

Social Media Influence on College Students' Education

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Abstract

The research looked at the connection between college students' time on social media, and whether or not the usage impacts their educational goals. Data was collected using a 10-question survey that was administered online. It asked questions pertaining to their social media use, including the number of hours they spent on social media, what social media platforms they used, and what activities they looked to do on these platforms. The survey was done anonymously to attempt to get the most accurate answers. In the report, the survey takers are referred to as "respondents," and the survey itself is referred to as "the survey." Other resources for research included multiple peer reviewed reports and scientific surveys. These reports were obtained using databases provided by Arizona State University. The conclusion of the research is inconclusive, as there are several advantages and disadvantages to students in regard to social media. The survey of college students provided no definitive answer to the question researched.

Keywords: social media, college students, usage

Social media has become an integral part of American society. Whether it's posting on Facebook about your day or snapping your "outfit of the day" selfie for Instagram, people are more time online than ever before. There is one demographic that seems to lead the way in the social media revolution: college students. Data suggests 94% of college students have an account (Bnguyen270, 2013). And while students spend more and more time online posting and sharing, it brings up one important topic of discussion. Is social media serving as a helpful collaborative tool, or a way to distract college students from their educational goals?

Dictionary.com defines social media as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content" The term "social media," however, has been endlessly shifting in definition, as new technologies change the way we communicate online. For example, the last fifteen years have seen Friendster lose to Myspace, and then see Myspace be supplanted by online juggernaut Facebook.

Encyclopedia.com states that "Facebook seeks to emulate real-life connections by structuring networks around schools, corporations, and geographic regions (Thomson, 2017)." After shedding its roots as a platform for Harvard students, Facebook today boasts over one billion users, and over half of those users are active daily. College students weren't alienated to Facebook either after the change, with a survey of college students finding that over 93% of respondents have a Facebook account.

College students aren't just spending time on Facebook either. A survey of college students was conducted, and it found that every respondent has at least one social media account, with most having more than one. Some of the popular platforms are Instagram and Snapchat (100% of respondents said they have an account), Facebook (93.33%), and Twitter (86.67%).

With all these platform options, those students surveyed are spending a good amount of time tending to their online presence per day. Forty percent of students said they spent two to three hours on social media platforms per day, and other forty percent said they spent four to five hours. Six percent declared to five or six hours on social media, and thirteen percent divulged that they spent over six hours per day.

With all this time spent online, its reason to question the time management of college students, and whether or not they are letting their online presence interfere with their educational goals. The survey posed that question, asking "Do you think social media impacts your educational goals?" Of those surveyed, sixty six percent admitted that social media did impact their goals. Some claimed a positive impact, saying "I am a journalism student, so social media is a powerful tool in my field of interest." Others admitted it was more a distraction than an educational aid, saying "I could study a bit more instead of being on Twitter."

Research has been done in this area and it has returned mixed results. There is no clear link between social media use and GPA, nor is there online culprits that are singled out for struggling students. However, there has been claims made to both the benefit and harm that social media has on college students, with some common themes among the approvers and dissenters of social media use on college campuses.

There have been benefits from the social media revolution, and college students have been among its biggest beneficiaries, both educationally and socially. The idea of an open marketplace online for ideas has greatly increased the access to the global perspective on a wide range of topics. According to L. Al-Sharqi, K. Hashim, and I. Kutbi, researchers for the Center for Strategic Studies at King Abdulaziz University, "include ability to learn about people's different thinking styles, connect to others and communities, [and] improve open-mindedness

