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Young People, Social Media, and Impacts on Well-being

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CHALLENGE CONVENTION.
CHANGE OUR WORLD.

Andreana Nop

M.S. Professional Communication, Spring 2020

Capstone Project: Research Thesis

Young People, Social Media, and Impacts on Well-being

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 2

Abstract/Executive Summary 5

Chapter 1: Introduction 6

 General Introduction of the Research Project 6

 Research Problem 7

 Rational for Research Project 8

 Key Terminology 10

Chapter 2: Theory..... 11

 Theoretical Foundations..... 11

 Addiction..... 11

 Social Health..... 11

 Identity Development and Social Norms 13

 Overview of Literature..... 13

Chapter 3: Methods 16

 Study Method and Design..... 16

 Study Sample 16

 Analytical Techniques 18

 Reliability and Validity Study Method 18

 Assumptions and Implied Limitations of Study Method and Design..... 19

Chapter 4: Findings..... 20

 Overview of the Research Project..... 20

 Results..... 20

 Information Accessibility..... 21

 Social Health and Networks..... 22

How Social Media Shapes Societal Norms 23

Social Media in the Workplace and Education for Young People 24

How Social Media Blurs the Boundaries of Work and Play 25

Descriptive Analysis 25

Reliability and Validity of Analysis 26

Hypothesis..... 26

Chapter 5: Discussion..... 27

 Overview of Material..... 27

 Findings and Implications..... 27

 Analysis of Findings 28

 Hypothesis and Findings..... 28

 Post Analysis and Implications of Hypothesis and Findings..... 29

Chapter 6: Conclusion..... 30

 Summary of Academic Study 30

 Reference to Literature Review 30

 Implications of Academic Study..... 31

 Limitations of the Theory or Method of Research..... 31

 Recommendations or Suggestions of Future Academic Study..... 32

Works Cited..... 33

Abstract/Executive Summary

Millennials and Generation Z were born into an age where social media and digital technology have been integrated in nearly all aspects of their lives. While social media has proven to be a valuable communication tool in connecting with each other and sharing information, the long-term psychosocial effects are beginning to become more apparent as social media matures. This study analyzes what these effects are and how communication is impacted for these young people. It questions how young people can leverage social media and decrease harm. The study will be conducted through a literature review and analysis. Its goal is to synthesize the current knowledge on social media well-being and how it relates to young people, specifically Millennials and Generation Z, in order to ultimately recommend strategies to optimize well-being in the digital age.

Chapter 1: Introduction

General Introduction of the Research Project

Social media became popular after blogging emerged in the late 90's and participation exponentially grew with Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other early platforms. Social media is a simple tool that brings ordinary people together. By making these technologies as accessible as possible, everyone is able use it in their daily lives. It's "power to the people" as Li & Bernoff (2017) would explain in *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies*.

The history of communication starts out with oral communication that evolved to print communication, electronic communication, and eventually digital communication. In the oral age, communication was limited to the sender and receiver being co-present and typically within a close society. With oral communication relying on hearing and memory, information had less accuracy and required trust between the sender and receiver. Written communication led to more organized, brief, and abstract thoughts. Those who could write, had more power. Mass production was a result of print communication that gave power to the gatekeepers such as news outlets and large corporations to control where messages went. Electronic communication allowed mass messages to be broadcasted to wider audiences which gave more power to those who were able to create personal connections with their receivers through emotional appeal such as leaders and celebrities. Eventually this evolved to digital communication as we know it today (Li and Bernoff, 2017).

Digital communication has allowed increased diversity of thoughts and ideas without the gatekeeping control of what messages go where from people in power. Diverse demographics of people such as age, race, sexual orientation, and religion have the opportunity to participate in communication without the previous restrictions of mass communication. It also provides people

with asynchronous access to fast and updated information. Rather than relying on experts, digital communication lets people depend on each other for information. With people trusting information from people they know more than large corporations, it is necessary for these institutions to shift their strategies when targeting their consumers and building personalized connections (Li and Bernoff, 2017). Like in the oral age, word of mouth is more powerful than ever for communication. The balance of power from traditional institutions to people is shaken by the emergence of people-powered technology. This poses a threat to many institutions attempting to control certain messaging since anyone can say anything at any time and information cannot be contained in the same way that it used to. These institutions are learning how to leverage digital communication and social media to influence their consumers. As the communication landscape has evolved, giving voice to the masses and providing a platform for constant exchange of information, the impacts of the shifts in power dynamics are proving to have unintended consequences for social media users. What started out as a way to connect with others, over time, some people found that social media can be detrimental to their well-being as a result of the information they are consuming (Newport, 2019).

