**Final Paper**

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**Introduction**

The Global Pandemic in 2020 affected the entire world and how we function on a day-to-day basis. We shifted from spending a majority of our time utilizing social interactions to complete isolation. Gen Z knew a life before and after the production of social media and have witnessed first-hand the effects it can have on personal relationships, interactions and communications, and our mental health. We learned to adapt to this new environment and maintain friendships with no physical contact. Communication changed completely between peers and technology gained a whole new meaning. Conversations in-person now contain subjects about things people shared online and no longer contain updates on someone's life previous to the interaction.

Four years after the pandemic, the use of social media is continuously growing and has become a part of everyday conversations. Whether it is showcasing a funny video, dissociation in conversations because someone is online, or simply sitting in the presence of others while mindlessly scrolling through feeds, our society is distancing itself from personalized interactions and conversations. Before technology, communication required your full attention and allowed people to connect through body language and be physically responsive to one another. With the many platforms available to the public, we can share videos, pictures, or ideas with friends, family, or even the entire world. These platforms give us the chance to be in constant contact with others, regardless of the distance between. As technology continues to advance, it is important to consider the effects excessive amounts of time spent online could have on mental health, connections with others, and the value of personal interaction.

**Review of Literature**

The idea of social media consumption taking up most of the public’s day-to-day life can offer many risks. It “can exasperate individuals' lives,” and waste time that could be spent on productive tasks, according to Akram (Akram, 2018, section VII). The use of social media also allows individuals to moderate what is shared about them or others. It is easy to destroy an enemy's image by a simple post of a situation out of context (Akram, 2018, section VII). Social media also has led people to believe in “superficial friendships,” that can later on affect someone’s mentality(Amedie, 2015, pg 4). Certain people create false realities online which allows others to think they live the ‘perfect’ life, this can lead to self-esteem issues and fixations that can alter concentration (Akram, 2018, section VII).

In today's society, we find more comfort through our phones than face-to-face interactions. As Amedie states through his research, it is “turning us into one of the most antisocial generations, yet,” (Amedie, 2015, pg 4). We eliminate any human interaction and replace it with some sort of online communication (Amedie, 2015, pg 4). At times it can seem exhausting to stay in the present and give people your full undivided attention, but to make this into our everyday reality leads us further away from personal connections (Amedie, 2015, pg 4). The overconsumption of social media has been known to result in depression and anxiety according to a study by psychologist Dr. Mark Becker, (Amedie, 2015, pg 4-5). Being able to filter your reality for others' consumption causes unneeded stress which can lead to depression anxiety (Amedie, 2015, pg 5).

Throughout a normal college students’ day, we spend an average of 4 hours on our phones using some sort of social media (Drago, 2015, section IV). We find comfort in carrying the device with us at all times and using it as a distraction for uncomfortable situations (Drago, 2015, section IV). A typical interaction between students in 2024 consists of some sort of technology 60% of the time (Drago, 2015, section IV). Outlets like social media allow people to disconnect with all reality and play pretend in the virtual world (Lengacher, 2023, para 2). It can affect “positive extraversion and empathetic social skills” (Lengacher, 2023, para 5). In everyday conversations, the use of social media can disrupt nonverbal and environmental cues which causes certain individuals to feel like they are bothering others (Lengacher, 2023, para 5).

Another issue that interpersonal communication faces due to the extensive use of social media is developmental issues. Having focused, superior in-person interactions affect people's minds in a good way according to a study done by Lamash (Lamash, 2023, para 1). It allows developing brains to gain awareness about social ques and the dynamics of interpersonal communication (Lamash, 2023). With adapting to new environments involving the excessive use of technology throughout conversations, this has affected peoples’ egos and mental health (Lamash, 2023).

Online presence might allow temporary comfort for some, but it also poses the idea of sociability impairment because of false ideologies that deep connections can carry from online to offline interactions (Marinucci, 2022). Social media leads to isolation and loneliness, affecting the mentality of our youth (Marinucci, 2022). During the pandemic, social media helped us prolong friendships and connections protecting our mental health (Marinucci, 2022). Now that we have veered away from strict isolation, social media interactions continue to grow and interpersonal connections are faltering (Marinucci, 2022).

The issue of mental health arising in today's youth typically starts with first-year students at college (Stebleton, 2022). They undergo a culture shock when gaining a new sense of freedom as well as responsibilities. When attending college, people try to build meaningful relationships via social media, creating a false sense of friendship that has no actual social interaction (Stebleton, 2022). This creates issues because when these people are to meet in person, they might seem different than online. The barrier of social media allows people to filter what is said and takes away all emotion because it is just texts (Stebleton, 2022). This can cause new friendships to falter and end in isolation.

One study created by Valkenburg, poses the threat to people's ill-being, as well as their life satisfaction and happiness (Valkenburg, 2021). In this study he found it is not a definite correlation and differs from audience to audience. It depends on a person's specific usage of social media how their mental health will be affected (Valkenburg, 2021).

**Research Question**

The research question I chose for my qualitative study questions how social interactions and conversations that happen in person are affected by social media. The question is;“How does the use of social media affect the face-to-face communication of college students?” This study will help us better understand the ripple effect technology has on our personal lives, not just our presence online.

The questions contained in the survey are written below.

