

How Different Social Media Apps Impact Different Emotions

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ABSTRACT: As social media has become commonplace, and influences thoughts and behaviors, one cannot help but wonder how social media causes shifts in the brain, specifically regarding mindset and emotions. This research paper was conducted to gather information on how different social media applications result in different emotions and behaviors. A survey that included 30 questions was conducted with a wide demographic of 95 participants, between the ages of 14 to 56. The survey evaluated how participants felt on a scale from 1 to 10 after using five social media websites: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter (X), and TikTok. This paper analyzes the data collected and compares how different social media applications contribute to forming different feelings. By examining the results from a wide perspective, the research suggests how to make negative emotions that stem from social media less prominent. The goal is to inform the public of better ways to use social media applications for overall well-being.

KEYWORDS: social media, thoughts, behaviors, brain, mindset, emotions, feelings, loneliness, well being, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Confidence, Facebook

Introduction

Social media has been making its debut since 1997, starting with websites such as Sixdegrees.com and Friendster, making never-before-seen impacts in a global community (Britannica 2024). With people finding it even easier to talk to people who are hours and sometimes countries away, why wouldn't it make an impact? People around the world were finally able to communicate with their relatives whom they hadn't seen since their childhood. Because of this, it is no secret that social media has become increasingly more popular. As of July 2024, around 63.7% of the entire population of the world used some kind of social media (Petrosyan 2024). However, what effects does the use of social media have on the population? Many studies indicate that social media could potentially cause loneliness and even a decrease in life satisfaction (Lin et al. 2016). These results are likely not far off from what one may speculate since the more one uses social media, normally correlates to less face-to-face human interaction, thus more loneliness. With social media playing roles in how lonely one might feel, naturally the next question is what social media sources are the safest to use or avoid based on what one wants from a social media experience.

The study of how different social media sources impact different mental states needs to be further discussed. Five social media sources were studied in order to find out what applications lead to specific outcomes: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (Twitter), and TikTok. These social media websites all allow for posting and consumption of content, which makes social media how it is. All of these social media websites also have become increasingly popular with millions of users daily. For example, Facebook has been dominant in the social media scene since 2004. In 2012 there were over 845 million users, and an average of 250 million photos were uploaded to the website daily (Wilson et al. 2012). Instagram was launched in 2010 with an average of 2 billion online users monthly. YouTube was launched in 2005 and has an average of 2.5 billion online users monthly. X (Twitter) was launched in 2006 and has 611 million active users monthly. TikTok was launched in 2016, and today, it still receives 1.5 billion active users monthly (Dixon 2024).

It is important to learn about how each social media impacts in order to prevent more severe mental illnesses and even physical symptoms stemming from loneliness. According to

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, loneliness can lead to some of the following issues: 50% increase in dementia and higher rates in depression, anxiety, and suicide (CDC 2024). Without learning how different social media websites impact different emotions, it would be difficult to find a way to know what social media websites should be avoided with those who have a higher risk for being lonely.

Methods

In 2024, 95 people aged 14-55 were surveyed to provide information for this study. No other personally identifiable information was given in the survey. There were 15 who responded to the use of TikTok, 31 for YouTube, 77 responses for Facebook, 15 responses for Twitter (X), and 67 responses regarding Instagram. The participants all lived in the United States, and most of the participants were gathered via Facebook. In the beginning of the survey, it stated that all of the responses given would be used for a research paper and that by submitting the survey, consent to use information would be assumed. This survey was available for responses for a total of three weeks before closing down.

Testing was conducted via Google Forms to see how people felt on a scale from 1-10 regarding how happy, lonely, and confident they felt after using a social media app. On the scale, 10 indicated the strongest presence of the given feeling, and 1 indicated the weakest presence of the given feeling. For someone to be eligible to answer a question regarding the social media website, they first had to select whether or not they had an actively used account for the social media website. An active social media account was defined as an account that is used for posting or viewing purposes at least two times a week.

Results & Discussion

After compiling the data from the form, the results are as follows for the averages of each answer:

Table 1. Average Feelings from Each Website

	Loneliness Average (1-10)	Confidence Average (1-10)
Facebook	3.71	6.92
Instagram	3.79	6.76
TikTok	3.73	6.00
YouTube	3.00	6.74
Twitter (X)	3.60	7.33

While the chart does not seem to show any significant differences between the websites, one can infer that Instagram causes people to feel the loneliest, followed by TikTok and Facebook. On the contrary, the apps with the highest level of confidence were Twitter (X), Facebook, and Instagram in decreasing order. It can be seen that social media does have roles to play in feelings such as loneliness and confidence, but it may not have as much of an impact as one would have originally thought.

Given that Youtube had the lowest impact on loneliness compared to its peer applications, it does bring up the question of whether the focus on information and education that Youtube tends to focus on compared to other applications that focus on social comparisons. This also correlates with Tiktok which presents bite size videos of comparisons and has the lowest confidence level.

Literary Review

There are many differing opinions on social media and how it impacts certain aspects of mental health and emotions. For example, Wei Jia, who is affiliated with the School of Politics and Public Administration, and her colleagues, all concluded that social media not only negatively impacts self-efficacy but also impacts loneliness through its effect on social support outcome. The study also recommended having less prolonged times on social media to minimize these potential results (Jia, Liu, and Peng 2023). Similarly to these results, another study was conducted by Tore Bonsaksen, who is affiliated with the Department of Health and Nursing Science in Norway. His colleagues found that higher levels of time spent on social media can lead to more loneliness. While it is shown within this study that loneliness does seem to increase after using social media, the results found in the other two studies had more of a significant correlation between social media and loneliness (Bonsaksen et al. 2023). This could have been because they might have been testing the difference of loneliness from different social media websites than the ones used in this study. On the contrary, another study indicates that increased engagement with Twitter and Instagram is associated with decreased loneliness among college students, but the opposite effect was present with Facebook. The results in this study differ from the results that were received for this study, as it was shown that Instagram, on average, resulted in higher rates of loneliness than Facebook did (Pittman 2015). This difference could be because of the different sample populations as this study was conducted among a wider range of ages (ages 14 through 56) and the other study was conducted on only college students.

Conclusion

This study supports the fact that different social media websites can impact different feelings, but the differences in the effects between the social media applications are minor. With that being said, many participants felt like social media barely impacted their loneliness rates which is against what most people would agree upon. The minimal changes to using different social media websites could help prevent or slow down some future development of lowered confidence or loneliness. These results can help people who are more at risk for lowered confidence and loneliness avoid certain social media websites for a positive benefit.

A recommendation in line with the other related studies by Wei Jia and her team is to minimize social media, especially the ones focused on others' updates and accomplishments, which can create a feeling of comparison, envy and inadequacy. Rather focusing on oneself, as one is a unique individual and spending more time learning and gathering information, such as mediums like Youtube could be more beneficial to the mind. Education institutions may use this data to create healthy programming.

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