Final: Research Design Paper

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the use of social media has continued to grow exponentially. It has become almost impossible to be at any location and not here someone mentions one of the many different social media sites (apps). Today, anyone can access social media anywhere at any time, especially with the growth of technology and smartphones. Along with the continuous development of social media are the numerous psychological and emotional effects users can experience. In the last few years, questions and concerns have begun to arise in regards to the connection between the use of social media and depression and/or anxiety in many adolescents, young adults included. The effects of possible over usage are known to be seen in their well-being, mental health, self-esteem, and more. In 2017, a study was done with the Kiddie Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia-Present and Lifetime (K-SADS-PL) in regards to adolescents and depression. "The primary finding was that the amount of time spent on the internet and on social network sites was significantly higher among depressed adolescents than non-depressed adolescents" (Gurbuz). Ranging from MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok and more, the influences of social media can have and are known to both positively and negatively affect people of all ages and all gender. On the majority of these sites, adolescents, people in general, can have access and view the lives of most celebrities, other socialites they may be interested in, and the lives of their friends and peers.

Background

What is social media? Mirriam-Webster defines social media as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)". Created for online communication purposes, many social media sites differ in numerous aspects giving them uniqueness and popularity in the social world. Facebook, created

in 2004, is one of the most common social media sites used today. Commonly seen and advertised over most media sources, Facebook's original use for connecting old college and lost friends, can now be used for sharing life events, pictures and videos, creating groups for people with similar habits and hobbies, and even selling and getting rid of old or no longer in use items. Two years later, Twitter, another popular site, was launched. Different from Facebook, the Twitter platform has been commonly and mostly used as an outlet to unapologetically express one's opinions and feelings openly and freely. A friend said it this way, "I use both Facebook and Twitter. The only difference is I keep everything I say on Facebook family-friendly. Twitter, not so much" (Anonymous, 2020). A third social media site that will be frequently mentioned in this review is Instagram. Created in 2006, Instagram differs from other social sites because everything is visual related, whether through pictures and videos. Scrolling through an Instagram feed is filled with pictures and videos of users sharing their life, adventures, thoughts, opinions and feelings with their followers.

Social Media Becoming a Problem

For many of today's adolescents, social media has become their platform for being vulnerable, and expressing their personal thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Through the use of photos, videos, status updates, even posting a song, they are able to communicate whatever it is their feeling at any time. The variety of these posts can range from events and confrontations happening within the home or difficulties experienced with peers, friends, or their significant other. It is also common for adolescents to re-share other posts and statuses from people they follow. In some, not all, cases when an adolescent expresses any amount of their own personal details on a social platform, they unknowingly stimulate negative peer experiences. From the J Youth Adolescence article, Frison, E., et. al. shared, "youth are sharing more information about

themselves than they did in the past, making them especially vulnerable to peer victimization, entailing the misuse of this personal information". Peer victimization is the aggressive behavior and attack amongst adolescents. Cyber-bullying is an example of a common progression for adolescents on social media. For example, an adolescent who gets bullied in school not only experiences the issues there, but now they are home scrolling on their social media and the same person who bullied them in school is either sending them hateful messages or posting hateful statuses of them on their own profile. A research study on adolescents experiencing online peer victimization said, "59% reported experiencing at least one form of bullying in the past year on Facebook… three out of four participants reported experiencing at least one victimization experience on Facebook in the preceding six months" (Frison, E., et. al.) It is these experiences that lead to depression and suicidal ideation.

The Increase of Anxiety and Depression

It seems as though today, there is no age limit to users accessing social media sites, therefore being exposed to everything and anything. So where does depression and or anxiety play a role? The life cycle stage of an adolescent is filled with self-discovery, comparison, pressure and doubt. Not only are many students struggling with the face to face pressures in everyday interaction with classmates and friends, these same struggles now follow them home the minute they leave the school doors and get on their bus. It is easy access at the palm of their hands. "A recent Pew Survey indicated that 95% of teens have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are on the internet nearly constantly" (Racha). With the easy access of social media, the commonality of adolescents spending a great amount of time online is very high. It's not just adolescents, adults are constantly spending time on it as well. The difference is the growing concern of more and more adolescents experiencing and being diagnosed with depression. Yes,

there are benefits of social media like connecting with family and finding information on

upcoming events nearby. However, the concern arises when adolescents are in constant

comparison of themselves to the lives of their friends, classmates, bloggers, and celebrities. It is

common in the comparison game where negativity, lack of self-worth and self-esteem begin to

kick in. An article on FOMO (fear of missing out) shared the following:

> An increase in social media engagement could prompt a cyclical loop
>
> of negative outcomes. For example, social media usage (e.g., using Facebook)
>
> may trigger mild depression or dysphoria; the more time spent on social networking
>
> sites, the more depressed people feel. For those who are depressed, insecure striving
>
> (i.e., the belief that one must strive to complete for their place in the social world and
>
> avoid mistakes and inferiority) is highly related to fears of missing or "losing" out.
>
> People experiencing symptoms of depression may feel they are losing the competitions
>
> of social life such as competing for care, acceptance, and social support from.
>
> Baker, Z. G,. et pg. 277

The fear of missing out is the lack of involvement adolescents can feel from their peers and

friends. On a social media site like Instagram, users are constantly spending hours on hours

scrolling up and down their newsfeed, exploring and visually viewing the lives of people they

follow, comparing themselves to what they are not or what they are not doing. However, looking

at the other side of "fomo", adolescents may do what they can to remain "in the loop", i.e., dress

or act a certain way to impress friends.