Research Problem

This project is a research thesis on literature exploring the impacts of social media communication on the well-being of young people, more specifically Millennials born between 1980 and 1994, Generation Z born between 1995-2015, and cuspers falling in-between the two generations born between 1990 and 2000. The main question for this paper is, what are the psychosocial effects of social media communication on young people's well-being? The question can be broken down into the following sub-questions: (1) how do Millennials and Generation Z communication habits compare to older generations? (2) what are the benefits and concerns of

using social media? and (3) how can social media and digital technology be leveraged to enhance young people's well-being through communication processes?

Through this study, the researcher aims to gain further insight into the digital media impacts within this demographic and how communication can be improved to be more effective. The main hypothesis of this research project is that social media does have a negative impact on well-being.

Rationale for Research Project

Despite being a part of most people's everyday lives, social media is a relatively new phenomenon and people are only beginning to realize the long-term effects of it now—specifically the negative effects which includes lower self-esteem, time mismanagement, exposure to inappropriate content, and more. The inspiration for this research project comes from Cal Newport's book, *Digital Minimalism*. Newport's position is that many people do not know how to be intentional with their social media usage and companies have learned to take advantage of that in today's attention-based economy. People are starting to realize this complex relationship and are getting uncomfortable as shown in the following passage: "The source of our unease [...] is this feeling of losing control—a feeling that instantiates itself in a dozen different ways each day, such as when we tune out with our phone during our child's bath time, or lose our ability to enjoy a nice moment without a frantic urge to document it for a virtual audience." (Newport, 2019). It is necessary to examine the impacts of social media as a communication tool that can be leveraged—especially by younger people who are more susceptible to facing the negative consequences. Both social media and well-being are complex concepts that integrate into all parts of life. Social media has changed the game in how all people and especially young people communicate and shape their world view.

The main target population of this study is regarding Millennials. They are a population of interest because of being born at a time before social media was pervasive but are also one of the largest age groups that use social media. Generation Z is a much younger generation who was born into the social media age (Taylor, 2015). While sharing similarities to Millennials in usage rate, this technology has been more deeply integrated since a younger age. A young person can be either a teenager, age 13-19, or young adult, age 18-32, as defined by the UN (United Nations, 2020). Because this age range contains both Millennials and Generation Z at the time of this research project, the study will focus on both with an emphasis on Millennials, the population that has been most studied within the current literature regarding social media. Between Millennials and Generation Z lie a unique group that do not fall neatly into one generation or the other. They are called cuspers – someone who falls between generations and shares experiences of their formative years with both the generation before and the one after. While these generations are distinctive, they all share a common experience as the pioneer users of digital media.

Key Terminology

Algorithm: a set of rules or calculations used to solve problems and deliver a result. Algorithms are used in social media to deliver to content to the user (Hopper, 2019).

Digital Minimalism: a philosophy of technology use in which you focus your online time on a small number of carefully selected and optimized activities that strongly support things you value, and then happily miss out on everything else (Newport, 2019).

Internalization: the extent to which an individual cognitively adopts a socially defined ideal as a person. This means that one will no longer perceive an ideal as imposed by others but will instead perceive it as a personal goal they should strive to obtain (Lenne, Vandenbosch, Eggermont, Karsay & Trekels, 2020).

Platform Intimacy: the degree to which a platform affords its users feelings of closeness or connection of others (Modality Effects, 2018)

Social Cognition Theory: one can learn which social norms are socially accepted by observing the behavior of role models (Lenne et al., 2020)

Social Media: user- or consumer-generated content including blogs, micro-blogging, podcasts, RSS, search engine marketing/results, social networking sites, video-sharing, and wikis (Dodd and Campbell, 2011).

Social Presence: the experience of being with another in a networked environment or the ability to perceive others in an online encounter (Modality Effects, 2018)

Well-being: the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity including having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and ability to manage stress (Davis, 2019)

Chapter 2: Theory

Theoretical Foundations

Addiction

The most widely used social media apps such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are designed like slot machines. With gambling psychology and reward systems, app developers have learned to retain the attention of consumers and influence their consumption patterns (Shimada, 2019). Through these algorithms, apps are able to personalize content and recommendations to keep users online for as long as possible (Alter, 2018). In the attention economy, time is money and the addictive nature of these apps puts users at risk. Many of the institutions that acted as information gatekeepers were originally pushed away by social media, but they have learned to continue holding power by redesigning their strategies to adapt to this new communication medium because it is inexpensive, has a large audience reach, and can collect direct feedback (Li and Bernoff, 2017). People do not have as much control over their social media consumption as they think.

