

The Impact of Social Media on Students' Self-Esteem: Findings From A University In Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The explored the impact of social media on university students' self-esteem. The research was limited to 120 Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) students who were surveyed, and a self-administered structured questionnaire was used. The students were selected from the Faculty of Social Sciences in the Department of Psychology. Stratified random sampling which is a probability sampling technique was used to select the participants. The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. Spearman correlation test and the Chi Square test were used. Findings indicate that there is a negative relationship between social media usage and self-esteem, self-confidence, and feelings of competence. The study indicate that the more frequent the students visit social media sites the lower their self-esteem, self-confidence and feelings of competence tend to be. However, students who spend an average of 3 hours per day on social media recorded high levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and feelings of competence. This led to the conclusion that social media is a double-edged sword whose impact can be either negative or positive depending on time spent on it. This study recommends that universities conduct awareness campaigns aimed at exposing the negative psychological effects of excessive use of social media with a view to reduce curb same. Furthermore future studies may need to focus on the causal relationship that exists between each social media site and various psychological conditions as little research has been done in that regard despite the unprecedented concurrent surge in psychological disorders and social media usage among the 21st century's young adults.

Key Words: Social media, Self-esteem, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram

I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to find out the impact of social media usage on university students' self-esteem following the discovery that the 21st century is overwhelmed by widespread use of internet and social media sites, mostly by young people particularly university students.

The 21st century has witnessed a vast emergence, growth and widespread use of social media globally - a development which has negatively impacted on users' mental health, notably by lowering their self-esteem and increasing anxiety owing to social comparisons. Social media which can be defined as computer-mediated technology that allows one to create and share information and other forms of expression through virtual communities, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram has become the most common global

platform for communication. These social media platforms have overtaken and superimposed traditional modes of communication and mass media platforms such as telephones, radios and televisions.

Noteworthy is that, mostly teenagers and young adults are the most active users of these social media sites. Smith (2013) found that 84% of 18-29 year olds are on Facebook, more than any other age group. While these social media sites are beneficial to many, some individuals spend too much time on them which negatively impacts on their mental health particularly self-esteem.

Social media has become the researchers' concern following its unprecedented growth in recent years which comes at a time the youth are recording a multitude of psychological challenges. According to Kemp (2018) by January 2017 about 42% of the world's total population was active on social media and since then the global annual digital growth has been above 13%. In 2018, 3.196 billion people out of the world's then estimated population 7.593 billion were active monthly social media users (Kemp, 2018). Given such growth in social media use particularly among the youth, it becomes incumbent upon researchers to establish the relationship between social media and mental health challenges such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression which are on the rise bedevilling the 21st century young adults.

According to Pew Research Centre (2015) 64% of the American total population is on social media with most of those being on Facebook and Instagram. In 2015 Facebook had 936 million active daily users and 1.871 billion active monthly users (Facebook, 2018). In the last quarter of 2020 Facebook recorded an estimated 1.85 billion daily active users and 2.8 billion monthly active users Facebook (2020).

Instagram which is one of the most widely used social media sites had more than 500 million regular active users (Instagram, 2018). According to Chen&Lee (2013) social media promotes social comparisons which intern increase individuals' distress and lower their self-esteem.

According to Jan, Soomro, & Ahmad (2017), a research conducted in Pakistan revealed that there is a strong relationship between social media and self-esteem. Ibid assert that increase in social media usage decreases individuals' self-esteem. Some studies assert that social media boosts

individuals sense of identity and confidence thereby increasing their levels of self-esteem (Nyagah, Stephen and Muema, 2015)

According to Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, Martin (2017) extensive use of social media, has been associated with increased risk of psychological disorders such as low self-esteem, depression and anxiety among young adults. Self-esteem is defined as the positive or negative evaluation of the self (Weiten, 2004). Young adults who spend 5 or more hours a day online were 71% more prone to having low self-esteem and suicidal ideation compared to their counterparts who spent only 1 hour a day online (Twenge et al, 2017). The world over numerous studies discovered that the greater the time spent on social media, the higher the chances of depression and anxiety and several other psychological disorders (Fardouly, Willburger, & Vartanian, 2017). Research shows that increased frequency on social media breeds unpleasant online experiences, reduces in-person social interactions, and lowers one's ability to pay attention (Fardouly et al, 2017).

