

Analysis Of the Impact of New Media on College Students' Mental Health

Chang Sun *

University of California, Davis, 95616, United States of America

* Corresponding Author Email: cfsun@ucdavis.edu

Abstract. Accompanied by the rapid development of new media technology, the carrying capacity of information and the speed of dissemination of new media has reached new heights that are unparalleled in history. The amount and speed of dissemination of new media have reached a new height that is incomparable in history. As the main group of new media users, college students are always influenced by the micro-environment of the Internet. New media has multiple impacts on college students, including both positive and negative impacts on mental health. Positive impacts include expanding communication channels, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting mental health-related endeavors. Conversely, negative impacts include potential addiction, escapism, and the promotion of unrealistic social comparisons. This paper provides comprehensive recommendations for individuals, universities, and new media platforms to address these challenges. These recommendations include increasing student media literacy and self-awareness, utilizing new media to provide online counseling services and outreach activities for universities, and promoting positive content and customizable content filters for new media platforms. By collaborating to implement these recommendations, all parties can contribute to creating an environment that prioritizes mental health, promotes positive interactions, and supports students' academic and personal endeavors.

Keywords: New Media; college students; mental health.

1. Introduction

In an era dominated by new media, the impact on the mental health of college students has become a topic of profound importance. The integration of social networking platforms, smartphones, and various digital media presents transformative opportunities and potential challenges for individuals to cope with the complexities of higher education. This scholarly exploration delves into the many ways in which new media impacts college students, analyzing positive impacts such as expanding channels of communication and enhancing mental health-related efforts, as well as negative consequences including addiction and the spread of unrealistic social comparisons. As college students struggle to cope with the ubiquity of digital platforms in their daily lives, it is critical to examine the multifaceted nature of these impacts and make comprehensive recommendations for individuals, universities, and new media platforms. This study has the potential to direct societal attention to the impact of new media on college student's mental health, and multiple parties can work together to create a favorable new media environment for college students to support their mental health.

2. Influence Factors

2.1. Positive Effects

2.1.1 Expanding communication channel

The need to belong refers to the strong human need for lasting and positive relationships with others [1]. Many cases have shown that a sense of belonging is viewed as a basic need, and a prolonged absence can lead to negative psychological consequences [2]. With the popularity of social networking platforms, college students have significantly increased their opportunities to connect with their peers around them and even globally. These digital channels have increased the frequency

of social interactions, allowing students to engage in social relationships more easily than ever before. College students who use social media and smartphones are more actively engaged in social activities and have a stronger sense of belonging as a result [3]. This certainly demonstrates the positive effects of new media in increasing the frequency of socialization among college students, which in turn promotes mental health.

In addition, new media provides a medium for college students to fulfill their desire for self-expression. By creating podcasts, short videos, or posting diaries on social platforms, students can express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in more diverse ways. Previous studies have provided indirect evidence suggesting that social media users possess the need to express an idealized image or an actual image of themselves [4]. As active users of new media, including social media, college students are able to make their voices heard.

2.1.2 Help with mental-health-related work

The development of new media has greatly increased the efficiency and accessibility of mental health-related work, especially in terms of information dissemination and immediate counseling services. Users can access a wide range of mental health information and resources on mental health-related forums and apps, and the development of social media has also helped to spread this information. A study of multiple mental health-related new media platforms showed that new media users were accustomed to using these platforms to access mental health information and to request specific services through different platforms [5]. This suggests that active new media users, including college students, have accepted and become proficient in using new media platforms as a tool for maintaining and improving mental health. The real-time and interactive nature of new media also allows for immediate crisis intervention, which can help to mitigate the severity of a mental health crisis. In addition, researchers are still making relevant new attempts, such as predicting and assessing the likelihood of a user developing a mental illness with the help of content posted on social media platforms [6].

2.2. Negative Effects

2.2.1 Addicted to the new media and overlay escapist

New media platforms offer the lure of easy access and instant gratification, a lure that can be a double-edged sword for college students. In an environment of high academic and life stress, using new media can help college students temporarily escape the pressures of academic life, which can lead to overuse. Procrastination can be viewed as an escapist behavior that postpones immediate responsibilities as a way to satisfy the pleasures of the moment. With 70% of college students identifying themselves as procrastinators, this data reveals the prevalence of procrastination among college students [7]. Studies have shown that students who suffer from procrastination tend to be addicted to new media. They spend time that would otherwise be spent on academic tasks browsing social platforms or playing online games, and experience high levels of anxiety due to the stress caused by a backlog of unfinished tasks [8]. This phenomenon demonstrates the seriousness of the addiction to new media by college students to escape from academic and life pressures, which negatively affects the mental health of college students.