Social Health

Social media became successful by giving users the opportunity to generate their own content and maintain peer-to-peer connection. Relationships and social connection are basic needs for all human beings. Matthew Lieberman describes social connection as “a resource in the same way that intelligence or the internet are resources” (Hobsbawm, 2017). Quality relationships are needed to maintain social health and ultimately boost productivity. Hobsbawm (2017) describes social health as “the ability of individuals and organizations to have access to sufficient knowledge and networks—and to manage time to use these in a balanced way” in

addition to a system for managing these connections. While it is known that rich forms of communication like face-to-face (see figure 1 below) are significantly more effective in delivering messages and minimizing miscommunication, newer technologies like video chat and text provide more convenience and speed. People spend less time together in-person which could lead to relationship decline. However, social media and other technologies allow this decay to slow down (Hobsbawm, 2017). Social media's ability to create platform intimacy, or the feeling of closeness or connections to others, makes it easier for people to stay connected with those they are physically separated from and also feel intimate with those they do not know personally. This is more powerful on platforms that are image-based because they create stronger emotional responses than text-based platforms (Modality Effects, 2018).

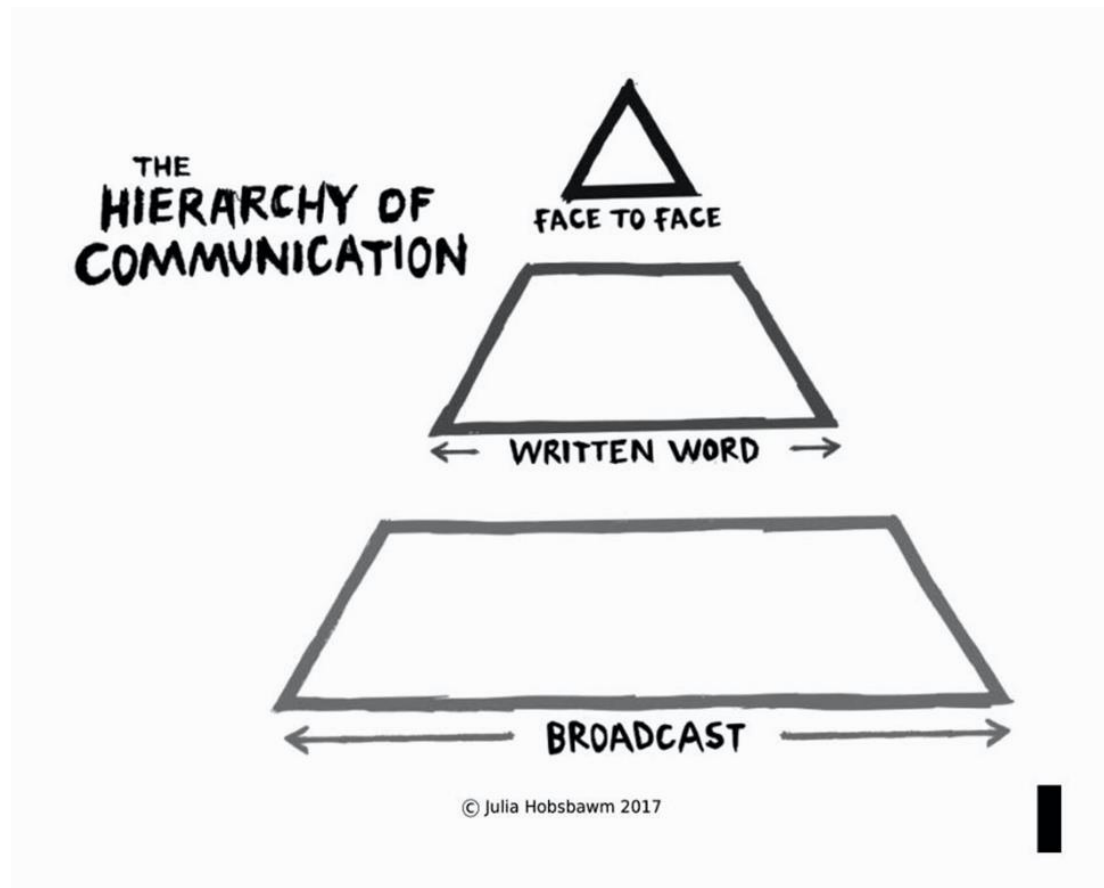


Figure 1. The Hierarchy of Communication (Hobsbawm, 2017)

