

The Effect of Social Media Use on Satisfaction With Life

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Author Note

This paper was written for the University of Oregon's Psy 303 Research Methods in Psychology course. The data shown and analyzed in the paper was collected for the purpose of this course.

Abstract

In this paper, we investigate the relationship between social media use and overall satisfaction with life in young adults. The data was derived from 129 students aged 18-34 at the University of Oregon. The study diverges from previous research by focusing exclusively on young adults, eliminating mediator and moderator variables, and directly assessing life satisfaction.

Participants completed a self-report survey derived from the general social media use scale and satisfaction with life scale. There were no significant correlations found between the two variables- social media use and satisfaction with life. Previous literature suggests that an increase in social media use correlates with a decrease in satisfaction with life. My results contrast these earlier findings, yet it is important to understand the limitations of this particular study.

Limitations include a small sample size and little validity and generalizability. The research helps guide future studies by suggesting a more diverse set of participants and refining methodologies to help the comprehensive understanding of social media's impact on life satisfaction.

Understanding the complex interplay between digital interactions and life satisfaction is essential for promoting positive online experiences and fostering a healthier society.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, Social media use, University of Oregon Psy303, Digital Age

Introduction

In a world where scrolling has become second nature, where every ‘like’ can spark joy or despair, questions arise. Individuals often wonder if social media may be the silent underminer of life satisfaction. In today’s modern world, social media has emerged as the dominant mode of communication, with nearly 5 billion users globally, and it rapidly continues to grow (Dean, 2023). Many individuals believe that social media has a significant impact on their overall life satisfaction. Studying the effects of social media use allows us to better understand the intricate relationship between our digital lives and overall well-being. Which, in turn, provides valuable insights for individuals, policymakers, and mental health professionals to navigate the digital age with greater awareness. In an era where social media seamlessly integrates into our daily lives, it becomes increasingly imperative that we look at its effect on overall life satisfaction. My study is viewing whether social media use impacts overall satisfaction with life in young adults.

Literature Review

Close to 60% of the population is active on social media, regardless of age or internet access. Each person averages a total of 8.4 different social media platforms and accounts (Dean, 2023). Some studies tracking social media use outline the variable as problematic social media use (SMU) (Brailovskaia et al., 2021). Also, it is often noted as social media addiction- “The unreasonable and repetitive use of social media to the point that it interferes with other aspects of everyday life” (Abd et al., 2021, p 69).

Buda & others (2020) analyzed data from a sample of University students and discovered a negative association between life satisfaction and problematic social media use. Satisfaction with life refers to a cognitive, judgemental process (Diener et al., 1985). Life satisfaction is dependent upon a comparison of one’s circumstances with what is thought to be an appropriate

standard. Different researchers believe satisfaction with life is made up of different components. An individual's judgment of satisfaction is seen to be within the components of “subjective well-being” (Andrews & Withey, 1976). Subjective well-being relates to how people perceive their lives (Diener et al., 1985).

The research on social media usage, which gained traction in the early 2000s, has since evolved significantly. One of the early studies in 2013 examined the relationship between Facebook use and changes in life satisfaction. (Kross et al., 2013). In this particular study, they utilized the variable of subjective well-being and they defined it: how people feel moment-to-moment and how satisfied they are with their lives. The study by Kross & others (2013) concluded that the more someone used Facebook, the less satisfied they tended to be with their life. Studies similar to this in the early age of social media prompted more research and continued to grow simultaneously with excessive social media apps and use.

Since then, Facebook has become less dominant of an app, with others such as Instagram and TikTok taking the lead for excessive use. The remarkable consistency of findings in multiple studies, each exploring a range of mental health-related outcomes, reinforces the idea that elevated levels of social media usage (more hours per day) are linked not just to loneliness but to a broader spectrum of mental distress. The COVID-19 pandemic also created a big change in the research surrounding social media. Moreover, these findings suggest that these associations remain relatively constant over time, even during the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Abd et al., 2021). This information emphasizes the importance of continuing research because it suggests that social media use will always affect mental health and life satisfaction no matter the circumstances.

Generally, there are many factors that fall under the category of life satisfaction: sleep plays a crucial role in someone's well-being. Brailovskaia & others (2020) utilize the variable sleep as a moderating variable between social media use and satisfaction with life. There are findings concerning social media use leading to sleep deprivation. There are highly statistically significant differences between adolescents with high internet or social media usage and those with less. (Abd et al., 2021). The statistical differences include a decrease in sleep quality and sleep duration and an increase in daily dysfunction and depression in young adults. Based on Abd's findings, he recommended that "adolescents should be aware of the effect of social media use addiction on their sleep quality and their life satisfaction" (2021, p. 9). Notably, life satisfaction is closely intertwined with the quality of sleep, making these findings relevant (Brailovskaia et al., 2020). Problematic and excessive social media use is highly correlated with levels of insomnia which are then correlated with suicide-related outcomes (Brailovskaia et al., 2020). Brailovskaia & others also found that a decrease in the time spent on social media contributed to an increase in life satisfaction and decreased some characteristics that fall into suicide-related outcomes (2020).

