The Effects of Social Media on Perceived Well-Being

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Abstract

Studying articles revolving around the effects of social media on perceived well-being is relevant because it can pertain to nearly 3 billion people. Studying this topic may directly contribute to, as well as contribute to opening other doors, research for improving the lives of those people. The method of obtaining relevant articles was to use PsycINFO and use key-words and phrases in advanced search, then applying exclusion criteria to get the end result of 24 references. The aims of this literature review were to unearth reasons for social media usage, explore the positive and negative effects social media have, the affected aspects of well-being, and intervention strategies to decrease the negative effects. The findings of this literature review were that passive social media usage had fewer negative effects than active usage, and thus active usage led to decreased well-being. Along with that finding, this type of research can only recognize trends but there is no hard-and-fast answer because everyone is different. Intervention strategies are mainly useful if used as a preventive measure, in order to preserve self-esteem, belongingness and other well-being factors, for young adolescents. Awareness of this topic could help the physical and psychological health of millions across social media platforms.
The Effects Time Spent on Social Media on Perceived Well-Being

Social media takes up time in nearly 2.77 billion people’s day (Number, 2017). Social media refers to any website or smartphone application that provides a platform for social interaction including social networking, gaming sites, virtual worlds, video sites, and blogs (Byrne, Vessey, & Pfeifer, 2018). Today, if you ask an individual of any age what could be done to improve everyday life, their answer will most likely revolve around either cutting down on technology usage or limiting social media. While this is a supposedly fine answer, how true is that sentiment in reality? I did some sifting through a long list of articles that shed some light on this so-commonly used simple wisdom. Research shows that good perceptions of social media are held by working adults in studies, with younger individuals reporting more good perceptions (Keating, 2015). This same source revealed that age and health problems were significantly associated with bad perceptions of social media. Younger individuals and those with health problems also report bad perceptions.

Users of social media, especially the young and impressionable, tend to feel that social media is to blame for a lot of well-being related issues, as well as the declining mental health of the general population. This specific literature review is focused on people around the developmental periods of adolescence to young adulthood, ages averaged collectively 12-35. These earlier stages of life are sensitive in terms of shaping outcomes of the maturing individual and they are also the most directly impacted, thus most research conducted has been directed towards this younger demographic.

The well-being of this age group that is being affected spans across all of the nebulous concepts and categorizations of well-being. It is important to merge the categories, such as psychological well-being and subjective well-being, in order to get an accurate feel for the scope
of the effects of social media. For where the effects tend to be negative, there are steps individuals can take in order to lessen these problems for themselves or a loved one. In this literature review, I will discuss reasons for social media usage, positive and negative effects social media have, the affected perceived well-being, and intervention strategies to decrease the negative effects among a younger demographic. I will also review the limitations of the current literature and make suggestions for future research.

Methods

The method of obtaining relevant articles was to use PsycINFO provided on the online database section of the Brigham Young University (BYU) library website. I used keywords and phrases in advanced search for access to Boolean operators, then applied exclusion criteria to get the end result of 21 references. First, I searched social media ‘AND’ well-being ‘AND’ wellbeing ‘AND’ youth, that yielded 5 results which I used 3 of. Next, I searched the same things except I replaced youth with adolescents and got 10 results and used 4. Searching social media ‘AND’ intervention ‘AND’ usage ‘AND’ negative gave 22 results, of which I am using 5. Social media ‘AND’ positive ‘AND’ well-being ‘AND’ negative showed 75 results. I used 3 but then added life satisfaction to narrow that search and got 18; of those 18 I used 3. Lastly, searching social media ‘AND’ purpose ‘AND’ reasons ‘AND’ adolescents provided 6 and I used 2.

Results

The results of sifting through articles upon articles of social media and well-being related articles proved to show a consistent trend without a definitive answer. The trend consisted of the articles admitting that, yes, social media has definitely improved and advanced many areas of day to day life, however, the effects on well-being for the majority of people are negative.
Technology and social media sites have allowed for better connectedness and have allowed for an immensity of products and services at the tips of billions of fingertips. The sad truth is that social media, social networking sites, and technology have become an alarming addiction for a ton of individuals. Along with addiction comes a loss of autonomy, more anxiety, loss in life satisfaction, as well as countless other well-being aspects.

Social media is not evil. Online technologies are being used for health and social care purposes; however, it is not always appropriately designed to promote the mental health care and support of younger people (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). It is extremely useful, inventive, and cutting edge, but problems arise in the tendencies of the users themselves. Without moderation and a lack of intervention when needed, social media produces detrimental effects to a person’s well-being. With this being said, everyone reacts differently, which makes calling a finding in this research “a proven fact” a tentative claim. Peoples’ unique latent qualities make it impossible for definitive claims to be made, for example, a naturally narcissistic person will tend to use social media in more self-serving ways than a non-narcissistic person (James et al., 2017). This social media can affect them in every way of life be it social life, work life, or family life, therefore effecting overall well-being and life satisfaction. Weinstein (2018) shared results that support this, reporting that there are individual differences in susceptibility to psychosocial disruptions from social media use.