Identity Development and Social Norms

Social media plays an influential role in identity development. According to social cognition theory, people learn which social norms are socially accepted by observing the behavior of role models. As a result of message reinforcement, eventually a person may internalize these messages whether they originally believed them to be true or not (Lenne et al., 2020). For adolescents, they are more likely to be susceptible to the ideas presented online because they are still in the identity development phase. Throughout this phase, expectations are formed by parents, teachers, peer relationships, romantic experiences, and more. While a person's immediate circle is highly influential, media also plays a large part in shaping a young person's identity. Social media gives its users the ability to express themselves and explore their identities. However, people may choose to filter how they express themselves online so that they can be socially accepted and increase their popularity (Lenne et al., 2020). Their communication habits are influenced by peer acceptance and societal norms. With social media being a main source of internalized messages and social comparison, it can significantly decrease a young person's well-being.

Overview of Literature

To explore the psychosocial effects of social media communication on well-being, a preliminary literature review was conducted to shape the development of the larger project by finding common themes, models, and further areas to research. Understanding the theories and methodologies for studying the relationship between social media and well-being provides an evidence perspective of the current knowledge and guide future studies on the topic.

This literature review contains sources from a variety of channels. As social media is user-generated and people-centered, the first place that the researcher explored is her own

network of peers and academic faculty to find literature related to social media and well-being.

The suggestions included books written over the past decade written by both scholars and practitioners working in the social media industry. Some of these books include original studies and comprehensive research, while others provide case studies and testimonies on the impacts of social media to further support the empirical research. These books are both commercial and academic-based.

The second source of literature is through online databases provided by Clark University's library resources. This literature review contains peer reviewed articles found on the Academic Onefile and Communication & Mass Media Complete databases. Although well-being is a generally a psychological concept, the literature focuses on studies and articles selected had a communications perspective. These include studies from the following journals: Health Communication, Media Psychology, Communication Research Reports and various theses found on the databases mentioned. The selection of these sources met the following criteria: (1) focus on a specific aspect of social media such as usage frequency, modality, and reasons for using social media, (2) connection to concepts of well-being such as autonomy, sense of control, and maintenance, (3) focus on how communication processes on social media impact these concepts of well-being, and (4) dated between 1997 to 2020.

While the literature covers a broad range of areas related to the intersection of young people, social media, and well-being, the different types of publications can fall under the following categories: information accessibility, social health and networks, social media shaping societal norms, social media in the workplace and education, and blurring the boundaries of work and play. While non-academic literature provided framing and background information, only peer reviewed studies and commercial books are included. Some of these books are written by

social media users and non-academics but are backed by empirical studies. These sources support the findings in the academic literature by providing testimonial evidence and user perspective. Young people are writing about their experiences with social media and they are doing so in ways outside of traditional academia such as blogs, books, podcasts, and more. These sources of information should not be discounted.

Chapter 3: Methods

Study Method and Design

This research project is an extensive literature review of impacts of social media on young people's well-being. Examining a wide array of the theories and methodologies provides a broader and inclusive understanding of the current knowledge and is intended to provide guidance future studies on the topic. The initial project began as a preliminary literature review to finding common themes, models, and further areas to research. The findings informed the direction of the current paper.





Study Sample

The population of interest is young people including teenagers and young adults from age 13-32. Young people who fall in this age range can be separated into two generations: Millennials and Generation Z. Each generation is defined by the life experience they share in their formative years. Because the cutoff between each generation is not exact, those who fall in-between, called cuspers, should be treated as their own group as they have different preferences from those who clearly fit into one generation or the other.

In a survey conducted in 2009 by Tapscott, Millennials tend to abide by eight established norms: freedom, customization, scrutiny, and integrity, collaboration, entertainment, speed, and innovation (Dodd and Campbell, 2011). Millennials are early adopters in the population most likely to use social media and as the generation gets older, they have more spending power to be influenced by advertising content. Generation Z values expressing individual truth, connecting through different truths, understanding different truths, and unveiling the truth behind all things (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Generation Z is defined by mobility and were born into the digital

age unlike Millennials who can clearly remember an age where they did not have the same technologies. Cuspers adopt the behaviors of both generations as Millennial characteristics are more prevalent in their early life and Generation Z characteristics show as they become teenagers and move into adulthood. Figure 2 shows key characteristics of each generation. Generational groups share common experiences that drive their thoughts and behaviors. Age may play a role in usage of a product or service and how much purchasing power an individual may have. Different generations use digital platforms differently and effective communication varies depending on how the messaging is sent and received.

