. That way, they can monitor their child's social media use. We want people to be mindful that social media can lower our self-esteem. We want people to take action based on this information.

Limitations

This study was conducted using high schools in Northwest Indiana and a small portion of Illinois. It lacked diversity because of this fact. Another limitation that we may face is a lack of participation due to consent forms not being filled out or because of a lack of interest in the study. Out of the schools we contacted, many of them did not respond to our email or said they were unable to send it out to the students. This prevented us from getting more diverse results. We also face the issue of the participants not being entirely truthful on their survey. Participants may want to appear better than they are, not want to answer questions that might trigger them, or they would want to give us the answer we want to hear.

References

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Results

Social Media Usage:

(We had 238 participants)

Snapchat was the most used social media platform.

The device used most to access social media was a cell phone at 97%.

86% reported that they are always logged onto social media.

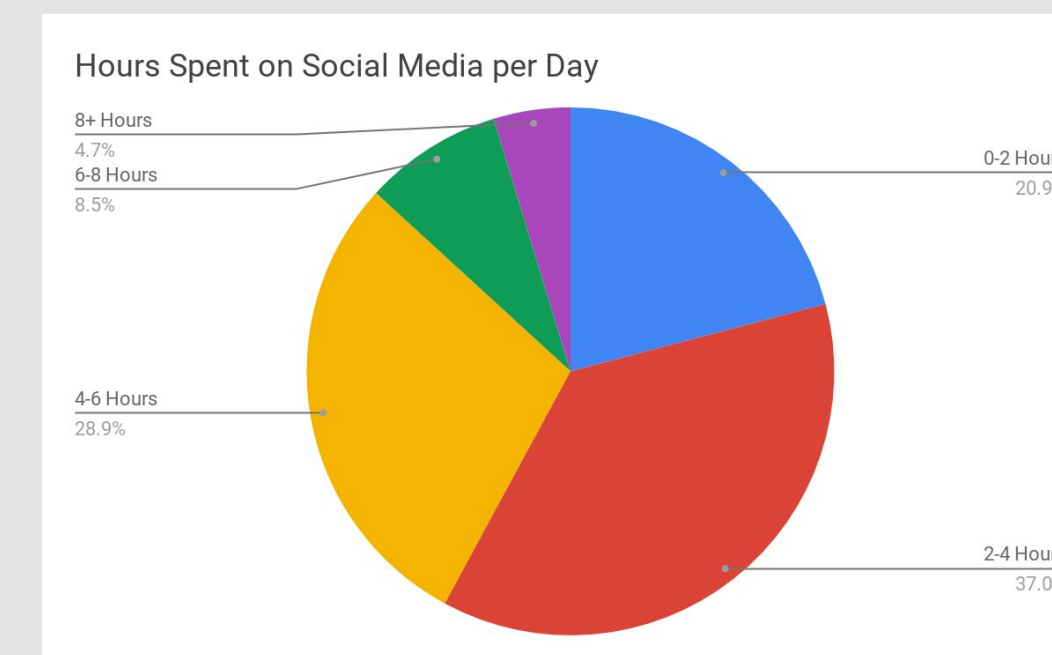
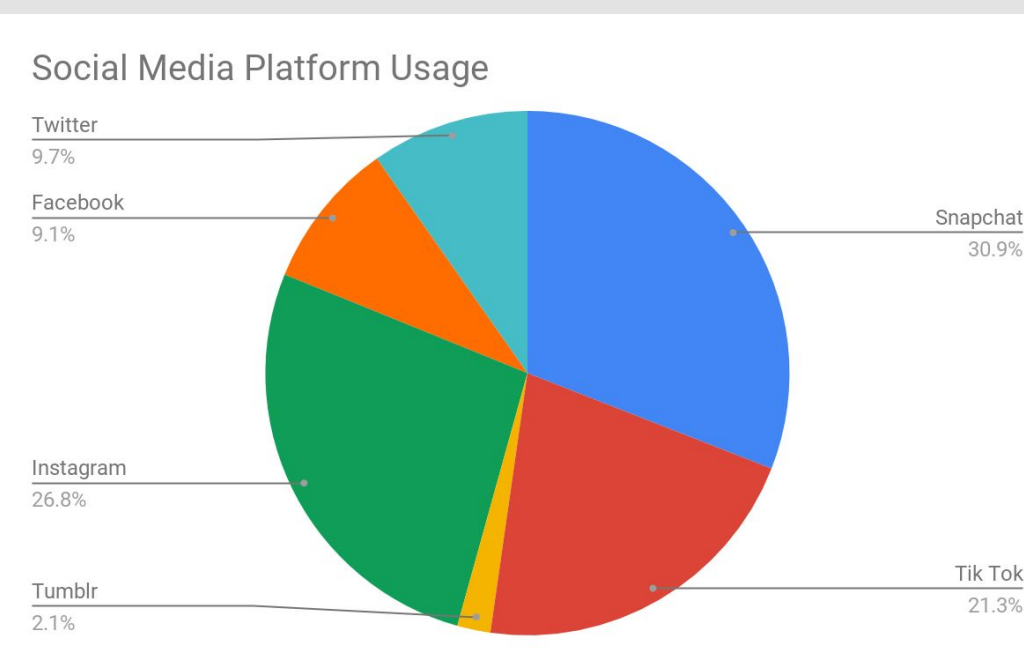
Most estimated that they spend 2-4 hours on social media daily.

Most indicated that they post on social media once a month.

25% reported that they had been cyberbullied.

90% use social media to communicate with friends.

The average number of social media accounts per person were 5.



Social Media and Self-Esteem:

Anxiety and always being logged on to social media: $p = .043$

Hours on social media per day and depression: $p = .003$

Hours on social media per day and not satisfied with self: $p = .002$

Hours on social media per day and feeling not good about self: $p = .046$

Hours on social media per day and feeling life is dominated by likes: $p = .019$

Account number and being not satisfied with self: $p = .030$

Account number and depression: $p = .000$

Account number and making a lifestyle change: $p = .012$

Were the Hypotheses Supported?:

Overall, the results support our hypotheses.

It is shown in this study that social media is correlated with negative self-esteem in young adults.