Passive social media usage had fewer negative effects than active usage, and thus active usage led to decreased well-being. That was a trend, but everyone is different. Intervention strategies are mainly useful if used as a preventive measure, in order to preserve self-esteem, belongingness and other well-being factors, for young adolescents. While social media is an amazing tool, moderation must be applied for little to no negative effects.
Demographic

There tend to be differential effects and usage rates by age. Along with this, not everyone in a particular age group is impacted the same way, hence it is more effective to have a broader scope when choosing demographic for this type of study. Compiling research from a more inclusive age range assures that the conclusive research will benefit a greater audience. The chosen age group is particularly important to zero in on as a review in 2013 found that 85% of younger adolescents (ages 12-15) access their main Social Networking Site (SNS) profile every day, 20% doing so more than ten times a day (Singleton, 2016, 1). The results of the study coming from 2013, however, would most likely read differently today, leaning towards higher numbers.

Having a slightly broader age group, not being restricted to only adolescents or only young adults allows for comparison across studies. An important note is the difference between digital communication and social media usage. Social media umbrellas the more in-person type of communication, whereas a means of personal communication, is separated as being more purposeful and productive, simply technology usage rather than social media. For example, Goodman-Deanea, Mieczakowski, Johnson, Goldhaber, and Clarkson (2016) include a comparison of ages 10-24 and 25-44 and note that the older of the two groups has lower life satisfaction. Along with that, in the same study, greater overall satisfaction with life was associated with time spent using more personal communication (including talking on landline phones, talking on mobile phones, use of email and video calls) and lower overall satisfaction was associated with time spent using more in-personal communication (text messaging, on social media websites and instant messaging).

Reasons for Usage
Adolescents and young adults alike use social media for an array of reasons, each person differing slightly from the last. Narrowing down reasons for usage can be difficult to get an accurate and definitive answer on due to the bias shown in self-reporting. Such as, in a recent article, James et al. (2017) explains that existing research suggests that narcissistic people use social networking sites more frequently and in more self-promoting ways than less narcissistic people. If attempting to collect data on social media usage from the said narcissistic individual, they would not outrightly admit to that motive. They may claim social media as a leisure pastime, however, time spent on social media is discretely due to their subconsciously narcissistic tendencies, hence the self-reporting bias.

Another reason for usage, offered by Lai, Hsieh, and Zhang (2019), is that both popular and unpopular users try to appear popular on Facebook, thus social media requires constant attention. Again, intertwining with self-reporting bias, few users admit to using social media platforms for manipulation of popularity. Participants in studies, similar to the ones mentioned, accidently report false information while subconsciously painting themselves in a socially favorable light.

On a more positive note, there are a plethora of genuinely useful reasons to use social media. A critical, and often overlooked, aspect of social media, which is a blessing for young struggling individuals, is the ability to communicate anonymously. The anonymity has set a precedent for help-seeking (James et al. 2017). This type of self-regulation, available at the push of a button, can facilitate overcoming social pressures, such as shame, that often interfere with an individual’s abilities to communicate effectively offline. Along with this, anonymous or not, this can allow individuals with rare and/or debilitating conditions to get effortlessly get in contact and form a community. No matter the age, individuals can feel disconnected from society due to
extraneous circumstances and social media can get disconnected individuals into contact with one another. A counter to these positive aspects is individuals who are vulnerable to the loss of self-regulation, such as children and adolescents, may show detrimental outcomes because of their less mature ability of self-regulation (Ahn, & Shin, 2013).

**Aspects of Well-being**

Well-being, unless specifically defined, can have a lot of grey area. The barebones aspects of well-being are mainly including humanistic concepts, particularly those captured in Ryff's six psychological well-being dimensions: positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Horwood & Anglim, 2019). With this being said, other aspects will be noted, such as an effect on subjective well-being, which tends to refer more general life satisfaction. To understand well-being in more generalizable terms, it consists of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement, each having a positive and negative polarity (Yang & Srinivasan, 2016).

Social media for some is simply just an occasional time filler or simple pleasure, but for many, it has snowballed into an addiction. Tromholt (2016) reported social media users use platforms with varying intensity and in this study, the intensity was measured consists of six items. While addiction is unhealthy from any standpoint, in this study heavy social media usage was tested and confirmed to be detrimental to life satisfaction and well-being. In conjunction, Sacco (2019) reports from his study that the more his participants used Facebook over a two-week period, the more self-reported life satisfaction decreased over time.