Today’s young people differ from yesterday’s.

	 B Baby boomer 1940–59	 X Gen X 1960–79	 Y Gen Y (millennial) 1980–94	 Z Gen Z 1995–2010
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postwar • Dictatorship and repression in Brazil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political transition • Capitalism and meritocracy dominate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalization • Economic stability • Emergence of internet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility and multiple realities • Social networks • Digital natives
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idealism • Revolutionary • Collectivist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materialistic • Competitive • Individualistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalist • Questioning • Oriented to self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undefined ID • “Communaholic” • “Dialoguer” • Realistic
Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideology • Vinyl and movies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status • Brands and cars • Luxury articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience • Festivals and travel • Flagships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniqueness • Unlimited • Ethical

McKinsey&Company

Figure 2. Generational Characteristics and Distinctions (Francis and Hoefel, 2018)

Analytical Techniques

The analysis approach used in this project is the narrative review. In this type of review, the literature already written on the topic of social media and young people's well-being is accumulated and synthesized to support the research hypothesis of social media being negatively impactful. A narrative review provides a comprehensive background on the current knowledge and highlights the significance of new research. Because the connection of social media to well-being has only been brought to light in the past decade, there is no cutoff date for which studies to be included.

Reliability and Validity Study Method

Using a wide range of sources for the literature review provides unique perspectives and approaches to the topic of interest. The studies included in this project consist of both primary data, which is "information collected for a current research problem or opportunity", and secondary data, or "information previously collected for some other problem or issue" (Hair, Wolfinbarger, & Ortinau, 2016). A drawback of the literature review is that the results found in these studies are not intended for the purpose of the current study. However, the findings are valuable in developing a position on the question and guiding further research. As with the nature of a narrative review, the literature selection may be biased to support the hypothesis.

To develop a more well-rounded picture of the topic, the researcher selected both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative data can explain what the relationship is but not why. The case studies and testimonies provide qualitative evidence that explores this topic from another lens. Through qualitative research methods, unconscious and hidden motivations can be uncovered as well as an understanding of the culture surrounding the topic interest (Hair, Wolfinbarger, & Ortinau, 2016). Using a mixed research method with both qualitative and

quantitative methodologies creates deeper insights of the dynamics of social media and well-being.

Assumptions and Implied Limitations of Study Method and Design

The intent of the literature review is to explore a variety of different sources related to the research project and to draw a conclusion based on these findings. Despite the intent to be inclusive of various perspectives, there are some assumptions that the researcher has that have informed the research process. These biases include: (1) social media is designed in a way to manipulate thoughts and behaviors of consumers, (2) social media has some sort of impact on consumer wellbeing whether it is positive or negative, (3) there is a general lack of awareness or regard towards how companies manipulate digital media, and (4) most people are not intentional about their relationship with digital media. With these assumptions in mind, the literature in this review provides multiple perspectives both supporting and negating these preconceived notions.

Chapter 4: Findings

Overview of the Research Project

Since the beginning of time, communication has been an integral part of people's day to day lives and essential for advancing society. While communication originated in oral tradition that required face to face interaction, it has evolved to surpass space and time. With newer technologies such as mobile phones and social media, people are able to communicate whenever and wherever. Consuming so much information can be detrimental to a person's well-being if they do not learn how to manage it (Newport, 2017). Young people especially are susceptible to this because they are shaping their views by what society tells them (Taylor, 2015). Sharing information publicly is also very personal. Mobile devices allow people to take social media with them and merge it into all parts of their lives. Social media is no longer just social; it is life. Those who lack digital literacy may fall behind (Newport, 2017). With these boundaries getting blurred, society must learn how to embrace it and integrate it into a new normal.

Results

Throughout the literature, five common themes were discussed: (1) information accessibility, (2) social health and networks, (3) social media shaping societal norms, (4) social media in the workplace and education, and (5) blurring the lines between work and play. These themes reflect the common impacts that social media has had in these areas. These findings would provide insight into areas of improvement and how social media can be leveraged in various environments such as work and school.

Information Accessibility

Technological advancements have allowed people to quickly access information in the palm of their hands through “the triple revolution”: mobile, social media, and the internet (Hobsbawm, 2017). These technologies could empower Millennials to learn more than previous generations and become more adept at finding answers to deep questions. However, some experts believe that this generation will exhibit a thirst for instant gratification and quick fixes, loss of patience, and a lack of deep-thinking ability due to what one referred to as "fast-twitch wiring" (Taylor, 2015).