2.2.2 Promoting unrealistic social comparisons

Content on social media platforms is often carefully curated by the publishers. The content that college students are exposed to on these platforms is often the highlights and accomplishments of their peers' lives, and this environment creates the ground for social comparison. On social media platforms, college students are constantly viewing the highlights of their peers' lives and comparing their own lives to these "perfect" lives. These comparisons can lead to frustration for many college students who believe they are not as good as their peers. In the case of body management, for example, social media is filled with pictures of perfect bodies and the promotion of exercise programs, which can lead to young people who are active users of social media being more likely to feel dissatisfied with their bodies [9]. Studies have also shown that, especially among women, those who frequently

view fitness content are more likely to experience negative emotions [10]. These negative emotions may trigger eating disorders such as binge eating or food refusal disorder, which in turn may lead to more serious psychological problems.

3. Reasons for Impact

The multifaceted impact of new media on college students can be understood through the lens of communication theory. Two well-known theories, Use and Satisfaction Theory (UTG) and Social Comparison Theory, can serve as windows into how college students engage in and are affected by new media. By understanding and examining these theories, people can gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and outcomes of college students' new media consumption.

3.1. UTG

UTG supports the subjective agency of the audience, which recognizes that the audience will self-select the information provided by the media to satisfy their desires and needs [11]. Stress and trend-seeking are two reasons why college students actively choose to indulge in new media. Studies have shown that many college students suffer from negative psychological conditions such as anxiety and depression due to the many challenges they face in college life [12]. These college students who cannot tolerate the stresses of college life have a tendency to become more stressed. They tend to be addicted to browsing interesting and diversified information in new media. In addition, college students' love of pursuing trends may also contribute to their obsession with new media. An analysis of college students' motivation to participate in TikTok challenges shows that they participate in popular activities on social media for reasons such as entertainment or to increase their social activities [12].

3.2. Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory provides a perspective for understanding social comparisons caused by social media. The theory states that there is a primal drive within individuals to compare themselves to others, and people use this to assess their own views and abilities [13]. Prior research has shown that users of social platforms who tend to make social comparisons are more likely to experience feelings of unhappiness [14]. College students, as active users of new media platforms, are accustomed to using information on these platforms as a basis for social comparison. They shape their virtual image by posting information related to themselves and comparing themselves with the excellent self-image of other peers as a self-assessment. This may have a negative impact on their self-esteem and identity formation.

4. Suggestions

4.1. College Students

4.1.1 Enhance media literacy

Social media, blogs, and other online platforms are flooded with information, some truthful and trustworthy, while others are false and misleading. In an era where information is flooded with falsehoods and misrepresentations, it is important for college students to actively develop their skills in recognizing reliable sources of information from misinformation.

First, college students can actively seek out credible news sources. They should regularly read and pay attention to recognized news organizations and authoritative media, which go through a rigorous news reporting and editing process and usually provide more reliable information. For major news events, reports from multiple credible media outlets generally converge, which can serve as a reference for the authenticity of information. In addition, students can take media literacy courses or

workshops to learn how to assess the credibility of news sources and identify potential biases and positions.

Second, before sharing information, college students should get into the habit of verifying authenticity. In the age of social media, false information tends to spread at a rapid pace, so students need to verify that what they are seeing is true. This can be accomplished by finding multiple independent, trusted sources to ensure the accuracy of the information being shared.

Finally, college students need to critically evaluate the sources and potential biases of the content they consume. Understanding the intent and motivation behind the information and recognizing potential political, commercial, or ideological biases can help college students understand the information more fully. This application of critical thinking can help college students better judge the credibility of information, as well as better understand its potential impact on their academic studies and personal lives.

4.1.2 Deepen self-awareness and understanding of the ideality of new media

In the context of social media profiles and online content that primarily present the highlights and successes of other people's lives, college students should actively develop a sense of self. One of the main characteristics of social media is that they usually show people only at their best, and these carefully curated online images hide the challenges and frustrations of everyday life. Therefore, college students must learn to recognize the difference between the virtual world and real life. By developing self-awareness, college students can better understand that the ideal state of affairs in new media is usually unrealistic. They can realize through self-reflection that everyone has their own frustrations and failures, whether or not these situations are publicized on social media. Understanding this will help students reduce unnecessary social comparisons and the kind of low self-esteem that is triggered by feeling inferior to others.

More importantly, college students should keep in mind that life's setbacks and failures are part of growing and learning. These experiences hone their resilience and toughness so that they are better able to cope with the challenges ahead. Having self-awareness means that instead of getting caught up in fictionalized images on social media, they are better able to balance their online and offline lives.

4.2. Universities

4.2.1 Leveraging new media for an online counseling service in college

Studies have shown that online counseling is a better way to improve mental health [15]. The development of new media has made it possible for educational institutions to conduct accessible counseling. By utilizing video conferencing or chat apps, universities can create a vibrant and inclusive mental health support space. This approach not only aligns with the new media preferences of today's college students, but also ensures more timely and flexible counseling services. Additionally, the use of new media allows for the exploration of additional ways to promote mental health among college students through self-help resources and real-time feedback.

