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The Social Dilemma: The Effects of Social Media on Learning in High School Classrooms

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Abstract

This Capstone Project focuses on How Social Media Affects Learning in High School Classrooms. This is an important issue because Social Media is ubiquitous in the lives of students, and this flows into their classroom learning as well. Social Media has been found to affect students grades, attention span classroom behavior, and so much more. The primary stakeholder perspectives for this project are hearing from current high school students, high school teachers, and high school alumni who have graduated from high school within the last five years. Based on the stakeholders perspectives and data analysis, there has been a consensus found regarding whether the effects are positive or negative. Based on an analysis of the interviews and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what they learned to formulate an action that responded in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Setting the Stage

Growing up I always loved school. I loved every day of school and loved all my teachers too. Learning was never a burden to me but something I truly enjoyed. I got good grades and was delighted to try my best to do well. I looked up to all my teachers, and a lot of them impacted my life and inspired me to want to be a teacher too… that was until I got into high school. Growing up my family had a rule, no smartphones, and social media til sophomore year of high school. I had two older siblings growing up, my sister two years older than me and my brother four years older than me. Being the baby in the family I was always wanting to do what they did and was also learning from their mistakes. However, there were just some things that I had to learn on my own, like managing learning in high school while using social media. My family made an exception for me during my freshman year of high school and my parents gave me my first smartphone. I was so excited so I got all the social media apps like Instagram, Snapchat, VSCO, Pinterest, and more. At the time all my friends had smartphones too and we would often communicate through social media. It was all very new and very exciting, but there were a lot of negative effects that I was blind to. My grades started dropping significantly, I was not doing my homework, and I was no longer being inspired by my teachers or valuing the gift of being able to learn. All I seemed to care about was what was going on online, what all my friends were doing, and trying to text them all during class resulting in a lot of distractions. I was never fully present with anyone because my mind was getting so used to keeping up with "what I cared most about" on my phone. My parents would try to discipline me by taking my phone away, but it only seemed to make me more distracted because I was anxious about what I was missing out on. Not only was having social media affecting my school performance and learning

abilities, but it was also affecting my well-being. I was developing unhealthy habits such as comparing my Instagram to another girl's Instagram account. Thoughts would race through my mind "Who gets the most likes in X amount of minutes?" "Who liked and commented on their post?" "Who are they friends with and why wasn't I invited?"... All these things were affecting my learning because I would have classes with some of these girls I was constantly comparing myself to and it would affect my focus. Thankfully I was part of a really great high school ministry at my church and a few friends and I shared with one another our struggles with having social media while in high school. Since we are all related, we committed to deleting social media from our lives and holding one another accountable. We went without social media for 9 months and saw huge shifts in our lives. We were not comparing ourselves to others, we were more present with those around us, we were doing better in school, we were more positive and saw many things from larger, bigger perspectives. I learned from that period of accountability with my friends that I needed to take my education seriously, and not let social media control my life. That break from social media made such a huge impact on my life that I decided to start a blog page on Instagram to share with others about my faith and to share ways to not let social media control your life. Social media is growing more to this day, and teens have more access than ever before. I am determined to observe how it is affecting high school students learning in classrooms today because if it was hard for me over five years ago when social media was still new and unknown, I cannot imagine how hard it must be now with the ubiquity of social media in the lives of high school students.

Literature Synthesis

       Social Media has become more common across the world and among the generations. Over 38% say teens spend more than 8 hours a day on social media (Real Research Media, 2022). On average the high school student takes six classes, and on average teens have more than 5 social media accounts (RRM, 2022). This is an issue because the more social media the students have, the less likely they are to perform well in their classes, and the lower their GPA will be (Dermibilek & Muhammet, 2017). Studies have shown that having social media while in school negatively affects multitasking skills and brain development. This is a risk because teens brains are still developing in the prefrontal cortex, which is the exact part of the brain that is used when students are trying to complete work without getting distracted (Moisala, Salmela, Hietarjarvi, Salo, Carloson, Salonen, Lonka, Hakkarainen, Salmela-Aro, & Alho, 2016). Not only does the use of social media affect students' brain development, but it also has an effect on the physical health and mental health of these students. Your learning is affected by how well you take care of your body and mind. Factors include; "Are you physically active? Do you eat nutritional foods? Do you have a social life?" These questions are important because social media can impact the answer to these questions as well. An article stated "The other big danger that comes from kids communicating more indirectly is that it has gotten easier to be cruel. 'Kids text all sorts of things that you would never in a million years contemplate saying to anyone's face,' says Donna Wick, EdD, a clinical and developmental psychologist" (Ehmke, 2023). Studies also show students who use social media are neither taking their meals on time nor getting the proper amount of rest, this may result in increased laziness and decreased face to face contact (Akram & Kumar 2017). Akram and Kumar (2017) also noted in their study that many students get low grades due to the absence of attention to the lessons and lectures. Some students may also be also less motivated because of the dependence they are building upon virtual