1. What is your age?
2. What is the gender you identify with?
3. What is your Race?
4. Where do you live, regionally/state?
5. What is your college year?
6. What are the social media outlets you use the most?
7. How much time do you spend on social media a day?
8. How do you use social media to communicate with others?
9. Do you prefer social media communication over phone calls?
10. How often do you call other individuals?
11. How often do you text other individuals?
12. When in conversations, do you use/bring up social media-related topics?
13. Do you ever sit on social media while friends are present?
14. Do you use social media when spending time with family?
15. Do you use social media to keep up-to-date with others?
16. Have you ever dissociated from your in-person conversations while using social media?
17. What do you believe is an appropriate amount of time to spend online for adolescents (10-18)?
18. How does social media affect the conversations you have?
19. Do you ever feel as if people are not listening to you because they are on their phones?
20. Do you check your phone when talking to others in-person?

**Methodology**

The qualitative study done during my research studies the influence social media has on face-to-face communication amongst college students. Twenty-five students participated in an anonymous online survey distributed through a social media platform. The survey, which was created on Google Forms, collected data on the measurements of social media use, as well as its effects on interpersonal communication.

Along with the online survey, three people were interviewed to give a deeper explanation of their personal experiences with the prompt. Both the survey and the interview explored the participants’ perceptions and behaviors regarding social media usage and personal experiences with face-to-face conversations.The data from both questionnaires were analyzed for recurring themes or feelings from participants.

**Results**

The following section presents the findings of a study exploring how social media impacts face-to-face communication amongst college students. The research question guiding this inquiry was :“How does social media affect the face-to-face interactions of college students?” Through surveys and interviews, this study aimed to understand the role social media plays in shaping interpersonal dynamics amongst young adults.

Participants primarily favor Snapchat and Instagram, occasionally utilizing other outlets like Facebook, Tik Tok, and Pinterest. The time spent on social media varies widely, ranging from 2 hours a day to 9 hours. All participants indicated using social media to connect with others through sending pictures, chats, and staying in touch through post interactions.

There was a diverse range of preferences regarding communication methods, deciding between phone calls and social media chats. Majority of the respondents stated they used social media-related topics in everyday in-person conversations. It was also stated that is gives the individuals “something to talk about” and “sometimes it can feel awkward” when they communicate in person because they are used to texting.

When asked if they use social media when conversing with friends and family, the majority of participants admitted to checking their phones regardless of their social setting. The respondents also stated they use social media to keep-in-touch and up-to-date with friends and family via different outlets.

Participants expressed how social media affects their conversations concerning dissociation during interpersonal communication, as well as how texting norms influence the flow and effectiveness of communication. Every person felt ignored or overlooked when conversing with other individuals using their phones in a social setting.

From this survey we gather the importance of social media in college kids' everyday lives. They use social media in a variety of ways, such as keeping up with friends and family, sharing content with others, or sending texts via these outlets. We can also see the in-person effects of them checking their phones when in the presence of family and friends, or detaching from real-life situations because they are zoned into their device. It has caused some to feel ignored or overlooked, and sometimes like there is no effectiveness or focus when speaking to others. In conclusion, we have learned there is a trend with social media consumption in college students that causes a pattern to build between emotions and actions.

**Discussion**

Through the results of this survey, it is evident the impacts social media has on college students' mental health. By stating their concerns about the effectiveness and focus of conversations, we can gather that there is no deep focus in interpersonal communication. They often feel ignored because they all have been able to dissociate from conversations themselves, which creates insecurities for each individual.

Based on previous surveys and research, it has become a chore for college students to live in the present and give someone our undivided attention. There is no emotional connection unless it is a drastic need from someone, and even then there is no promise they will not pick up their phones during the conversations. From this study, we can gain awareness of our own actions and how we use social media. The respondents stated they use social media as a tool to stay in-contact with family and friends, but when faced with these individuals in-person, they are busysing themselves with other relations via social media outlets.

While the sample size was limited to 23 people, there was a variety of male and female participants located in Alabama or Georgia. In previous studies, researchers have gathered the notion that excessive amounts of time spent online for college students can take a drastic toll on the mental health and motivation of students. The confidence of students in social settings suffers due to the comfort their online presence gives them. It gives these individuals a false sense of security in their online identity, and most cannot carry these traits in their real-life interactions.

**Conclusion**

Through my research, I have found some studies show direct correlation of mental health issues and isolation due to social media use. The amount of type spent online and away from others is a very important factor when analyzing mental effects and communication effects. Depending on the situation, conversations lack interest and personalization. The use of technology when consulting others can make people feel unheard or like they might be pestering the person listening. College students use social media on a day-to-day basis, which typically become a part of most conversations.

Through my own studies, I have discovered a trend in college age students who seem to think social media has no effect on their relationships and conversations with their peers. At the same time, each of the people observed admitted to feeling some sort of insecurity when having conversations with people who are multitasking by engaging in a conversation in-person while using their phones. Every person seemed oblivious while answering these questions honestly about how they feel and what they discover. They say they feel ignored and overlooked, but also say excessive social media use hotels has no regard in their personal lives.

In conclusion, I believe my study helps show the depth of the effects of social media communication on mental health and social interactions. It shows how attached this generation of college students are to their phones and how it has become an important part of their day-to-day lives. It no longer is an outlet used during freetime, social media is used to carry conversations, distract people from reality, and to relate to individuals when things might feel uncomfortable or awkward.Since social media gained popularity and the pandemic restricted people from coming in-contact with others, we no longer have the attention spans to conversate with others for hours with no interruptions.

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