| Research Article

Disconnected in a Connected World: Examining Social Isolation and Social Media use Among College Students at St. Cecilia's College - Cebu

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between social media use and social isolation and its implications for mental health and well-being among college students at St. Cecilia's College - Cebu,". This research utilized a cross-sectional survey design, data was collected from 50 college students across various years of study within the College of Education program. This paper utilized a structured questionnaire modeled from the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) by Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Johnson (2013), the UCLA Loneliness Scale by Hughes et al. (2004), and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. The following presents the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study: (1) The study found a significant positive relationship between social media use and social isolation among college students at St. Cecilia's College - Cebu; (2) The study found that students' social isolation is significantly influenced by the quality of their online interactions, with genuine, supportive interactions reducing feelings of isolation; (3) Based on the findings, several recommendations for St. Cecilia's College - Cebu are proposed to implement awareness programs on social media use, encourage balance between online and offline interactions, promote face-to-face activities, and integrate healthy social media habits into mental health services and counseling to improve students' social and emotional well-being.

Keywords: Digital Age, College Students, Mental Health, Social Isolation, Social Media Use.

INTRODUCTION

In this digital age, technology has significantly impacted communication, engagement, and social relationships. While it has brought benefits like increased accessibility and global interconnectedness, it has also introduced new challenges. The paradox of interconnectedness is the social disconnection, particularly among college students who are often at the forefront of adopting new

technologies, has become a significant concern. This study aims to understand social isolation in the digital era, focusing on college students' experiences and potential impacts on their mental health and overall well-being.

Social isolation, a term referring to the absence of social connections and the feeling of loneliness, has been increasing in recent years, according to a 2020 survey by Cigna. This disconnection from others can significantly impact an individual's mental, emotional, and physical well-being, as highlighted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In the digital age, feeling of loneliness had become a major concern among college students. College students, who are at a developmental stage, are better equipped to tackle these issues due to their involvement in academic and social settings. However, excessive social media usage can lead to social isolation and negatively impact mental well- being. A 2020 survey by Cigna revealed a significant increase in individuals experiencing symptoms of loneliness in recent years. The feeling of being disconnected from others is a complex and diverse phenomenon that can negatively impact an individual's mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

Moreover, the number of social media users globally has significantly increased, with

4.2 billion users in 2021, according to Statista (2021). This growth is concerning, as it raises questions about the link between excessive social media use and mental health issues. Studies show that 90% of young adults use at least one social media site, a trend that has been gradual (Lin et al., 2016). The prevalence of depression among young adults has also increased due to increased mobile device usage. Studies show that those who use social media more frequently are more likely to experience depression symptoms. Additionally, regular social media usage increases the likelihood of developing mental health conditions like anxiety and eating disorders (Vannucci et al., 2017; Zenni et al., 2018).

As we navigate an increasingly digital landscape, the question of how virtual interactions reshape our social experiences becomes particularly pertinent. This study, centered at St. Cecilia's College— Cebu, aims to illuminate the nuanced dynamics of social isolation among college students in the digital age. It also aims to explore the impact of social media use on social isolation and its implications for mental health and well-being.

Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between social media use and social isolation among St. Cecilia's College – Cebu college students?

2. Does the quality of online interactions affect the degree of social isolation experienced by college students at St. Cecilia's College - Cebu?

3. What recommendations can St. Cecilia's College - Cebu implement to reduce social isolation and improve mental health among students related to social media use?

REVIEW AND RELATED LITERATURE

The digital revolution has increased social media usage among youth and college students. Young adults aged 18-29 use social media more than older age groups, with 84% engaging with it in 2021(Auxier & Anderson, 2021). However, this increased engagement has led to a rise in reported mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, body image concerns, and eating disorders. This highlights the need for more research and awareness of social media usage (Lin et al., 2016; Rideout et al. Trust, 2018; Vannucci et al., 2017; Zenni et al., 2018).

From a Sociological perspective, Émile Durkheim's theory of social integration and anomie examines the impact of digital isolation on social structures. Durkheim argued that social stability

and individual well-being depend on social integration. Anomie refers to normlessness in social interactions, which can be undermined by virtual interactions, weakening social bonds. In this context, the digital transformation has led to more ephemeral and less emotionally fulfilling interactions. According to Durkheim, the quality and type of social ties directly affect the social cohesion of a community. In the digital age, the predominance of superficial online interactions may contribute to social isolation, reducing the effectiveness of traditional social networks in providing emotional support and maintaining societal norms (Turkle, 2011). Durkheim emphasized the importance of collective consciousness and social integration. Digital isolation can lead to a decline in social capital, distorting reality and causing anomie. Social media can distort expectations, making individuals feel disconnected and unsatisfied with societal norms (Chou & Edge, 2012).

In a Psychological Perspective, Social Comparison Theory, proposed by Leon Festinger in 1954, suggests that people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others. This process can be upward or downward, impacting self-esteem, motivation, and emotional well-being. Upward comparisons can motivate improvement but lead to inferiority, while downward comparisons can enhance self-esteem but may cause complacency or guilt. The theory has significant implications for understanding self- evaluation and social media's impact on self- esteem and mood.

