



Drowning Screens: Social Media Experience and the Emotional Well-Being of Filipino Adolescents

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Abstract: This study explored the social media experience in Facebook and Twitter and its relation to the emotional well-being conditions of twenty (20) senior high school students in Metro Manila. Online in-depth interviews were conducted that centered on the quality of their Facebook and Twitter experience, the prevalence of distress, negative emotions, and life satisfaction. Facebook and Twitter have been utilized for entertainment and maintenance of social networks online. However, Facebook has been maintained as a “les lieux de communication” or a space to communicate with friends, family members, and classmates. Yet, due to its “public” nature, the participants were inhibited from sharing their thoughts and feelings in their Facebook account. On the other hand, multiple Twitter accounts have been maintained: for public consumption and an “exclusive” account. This exclusive Twitter account has been maintained as a “les lieux de emotion” or a social space wherein they could be inhibited on what ideas, opinions, or sentiments they will share. Experiencing distress, negative emotions, and satisfaction with everyday life has been associated with utilization of Facebook and Twitter due to issues on accessibility and unwarranted information, lack of control on popping up pornographic materials, and the threat of hacking and breached in their “les lieux de communication” and “les lieux de emotion.” Moderation and vigilance should be maintained in utilizing social media accounts to mitigate the risks of negative experience and impact on one’s emotional well-being.

Key Words: social media experience; emotional well-being; Facebook; Twitter; Filipino adolescent

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of an individual's life for this allows people to connect, create, and collaborate, wherein it has also been used to convey one's feelings, thoughts, and ideas. Despite this, there has been developing literature that provides evidence on the changing motives, attitudes, and behaviors due to one's involvement in social media. A study by Rasmussen, Carter, LaFreniere, Norman, and Kimball (2020) elaborated on how one's emotions are affected due to the excessive use of social media, resulting in complications on emotion regulation. Some individuals have positive experiences such as encouraging posts, entertainment, and accessibility, while others have negative experiences like having fake news, malicious posts, and inappropriate content from other social media users. Young, Kolubinski, and Frings (2020) stated that the role of social media on one's emotional well-being could help boost self-worth, increase self-esteem, provide joy, and prevent loneliness. On the

other hand, negative engagement in social media, such as promoting toxicity, bashing people online, and more, creates effects that may damage an individual's well-being in the long run.

As Filipino adolescents engage in social media, they encounter experiences that are positive or negative. Datu, Yang, Valdez, and Chu (2018) stated how self-expression correlates with online engagement, elaborating that positive experiences are when individuals share their sentiments and like towards each other, while negative experiences are when individual are exposed and have become involved in inappropriate behavior resulting to the user's emotional, psychological, and emotional well-being affected. With this, the issue of one's engagement in social media centers on its unique characteristic, to provide an avenue for an individual to communicate their feelings, ideas, and sentiments.



Review of Related Literature

1.1. Social Media Experience

Adolescents are usually immersed in social media since they frequently use it in their daily lives. The effects of online life given a highlight on social connectedness explain that social networking experiences may build up its setting, which could be versatile to an individual. A better understanding of the contributing factors is necessary, given the severity of these conditions, their negative and potentially long-term consequences for adolescents. Based on the research by Kelly, Zilanawala, Booker, & Sacker (2018), utilizing social support and knowledge acquisition can be beneficial when using social media since it could help improve and understand the underlying processes. Also, it could help identify opportunities for interventions that could benefit adolescents in social media.

1.2 Emotional Well-being

Numerous literature defines emotional well-being as having the absence of any mental health problem. Brown's article tackles emotional well-being and its relation to health, citing WHO's definition of emotional well-being, "a state of complete physical, mental and social well being" (p. 1). It was emphasized that the importance of emotional well-being to a person's health shows that being emotionally healthy means that one knows how to deal with the highs and lows of life while having confidence and a positive outlook in life. However, when one doesn't pay attention to their emotional well-being, they could develop emotional distress and encounter various illnesses, such as being prone to different viral illnesses, developing stress, and the like.

1.3. Social Media Experience and Emotional Well-being

The role of social media in adolescent's lives has become central and globally ubiquitous. At the same time, many advantages of using social media are existent, like having more prominent connectedness with others. According to Brunborg & Andreas (2019), social media, being a significant part of adolescents' lives, may relate to negativity as an effect. Connections between the time spent engaging in social media and emotional well-being issues, such as depression and anxiety, were found since their social media engagement could be the potential intervening pathways relating to their emotional well-being.

1.4. Statement of the Problem

This study explores the social media experiences and their relation to the emotional well-

being among Senior High School students in De La Salle University-Manila. The following specific questions were sought:

1. What is the social media attitude and behavior of the participants?
2. What is the type and quality of social media experiences of the participants?
3. What is the type and quality of emotional well-being of the participants?
4. How do online attitudes and behaviors and type and quality of social media experiences relate to the type and quality of emotional well-being?
5. What is the overall emotional well-being of the participants?
6. How do social media, the extent of social network, social media experience, and attitude and behavior towards social media relate to the emotional well-being of the participants?

2. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research utilized a purposive sampling method in selecting the participants. Fifty (50) senior high school students were initially invited and screened based on the following criteria: 1) have Twitter and Facebook accounts; 2) spends at least 4 hours of active engagement in Twitter and Facebook; 3) often or regularly likes or reacts to posts; 4) often or regularly comments on others' posts, and 5) often or regularly posts on their social media accounts. A final list of twenty (20) participants was engaged in an in-depth online interview which centered on their utilization of Facebook and Twitter, the quality of the social media experience in Facebook and Twitter, issues and concern with Facebook and Twitter, and their experiences of distress and negative emotions as well as their self-assessment of life satisfaction. The six-stage thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2016) guided the coding and identification of the major themes. Ethical guidelines set by the DLSU Integrated School have been observed, including, but not limited to, securing informed consent and voluntary participation.