When adolescents are experiencing depression, research has shown that it is common for

them to seek out friends or circles sharing the same emotions and feelings. "You are who you hang out with" is a commonly expressed quote which can be applied to these kinds of friendships. One article, subjected around the selection, influence, and de-selection of a friendship process had found "...links between levels of depressive symptoms in adolescents and levels of such symptoms in their friends that may provide insight into the role of friends in adolescents' depression, as adolescents tend to be similar to their friends in depressive symptoms" (Zalk, M. H. W. V., et. al.), It is a natural instinct for people to surround themselves with similar interests, similar desires, hobbies, hurts and habits. For adolescents, although they may be experiencing depression and other circumstances, knowing that there is someone who may not be experiencing exactly what it is they are going through, but in their own life are dealing with something that influences a similar emotion and feeling. In possible theory, does having that person, that friend for them who shares in the commonality, influence their depression? Do they feel as if no longer being depressed will cause them to lose their friend(s), falling back on the idea of fomo, expressed earlier?

The continuous research and readings on the relation between social media and depression in adolescents raises the following question. The concern is, do these teens feel they need to be this open and expressive of their personal lives in order to fit in? Is their inability to fit in what causes fomo? Eventually leading to depression because they are not involved or "liked"? When looking at the social media profiles of celebrities and famous people, there is no filter. The world has full access and full view to all of their personal information because 1, they put it out there (for the most part). These accounts are their own and they freely post whatever they want, with the knowledge of their grandiose following. 2, there are people being paid to expose their secrets and their personal lives. Paparazzi make their living off of exposing the secrets and

private lives of many celebs. Some celebrities can experience hatred for living the life and the mistakes they may make while at the same time, many more are praised for their lifestyle. Either way, their following and attention of numerous users continue to grow, making them likable to most. So now the wonder is, do adolescents possibly feel that in order to be noticed, in order to feel connected, seen, liked or loved, they too have to give everyone on social media full access to their lives, like the celebrities do? Whether they receive good feedback or not, unaware of the emotional and psychological consequences and repercussions that follow, including depression.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As was previously mentioned above, this portion of the paper will include the research methodology of the topic at hand. Depression and/or anxiety and its relation to adolescent depression. For this section, the writer goes over the research method, the strategy, methods for collecting data, the research process and any limitations or ethical conflict.

Research Strategy

For the topic, this writer will use 10 students within the youth group she works for. This experiment is projected for 1 month. Each week, students will be expected to spend 2 days off of social media (Wednesday & Sunday). These students will range from ages 12 to 18, in grades 6th to 12th. 5 of the students will be boys and the other 5 will be girls. Each student will receive a

consent form filled with information about the study, materials they will be given (notebook for journaling), policy on honesty and a section for parents to read and sign as well. After all forms have been sent in and signed by participant and parents, the participant will then be entered into a raffle drawing for a $50 gift card. This raffle will be used as motivation for participation.

Research Method - Qualitative versus Quantitative techniques for validity

To bring validity to this research topic, this writer will use both qualitative and quantitative techniques. In using quantitative, this writer will look into the rising use of social media in adolescents and its connection to depression and/or anxiety they experience. For this experiment, each participant will be given a journal to write in daily, recording feelings, thoughts about their time on and off social media. Data on hours spent and the specific time social media are used will also be recorded by each participant in their journal.

In using the qualitative technique, this writer will use the information from the journal entries. The information provided by each participant will help give in-depth understanding of their experiences and thoughts as the depression and/or anxiety is further looked at. Each participant will answer the following questions in their journal entries:

Data Collection Method

To further validity and have beneficial results, thorough interviews will be done with each participant. In each interview the writer will review the journal questions with each participant. Interviews are to be done on a weekly basis. The goal of each interview will be to identify and understand each participant's feelings, emotions and opinions in regards to the study and weekly activities expected of them. The encouraging part about interviews is it creates room for building rapport between this writer and the participant. It also builds an area of trust and holds each

participant accountable, leaving less room for a non-responsive rate.

In collecting data, this writer will use self-report measures along with behavioral observations. Self-report will be accomplished by each participant answering the following questions in their journal entries:

Social Media Days

1. How did you feel when you woke up today?
2. Did you reach for your phone as soon as you woke up? If yes, what was the first social media app you opened.
3. How did you feel after being on social media in that specific time frame?
4. Did you open social media anytime during school? If yes, what app did you use?
5. Identify 1 or 2 feelings you experienced during that specific time on social media?
6. Did your mood change after being on social media during that time?

Non-Social Media Days

1. How did you feel when you woke up today?
2. Did you feel tempted to open up a social media app? How did you feel about not being able to use the apps?
3. In school, do you feel more of a pressure to use social media? Is there a sense of FOMO (fear of missing out) because you are not using social media?
4. On Sunday discuss your weekly reflection with the research project leader.

This writer will then assess the behavior of each participant during their weekly review.

Ethical Awareness

This writer is aware of the ethical obstacles that could cause possible complication in this study. The age of each participant ranges from 12 to 18, therefore, this writer acknowledges the immaturity and level of irresponsibility the participants might have. In the informed consent, the

writer will specifically address the parent or guardian who will be signing off on their child's participation, acknowledging the importance of the study and the students through participation. As long as the parent or guardian is on board with the project, the student should as well. However, this writer is aware this may not be the case.

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