Too much exposure to living styles of other people as shared on social media platforms has a propensity to elicit social comparison tendencies thereby subsequently impacting on one's self-esteem. Various scholars who studied the nexus between social media and self-esteem came up with contradicting findings. A number of researchers found out that most people with low self-esteem spend more time on social media sites (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013). However some scholars described such individuals as having challenges in their social relations. According to Bargh & McKenna (2004), these scholars use the theory of social compensation to maintain that individuals suffering from social anxiety and decreased self-esteem are more inclined to visiting and using social media as compensation for their poor real life confrontational interactions

Studies conducted in Kenya have found that frequent Facebook users particularly those of African descent view other face book users as more successful and happier than themselves (Chou & Edge, 2012). This is because they compare their realistic offline selves to idealised online selves of others, which is detrimental to well-being and self-evaluation and lead to low self-esteem levels (Chou & Edge, 2012).

Social media platforms have been fingered in facilitating adolescents' pursuit of sexual relationships (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 2008). A 2011 UNICEF study conducted with social media users across South Africa found that dating and sexual intimacy were the most commonly trending topics of conversation among the 15–24-year-olds. Beger, Kounkou Hoveyda & Sinha (2011) notes that young adults who get fewer love or intimacy comments or messages on social media often feel rejected and count themselves unworthy and subsequently register low levels of self-esteem.

A study carried out in South Africa by Hene (2015) reveals that the need for relevance is one other key driver for social media use, thus young adults seek perfection and validation which if they fail to get, their self-esteem and confidence is negatively impacted. Some authors posit that, by promoting upward social comparison, social media has a positive effect as it motivate young adults to improve their lives. Zuo (2014) found that social media users are often exposed to details about their peers' lives. Same furthers that this exposure to other people's social activities can cause social media users to compare their own social lives with that of their peers, which may have negative effects (Zuo, 2014). However, according to Zuo, (2014) the relationship between self-esteem and social comparison is complex as there is no clear distinction on whether self-esteem is a predictor or an outcome.

Social media portrays a distorted picture of success and attractiveness which causes many users to upwardly compare themselves with others and subsequently feel dissatisfied with their own lives often because social media standards are seemingly unattainable (Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011). Studies on the psychological effects of frequent social media usage have found that users who use social media more frequently and for longer periods are prone to thinking that others were happier and lived better lives than them, thereby feeling more dissatisfied with their own lives. (Chen & Lee, 2013)

In Zimbabwe there is a notable paucity of published studies on the relationship between social media and mental health particularly self-esteem, a situation which has since become the impetus of this study.

Objectives

- To compare the self-confidence of more frequent and less frequent users of social media.
- To compare the feeling of competence of more frequent and less frequent users of social media.
- To explore the relationship between time spent on social media and self-esteem
- Find out what strategies can overcome the negative psychological impact of social media on self-esteem.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study took a quantitative approach. This approach has been chosen to minimise the requirement to directly observe each participant particularly taking cognisance of the novel COVID-19 pandemic which impedes face to face interaction during the time of the research. The researcher had to send questionnaires online and get responses without engaging in face to face meetings with participants.

Research design

The study used a Correlational Research design to determine whether there exists any relationship between time spent using social media and self-esteem. This type of design serves to

evaluate whether an increase in social media use correlates positively with an increase in low self-esteem.

Population and Sampling procedure.

The population was drawn from Great Zimbabwe University Psychology undergraduate level two (2) male and female students. Participants were drawn from level 2 semester 1 and 2 students from the GZU Department of Psychology totalling 162.

The researcher used the online Raosoft sample size calculator to come up with a sample size of at least 110 testing the hypothesis at 95% confidence level, accepting a 5% margin of error where 162 was the total target population.

The researcher designed and used self-administered Social Media Use structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to measure the average number of hours participants spend on social media platforms on a given day. In order to measure the dependent variable which in this case is ‘self-esteem’ the researcher adapted Rosenberg (1965) Self-esteem Scale and Heatherton & Polivy (1991) State Self-esteem scale. Items were answered on a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The data on level of satisfaction was measured on a Likert scale of 1-4 so that it could be easily quantified. That data was computed and analysed using SPSS. WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram are being defined as social media.

Characteristics of participants

A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed electronically and 102 (85%) questionnaires were completed and returned. The high response rate could be attributed to the confidentiality and anonymity which were guaranteed on the questionnaire. More females than males participated. 50.98% of the sampled GZU respondents were females while 40.02% were males.

III. FINDINGS

Social media usage

The time spend on social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram was examined. Table 1 illustrates the use of social media statistics by GZU students.