A study analyzing media use and its relation to educational, social, and health outcomes found that youth who used media primarily for informational purposes had the best grades and was most involved with extracurricular activities compared to their peers who use media mainly for entertainment. They were also the least troubled by feelings of hopelessness. The study found that there was a balance of using the internet for schoolwork versus reading newspapers and books often (Cluster Analysis of Youth Media Use, 2011). Pew Research studies show that “Millennials are more likely than older Americans to participate in news by sharing links, contributing comments, and podcasting their own material” and they directed towards a variety of news-related topics through search engines and social media (Taylor, 2015). While there is more access to news and information online, there is a question of whether young people are using social media and the internet for this purpose. Some people would rather follow their favorite celebrities than a news outlet. Accessibility is not equivalent to more knowledge.

Since people are able to share any content they wish on social media, a major concern is that young people would be exposed to distressing and destructive content. Censorship and regulations could remove or prevent these young people from seeing it, but it could also prevent

sharing content that could potentially be an important source of support for some people (Shimada and Raphael, 2019). It is also difficult to draw the line between positive and negative content. Hootsuite estimates that “users post more than 3 billion Snaps per day and 500 million Tweets” and filtering harmful images is not entirely feasible (Shimada and Raphael, 2019). Some platforms require users to flag inappropriate content for minors prior to uploading. While complete censorship is against social media’s freedom of speech, there are precautions in place to prevent this type of content to reaching young people.

Social Health and Networks

Young people’s excessive social media use is often criticized by older generations that do not understand that it is not just a form of play. Social media has become integrated into most day to day activities including the workplace (Dodd & Campbell, 2011). It is a communication norm and a way to always be connected to the world beyond them. Young people have reported that social media benefits them in areas such as learning, socialization, greater levels of social and emotional support, and creativity (Goodyear & Armour, 2019).

Goodyear & Armour (2019) explore the concept of social health through networked publics that comprise of both the “space constructed through networked technologies and the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practice”. When people are socially healthy, then they are more likely to be productive because they are able to make the connections and obtain the resources they need. However, individualistic societies that focus more on transactional relationships can lead to a decrease of social health satisfaction (Lenne et al., 2020). As people are able to grow their networks without ever meeting face-to-face, the quality of these relationships deplete as there is the expectation of having to give something in return for a connection.

A person's social presence can influence people's perceptions of them in real life. Highly curated feeds, follower ratios, and post engagement levels become status symbols and create opportunities for social comparison (Shimada and Raphael, 2019). Social media can "result in social alienation, hinder the ability to engage in interpersonal communications, and lead to the development of shallow relationships focused on self-expression" (Goodyear and Armour, 2019). Social presence can create assumptions about a person, prevent the development of genuine relationships, and increase the number of transactional relationships (Shimada and Raphael, 2019).

Social Media Shaping Societal Norms

Young people are susceptible to the algorithms designed by many popular websites and social platforms. These algorithms serve as "potent gatekeepers and arrangers of information" that benefit from taking up time and attention (Taylor, 2015). Goodyear & Armour (2019) suggest that young people will gain the skills native digital citizens need to determine what information is valuable, trustworthy, and intended for commercial means.

There is a false sense of reality and authenticity embedded in social media posts. Naomi Shimada (2019) shares that in her experience as a social media influencer, "the advertising trend of the moment is all about the staged 'authentic experience'. Brands often want to come into my personal spaces—whether that's where I live or where I hang out—but it can also feel intrusive when a supposedly laid-back 'walk through' my wardrobe has a team of 10 people on the other side of the camera." The rise of influencers and brands present on social media platforms has created a new way of marketing that is changing the way young people shop and shape their ideal norms. While people use social media to connect with people they know, they are also expanding their networks beyond their immediate circles. On image-based platforms such as

Instagram and Snapchat, people are more likely to follow those that they do not know in real life such as celebrities because there is an increase in platform intimacy that enhances emotional connection to these people (Modality Effects, 2018) (Lenne et al., 2020).

Social Media in the Workplace and Education

Dodd & Campbell (2011) examined the importance of social media to organizations and public relations practitioners in addition to Generation Y's expectations and desires regarding the direction of an organization's social media use. Overall, the study found that practitioners seem to "get it", but the organizations that PR practitioners work with are not currently placing enough importance on social media. According to Tapscott (2009)'s eight established norms of Generation Y, this group values freedom, customization, scrutiny and integrity, collaboration, entertainment, speed, and innovation. The nature of social media being user-generated is one way that Generation Y expects organizations to "facilitate two-way symmetrical communication with the Gen Y public" (Dodd & Campbell, 2011). Mass media is no longer as effective in gaining this generation's attention both as employees and target consumers. Organizations need to adapt their social media strategies to this change.

