

An investigation of the relationship between mobile phone use in social media and college student anxiety

Ziqiang Fan*

Department of psychology, Syracuse University, Syracuse, the United States

*Corresponding author: zfan20@syr.edu

Abstract. With the development of technology, the use of social platforms is becoming more and more common. People have very different views on social media, some think it is a good tool to help us maintain social interaction, while, others think that social media has too many negative effects that weigh out its positive effects. College students are a large part of the population that uses social media. In this paper, the author uses a literature study to investigate the previous literature and tries to find the relationship between college students' social media use and their anxiety level. The study aims to help the college student population address social anxiety-related issues. The results of the study did not find a strong positive or negative relationship between social media use and anxiety level among college students. However, the study found that the three negative effects of social media use did increase social anxiety levels among college students.

Keywords: social media, social addiction, anxiety, cyber violence, college student.

1. Introduction

Since developers have a hidden agenda and temptations are buried all over the page, temptations like short videos that can never be pulled down to the bottom, displays of the number of likes one's friends have received, reminders that they frequently purchased an item at a super low price with a sold-out warning, etc., are not entirely the fault of the user. But not everything is the developer's fault. There are many factors involved in brain function, psychology, business competition, and social behavior. Social media sometimes can be intimidating as no matter how much pleasure, fun, or fleeting sense of belonging it may bring, it still carries serious negative effects. People will not realize the negative impacts of social media until their mental effects get above a certain point, though. Among the most frequent users of social media are college students. Social media brings convenience and joy to students, but it also brings harm. Anxiety is one of the by-products of social media use. This paper will focus on the relationship between college students' social media use and their level of social anxiety. The research method used is mainly archival study. The result of the research can be used to help college students reduce social anxiety issues.

2. Negative influences result from the use of the cell phones

The use of social media can have impacts on college student's mental and physical well-being leading to anxiety, misconduct, and social media addiction among college students. In this paper, students' anxiety level is evaluated from two aspects: social anxiety and cognitive anxiety. Social anxiety will be measured by the degree of fear or worries about social or public situations. Cognitive anxiety is measured from the perspective of self-esteem.

With the development of smartphones, more and more social software has been developed, such as Instagram, WeChat, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok. People can contact and communicate with each other wherever and whenever they want. College students are the most socially demanding group of people among all people. The development of online social apps has brought a lot of convenience to college students, meanwhile, it also causes a lot of trouble. There is no doubt that with the development of social networking software, the time spent by college students on it has increased. As a result, socializing on the internet may take up a lot of real-life socializing. Face-to-face socialization ability becomes weaker if too little time is spent using it. Socializing online is also socializing, but it

is not the same as socializing in real life. In online socializing, one cannot see each other's faces, bodies, outfits, etc., nor can one hear each other's voices, which also leads to the lack of many elements of real-life socializing. Many people are very comfortable socializing on the Internet, but rarely have contact with people in real life. Chan conducted a study in 2014 to investigate the impact of Facebook on its users. Facebook has an online feature called My Personality that allows users to be able to take psychological tests online. Since college students are heavy users of Facebook, the sample for this study was the population of college students who participated in the psychological test. The study found that Facebook is beneficial to college students as a temporary alternative to offline social interaction. However, excessive use of Facebook can inhibit the empathic social skills of extroverted and neurotic individuals. Excessive use of social media by college students can cause their real-life socialization to be gradually taken over by online socializing, leading to a decrease in real-life social skills. The lack of competence in real-life social interaction can lead to social anxiety [1].

The phrase "cyber violence" has begun to occur along with the advancement of social software. Cyber violence is a form of violence that involves using the Internet as a means of abusing, attacking, insulting, and defaming the victim while also endangering their privacy, personal safety, and ability to go about their daily lives [2]. Since people cannot see the other party on the Internet or even know who the other party is, people can say what they dare not say in real life, which also leads to the emergence of violent speech. According to statistics, the number of college students who report having experienced cyber violence ranges from 10% to 21% [3]. Due to the lack of legal control over online violence, it has been difficult to gain control over it. Cyber violence can lead to a variety of negative effects for the victim. Two of the major symptoms are social anxiety and cognitive anxiety. College students are a generally sensitive group, and they are more concerned about how they are perceived by others. This leads to a greater physical and psychological impact of cyber violence on them. Students who are subjected to cyber violence generally have three kinds of reactions. The first is to doubt themselves, which leads to low self-esteem, and this occurs mostly in people who are overly concerned about what others think about them [4]. The second is resistance to social interaction. Socialization causes harm to the victim, and the victim tries to reduce socialization in order to avoid harm. The last one is not caring about what happened to them. The degree of harm caused to students varies based on the severity of the cyber violence. In Kričkić et al.'s study, they administered the Internet Violence Scale to 202 college students. more than 60% of the participants indicated that they had sent sexual-related content to others at least once. 60% indicated that they had received sexual-related content at least once. about 4% of the participants indicated that they had experienced cyber violence [5].