3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Facebook and Twitter as an Integral Part of Everyday Life

Facebook and Twitter are two of the most used social media applications, especially for adolescents. Both platforms may bring beneficial and disadvantageous uses for their users. As the world increasingly depends on technology, the utilization of these platforms has also been developing. Both platforms provide entertainment, access to information, and maintenance of social ties online. However, the participants of the study highlight the distinction on the primary utility of Facebook and Twitter as social media. The distinction is associated with the type of activities, posts, or information they access when logged in.

Facebook and Twitter are avenues for individuals to share their insights and experiences in life. With Facebook being a social media platform for meeting and interacting with people, it provides an opportunity for individuals to become more open and expressive online. Exclusivity in the application ultimately covers whether the users would accept friend requests, including determining whether the type of content they possess online is fit for their liking. On the other hand, Twitter is a social media platform wherein individuals freely express their opinions and share their experiences online; similar to Facebook, it is extensive in a way that it is universally used as an “online diary” for individuals. Twitter can also be exclusive in a way that users have the ability to private their account, wherein they can choose the people who can view their account since follow requests are enabled.

3.2. Facebook as a ‘Les Lieux de Communication

Facebook is maintained as a place of communication, especially since most participants use Facebook for educational purposes wherein they check their Facebook groups and group chats to be updated about their academics. Additionally, they use this to connect with their friends, family, and relatives to keep in touch and maintain their relationship with one another. This also includes chatting with their classmates when necessary.

Facebook is known to be a universally used social media platform; it serves as the main way of communication for most people on the internet. Consequently, the majority of the users stated that there were issues regarding their privacy online. In addition, the participants of the study value privacy and exclusivity; in return, the decision in accepting friend requests was based on the relationship with the

person online. Simultaneously, blocking Facebook friends was also evident because it would stem from how they think the participants are online. Thus, most Facebook users find this need since the prevalence of suspicious activity online bothers them. The participants usually block people who oppose their political stands, when they find the other person weird and annoying, and whenever a stranger starts to show suspicious activity.

3.3. Twitter as a “Les Lieux de Emotion”

Twitter users maximize the platform to post and express their emotions and feelings through tweets. Provided that Twitter is a more private platform than Facebook, it is maintained as a place of emotion as participants are inclined to express themselves through tweets since users can post their emotions more freely without the fear of privacy invasion, particularly by their relatives. Especially in this day and age, wherein adolescents use social media as a platform to rant about their daily lives, most of the participants have said to do this activity more on Twitter.

When the participants were asked about how they use their Twitter account/s, the majority of the Twitter users make use of more than two accounts: one is two fully share their opinions and sentiments to which is only open to their closest friends, another may be a stan account in order to support the people they idolize, and another is a more formal and professional Twitter account wherein their tweets, retweets and likes are open to the public. Thus, people use Twitter as a personal application to share their sentiments and opinions.

Most of the participants considered the need to block people due to suspicious acts and inappropriate tweets. The participants would often block people who spread negativity, such as fake accounts and threats. Moreover, fewer Twitter users use the block option in the application since they have not encountered any experience to deem this feature applicable. Thus, Twitter users use the block feature to avoid negativity and suspiciousness to prevail on their timelines.

3.4. The Emotional Well-being of Facebook and Twitter Users

Considering how social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter could significantly impact its users’ quality of experience, participants classify these experiences as either positive or negative. Positive experiences are associated with positive thoughts and feelings like being happy in being able to communicate with friends and classmates, relieved to be updated with what is happening in school, with the situation



of people they love, and being able to get the information that they need whenever they want them. The participants associated the distress and negative emotions that they feel with their utilization of Facebook and Twitter. There are instances where unwarranted information is made public online or accidentally views pornographic and disturbing materials. Additionally, most participants are inhibited from expressing themselves freely in their public accounts because of fear of being targeted by “cancel culture.” Moreover, the feeling of distress and anxiety are associated concerns on their account’s privacy. These include fear of hacking, receiving random messages, and group invitations. Consequently, the uncanny social media algorithm disconcerts them, making the users feel unsafe. One of the biggest worries is the idea that their “private” thoughts and emotions are shared with other people outside their “exclusive” online circle. Unwarranted information overload is also causing the participants distress and makes them anxious like trigger warnings, especially COVID-19 concerns. Also, viewing the achievements of their networks posted online makes them feel insecure about themselves, which significantly affects their life satisfaction because they think they have a lot of things missing in their lives.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Facebook and Twitter are social media platforms that have become an integral part of the life of Filipino youth, evident in the narratives of the participants of this study. They are both utilized as a tool for communication, entertainment, access to information, and maintenance of their social ties online. However, Facebook has been maintained as a “les lieux de communication” or a space to communicate with friends, family, and classmates. Although, due to its “public” nature, the participants were inhibited from sharing their thoughts and feelings in their Facebook account. On the other hand, multiple Twitter accounts have been maintained: for public consumption and an “exclusive” account. This exclusive Twitter account has been maintained as a “les lieux de emotion” or a social space wherein they could be inhibited on what ideas, opinions, or sentiments they will share. One of the interesting findings of this study is the association of Facebook and Twitter as an online space of toxicity and negativity. Thus, experiencing distress, negative emotions, and satisfaction has been associated with utilization of Facebook and Twitter due to issues on accessibility, unwarranted information, lack of control on sudden posts of pornographic materials, and the threat of hacking and breaching in their “les lieux de communication” and “les lieux de emotion.” Moderation and vigilance should then be maintained

in the utilization of social media accounts to mitigate the risks of negative experiences and impact on one’s emotional well-being.

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