A study by Dutot (2020) relies on the idea that self-esteem is the key factor to satisfaction with life. The research seeks to understand how social media addiction impacts satisfaction with life and how self-esteem plays into both these variables. The results of this study suggest that self-esteem influences life satisfaction, and heavy social media use decreases both of these variables.

Individuals scoring higher on neuroticism scales, which is a Big Five personality trait, are more prone to lower life satisfaction (Busseri & Erb, 2023). It was found that young adults with high levels of neuroticism tend to use social media more to temporarily escape (Brailoviskia et

al., 2021). Brailovskaia & others (2021) also assumed that individuals with low levels of life satisfaction turn to the online world to escape their obligations and emotions. This evolves into a situation where an individual's life satisfaction becomes intertwined with their usage of social media, creating a codependent relationship. The findings suggest a cycle of excessively using social media and continuously decreasing one's satisfaction with life.

Purpose of the Present Study

The previous body of literature has suggested a complex interplay between social media use and satisfaction with life. However, as the prevalence of social media continues to rise at a rapid rate, there remains much comprehensive data on the long-lasting consequences of its use. Many current studies around this topic often lack an exploration of age-specific impacts. My study will specifically address how social media use and satisfaction with life are correlated solely between young adults (ages 18-34). By focusing on this specific age cohort, my research will provide insight into how social media influences the satisfaction of individuals at this young and critical developmental stage. Much of the previous literature also utilizes mediator and moderator variables such as sleep (Abd et al., 2021), neuroticism (Busseri & Erb, 2023), and self-esteem (Dutot 2020). From there, they link on how that counteracts with an individual's satisfaction with life. They use these mediator and moderator variables to explain the potential reasoning through which social media use influences satisfaction with life. Because of this, some of this research can only suggest evidence for an indirect relationship rather than a direct one. My study takes a focused approach by eliminating mediator and moderator variables and looking purely at satisfaction with life. By doing so, the research aims to provide a more direct understanding of how social media use correlated with an individual's overall life satisfaction

without the inclusion of different variables. I hypothesize that heavy social media usage will be negatively correlated with satisfaction with life.

Method

Participants

There were 129 individuals whose data was collected: 86 women, 30 men, 3 non-binary, and 4 self-report. They were all recruited from the University of Oregon's Psychology 303 class fall term 2023- with no compensation. Participants ages ranged from 18-34 years old ($M=21.2$, $SD=2.33$).

Materials

Social media use utilizes the General Social Media Use Scale that was adapted from the Social Integration Scale (Jenkins- Guarnieri et al., 2013). The participant answers the questionnaire with how much they agree with the statements. The 10 questions pertain to how integral of a role social media plays in their relationships and connectedness with others. An example includes Social_media_4 I get upset when I cannot log on to social media. The participants answer with 1= strongly disagree, 6= strongly agree, and in between. Each participant received a mean score for social media use. The calculations were: 1 as the lowest social media use, and 6 as the highest social media use.

Satisfaction with life was calculated via a 5 question self-report survey. The participant would indicate their agreement with each item through an online format. It uses the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The participant is answering questions on how ideal their life and conditions are. An example includes: Swl_5 If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. The answer options are: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=slightly agree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=slightly agree, 6=agree. The sum of all items is

then calculated for each participant. The lowest satisfaction of life level would be 5 and the highest level would be 35.

Procedure

Informed consent was received from all 129 participants. The surveys were sent out online and taken all on an online device. They were asked a few personal demographic questions and then went straight to the survey. The questions were randomized and there were a total of 250 survey questions. All students in The University of Oregon's Psy 303 class were given an online link to the survey. From there, they received a series of questions: 10 questions based on the General Social Media Use Scale and 5 questions from the Satisfaction With Life Scale. Participants were given an unlimited amount of time to complete the task, and all data was anonymous.

Results

The variables in the experiment are satisfaction with life and social media use. The data used was gathered from self-report surveys using the General Social Media Use Scale and Satisfaction With Life Scale. Items on the general social media use scale had high internal consistency at $\alpha=.76$. General social media use scores ranged from 1 to 5.30 ($M= 3.23$, $SD=.91$). Items on the Satisfaction of Life Scale had high internal consistency at $\alpha=.86$. Satisfaction with life scores ranged from 5 to 35 ($M= 21.4$, $SD= 6.87$). Descriptives are shown in Table 1.

A correlational matrix was conducted with the two variables. We hypothesized a negative correlation between general social media use scores and satisfaction of life scores. The results are inconsistent with our hypothesis and show that there is no considerable correlation. The findings showed: $r(125)= -0.03$, $p= 0.784$, $CI [-0.20, 0.15]$. The scatterplot is shown in Figure 1.

The results of this experiment suggest that there is no correlation between life satisfaction and social media use. The results indicate that the correlation is negative but is not enough to be considerable. The hypothesis was not supported.