One of the detrimental effects of the development of cell phones is social media addiction. A person is said to have a social media addiction if they spend so much time and effort on these platforms that it affects their ability to perform daily tasks like going to school, working, maintaining relationships, and taking care of themselves in general. Social media is particularly addictive because it preys on people's psychology. The unpredictability and arbitrary character of what occurs on social media platforms is the first component that contributes to its extreme addictiveness. The possible benefits of social media in terms of the physical, psychological, and social realms will be few and far between, but simply the anticipation of one of these benefits can cause psychological or physical pleasure. If the person stops using social software right now, their rewards are taken away, which leads to a desire to continue using social software for pleasure. The like button is yet another important element influencing habitual social media use. The fact that people frequently return to their social media platforms with a purported "need for affirmation" and "liking each other" shows how powerful this feature's straightforward design can be [6]. Because college students have a greater need for social interaction, they are more likely to suffer from social addiction. Spending too much time socializing can lead to less time for meaningful activities such as studying and exercising. The inability to get things done as planned is their worst enemy and a source of cognitive anxiety.

In order to look into the connection between social media addiction and university students' levels of anxiety, Dr. Lozano et al. performed a questionnaire survey of 361 Spanish university students in 2020 [7]. The experiment's findings demonstrated a link between social media addiction and college students' anxiety levels.

3. Suggestions

In order to solve anxiety issues among college students, the first thing they need to do is to make an assessment of the level of their anxiety. There are many scales available on the Internet to measure anxiety, or students can go to the school counselor for an assessment. Those with mild anxiety can first try to recover naturally. This can be done through diet, exercise, reading books, etc. Research has shown that satisfaction with life leads to lower stress levels and increased happiness, which in turn reduces addiction to social media [8]. There are a number of techniques that can help enhance life satisfaction, thus alleviating anxiety symptoms. Learning stress reduction techniques, participating in regular physical exercise or physical activity, getting enough sleep, eating a healthy, balanced diet, avoiding alcohol, limiting or avoiding caffeine, and participating in social activities by reaching out to people who make you feel comfortable are all helpful techniques. Treating social anxiety is a long process. The most important thing is not to give up along the way when the patient doesn't see results in a short period of time. As long as they can hold on to it, they will definitely see some degree of improvement.

For college students who have more serious anxiety problems. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is effective in addressing both social anxiety and cognitive anxiety in college students [9]. Traditional cognitive-behavioral therapy makes the assumption that changing maladaptive thinking will improve behavior and affect, but more recent variations place an emphasis on altering one's perspective on unhealthy relationships rather than altering one's thinking overall. Cognitive-behavioral therapy looks at the person as a whole and identifies what may be altered, rather than diagnosing the person as having a disorder. Depending on the cause of a college student's social anxiety, they may develop different cognitive distortions. Cognitive-behavioral therapy can target specific cognitive distortions and help college students ease their anxiety symptoms [10]. The behavioral treatment method of exposure therapy is used to treat anxiety problems. One of the most successful forms of behavioral treatment for treating anxiety disorders has been demonstrated to be exposure therapy. In exposure treatment, the target patient is unintentionally exposed to the source of their fear or their environment. People think that doing this will help them get over their tension or worry. In order to overcome fear and anxiety, people need constant self-exposure. The best way for college students who suffer from social anxiety is for them to keep exposing themselves: for example, they can try talking and socializing with good friends first, expose themselves to social situations, and force themselves to learn to socialize. The process has to be slow and gradually increase the level of exposure. It is very important to not come up and expose on a very high level, because it may bring the opposite effect on the patient. After chatting with good friends and feeling no obstacles, the next step can be trying to chat with strangers. Next is a group of people. Finally, speak in a public setting [11].

