The Impact of Social Media on Youth Education and Well-being

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Abstract. The study dives into the impact of social media on youth education and well-being as social media represents a significant obstacle to the academic achievement of youth and holds the opportunity for youths to improve their teaching and well-being. The dangers associated with social media are hinged on the continued use of these platforms, which can be referred to as social media addiction, which negatively causes poor sleep patterns and duration, invariably impacting academic activities during the day and resulting in drowsiness. More so, the constant following of trends and messages can be distractive, thus affecting productivity and focus. Excessive screen time and social media addiction can also negatively impact the well-being of youth, with social media content capable of contributing to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. Stakeholders must recognise these dual effects and implement measures to promote healthy online behaviours and digital literacy skills. By doing so, we can harness the educational benefits of social media while mitigating its potential harms, ultimately supporting the holistic development and well-being of young people in the digital age.

Keywords: Social media, education, well-being, impact, youth, addiction.

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have rapidly developed globally, with several billion users. As of February 2024, an estimate of over 5 billion users of social media has been reported from the global world population, which is estimated to have slightly exceeded the 8 billion mark [1], which indicates that over 62% of the worldwide population is current user of social media with youths and teens forming a high percentage of active users of these platforms. Vogel et al. reported that 95% of youth aged 13 to 17 use social media, further bolstering the many youths who actively use these platforms [2]. Similarly, the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research also noted the high social media usage among teens, with 95% of them using diverse social media platforms [3].

There are currently several social media platforms, with Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram among the leading platforms, with active users exceeding 2 billion. In contrast, other social media platforms with high users include TikTok, WeChat, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Telegram, among many different platforms [4]. The central aim of these media platforms is the interconnection of the globe through the creation and sharing of content, ideas and interests, which, to a high degree, has a significant impact on the lives of users, positively or negatively, bearing in mind the high human population actively using these platforms. The increased usage of social media, thus, indicates that the time spent on these platforms for the sole purpose of socialising and engagement in global trends would have an immense impact on the academics of youth due to increased distraction, increase in procrastination of reading of their academic's instructional material and less time in conducting academics' research.

Despite the perceived impact of social media, when these platforms are precisely channelled towards youth education, they hold great potential to increase their knowledge base. Education is built on the foundation of the transmission or access to knowledge, skills and character that can be obtained through formal and informal processes. Authors [5] noted in their study that social media could help facilitate learning and knowledge creation in e-learning. However, the excessive usage of social media could prove detrimental to the formal academic achievement of youth, considering that a considerable percentage of them spent more time online checking out videos and commenting on social activities, which could be a source of distraction from attaining academic success. Authors [6] noted that

the more time children spend using the internet comes with the negative consequence of losing touch with their physical surroundings. They further stated the challenge of the time spent online, with an average of 2-5 hours spent online daily [6].

This study seeks to explore social media's impacts on the education and well-being of youth, considering that the most active users of these platforms are youth. The well-being of an individual encompasses the emotional, physical, social, mental and intellectual state, which invariably is a determinant of the quality of life and the ability of such individuals to be responsible for making quality contributions to their environment. The focus of the study would be limited to the impact of social media on youth education, bearing in mind the duration of their time spent on these platforms and how these platforms affect their all-round well-being.

Literature review

The world is rapidly advancing technologically, and one of the consequences of these changes in the usage of technology is the increase in social media usage among youth and how these platforms play a significant role in the lives of youth, thus ushering significant challenges and providing exciting opportunities for youth. Authors defined social media as any application or website that offers a platform for users to create and share content or enable the social networking/connection of diverse users [7]. Authors added that social media further promotes businesses and discussion and has an advantage over traditional media [8]. These platforms became popular with the launch of Facebook and Twitter in 2004 and 2006 respectively [9]. The success of both Facebook and Twitter ensured the rapid growth of other social media while placing this judgement on the number of active users of these platforms. Currently, Facebook with 3.1 billion monthly active users, YouTube with 2.51 billion, Instagram with 2 billion, WhatsApp with 2 billion, WeChat with 1.31 billion users and TikTok with 1 billion are the most accessed social media in the world [10].