conditions as opposed to learning from the present reality. As a future educator, there is a great deal of responsibility to be equipped and educated in supporting students with the ubiquitous usage of social media and technology. There is a fairly high level of liability as a future educator to make every effort to transform and facilitate the effects that social media has on learning in classrooms with the all-time high use of social media and technology. There have been studies conducted to see the full effects, and those studies also included ways to improve the learning environment as well as how to support the students. A study showed that it is important to stay informed on the latest technology trends to build relatability between your students and the curriculum they are learning (Akram & Kumar, 2017).

Many educators are now asking the right questions and are seeking the answers to this issue we see arising. There are things being done about social media's presence in the classroom but there are things that can be done now to try to help. Some teachers say that Social Emotional Learning, which is being taught in the primary grades, should help assist the students with living in the digital world and the real world (Prothero 2022). While this may help high school students if they learn at a young age, it still does not target the main issue, how to facilitate and manage the effects of social media in high school classrooms. What should be done is hearing more from the stakeholders, and asking the high school students and teachers the right questions, such as "What have been your experiences with social media in classrooms? What do you know about social media affecting learning in the classroom? What do you see as the benefits and challenges of having social media while being a high school student or teacher (depending on who is being interviewed); What are you most concerned about when it comes to social media affecting learning in the classroom? What do you think should be done about the effects of social media in the classroom?". This would be of benefit because then the issue will be more refined making it

one step closer to resolving the issue and knowing the real effects of social media in high school classrooms and how to mitigate those affects.

Based on the information collected, we can conclude that there is indeed an issue regarding how social media effects learning in high school classrooms. There are many subdivisions to this issue, informing that the issue goes farther than initially notioned. However, this advances the question, because there is a great need to help these students and teachers to have a thriving learning environment for all.

Method

Learning is a fundamental factor in high schooler's brain development and for their stage of adolescence. Teachers have the responsibility to manage their classrooms and protect and develop the students' learning at all costs. However, social media has been a silent distractor in current classrooms, that is at the fingertips of the majority of students. Social Media has been defined by many scholars as ubiquitous in our current day and age. For this Capstone Project, the researcher will investigate how social media is affecting learning in high school classrooms and what action should be taken. Based on the analysis of this data and the relevant research literature, the researcher will use what she has learned to formulate an action that responds to the focus in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

This study took place at two public schools, Cow High School and Rodeo High School[1]. Tulare Union High School is a 9-12 School located in Tulare County. Tulare Union is located in the midst of the town area. Relevant demographics include; 1,732 total enrolled students, 73.2% Hispanic/Latino, 19.8% White, 3.2% Black or African American, 0.7% Asian, 0.4% Filipino, 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.5% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 0.9% Two or More Races. Over 73.2% of the school population is Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, 9.45 English Learners, 7.3% Students with Disabilities, 0.5% Foster Youth, and 3.5% Homeless. The conditions of learning, according to the School Accountability Report Card (SARC), is basic. Salinas High School is located in Monterey County, surrounded by commercial buildings.

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[1] The names of people, places, and organizations are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Relevant demographics include; 2,830 total students enrolled, 72.5% Hispanic or Latino, 20% White, 1.2% Black or African American, 2.1% Asian, 1.7% Filipino, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1.6% Two or More Races.

Participants and Participant Selection

Tulare Union High School was chosen because it is a diverse community of students with a high number of socioeconomically disadvantaged students that I have had previous connections with. Salinas High School was chosen because this school is also a diverse community of students as well as a high number of socioeconomically disadvantaged students that I have current connections with.

Brad Matthews. A Mexican male sophomore from Rodeo High School who has social media.

Jim Matthews. A Mexican freshman male from Rodeo High School who has social media.

Kim Slate. A South African American female freshman from Rodeo High School who has social media.

Luke Slate. A South African American male junior from Rodeo High School who has social media.

Gracie Cooper. A Mexican American female senior from Cow High School who has social media.

Gary Matt. A white male teacher from Cow High School whose majority of students in classroom have social media

Brian Payton. A white male teacher from Cow High School whose majority of students in the classroom have social media.