Additionally, John Bowlby's attachment theory explains how students' attachment styles affect their social media use, social isolation, and mental health. Insecure attachment styles may seek validation and connection through social media, leading to social isolation. Johnson's research shows college students with insecure attachment styles have higher social media use and social isolation.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study will employ a cross-sectional survey design. The study involved 50 randomly selected college students from the College of Education program at St. Cecilia's College, Cebu, spanning 1st to 4th year. This research utilized a structured questionnaire modeled from the Social Media Use Integration Scale

(SMUIS) by Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Johnson (2013), the UCLA Loneliness Scale by Hughes et al. (2004), and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Data will be collected through surveys via Google Forms, a platform accessible to all students to maximize participation. Information about the survey and a link will be sent to student's official college email addresses. Data will be analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including linear regression analysis, were used to analyze the data.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research guidelines. Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. Cecilia's College, Cebu. Participation will be voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at their discretion. Data confidentiality was maintained, and all personal identifiers were removed from the dataset before analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

For this study, an online survey was completed by 50 participants over three days, spanning from April 29th to May 1st, 2024. All participants consented to being over 18 years of age; see Table 1 for age breakdown. Of the 50 participants, 62% identified as female, 38% as male. The Quantitative data was collected through Qualtrics and transferred to SPSS for interpretation. In this study, a conceptual framework was used, see Figure 1 for visual.
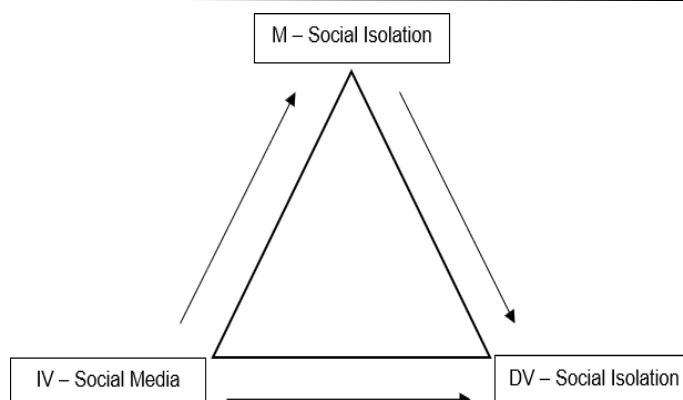
Figure 1. The diagram depicts the mediation model investigating the relationship between social media use (IV - Independent Variable). Social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing and aggregation of content, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks. and social isolation (DV - Dependent Variable), Social isolation is a state of complete or near-complete lack of contact between an individual and society. It differs from loneliness, which reflects a temporary and involuntary lack of contact with other humans in the world. Social isolation can be an issue for individuals of any age, though symptoms may differ by age group with social isolation acting as both a mediator (M) and an outcome.

Table 1: Age Breakdown

Age	N	Percentage
18-20	15	30%
21-23	18	36%
24-26	17	34%

Table 1 displays the sample population by age, showing how the individuals are distributed across the specified age ranges. In a pattern consistent with the current study on social media use, there are some stark age differences. Some 34% of adults ages 21 to 23 say they ever use any social media sites, which is like the share of those ages 24 to 26 who say this (34%).

Table 2. displays data on the gender distribution of a sample population.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficient Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.200	0.250		4.800	<0.001
Media	0.220	0.075	0.270	2.933	0.005

Data Interpretation

The table displays the results of a linear regression analysis examining the relationship between social media use and social isolation among St. Cecilia's College - Cebu college students. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.220) suggests that there is a 0.220 unit increase in social isolation for every unit increase in social media use. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.270) indicates a moderate positive relationship between these variables. The t-value (2.933) and the significance level (p= 0.005) demonstrate that this relationship is statistically significant, implying that increased social media use is associated with higher levels of social isolation among the students.

This finding aligns with existing research indicating that excessive social media use can exacerbate feelings of social isolation. This further supports the research of Primack et al. (2017), which found that young adults who spend more time on social media feel more socially isolated

than their counterparts who engage less frequently. Similarly, Nowland, Necka, and Cacioppo (2018) discussed how social media might displace more meaningful, face-to-face interactions, leading to increased feelings of loneliness. These studies support the notion that while social media can provide a platform for interaction, it often needs more depth and quality of in-person relationships, which are crucial for emotional support and connection.

The implications of this study are significant for educational institutions like St. Cecilia's College - Cebu. The findings suggest that high social media usage among students may contribute to their social isolation. Furthermore, mental health services on campus should incorporate discussions about healthy social media habits into their counseling sessions, aiming to balance online engagement with real-world social interactions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, key recommendations were formulated; (1) the college could implement workshops and seminars to educate students on the responsible use of social media, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balance between online and offline interactions; (2) promoting extracurricular activities that foster face-to-face social engagement could help mitigate feelings of isolation; (4) the institution should consider regular assessments of students' social media usage patterns and their effects on mental health, providing tailored interventions when necessary; (5) further research should be conducted to explore the long-term effects of social media use on social isolation and to identify specific factors that may mediate this relationship, such as the type of social media activity and the quality of online interactions.

CONCLUSION

In the digital age, the paradox of feeling disconnected despite being constantly connected has become a growing concern, particularly among college students who are at the forefront of technology adoption. The following presents the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study: (1) The study found a significant positive relationship between social media use and social isolation among college students at St. Cecilia's College - Cebu. It found that students who spend more time on social media are more likely to experience social isolation, despite the perceived connectivity offered by these platforms, indicating a negative correlation between social media usage and social isolation; (2) The study found that students' social isolation is significantly influenced by the quality of their online interactions, with genuine, supportive interactions reducing feelings of isolation; (3) Based on the findings, several recommendations for St. Cecilia's College - Cebu are proposed to implement awareness programs on social media use, encourage balance between online and offline interactions, promote face-to-face activities, and integrate healthy social media habits into mental health services and counseling to improve students' social and emotional well-being.

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