4.2.2 Ensure students are aware of access to mental health-related supports

Building on the foundation of well-established counseling pathways, it becomes critical to ensure that students are aware of mental health services available on campus or in the community. Implementing a comprehensive awareness campaign can serve as a foundational step in this endeavor. Universities can utilize a variety of communication channels, such as official websites, social media platforms, and campus events, to disseminate information about available mental health resources and emphasize the importance of seeking help when facing negative psychological issues. This initiative is also in line with the broader goal of creating a supportive environment, promoting open dialog, and empowering students to actively participate in their own mental health enhancement.

4.3. New Media Platforms

4.3.1 Promote positive content to foster users' happiness

The prevalence of negative content, misinformation and harmful narratives in the digital space requires new media platforms to pay attention to the selective promotion of content in order to create a positive online environment. By integrating algorithms and features that prioritize positive content, new media platforms can play a key role in shaping the user experience. This requires a commitment to promoting inspiring, educational, and entertaining content in a way that positively contributes to the mental and emotional well-being of users. Additionally, fostering a sense of community and connection through positive interactions can increase user satisfaction and overall well-being. This shift toward more positive content promotion strategies is consistent with the ethical responsibility of new media platforms to contribute to the mental health of their users.

4.3.2 Allow users to customize content filters to avoid triggering harmful information

Recognizing the different sensitivities of their user base, new media platforms should implement customizable content filters. This allows users to customize the content they are able to see according to their personal preferences and sensitivities, enabling them to curate a digital environment that meets their mental health needs. This customization can extend beyond generic keyword filters to include advanced features such as sentiment analysis and context-based filtering, allowing users to improve their online experience in a nuanced way. By integrating these customizable filters, new media platforms will demonstrate a commitment to user safety and mental health with the goal of fostering a more inclusive and supportive online community.

5. Conclusion

Due to the diversity of impacts of new media on college students, a variety of approaches are needed to promote mental health among college students in the digital age. While positive impacts such as enhanced communication and improved access to mental health resources highlight the potential benefits of new media, negative consequences including addiction and unrealistic social comparisons require active intervention. The recommendations provided in this paper for individuals, universities, and new media platforms provide a comprehensive framework for mitigating the negative impacts of new media on college students and maximizing its positive effects. By prioritizing media literacy, self-awareness, online counseling services, awareness campaigns, active content promotion, and customizable content filters, multiple parties can work together to shape an online and social environment conducive to college student engagement and support the overall development and mental health of college students on their academic journey.

References

- [1] Leary, M. R., & Baumeister, R. F. The need to belong. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1995, 117(3), 497-529.
- [2] Gere, J., & MacDonald, G. An update of the empirical case for the need to belong. *Journal of individual psychology*, 2010, 66(1), 93-115.
- [3] Kim, Y., Wang, Y., & Oh, J. Digital Media Use and Social Engagement: How Social Media and Smartphone Use Influence Social Activities of College Students. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 2016, 19(4), 264–269.
- [4] Choi, T. R., & Sung, Y. Instagram versus Snapchat: Self-expression and privacy concern on social media. *Telematics and informatics*, 2018, 35(8), 2289-2298.
- [5] Stawarz, K., Preist, C., & Coyle, D. Use of Smartphone Apps, Social Media and Online Resources to Support Mental Health and Wellbeing: An Online Survey (Preprint). *JMIR Mental Health*, 2018, 6(7).
- [6] De Choudhury, M. Role of social media in tackling challenges in mental health. In *Proceedings of the 2nd international workshop on Socially aware multimedia*, 2013, (pp. 49-52).
- [7] Schouwenburg, H. C. *Procrastination in Academic Settings: General Introduction*. 2004,

- [8] Przepiorka, A., Blachnio, A., & Cudo, A. Procrastination and problematic new media use: the mediating role of future anxiety. *Current Psychology*. 2021.
- [9] Jiotsa, B., Naccache, B., Duval, M., Rocher, B., & Grall-Bronnec, M. Social media use and body image disorders: Association between frequency of comparing one's own physical appearance to that of people being followed on social media and body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2021, 18(6).
- [10] Fioravanti, G., Svicher, A., Ceragioli, G., Bruni, V., & Casale, S. Examining the impact of daily exposure to body-positive and fitspiration Instagram content on young women's mood and body image: An intensive longitudinal study. *New Media & Society*, 2021, 146144482110389.
- [11] West, R. L., Turner, L. H., & Zhao, G. *Introducing communication theory: Analysis and application* (Vol. 2). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. 2010.
- [12] Saleh, D., Camart, N., & Romo, L. Predictors of stress in college students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2017, 8, 19.
- [13] Festinger, L. A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 1954, 7(2), 117-140.
- [14] Verduyn, P., Gugushvili, N., Massar, K., Täht, K., & Kross, E. Social comparison on social networking sites. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 2020, 36, 32–37.
- [15] Ardi, Z., & Sukmawati, I. The Contribution of Social Media and Mobile Application to Individual Subjective Well-Being in Counseling Perspective. *Journal of Counseling and Educational Technology*, 2019, 2(1).