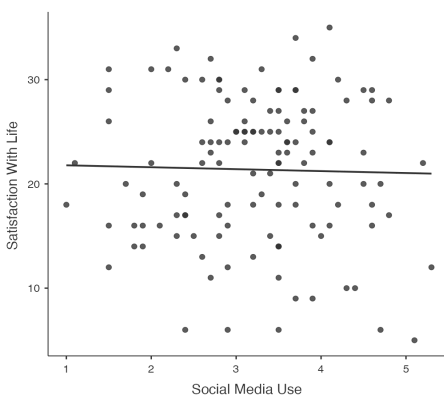
Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Responses

	SWL	Social Media
N	127	127
Missing	2	2
Mean	21.4	3.23
Median	22.0	3.30
Standard deviation	6.87	0.909
Minimum	5.00	1.00
Maximum	35.0	5.30

Figure 1

Scatterplot Depicting Correlation Between Social Media Use and Satisfaction of Life



Note: The observed x-axis uses data derived from the general social media use scale. The Y-Axis uses data from the satisfaction with life scale. All data comes from students at The University of Oregon ages 18-34 years.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social media use and overall satisfaction with life in young adults. I hypothesized that as social media use increased, life satisfaction would decrease in young adults. Our findings, based on the data collected from 129 University of Oregon students, revealed no significant correlation between social media use and satisfaction with life. This lack of correlation stands in contrast with previous literature's findings and what was hypothesized. The absence of a significant correlation may be surprising, considering the negative associations found between social media use and well-being (Kross et al., 2013; Abd et al., 2023). Our findings deviate from earlier studies, such as Kross & others (2013), which suggested that more Facebook usage was associated with lower life satisfaction. Our study extends beyond just Facebook, emphasizing the broader spectrum of social media platforms that are currently used. The previous research emphasized how multifaceted the nature of life satisfaction is. It touched on factors such as sleep quality playing a crucial role in overall well-being and satisfaction (Abd et al., 2021; Brailovskaia et al., 2021). The previous research also dove into the role of neuroticism and its correlation with both social media use and life satisfaction. (Busseri & Erb, 2023). Our findings did not explore some of these factors directly but instead utilized life satisfaction as its own singular variable. Our research contributes to the literature by examining a specific age group, providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between social media use and satisfaction with life. However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of our study.

Implications of Study

Investigating the intricate dynamics between social media usage and life satisfaction is essential for advancing psychological knowledge, offering insight into the factors that contribute

to individuals' well-being in the context of digital communication. This particular study found that there was not a significant correlation between social media use and life satisfaction. Even in the absence of a significant correlation, these findings still have practical implications. It could imply that the relationship between social media use and life satisfaction may be too intricate to approach so straightforward. Previous literature with strong correlations elaborates on the nuanced and multifaceted relationship between these two variables. Online social use continues to grow, and people still want to learn more about the effects it has on individual's minds, lives, and society as a whole.

Limitations of Study

Several factors might have constrained the scope of our research findings. The collected data was derived from a small sample size. To put in perspective the previous literature had sample sizes with over 20,000 participants ranging from around 14 countries (Busseri & Erb, 2023). Our study had a sample size of 129. Since satisfaction with life is a judgmental process based on personal perspective (Diener et al., 1985), the research is lying on much subjectivity. This subjectivity makes it difficult to establish a clear and consistent set of criteria for analysis in a self-report survey without viewing other factors. Additionally, generalizing the results may pose challenges since the entirety of the data originates exclusively from the University of Oregon's Psychology 303 class, representing a specific cultural context. The data is from current college students in Eugene, Oregon, who could have different factors and patterns of both variables. Beyond just that, the subjectivity, as mentioned before, of personal judgments can be influenced by cultural and social factors. Individuals can interpret questions differently based on personal background and experiences. With all of the data being derived from individuals with

similar cultural, educational, and contextual factors- it is hard to generalize the data. The external validity of the questions may not apply well in a real situation.

Future Directions

There are different avenues we can take for future research in this realm of study. To tweak this survey we should broaden the scope of subjects to increase generalizability. Instead of focusing solely on a specific university population, future studies could employ more extensive and globally representative samples within the targeted age range of young adults (18-34 years). A good survey medium, such as Mechanical Turk, could be utilized to capture a broader audience. This would account for a more accurate depiction of real-life understandings. Previous literature utilized mediator and moderator variables to help explain why their found relationship exists. For instance, Dutot (2020) looked at the relationship between self-esteem and our two variables, satisfaction with life and social media use. While my study focused on the direct relationship between social media use and satisfaction with life, it would be beneficial for future research to dive into different mediating and moderating variables such as the previous literature did.

Conclusion

Despite the current study's limitations, the complex dynamics between social media usage and life satisfaction warrant continued exploration. We hypothesized that as young adult's social media usage increased, their satisfaction with life would decrease. The results of this study stand in contrast to previous literature and what was hypothesized. In summary, this study found no notable correlations between social media usage and satisfaction with life in young adults. While this particular study did not find a significant correlation between social media use and

life satisfaction in young adults, the evolving landscape of the digital era necessitates ongoing research to unravel the intricate effects of the online world.

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