Group therapy has also been shown to be very effective in treating social anxiety. In the group, the doctor explains to the patient about the medical knowledge and healing methods, supports and encourages the patient, and answers any questions the patient may have. More importantly, patients talk to each other, both to exchange ideas and experiences about medical treatment and to support each other and promote spiritual communication [12]. In the social anxiety disorder population, some people may develop severe substance abuse. For these populations, group therapy is their best option.

Similar to most medical conditions, pharmacological treatment has benefits in dealing with social anxiety. Despite the fact that a variety of drugs are available, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are frequently chosen to treat symptoms of persistent social anxiety. Healthcare professionals may recommend Paxil or Zoloft to patients. Another option for treating social anxiety disorder is the

SNRI venlafaxine (Effexor XR), a serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor. It has been demonstrated that each of these drugs works well in the treatment of social anxiety [13].

4. Conclusion

According to the above analysis, excessive use of social media can lead to three consequences: reduced reality social skills, social media addiction, and cyber violence. These consequences lead to increased anxiety among college students, thus demonstrating there is a relationship between social media use and anxiety among college students. It would be unfair to claim that social media is poison as it brings a lot of benefits and convenience for college students. Nevertheless, there are two sides to everything, and social media is no exception. Moderate use is the best manual for using social media. Making college students anxious is not the original purpose of social media developers, but it is their responsibility to prevent students from anxiety. Many companies have begun to develop different mechanisms to limit excessive cell phone use. Apple, for example, has developed screen time, and TikTok reminds users to take breaks from time to time. Although relevant policies to prevent over-use have been established, these are far from enough, and developers need to find more effective and feasible measures aimed to help people reduce social media anxiety.

Since specific experiments and data were not available, most of the analyses were made based on experimental results from previous research papers. There are some research papers with slight differences, which may lead to the limitations of this study.

Currently, most of the research is about how social anxiety can be treated in college students. In the future, more attention can be paid to how to change the function of social media to address the harmful effects of social media such as online violence, social media addiction, etc.

References

- [1] Chan, T. H. Facebook and its Effects on Users' Empathic Social Skills and Life Satisfaction: A Double-Edged Sword Effect. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 2014, 17(5): 276–280.
- [2] Peterson, J., & Densley, J. Cyber violence: What do we know and where do we go from here? *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 2017, 34: 193–200.
- [3] Ybarra, M. L., Mitchell, K. J., & Korchmaros, J. D. National Trends in Exposure to and Experiences of Violence on the Internet Among Children. *Pediatrics*, 2011, 128(6): e1376–e1386.
- [4] Šincek, D., Duvnjak, I. i Milić, M. Psychological Outcomes of Cyber-Violence on Victims, Perpetrators and Perpetrators/Victims. *Hrvatska revija za rehabilitacijska istraživanja*, 2017, 53(2): 98-110.
- [5] Kričkić, D., Šincek, D. Babić Čike, A. Sexting, cyber-violence and sexually risk behaviour among college students. *Kriminologija & socijalna integracija*, 2017, 25 (2): 15-28.
- [6] . Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. Online Social Networking and Addiction—A Review of the Psychological Literature. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2011, 8(9): 3528–3552.
- [7] Lozano B. R, Latorre C. C, Quílez R. A. Social Network Addiction and Its Impact on Anxiety Level among University Students. *Sustainability*. 2020, 12(13): 5397.
- [8] Longstreet, P., & Brooks, S. Life satisfaction: A key to managing internet & social media addiction. *Technology in Society*, 2017, 50: 73–77.
- [9] Brown, E. J., Heimberg, R. G., & Juster, H. R. Social phobia subtype and avoidant. personality disorder: Effect on severity of social phobia, impairment, and outcome of cognitive behavioral treatment. *Behavior Therapy*, 1995, 26(3): 467–486.
- [10] Rothbaum, B. O., Meadows, E. A., Resick, P., & Foy, D. W. Cognitive-behavioral therapy. In *Effective treatments for PTSD: Practice guidelines from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies*. The Guilford Press. 2000: 320-325
- [11] Foa, E. B., & McLean, C. P. The efficacy of exposure therapy for anxiety-related disorders and its underlying mechanisms: The case of OCD and PTSD. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 2016, 12: 1-28.

- [12] Slavson, S. R. An introduction to group therapy. (pp. xvi, 364). The Commonwealth Fund. 1943.
- [13] Blanco, C., Bragdon, L. B., Schneier, F. R., & Liebowitz, M. R. The evidence-based pharmacotherapy of social anxiety disorder. *International Journal of Neuropsychopharmacology*, 2013, 16(1): 235–249.