The amount of time spent on social media has dramatically increased the dangers associated with these platforms. Authors [11] conducted a cohort longitudinal study on the time spent on social media by youth between the ages of 12 and 15. He noted the impact of adolescents spending over 3 hours on social media. The authors said that adolescents are more likely to have their mental health impacted by increased social media and further advocated that research should be conducted to ascertain a suitable time for youth to engage in social media. In the same vein, some other authors noted that an average of 3.5 hours per day is spent daily by 8th and 10th graders, with the authors asserting that adolescents who spend over 3 hours per day have an increased risk of experiencing depression and anxiety, which cumulatively affects their mental well-being [12, 13]. Other challenges of spending a considerable amount of time were exemplified by the study conducted by authors [14]. They noted how negative experiences such as cyberbullying as well as cyberstalking affect the self-esteem of youth [14].

Smith et al.'s study on the impact of social media on adolescent social well-being indicates that these platforms can both boost the sense of social well-being of youth and deter them [15]. The author advocates the cautious use of this platform to enhance and promote psychological well-being among youth. Similarly, authors [16] asserted that social media promotes a sense of belonging among youth.

The Academics of youth are vital in contributing to their nation's development. Some studies have been conducted to ascertain social media's impact on youth academic achievement [14, 17, 18]. Addiction to social media was found to be associated with student, most especially those in higher education, with this addiction having an impact on their academics [19, 20]. Authors [21] studied the effect of social media on academics and interpersonal relationships among undergraduate students. The finding of their study indicates that it is not the usage of social media that affects the academic performance of students with undergraduates who spend between 2-5 hours and follow social media between 1 and 10 times a day having lower GPAs. The study further shed light on social media addiction and how it affects the duration of sleep of youth, thus impacting their well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of social media on the education of youth. Since the introduction of Facebook, the popularity and usage of social media platforms have been

increasing as they form an essential part of individual lifestyles. The impact of social media has been studied to ascertain its effect on the educational achievement of youth [14, 17, 18]. Several variables need to be considered to understand social media's impact properly. Of these, the most important is the amount of time the continued use of these networks leads to a situation known as social media addiction. Social media addiction is on the rise among adolescents and youth, and it seems not to be slowing down, considering the continuous increase in the number of active users of these social media platforms. Authors [21] study exemplifies the duration of time that youth spend on social media, as over 84% of the undergraduates involved in his research claim to spend over 2 hours daily on social media while a high percentage of them claim to visit or follow their favourite platform at least ten times in a day. Some authors have noted that the interface and every other design of these platforms have been designed to ensure maximum user engagement, encouraging the excessive use of these platforms. Some of the strategies employed in the design include the infinite scroll, push notification, the display of popularity, and an algorithm that recommends content to users based on their data, such as displaying content that users would be interested in [22].

The constant visits to these platforms, which, on most occasions, are for social interaction, could prove distractive and negatively affect students' academic performance, resulting in reduced productivity and focus. Authors [21] called frequent or impulsive visits to these social media platforms social media addiction, with the authors further stating that ongoing visit to social media platforms negatively affects students' academic performance. Some other scholars also noted that the changes in the brain structure of individuals with social media addiction are similar to the changes that occur in individuals who have gambling and substance abuse [23, 24].

The addiction to social media has been observed to affect the academic of youth, with one of its effects attributed to both the quality and duration of sleep. The fatigue resulting from disrupted sleep patterns and time impacts the cognitive function of youth during lecture periods study time while cumulatively affecting their academic activities. Author [17], as cited in [18, p. 2], described, "Social media exposes people, especially the young generation, to new exciting activities and events that may attract them and keep them engaged in different media contexts for hours just passing their time. It usually leads to reduced productivity, reduced academic achievement, and addiction to constant media use" [18, p. 2].