Horwood and Anglim (2019) shares that given that low autonomy is defined by greater concern for social approval, people with low autonomy are more concerned with social media applications, as they can lead to the sought-after validation. In tandem, the notification systems
in smartphones may serve to reduce a person's sense of agency. Autonomy and agency are examples of aspects of well-being that are being affected by social media. This is just one scenario and one set of well-being aspects included in the 2019 article which also includes instances of hostile communication between adolescents.

Examining across studies helps reinforce that everyone reacts differently to the presence of social media. Hawi and Samaha (2017) had their first and second hypotheses confirmed, due to it being observed that self-esteem mediates the relationship between social media addiction and satisfaction with life. With this in mind, that leads to the conclusion that those with innately lower self-esteem are more susceptible to social media addiction and lower life satisfaction. Compounding on the last study, psychosocial well-being variables, including loneliness, self-esteem and life satisfaction, explained 38% of the total variance in Internet addiction among Turkish university students (Wang, Gaskin, Wang, & Liu, 2016).

The results of the study of Caron and Light (2017) demonstrated that social media played an important role in the lives of seven of the participants who had cerebral palsy who communicated with Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). Belongingness, as having three aspects: companionship, affiliation, and connectedness, greatly influences overall well-being, tying back to a need for usage for this scarce group (Cooper, 2017). The social media platforms the participants were exposed to helped them communicate with one another so much that they continued to suggest it to friends outside the study. By increasing their sense of belongingness, it increases their well-being in multiple tiers.

**Intervention Strategies**

Fardouly, Magson, Johnco, Oar, and Rapee (2018) explain that are significant links between social media browsing, appearance comparison frequency, and mental health concerns
within their young sample. They then suggest social media literacy and mental health intervention programs may be necessary, in hopes these types of programs can be not only a source of intervention but also prevention, of negative effects of social media.

Wang, J., Wang, H., Gaskin, and Hawk (2017) propose the negative effects of SNS usage on individuals’ psychological well-being could be explained by the upward social comparisons (self-comparison to someone viewed as superior) that repeatedly occur on SNSs, which in turn decrease users’ self-esteem and then psychological well-being. Along with those findings, they suggest that differentiating between passive and active SNS usage is significant for understanding the influence of SNS usage on well-being, so perhaps help the affected realize that social media does not determine their value would trigger a more passive approach.

A widely discussed and purely negative aspect of the internet, especially prevalent in social media, is cyberbullying. Interventions and preventions should be in the home as well as school systems. Intervention efforts should begin before middle school, as the research reveals that middle school students experience greater face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying than high school students (Byrne et al., 2018).

**Discussion**

Social media can no longer be considered a pastime because more people than not it has become an addiction, and, with that, an epidemic. To preserve the well-being of the current generation and to prevent the upcoming generations from the negative side effect of networking sites, this research field needs to expand and to be heard. This does not just affect adolescents and young adults; it affects older people and is even beginning to spread into the lives of young children. Social media itself is not evil but can fester when left unchecked. If a teenager is constantly glued to a screen, it is the duty of a responsible adult to start intervening to prevent as
much damage to well-being as possible. Technology applications can be used to facilitate learning, connectedness, and other services but should not dominate the hours in one’s day; it is unnatural, damaging, and disconnecting.

These findings have been concluded through extensive trends; however, limitations prevent further confirmation. The main limitation in this field of research lacks directional causality. One could look at the results of research and say because the participant is depressed, they spend more time on social media. To counter that, an opponent could say because of the time the participant is spending on social media, it has caused depression. Social media can cause some symptoms for some users but can also just bring out and enhance positive or negative aspects in others. One of the main findings of a reviewed study was that it was hard to find people who were willing not to use social media for a week voluntarily (Stieger, & Lewetz, 2018), which is a harsh reality of the addiction and a testament to the importance of moderation. Other limitations included skewed demographic, generational differences, and accessibility.

For future research and policies, I suggest investing in longitudinal studies and pulling from a variety of demographics. Longitudinal studies will provide a more in-depth analysis of the participant themselves, therefore helping to make more sense of causal factors. Some children are starting on social even before middle school age and studying these differences in developing children with and without social media could show groundbreaking results. Along with this, pulling from upper-class families, lower class families, American ethnic groups, Korean ethnic groups, and a ton of other variations could also pull back the curtain on why certain effects are happening in certain areas.

As stated plenty of times throughout this literature review, social media itself does not seem to be the sole blame of this new-aged addiction taking over the world. It has as much to do with
character traits of the user and lack of intervention as it does to do with the features viewed on social media. This literature review has discussed reasons for social media usage, positive and negative effects social media have, the affected perceived well-being, and intervention strategies to decrease the negative effects among a younger demographic; as well as I have shared a review of the research limitations of the current literature and have made suggestions for future research.
References


Wang, J., Wang, H., Gaskin, J., & Hawk, S. (2017). The mediating roles of upward social comparison and self-esteem and the moderating role of social comparison orientation in the