Table 1. Social media usage

		Facebook (%)	WhatsApp (%)	Instagram (%)
Valid	< hour	34.3	28.4	51.0
	1-3 hours	44.1	45.1	36.3
	3-6 hours	16.7	17.6	12.7
	> 6 hours	4.9	8.8	0.00
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4.2 results indicate that the majority 44.1% and 34.3% spend about 1-3 hours and less than one hour on Facebook, respectively. About 45.1% and 28.4% of the students spent 1-3 hour and less than an hour on WhatsApp, respectively. As

for Instagram, 51% and 36.3% of the students spend less than an hour and 1-3 hours on Instagram, respectively. However, no student spent more than 6 hours on Instagram unlike they do on WhatsApp and Facebook. Generally, GZU students spend more time on Facebook and WhatsApp than on Instagram according to the displayed results.

Self-confidence and self-competence

The first objective sought to compare the self-confidence of more frequent and less frequent users of social media. The second objective sought to compare the feeling of competence of more frequent and less frequent users of social media. Several items were raised and the items were measured on a four-pointer Likert scale rated as Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1) was used. A high mean score (M) indicates a high self-confidence and self-competence while a small standard deviation (SD) value indicate low variability in how the students responded. The results on the frequencies of the responses are in Table 2.

Table 2. Self-esteem

Items	M	SD	Percentages (%)			
			SA	A	D	SDA
Satisfied with myself	1.45	.816	1.0	2.9	30.4	65.7
Inadequate	3.63	.757	71.6	15.7	8.8	3.9
Good	3.41	.948	3.9	4.9	15.7	75.5
Able to perform tasks as well as other people do	2.22	.591	7.8	8.8	17.6	65.7
I do not have much to be proud of	1.71	.897	4.9	72.5	18.6	3.9
Useless at times.	3.16	.625	57.8	14.7	26.5	1.0
Worthy, on an equal plane with others	1.90	.668	1.0	9.8	61.8	27.5
Like a failure compared to others	3.48	.853	24.5	63.7	8.8	2.9
I have a positive attitude toward myself.	1.47	.853	2.9	14.7	13.7	68.6
Satisfied when my posts get more likes and shares	3.61	.600	71.6	14.7	8.8	4.9
Overall score	2.6	0.761				

It can be seen from Table 2 that the overall score of the Mean is 2.60 which is associated with a standard deviation of 0.761. The overall mean score is slightly low indicating relatively low self-self-confidence and the standard deviation value is small suggesting that there was low variability in how the students responded. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents are in agreement with the items which are strongly linked to low self-confidence. The students indicated that, when they spent more time on social media they feel inadequate, dissatisfied with themselves and do not feel good, do not have much to be proud of, useless at times and that they feel like they are a failure compared to others. More-so, majority reported that they feel like they cannot perform tasks as well as other people do and that they did not have a positive

attitude toward themselves- all of which points to low self-confidence and low feeling of competence. However, majority are satisfied when their posts get more likes and shares and vice-versa. Figure 1 presents the responses.

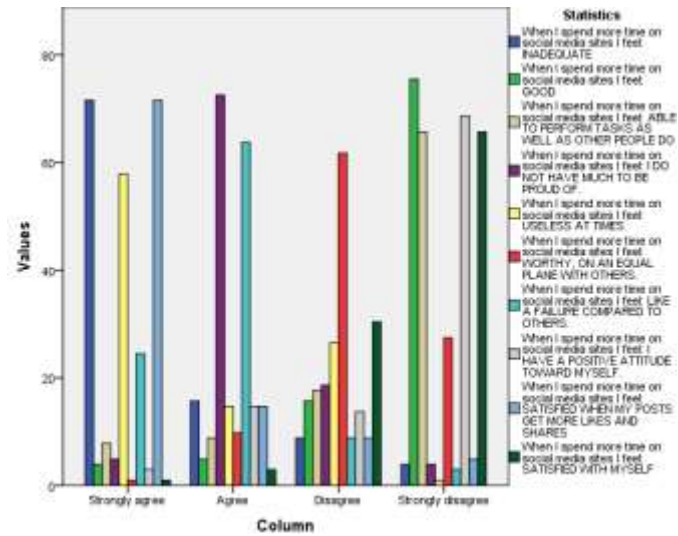


Figure 1. Summary percentages of self-esteem responses

Relationship between time spent on social media and self-esteem

The third objective sought to examine the relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem. A bivariate analysis in the form of Spearman correlation coefficient was done to examine the relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem. The Spearman correlation coefficient was tested under the following hypothesis.

H₀: There is no negative statistically significant relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem.

Versus

H₁: There is a negative statistically significant relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem.

The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem.

		Esteem	Time-spent
Spearman's rho	Esteem	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
		N	102
	Time-spent	Correlation Coefficient	-.677**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
		N	102

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the findings, there is a strong negative correlation between the time spent on social media and self-esteem as indicated by the correlation coefficient value of -0.677. The relationship is statistically significant at 1% because of the probability value of 0.005 which is less than the threshold value of 0.01. The results suggest the rejection of the null hypothesis; hence it can be concluded that there is a negative statistically significant relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem. Thus, the more time students spent on social media the more their self-esteem is lowered.