(Al-Sharqi, K. Hashim, and I. Kutbi, 2015).” Students have taken advantage of this opportunity, as Al-Sharqi, et al. found that over sixty percent of students said they use social media for learning. With the rise of social media, there has also been an unprecedented access to collaboration between students of different backgrounds. As Ferris writes in his 2012 book *Teaching, Learning, and the Net Generation: Concepts and Tools for Reaching Digital Learners*, “Social Media offers a means of engaging digital learners in critical thinking and collaborative learning (Ferris 2012).” This benefit has been clearest through the instant access to information and collaboration tools available through websites like Google. In fact, “Google has helped over 20 million students in their education using their tools (Raut & Patil, 2016).” These tools include things like Gmail, which allows for people to communicate almost instantly, no matter the place, and Google Docs, which allows for online collaboration of reports and presentations, without ever having to meet in person. There have also been social benefits to social media use. Students can now communicate with friends and family, wherever their educational journeys lead them. Multiple survey recipients acknowledged their use of social media as a tool to stay up to date with their friends and family. They responded to the question “What do you look to do on [social media]?” by saying things like “connect with friends,” “connect with friends and family,” and “see what my friends... are doing.” Research and surveys have seen that social media has had a positive impact on the student experience.

However, there is still some concerns over the use of social media in the college campus setting. The “common concerns include physical inactivity, exposure to negative ideas and bad company, unproductivity and distraction, introversion and mental dullness (Al-Sharqi, et al, 2015).” There is data to back up that mental dullness has occurred among students. The Raut & Patil report found that, “Our ability to retain information has decreased, and the willingness to

spend more time researching and looking up good information has reduced, due the fact that we got used to the ease of accessibility to information on social media. (Raut & Patil, 2016).”

Another concern regarding social media use is the ability for students to communicate effectively in a business or professional manner. Waite & Wheeler write in their book *Understanding and Using Social Media on College Campuses: A Practical Guide for Higher Education*

Professionals that “Incorporating social media into the faculty student communication dynamic can blur formal and informal communications on campus (Waite & Wheeler, 2016).” With how informal communications are on social media, students may be unable to recognize situations where a professional tone and manner is required, especially with school staff, faculty, and professors. There is a problem with social media greater than communication or mental dullness.

It was an issue that was brought up both in research and in the survey responses from college students: Addiction.

Addiction is a growing problem among college students' use of social media and the internet. Students are spending more and more time online checking Facebook and Twitter and are sending an increasing number of snaps to their friends every day. Raul & Patil claim, “This addiction could negatively affect other valued activities like concentrating on studies, taking active part in sports, real life communication and ignoring ground realities. (Raul & Patil, 2016).” There is evidence of social media habits interfering with study time. In a video titled “How Social Networking Websites Affect College Students' Study Habits.mp4” by YouTube user JohnDiaz14, he asked questions of students leaving the library. He asked them how much time they spent studying, and how much of that time they spent on social media. All of the students admitted to being on social media for at least part of the time, with one student claiming to be on social media for half the time (JohnDiaz14, 2009). There is also data and research to

suggest that poor time management is hurting the scholastic progress and achievement of students. "In terms of academic achievement, several studies cite a detrimental relationship between time management and scholastic progress (Issa, Isaias & Kommers, 2015)," states the book *Social Networking and Education: Global Perspectives*. Students, however, aren't completely sold on the data. Terri Pinyerd states that "When asked how they felt social media was affecting their study habits, fifty-three percent said that the effects were detrimental, while twenty-eight percent claimed that social media sites did not affect their study habits at all (Pinyerd, 2014)." This data falls distantly in line with the survey, where a little over sixty six percent of students admitted to having social media influence their educational goals.

Surveyed students are also mostly aware of the distraction social media is on their education. Students gave responses that said, "Spending less time on social media could give [me] more time to work on assignments," and "I would be more productive [by spending less time online]." However, the students were mostly split on whether or not spending less time on social media was the answer to improving their academic success. When the survey asked, "Do you think you could improve your educational experience by spending less time on social media?" only fifty three percent of responses said they would see an improvement, whereas forty six percent said they wouldn't necessarily see an improvement by cutting down on social media.

Social media is a complex system of messages, memes, posts, and pictures. College students have taken to the platforms more than any other demographic, leading to the question of whether or not it is beneficial or harmful to academic success. Research is mixed, and it seems that college students can't seem to agree on an answer either. It may be better to determine usage on a person by person basis, since everyone learns differently. However, whether you're a heavy or light user, no one can dispute the collaboration tools available to students around the world.

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