

## Ambivalent Roles of Social Media on Young Adults' Mental Health

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Social media platforms were created with the aim of enhancing social connections and interactions, both of which supposedly have potential to improve psychological well-being and happiness. Nevertheless, many research studies suggest that social media may have negative effects on mental health, particularly on adolescents and young adults (Fumagalli et al., 2024), prompting US Surgeon General's calls for greater scrutiny of social media platforms (Murthy, 2024). Extant research suggests social media use negatively impacts mental health through physical, social and psychological symptoms such as displacement of time, addiction, sedentary lifestyle, sleeping disorder, anxiety, unrealistic expectation, eating disorder, depression, stress, displacement of social relationships, social comparison, fear of missing out (Bissell & Chou, 2024; Czeisler, 2013; Kraut et al., 1998).

There is a lot of research evidence to associate excessive social media use with negative psychological well-being. For example, social media use can cause various psychological disorders, such as depression, anxiety, insomnia and depression (Czeisler, 2013; Malaeb et al., 2021). Some studies suggest that social media often triggers fear of missing out because digital platforms provide easy access to an abundance of fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) inducing content, such as vivid reports of other people's "successes, beautiful families, and exciting vacations" (Chan et al., 2022). In addition, some studies suggest that social media can lead to body dysmorphia and eating disorders, as people do excessive social comparison that gives rise to appearance anxiety, especially among women as they are more susceptible to developing eating disorders (Bissell and Chou, 2023).

We conducted this research using a mixed method approach. There are two stages in this research. Stage 1 consists of an online survey and a qualitative interview. The informants answered an online survey about their experiences with social media and its relations to psychological well-being, which includes questions about social media usage, mental well-being, subjective well-being, fear of missing out, anxiety, demographics, and so on. Then, the informants were interviewed to probe their thoughts about their social media use using an interview guide. The interviews varied in length, from 20-60 minutes. In addition, informants' cell phone's screen time and demographic information was also collected. Stage 2 consists of a detox intervention, such that the research participants are to refrain from using social media for 48 hours. Upon the completion of the detox, the participants would answer another online survey to gauge any changes in their psychological well-being.

Stage 1. 29 interviews have been conducted, 17 females and 12 males. Informants' age range is from 18 to 25 years old. The complete recordings of the informants' responses to the interview questions were transcribed into text for analysis. Although all Stage 1 informants were invited to participate in "detox," only 9 were successful in refraining from using social media for 48 hours. Booster samples were collected, and the resultant sample size for Stage 2 is 28.

We examine the experiences and thoughts about social media from a variety of perspectives in Stage 1. We found out the notion of "boredom" has been repeatedly mentioned and articulated by the informants. In addition, we also found out that there are discrepancies between informants' perceived and actual social media usage. Finally, informants mentioned various types of social media content that could cause negative emotions and the coping practices that might alleviate the perceived negative influences from social media. Stage 2 findings suggest that social media detox, albeit a short one, has a statistically significant positive effect on subjective well-being and sleep quality and reduce tendency of social comparison.

This study offers insights about the relationships between social media usage and psychological well-being among young adults. Excessive social media usage often arises due to perceived boredom, and likely lead to negative emotions, including negative social comparisons and increased anxiety. Future research should explore effective coping mechanisms that can mitigate the negative impacts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper understanding into the long-term effects of social

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media usage on mental health. Understanding the dynamics of usage and interventions will not only help in developing ethical marketing strategies for organizations, but also inform public policy to regulate social media use more effectively.

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