IV. DISCUSSION

Social media turned the world into one global village by promoting virtual interactions. What is worrisome, however, is the rise in cases of psychological disorders, particularly among young adults who are the most active social media users. It is that worrisome trend that inspired this research.

The extent to which students feel when they are on social media or soon after visiting social media sites was examined with a view to compare the effect of spending more time on social media. Responding to items that measure self-confidence and feelings of competence majority of the respondents were in agreement with the items which are strongly linked to low self-esteem. 71.6% of students of students strongly agreed that they feel inadequate when they spent more than 3 hours on social media while only 3.9 % strongly disagreed. 65.7% strongly disagreed that they feel satisfied with themselves when they spent more time on social media while only 1% strongly agreed that they feel satisfied.

Generally over 65% of respondents strongly agreed that they do not have much to be proud of, feel useless at times and that they feel like they are a failure compared to others when they spend more time on social media. 75.5% of the students strongly disagreed while only 3.9% strongly agreed with the item which said 'I feel good' when I spent more time on social media. Thus the more time students spend on social media the less good they feel. Overall 68.6 strongly disagreed with the item that they had a positive attitude when they spend more time on social media while only 2.9% strongly agreed with the same item.

In addition, 65.7% reported that they feel like they cannot perform tasks as well as other people while only 7.8% strongly agreed with the same item- responses which points to a low feeling of competence. All the above responses points to low self-esteem hence the deduction that there is a strong negative nexus between social media and self-esteem.

On the other hand 71.6% of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied when their posts get more likes and shares while only 4.9% strongly disagreed with that item. This means that 71.6% get worried when they get few likes and shares - a condition that breeds low self-confidence and low feeling of self-competence. Given that people do not always get as many positive comments, likes and shares as they wish, they tend to blame or condemn themselves and resultantly record low self-confidence and feelings of self-competence. It is in that

process of upward comparison that students become anxious and worried that they are not getting as many comments and shares as they desire hence low self-esteem.

Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles (2014) observed that upward comparisons arouse a sense of inferiority and cause people to negatively evaluate themselves leading to low self-esteem. Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong (2008) intimates that some people use posts and social media profiles to analyse and compare themselves with others hence they become anxious when they perceive others as more privileged than themselves. This makes one feel less privileged and unworthy, reactions which breeds low self-esteem (Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014).

The third objective sought to examine the relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem. The time spent by students on Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram was examined. A bivariate analysis in the form of Spearman correlation coefficient was done to examine the relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem. Findings indicate that there is a strong negative correlation between the time spent on social media and self-esteem as indicated by the correlation coefficient value of -0.677. The relationship is statistically significant at 1% because of the probability value of 0.005 which is less than the threshold value of 0.01. The results suggest the rejection of the null hypothesis; hence the conclusion that there is a negative statistically significant relationship between the time spent on social media and self-esteem. Most students who spend more than 3 hours on social media recorded lower self-esteem, hence there is a negative correlation between time spent on Social media and self-esteem.

These results corroborate Chaffey's (2017) findings that excessive usage of social media results in Psychological health hazards such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. These findings are also in tandem with those of Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, (2016) that young people are at risk of adverse effects of social media and are likely to develop mental disorders due to their limited capacity for self-regulation and their vulnerability to peer pressure. According to O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) many youth suffer from low self-esteem and Facebook depression, owing to excessive use of Facebook and other social media platforms.

V. CONCLUSION

The researcher has concluded that social media is a double edged sword whose impact can be either negative or positive depending with time spent on it. While it is undisputable that social media has a plethora of benefits such as promoting timely information communication and building and maintenance of handy friendships, relationships and connections, it should be noted that it also wields the power to ruin the users self-esteem if excessively visited or used. Spending too much time on social media destroys face to face interactions and promotes upward social comparison and make excessive users feel that they are worse than their counterparts thereby developing psychological conditions

such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression among many others. Spending too much time on social media also promote unhealthy sleeping patterns leading to subsequent insomnia and poor academic performance.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Research and awareness campaigns on the negative psychological effects of excessive use of social media can be conducted to reduce the aforementioned negative effects.
- Model figures such as lecturers, teachers, parents and guardians should monitor social media usage by children under their custody.
- Social media users should undergo regular mental health assessment to determine the impact of social media on them and get early intervention.
- Educating students on ways that boost one's self-esteem such as avoiding unproductive and anxiety provoking social media personalities such as bullies and sly queens.

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