Ruby Nelsen. A white female teacher from Cow High School whose majority of students in the classroom have social media.

Researcher

I, Bailey Stewart Goswick, have formulated the topic of research on how social media can affect high schoolers learning in the classroom because when I was a high schooler, it

impacted my learning negatively. When I was in high school and had social media, it was all I wanted to spend my time doing, before school, during school, and after school. My grades were greatly impacted and so was my opportunity to learn. Social media was really all-consuming in high school. I am similar to my participants because I too once was a high school student with social media... However, I differ because social media was a lot newer back in my high school years than now. As I move forward in this project I would like to keep in mind that not everyone is affected by social media, not everyone has social media, and some people might not know that their learning is affected by social media.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

1. What have been your experiences with social media in classrooms? What do you know about social media affecting learning in the classroom? What do you see as the benefits and challenges with having social media while being a high school student or teacher (depending on who is being interviewed); or What are you most concerned about when it comes to social media affecting learning in the classroom?

2. What is currently being done to address the social media affecting high school students - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

3. What do you think should be done about high school students having social media while school is in session?

4. What do you think are the challenges to doing something about having social media in the lives of high school students?

5. Is there anything else that you would like to say about how social media may or may not affect classroom learning for high school students and/or the improvement of social media affecting/not affecting the lives of high school students with social media?

Procedure[2]

All participants were interviewed. All interviews were done individually. All interviewees were asked if they were comfortable participating in this project. For students, their parents were reached out first to get their parietal consent, and following the student was given the option to participate or not. When the participants were unable to meet in person or call they were sent a survey of the same questions. All interviews took less than one hour and took place

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[2] http://my.ilstu.edu/~jhkahn/

in a comfortable manner and in a relaxing situation when distraction and interruptions were minimized. All interviews/surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, high school students and high school teachers were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve the way social media affects learning in high school classrooms. This is important because social media in high school is ubiquitous and has effects on the students in many ways, but primarily their learning. If students stop learning because of the effects of social media, this can affect not only their lives, but the lives of generations to come if we do not take action now. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: Action; Impact; and Reach. Action is an option because there needs to be something done to help improve the effects that social media has in the classroom since the presence of social media is continually increasing in the lives of students. Impact was also chosen because we want this to actually benefit the students' learning, and relationship with social media in the classroom. Reach is vital as well since there are so many high school students world wide that have to face the effects that social media has on learning in the classroom. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Access	Impact	Reach

Making Social Media From Free to Fee	Low	High	Low
Make A Poster to Share with Teachers and Students about the Effects & How to Set Boundaries in the Classroom	Medium	High	High
Disabling Public Wifi From High School Campuses	Low	High	Low

Making Social From Free to Fee

An interviewee suggested, when they were asked what should be done, that social media should not be free. They stated that the main reason there is such a strong presence in the lives of high school students is because they do not have to pay for it. Mr. Payton also suggested that this would help with parent involvement in the issue because the parents would likely not want to pay for it, which would decrease the presence of social media affecting learning in the classroom. There is an article regarding the same issue from a study that addressed that social media is ubiquitous in the lives of high school students. This option would have a high impact but a low reach and access. Getting to the personnel with the authority to change the social media from free to fee would be unreachable due to the time allotted to complete this project, as well as limited resources to reach those with that authority.

Make A Poster to Share with Teachers and Students about the Effects & How to Set Boundaries in the Classroom

This option emerged based on the responses from two high school student interviewees. Kim Slate expressed that "Some challenges of having social media are it's quite frankly addicting and it's hard to get off of. It also can be quite damaging to someone's mental health".

Based on that interviewees response and another high school student who expressed that "we get yelled at to not go on our phones but are never told why we shouldn't" it grew evident that these students could benefit from a poster to give them insight about the effects of social media on learning in the classroom. This theme relates to my literature synthesis as well, correlating with the statement that "it is important to stay informed on the latest technology trends to build relatability between your students and the curriculum they are learning" (Akram & Kumar, 2017). This option would have medium access due to the limited number of teachers the researcher knows, but the researcher can ask the teachers they do have connections with to share with their colleagues and students so that could cause a ripple effect in the reach. This same ripple effect concept applies to the impact and reach of this action as well, the teachers and students that the researcher knows can be asked to share with their connections in hopes that it will continue to impact and reach as many students and teachers as possible.