The same concept applies to education. Goodyear & Armour (2019) propose that adults may not be able to fully integrate these digital technologies into the classroom, but educators and practitioners have a major role in helping these young people to navigate the information they consume online. Social media provides a context for peer-based learning that is friendship-driven and interest-driven. If these adults understand the potential impacts of using these platforms, then they can take preventative measures to lessen the negative effects on young people who are most vulnerable.

Blurring the Boundaries of Work and Play

For many, social media is an engine for addiction that is designed to take time and attention in a way that feels natural to its users. Millennials and Generation Z, who have been born in this digital age, have ingrained social media into most aspects of their daily lives because it is a key communication medium. Goodyear and Armour (2019) states, “A dissolution of the online/offline binary is made apparent where social media operates as an active digital space for young people where relationships, identities, and intimacies are formed”. Because mobile devices allow people to take social media wherever they go, it has been able to cross personal and professional boundaries in ways that were clearly separated. People can bring their work home on their laptops and also have drinks with coworkers during their lunch hour. The way that young people communicate in the workplace is established by their generation’s norms and values with a higher prioritization for work/life balance. Work and play get more complex with those whose careers are in social media and individuals’ lives are the brand. Shimada and Raphael (2019) show that many of the negative assumptions of social media are amplified when their life is essentially their work.

Descriptive Analysis

The findings of the literature review show that social media is a powerful tool when used mindfully. The negative effects of social media such as poor time management, inability to be productive, and distraction are detrimental to a young person’s well-being. This can be a result of poor regulation of the user and the addictive qualities of the social media algorithm. It is not the young person’s fault as it is known that these platforms are designed to control consumer attention. Young people are not taught how to healthily manage their relationships with social media and the findings show that their role models such as parents and teachers do not

demonstrate how to do so. While young people are better social media experts than older generations, these adults also face resistance to change in adapting to this modern mode of communication.

Reliability and Validity of Analysis

This literature review outlines the major contributions surrounding young people's social media and well-being. The studies included use samples within the generational and age range criteria and therefore the analysis is representative of the population of interest. Because of recurring ideas and results in a wide range of work, the analysis of the findings can be considered as both reliable and valid. The psychosocial theories discussed at the beginning of this paper are further supported by the literature.

Hypothesis

The original hypothesis of this paper predicted that social media does have a negative impact on well-being. While the findings show that there is some relationship between social media and poor well-being, there is no clear evidence that supports the hypothesis to be true. The literature shows that this question is more complex as intentions and context play a role on how damaging social media can be on well-being.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of Material

Despite its young age, social media has revolutionized communication for young people and the entire world. Surpassing space and time, social media provides accessibility to information, opportunities, and connections that may have not been previously available. It is commonly believed that social media may be linked to negative well-being, but after completing an extensive literature review, it was found that a clear correlation did not exist. Rather, the review found that lack of moderation within individuals and underlying factors such as low self-esteem contributed to poorer well-being. Although related, social media does not cause negative well-being.

Findings and Implications

Social media is commonly criticized for its negative effects, but the research does not show social media is harmful to young people's well-being. A 2011 study on Cluster Analysis of Youth Media Use found that there is "no simple relation between overall use of media and outcomes". Another study by Lenne et al. (2020) predicted that "the link between social media use and poor mental well-being may develop through the internalization of media ideals". However, they concluded that "only measuring usage oversimplifies the possible effects of social media on an adolescents' well-being" (Lenne et al., 2020). Granow, Reineck, and Zeigele (2018) concluded in their study that binge-watching "could increase viewers' enjoyment, recovery experiences, and vitality through an increase in perceived autonomy" and having self-control could help "moderate the effects on well-being". The findings indicate that interacting with social media is not the sole factor that impacts well-being. Rather, there are more complex and

underlying reasons that have not yet been uncovered or studied in-depth. Context and intersection with other factors that impact well-being such as environment, mental health, and ability to self-regulate can lead to overgeneralization when evaluating social media's effect.

Analysis of Findings

The ability for a young person to healthily navigate the digital world can be challenging when the entire world is experiencing its effects for the first time and the long-term impacts are not well-known. With quicker adoption and usage rates, young people are the most susceptible to any potential harm. As older generations become technologically savvy, they play a crucial role in helping young people manage their relationships with social media. This includes teaching them the skills to build their self-esteem so they are less likely to compare themselves to people they follow online and developing hobbies that could replace excessive screen time. Adults do not need to know how to use social media at the same levels as young people. Educating young people on minimizing well-being depletion requires identifying what the threats are and teaching personal and social skills that decrease the magnitude of the negative impacts.

