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# A Review Of The Relationship Between Social Media Consumption And Happiness: Impacts On Subjective Well-Being In Educational Contexts

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## Abstract

Social media consumption has become an integral part of modern life, profoundly influencing subjective well-being, particularly in educational settings. This narrative review examines the relationship between social media use and happiness, focusing on its impacts on students' subjective well-being. By synthesizing existing literature, this article explores how frequency, type, and purpose of social media engagement affect students' mental health, academic performance, and social interactions. Additionally, it identifies the potential for both positive and negative outcomes, providing insights for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Future research directions and practical implications have been discussed.

**Key Words:** Happiness, Social Media Consumption, Subjective Well Being.

## Introduction

Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter have transformed the way individuals interact, communicate, and consume information. Particularly among students, these platforms serve as spaces for social connection, learning, and self-expression. However, the rise in social media usage has sparked debates about its effects on subjective well-being (SWB), defined as individuals' evaluations of their life satisfaction and emotional experiences (Diener et al., 1985).

Happiness, as a component of Subjective Well-being (SWB), refers to a state of positive emotion and satisfaction with life. It encompasses both momentary pleasures and long-term contentment, contributing significantly to individuals' mental and emotional health. Subjective well-being, a broader construct, evaluates happiness by considering emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global life judgments.

Social media, broadly defined, refers to digital platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, and interact with content. These platforms facilitate various forms of communication, from personal messages to public broadcasts. Social media consumption involves the extent and manner in which individuals engage with these platforms, including the time spent, types of activities (e.g., browsing, posting, or commenting), and purposes of use (e.g., entertainment, education, or social interaction).

Within educational contexts, social media plays a dual role: it acts as a tool for learning and collaboration while also posing challenges to mental health and productivity. This article aims to provide a comprehensive review of the relationship between social media consumption and happiness, emphasizing its implications within educational settings. By

examining the nuances of this relationship, we highlight the mechanisms through which social media shapes students' emotional and academic lives.

## Methodology

This narrative review synthesizes findings from peer-reviewed articles, meta-analyses, and reports published on online databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The articles were searched using keywords including “social media,” “happiness,” “subjective well-being,” and “educational contexts.” Studies focusing on adolescents and young adults were prioritized, given their significant engagement with social media.

## Theoretical Framework

Understanding the relationship between social media and happiness requires a multidimensional approach. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974) The **Uses and Gratifications Theory** explains social media consumption as a purposeful and goal-driven activity where individuals actively engage with platforms to fulfill specific needs. These needs can include seeking information (e.g., news updates), entertainment (e.g., funny videos or memes), social interaction (e.g., connecting with friends and family), identity expression (e.g., sharing achievements or opinions), and stress relief (e.g., browsing content to relax). Social media provides a versatile space for users to satisfy these diverse motivations, emphasizing their role as active participants who tailor their consumption to meet personal and social gratifications. This perspective underscores the dynamic relationship between individual needs and the multifaceted nature of social media platforms. Conversely, the Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) explains how social media consumption influences self-perception through comparisons with others. On platforms filled with curated and idealized content, users frequently engage in **upward comparisons**, where they compare themselves to those perceived as more successful, attractive, or happy, often leading to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem. Conversely, **downward comparisons**, where users view themselves as better off than others, can temporarily boost self-esteem but may foster unhealthy attitudes. Additionally, **lateral comparisons** help users gauge their alignment with peers and societal norms. The theory suggests that excessive social media use can lead to negative self-evaluations due to upward social comparisons. These frameworks provide a foundation for examining how social media impacts SWB.

## Positive Impacts of Social Media on Subjective Well-Being

### Enhanced Social Connectivity

Social media facilitates communication and connection, enabling students to maintain relationships despite geographical barriers. Studies indicate that online interactions can strengthen existing bonds and provide emotional support, enhancing life satisfaction (Ellison et al., 2017).

### Access to Educational Resources

Platforms such as YouTube and LinkedIn offer educational content, skill-building opportunities, and career guidance. Students who use social media for academic purposes report higher levels of satisfaction and reduced stress, as these platforms supplement traditional learning methods (Manca & Ranieri, 2016).

### Opportunities for Self-Expression

Social media allows individuals to express their identities and share achievements. Positive feedback from peers can boost self-esteem and contribute to overall happiness (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

### **Negative Impacts of Social Media on Subjective Well-Being**

#### **Increased Risk of Anxiety and Depression**

Excessive social media use has been linked to mental health issues, including anxiety and depression. A meta-analysis by Keles et al. (2020) found a significant correlation between high social media engagement and poor mental health outcomes among adolescents.

#### **Social Comparison and Envy**

The curated nature of social media content often leads to upward social comparisons, where individuals perceive others as more successful or happier. This can result in feelings of inadequacy and decreased life satisfaction (Chou & Edge, 2012).

#### **Academic Distractions**

Prolonged social media use can detract from academic responsibilities, leading to lower grades and heightened stress. Students who multitask between social media and study often report diminished focus and productivity (Junco, 2012).

### **Factors Influencing the Impact of Social Media on Happiness**

#### **Frequency and Duration of Use**

Studies suggest a U-shaped relationship between social media use and SWB, where moderate use enhances happiness, but excessive use diminishes it (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017).

#### **Type of Engagement**

Active engagement, such as creating content and interacting with others, is generally associated with positive outcomes. Conversely, passive consumption, such as scrolling through feeds, is linked to negative emotional states (Verduyn et al., 2017).

#### **Individual Differences**

Personality traits, such as extraversion and neuroticism, influence how individuals respond to social media. Extraverts tend to benefit more from social interactions online, whereas neurotic individuals are more susceptible to its negative effects (Kircaburun et al., 2018).

### **Implications for Educational Contexts**

#### **Promoting Digital Literacy**

Educators can foster digital literacy by teaching students to critically evaluate content, manage screen time, and develop healthy online habits. Programs emphasizing mindfulness and self-regulation can mitigate the negative impacts of social media.

#### **Leveraging Social Media for Learning**

Integrating social media into curricula can enhance engagement and collaboration. For instance, platforms like Twitter can facilitate discussions, while Pinterest can support creative projects (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

### Supporting Mental Health

Institutions should provide resources such as counselling services and peer support groups to address social media-related stress. Encouraging open dialogues about its effects can also help students navigate challenges.

### Conclusion

The relationship between social media consumption and happiness is complex, shaped by factors such as usage patterns, individual traits, and context. Social media fosters connection, learning, and self-expression, offering opportunities to maintain relationships, access educational resources, and showcase creativity. When used mindfully, it can enhance happiness, satisfaction, and a sense of belonging.

However, excessive use poses risks, including mental health challenges like anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, often driven by social comparison with idealized content. Academic performance can also suffer due to distractions and procrastination. These negative effects highlight the importance of promoting healthy social media habits.

Stakeholders such as educators, parents, and mental health professionals play a critical role in mitigating risks. Encouraging **digital literacy** helps users critically assess content and navigate online spaces responsibly. Teaching the importance of **balanced use**, including setting screen time limits, and prioritizing offline interactions, is vital. Addressing mental health concerns through counselling, awareness campaigns, and peer support can further reduce negative impacts.

By fostering awareness, promoting mindfulness, and encouraging constructive engagement, social media can be a tool to enhance happiness and well-being while minimizing its potential drawbacks.

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