Disabling Public Wifi From High School Campuses

This action idea came from a teacher that the researcher interviewed, Mrs. Nelsen, who suggested this because she believed that the source of the issue is giving students access to wifi on the high school campus. Mrs. Nelsen also shared two other key facts; one being that her campus specifically does not have good cell service without wifi, so that would eliminate the ability for students to use social media. Her second key statement regarding this action was that her students use their social media devices to put other students down and spread hurtful and inappropriate messages. This data collected from the interviewee was also displayed in an article that states "The other big danger that comes from kids communicating more indirectly is that it has gotten easier to be cruel. 'Kids text all sorts of things that you would never in a million years

contemplate saying to anyone's face,' says Donna Wick, EdD, a clinical and developmental psychologist' ' (Ehmke, 2023). This action idea has low access due to the researchers lack of connection to the personnel with the authority to make this change. This action would have a high impact due to it having the possibility to eliminate social media entirely from high school campuses and classrooms. This would have low reach due to the researchers limited connections, and not having a way to contact the personnel with the authority to change this on high school campuses.

Conclusion

    Recommendation. The action to Make A Poster to Share with Teachers and Students about the Effects & How to Set Boundaries in the Classroom is the option the researcher recommends. This action is recommended due to hearing directly from the students, that this is something that could benefit them, by giving them clarity and insight into the issue of how social media affects learning in high school classrooms. This action shows the value of giving the students the tools they need to fight the effects that social media can have on learning in their classrooms as well as giving the students a clear indication that there are reasons why they should be aware of the effects that social media can have on learning in the classroom

    Concessions. Making Social Media From Free to Fee has the strength of having a high impact because it would increase parent involvement and would likely decrease the number of students that have social media in general. This would decrease the effects that social media has on learning in the classroom, by some students not having social media altogether. Disabling Wifi From High School Campuses would have the same strength of having a high impact on the students' learning environments, by limiting the effects that social media can have on learning in

the classroom. This would greatly benefit the students by not having the option to access social media on high school campuses reducing their distractions during class.

Limitations. Making posters is a limited action due to the uncertainty about whether or not the poster will be distributed further, other than to the teachers and students the researcher personally distributes it to. Of course, it can be encouraged, but there is no guarantee. There is also no guarantee that the information on the posters will be beneficial enough to the students to make a strong impact on the effects that social media has on learning in the classroom. To go to the extreme case, there is also a chance that the students may not even read the poster altogether.

Potential negative outcomes. A possible negative outcome of creating a poster with effects and how to set boundaries is that students will choose to abuse the boundaries and use it as an excuse to not use any social media, or technology trying to eliminate their school work or homework that might have to be done on any technology in the classroom. By encouraging the students to not use social media and giving them resources to set boundaries it also might increase their anxiety levels due to more separation from social media. Based on interviews with teachers and students, it was found that when teachers take the students' devices away from their students, they get separation anxiety, so the poster too could increase the students anxiety.
Conclusion. Despite the concessions, limitations, and negative outcomes identified above, the action being used based on the results collected for the study will be to Make A Poster to Share with Teachers and Students about the Effects & How to Set Boundaries in the Classroom**.** This action met the three criteria for the evaluation of actions; access, impact, and reach. The poster will be distributed as a PDF to the teachers interviewed for the study, as well as to the parents of the students who were interviewed for the study.
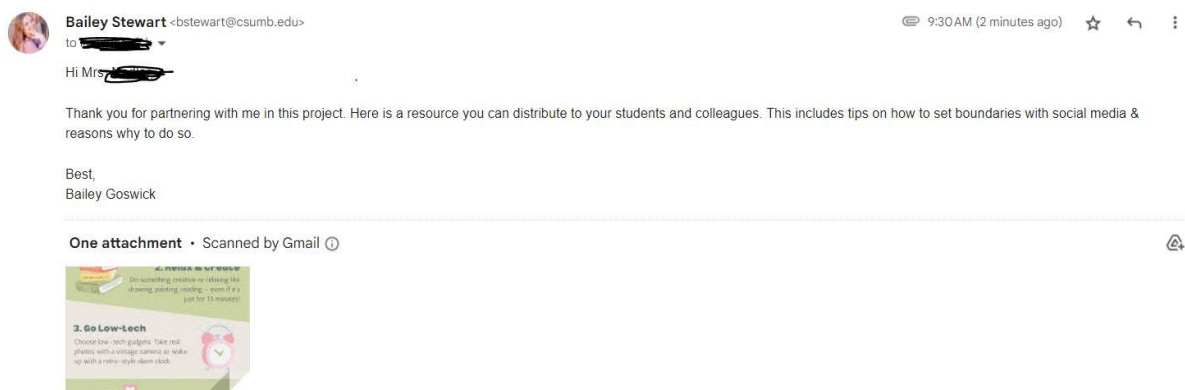
Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