The addiction or spending of excessive time on social media has been observed to cause distraction during academic activities, for instance, during lectures and study periods, with student constantly checking their phones at the beep of any message. This aligns with the view of [18], who asserted that students repeatedly pay attention to their phones to keep track of their messages on social media. This addiction affects their cognitive mental capacity and their ability to pay attention to their learning process. The addictive nature of social media could also impact the time allocated to studying and completing learning activities such as assignments, which can hinder learning and retention of academic information.

Despite the negative consequence of social media addiction on student academic achievement, some other studies have reported the benefits that could be extracted from these platforms to ensure a quality learning environment. Authors [21] noted that most of the students involved in their survey claimed that social media enhances knowledge-sharing among peers, friends and classmates. More so, these students further claimed that through social media, they could participate in project group discussions, contact their instructors and teachers and share notes, which would aid their academic development and easy completion of study projects without face-to-face interaction [21, 25].

Overall, the impact of social media on academic achievement depends on how individuals use and manage their social media usage. While it can offer benefits regarding communication and resource access, students must develop strategies for balancing social media use with their academic responsibilities and prioritise activities supporting their learning goals.

Impact of Social Media on the well-being of youth. The well-being of an individual is the quality of their life, which could be measured in terms of their happy and healthy state, both physically or mentally and the ability to manage stress. The growing concern about the impact of the increased usage of social media on the well-being of youth has been studied by psychologists, educators, and social scientists, who have been bearing in mind the increased usage of these platforms within the last two decades. The American

Psychological Association warned on the influence of social media in shaping the mental development and health of youth with factors such as the duration of time spent on these platforms, the content type that they are exposed to and the extent to which these platforms interfere with activities that are necessary for quality health such as sleep and physical activities [26].

In their study, the authors [7] noted the report of nineteen studies that showcase the relationship between social media use and depression. Authors [11] further stress that young adults who spend over 3 hours daily on social media have a double chance of developing poor mental health with symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Authors [22] controlled trial among youths is a pointer to the relationship that exists between increased social media usage and depression. In their study, social media was deactivated for four weeks to observe its impact on the well-being of the young adults and adults involved. The result of the survey indicates that well-being (i.e. life satisfaction, depression, happiness and anxiety) had improved at the end of the fourth week [22].

The poor well-being of youth associated with the continued use of social media could be caused by factors such as reduced self-esteem as a result of comparison with the achievement of others, cyberbullying that could translate into a state of inferiority and body shaming [7]. More so, the over-reliance on social media to form a social connection could limit face-to-face interaction and real-life social connections. This lack of meaningful interpersonal relationships can contribute to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression.

Social media can also pose the danger of addiction among youth in a bid to follow trends and exposure to content that encourages substance abuse, violence, conflicts, sex and other vices. Constant exposure to negative news and images can increase stress levels and contribute to feelings of anxiety and helplessness. Authors [27], in their study, also shared a similar viewpoint that youth are more likely to engage in the risky behaviour that they are exposed to on social media with huge content that relates to substance abuse, self-injury and suicide readily available online. Authors [28], in their study of 400 psychiatric patients, noted that a small proportion of youth who were hospitalised due to psychiatric challenges and to prevent self-harm to others claimed to have viewed online content promoting suicide or self–injury two weeks before their admission.

Sleep patterns and duration have been recognised to impact an individual's cognitive function and mental health. Author [29] showcased the relationship between screen time before bed and other outcomes such as poor sleep quality, day drowsiness, and shorter sleep duration. This is the reality of most youth and adolescents, as most check their phones at least once at night [30]. Therefore, inadequate sleep is sure to affect an individual's well-being, bearing in mind the meaning of well-being, which concerns the quality of life.

The prospect of social media. Although several negative consequences of social media have been observed, in most cases, the negative consequences of social media are associated with the duration of time expended on these platforms, several other benefits and potential still exist for the use of social media to improve educational outcome and further, improve the well-being of individuals.