Hypothesis and Findings

The hypothesis of this study predicted that social media has a negative impact on young people's well-being. This research project findings do not support the hypothesis. Social media and well-being are two concepts that are very generalized and do not have a consistent operational definition. As a result, the literature regarding this topic does not provide a cohesive answer to the question at hand. The general consensus of the studies is that there are inner issues within people that are exacerbated by social media, not that social media causes these impacts. Support networks such as family and educators may prevent or minimize some of these effects.

Post Analysis and Implications of Hypothesis and Findings

Since young people are the majority of social media users, it is not surprising that those that overlook social media's benefits and heavily criticize it are not these same young people. When dealing with uncharted territory, focusing on the negative aspects provides justification for not accepting and embracing the new normal. The reality is that social media is how young people communicate, and it should be worked with, not against. The complications come from institutions that are exploiting young people through social media and young people need to learn how to identify and manage that to protect themselves. The findings show that social media has a lot of potential because there is a wealth of information that is easily accessible. However, this is not what young people are using social media for. Future studies should think more critically about how social media is used and how it provides meaning for young people.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Summary of Academic Study

Overall, the literature review showed that although social media has many potential threats to well-being, they become magnified by typically older generations who do not see social media's potential to positively develop all areas in life. The harm with using social media comes from a lack of education and coping mechanisms on combatting these threats because these harmful effects are only starting to surface recently. Based on the literature, young people do not have the capacity to manage social media's impacts on their own although they are the largest population that uses these platforms. It is the role of adults to acknowledge that social media is deeply ingrained in current society and that they must learn to help young people navigate digital citizenship to prevent potential harm. Rather than chastising social media, society needs to learn how to leverage its strengths because it is not going away anytime soon. Many companies have realized this and have taken advantage of this opportunity which has potential for consumer exploitation. How a young person uses social media and interprets the information presented is what impacts their experience and not the usage itself.

Reference to Literature Review

For this project, the initial literature review was a crucial part to defining the final research project. While well-being tends to be a psychological topic, focusing on a communications lens made it easier to find the relevant literature. The studies were not predominantly negatively biased despite how much ridicule social media gets. The studies showed that social media is framed as bad because there is a lot of unknown effects of it. Results

show that it either does not have much of a negative effect or that there are different factors at work.

Implications of Academic Study

Teaching young people how to manage their social media consumptions and minimize the potential harm is a task that requires the aid of role models such as parents, teachers, and other immediate influencers. While Millennials and Generation Z are the largest consumers of social media, older generations need to increase their social media intelligence so that they can continue effectively communicating with young people. Incorporating modern technology into curriculums and traditionally non-tech environments can teach young people at an early stage to use these mediums in a healthy, manageable, and impactful way. Introducing environments and practices that promote positive well-being and self-regulation can prevent negative internalization from messages they are likely to receive on social media. Some of the barriers to implementation include resistance to change and the lack of knowledge about these technologies. Understanding and leveraging the benefits of social media and other digital mediums can improve the capabilities of these support networks to help young people navigate the digital world.

Limitations of the Theory or Method of Research

A literature review provides an overview of the existing knowledge surrounding the subject of interest. The intent of the literature review is to provide context and information to support the study hypothesis. However, using outside studies can lead to conclusions that may not accurately answer the research question because the data was not intended for that purpose. In addition to this, the population of interest, Millennials and Generation Z, is a young generation

which means that there may not be as much data and research to support the hypothesis as opposed to studying an older generation. However, since social media is a newer technology, the long-term effects may not be known regardless of the generation studied. As shown in the literature and throughout the paper, the components of social media and the concept of well-being are highly complex and generalizing the relationship between the two discounts the wide range of factors that impact their relationship. There are limited studies that examine the long-term effects of this phenomenon simply because social media has not existed long enough.

Recommendations or Suggestions for Future Academic Study

Education, formally or informally, has a critical role in young people's development. With a sudden increase in virtual learning at the time of this study, researching its impacts on well-being as a result of distanced education can help inform strategies to use digital mediums to enhance learning. Future research can examine the root cause of many of the common impacts that are likely linked to psychosocial theories. Many of the gaps in this research area come from the lack of time that has passed to study the long-term effects. As social media, Millennials and Generation Z matures, some of these effects become more apparent and provide direction for future longitudinal research.

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