For this Capstone Project, high school students and high school teachers were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve the way social media affects learning in high school classrooms. This is important because social media in the lives of high school students is ubiquitous and has effects on the students in many ways, but primarily their learning. If students stop learning because of the effects of social media, this can affect not only their lives, but the lives of generations to come if we do not take action now. Two High School Teachers and Four High School Students were interviewed. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged. Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: Action; Impact; and Reach. The three actions that emerged were; Making Social Media From Free to Fee, Make A Poster to Share with Teachers and Students about the Effects & How to Set Boundaries in the Classroom, and Disabling Public Wifi From High School Campuses. The action that was implemented out of the three was, Making a Poster to Share with Teachers and Students about the Effects of Social Media and Learning in High School Classrooms & How to Set Boundaries (Image 1). This action was implemented by sending a PDF poster to the teachers and students interviewed and asking them to send it to their colleagues as well to share with their students (Image 2). The Poster is attached below as Image 1. The email with the evidence

of the poster sent to the teachers and students interviewed is also attached below as Image 2.

(Image 1).

(Image 2).

Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection (Group)

As displayed in Image 2, an email was written and sent to the teachers

interviewed with the poster attached asking them to share it with their students and colleagues. After distributing the resources, the teachers gave feedback that was shocking. The teachers shared that after being interviewed they were awakened to the fact that social media truly does have negative effects on their students learning in the classroom. They also expressed their gratitude for the resource to distribute, expressing their concerns for other teachers and students as well. There were no modifications found that needed to be made in the process of getting the posters to the interviewees. The responses thus far have been very positive, from the teachers. One teacher that had a poster distributed from an interviewee teacher expressed that she had two family members who were teachers and were in desperate need of resources to help the effects of social media, and was very excited to get the poster to their family members. The high school student interviewees have not had any expression or feedback after the interview or distribution of the source. This is something that would have been beneficial to know from the start because given that they were willing to be interviewed it was assumed that they would give feedback or at least express their thoughts on the poster, but there was neither from the students. An important next step would be to conduct one final survey to collect their thoughts and feedback on the poster distributed to see if the tips and boundaries were of any benefit to their learning experience in the classroom with social media. Throughout this action portion of the research, as a researcher, it was discovered that getting feedback was the most exciting and important part of the entire project. Sure you can do all the interviews and have a recommended action based on the research,

but if no action is taken with feedback given you can hardly see the results of your research.

Critical Reflection (Individual)

From this project I learned that people are willing to share about their personal experiences, if given the opportunity. There was a lot of communicating with individuals who either work in the high school education system, or are in the high school education system. This taught me to learn how to communicate well with others who may not be in the demographic I am currently identifying with. I also was able to learn from communicating with the interviewees by analyzing their responses to formulated questions regarding the project. This allowed me to strengthen the skill of learning from asking and listening. I also learned to evaluate what I learn from asking and listening and formulate an action or response. This is a skill to utilize for many future endeavors, as I will continue to advocate for change in the education system for the benefit of the faculty and students.

Synthesis and Integration (Individual)

The Liberal Studies Program Major Learning Objectives, along with the required coursework for this Action Research Project all contributed to and impacted my professional development. One MLO that specifically impacted my professional development during this Action Research Project was MLO 3 which states "Students use technologies effectively for investigation, expression, design, and collaboration. Students reflect on the role of technologies for innovative teaching and learning, and effective instruction". This MLO impacted my

professional development because a high percentage of this project was based on the research you synthesized. I was able to collect all of my research, aside from the in-person interviews, on the Internet by using technology. I also used technology to create the action portion of this project and used technology to distribute the action resource. This action process was found to be the most effective and impacted my professional development by strengthening my skill of utilizing technology effectively. The required coursework also contributed to my professional development in a similar aspect because most of the coursework was technology-based, and so it grew my confidence in utilizing technology in various ways. This will be beneficial as a future educator as technology is evolving in classrooms.

As a future educator, some steps I need to take to become the professional I envision being included; 1. Continuing to utilize technology effectively for investigation, expression, and design, & 2. Continue to learn by asking and listening, following with action. I chose these two steps because although I can confidently say that I successfully attained these steps within the frame of conducting this Action Research Project, these are very important steps that I want to continue to grow and expand upon. I have learned them in one aspect with this project, and I want to take what I have learned and apply them to other aspects of my professional development as well.

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