Social media platforms provide access to vast educational content, including articles, videos, and tutorials. Students can follow educational pages, groups, and accounts relevant to their academic interests, enhancing their understanding of various subjects. One social media platform that has been observed to contain several tutorials that would enable learning and further improve blended education is YouTube. Authors [31] study conducted at the University of Sharjah, UAE, among Medical, Pharmacy and dental students buttresses their favourite social media platforms, Facebook and YouTube, as they would facilitate learning.

The formation of online communities can be vital in improving youth education, bearing in mind that some of these platforms enable the creation of online learning communities where students can connect with peers, share resources, ask questions, and collaborate on academic projects [32]. These communities foster a sense of belonging and support, which can enhance learning outcomes. Platforms like LinkedIn offer networking opportunities with professionals, experts, and alums in students' fields of interest. This is vital in answering students' curiosity by connecting them to other experts in their field of interest. Networking through social media can lead to internships, mentorship opportunities, and valua-

ble connections that support academic and career development [33].

Social media facilitates collaborative learning through group chats, discussion forums, and shared documents. Students can engage in group study sessions, exchange ideas, and work together on assignments, leading to deeper learning and improved academic performance. Social media platforms provide real-time updates and news on current events, developments in various fields, and educational conferences. Staying informed through social media can enrich students' understanding of their subjects and inspire them to explore new topics.

Social media allows students to communicate with their educators outside of traditional classroom settings. They can ask questions, seek clarification, and engage in discussions with professors and teaching assistants, leading to a deeper understanding of course materials. Social media platforms allow students to express their creativity, share their academic achievements, and showcase their projects to a broader audience. This can boost confidence, motivation, and pride in their academic work. Students can leverage social media to share educational resources, study tips, and exam preparation strategies with their peers. This collaborative resource-sharing can enhance learning efficiency and academic performance for all involved.

Social media platforms allow people to connect with friends, family, and communities, especially geographically distant ones. Maintaining social connections through social media can reduce loneliness and foster a sense of belonging and support [15]. Some studies have associated an improved sense of belonging with enhanced academic performance [34, 35].

Social media communities offer support networks for individuals facing challenges such as mental health issues, chronic illnesses, or personal crises. These communities provide a space for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and accessing resources that promote well-being. Social media platforms disseminate valuable information and resources related to health, well-being, and self-care. Users can access articles, videos, and information on mindfulness, stress management, and healthy lifestyle choices, empowering them to make informed decisions regarding their well-being.

While social media has the potential to enhance well-being, users need to be mindful of their usage patterns and prioritise activities that promote positive interactions, meaningful connections, and personal growth. Balancing social media use with offline activities, practising digital detoxes, and setting boundaries around screen time can help maintain a healthy relationship with social media while prioritising overall well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

The impact of social media on the education and well-being of youth can be seen from the perspective of a coin having two sides, with one side posing a negative impact on the educational development of youth due to the continued use of this platform. At the same time, it can also revolutionise how young people access information and educational content. Social media addiction can interfere with academic performance, attention span, sleep duration and patterns. Moreover, constant exposure to social media feeds and content can affect the quality of life of youths, hence contributing to feelings of anxiety, depression and inadequacy among young people, affecting their overall well-being.

Despite the dangers associated with the continued use of these platforms, when used in moderation, they can be a powerful tool for youth to improve their creativity and education with information available to them. Platforms like YouTube, LinkedIn, and educational blogs provide efficiently accessible resources for various subjects, making education more engaging and interactive. Social media also facilitates collaboration among students and educators, fostering a sense of community and enabling peer-to-peer learning.

It is pertinent that a proper balance be staked on the use of social media, hence taking advantage of the educational benefits available within these platforms and mitigating the negative impact of the continued use of these platforms. The success of using social media to facilitate the academic improvement of youth would require the efforts of parents, youth, policymakers, and educators to step up to ensure the healthy use of these platforms.

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