

Impacts of Social Media on Psychological, Social and Educational Aspects of Life

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ABSTRACT

Background: One of the revolutionary applications in the last few years is the social media which enhanced easy communication between people from different localities. Social media enters the daily lives of people and becomes an essential technology. According to the latest statistics, social media users are approximating 4.74 billion worldwide with average use of 2.5 hours per person.

Aim: This study focused the light on the potential effects of social media on the social life of people, the psyche of individuals, and the academic performance of students.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was carried out on 512 participants of both sexes and of different socio-demographic backgrounds in Nineveh Governorate over a period of 6 months. For the academic aspect, the questionnaires were allocated to 486 students from the total participants. The questionnaires were designed to cover as much as possible the potential effects of social media on the social, psychological, and academic aspects of life.

Results: The use of social platforms made three quarters of the participants experienced some sorts of psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, 38% were negatively affected by bad comments, in addition to loneliness feeling, all of them showed significant association ($P < 0.001$). However, the social media did not affect the social life of the participants and their communications. Inversely, most users confirmed that social platforms enhanced their academic performance despite the effects of wasting time and reduced focussing on their study.

Conclusions: Social media have variable effects on individuals' life. They have negative effects on the psychological status, neutral on the social life, and positive on the educational level. Knowledge of these effects is crucial to avoid the harmful effects and achieve the greatest benefit from using these platforms

Keywords: Social media, Mental health, Education, Networks, Technology, Nineveh.

آثار وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على جوانب الحياة النفسية، والاجتماعية والدراسية

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الخلاصة

الخلفية: تعتبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي من الاختراعات الثورية التي غيرت شكل التواصل بين الناس عما كان عليه من قبل، فقد دخلت حياتنا اليومية بقوة وأصبحت تكنولوجيا لا غنى عنها. ويقدر عدد مستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بنحو 4.74 مليار بحسب آخر الإحصائيات وبمعدل استخدام يومي ساعتين ونصف للشخص الواحد.
هدف الدراسة: تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على التأثيرات المحتملة لهذه التقنيات على المستوى الاجتماعي ونفسية الأفراد والإداء الأكاديمي للطلبة.

طرق البحث: أجريت الدراسة المقطعية على 512 مشاركاً من الجنسين ومن مختلف الخصائص الديموغرافية في محافظة نينوى لمدة 6 أشهر، باستثناء الجانب الأكاديمي الذي خصص للطلبة فقط، وشارك فيه 486 طالباً. وقد صممت الاستبانة بحيث تغطي قدر الإمكان التأثيرات المحتملة لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على الجوانب الاجتماعية والنفسية والأكاديمية.

النتائج: إن استخدام منصات التواصل الاجتماعي جعل ثلاثة أرباع المشاركين يعانون من بعض أنواع المشاكل النفسية مثل القلق والاكتئاب، و38% تأثروا سلباً بالتعليقات السيئة، بالإضافة إلى الشعور بالوحدة، وجميعهم أظهروا ارتباطاً معنوياً ($P < 0.001$). ومع ذلك، لم تؤثر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على الحياة الاجتماعية للمشاركين واتصالاتهم. وعلى العكس من ذلك، أكد معظم المستخدمين أن منصات التواصل الاجتماعي عززت أدائهم الأكاديمي على الرغم من آثار إضاعة الوقت وتقليل التركيز في دراستهم.

الاستنتاجات: وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لها تأثيرات متغيرة على حياة الأفراد. ولها آثار سلبية على الحالة النفسية، ومحايدة على الحياة الاجتماعية، وإيجابية على المستوى التعليمي. ومعرفة هذه التأثيرات أمر بالغ الأهمية لتجنب الآثار الضارة وتحقيق أكبر فائدة من استخدام هذه المنصات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الصحة العقلية، الجانب التربوي، الشبكات، التكنولوجيا، نينوى.

INTRODUCTION

Since birth, humans try to communicate with the surrounding environment, and as they grow, they develop various skills for interaction with each other. These skills range from gesture and expressions to spoken and written language. As a result, people are sensitive to the behaviors of those surrounding them and make countless decisions according to the social context¹.

With the ongoing technological improvements, social media usage has increased substantially in the last years and become the most widespread form of communication and collaboration between people to share opinions, thoughts, and information all over the world by using various platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, etc.^{2,3}. As a result of the growing popularity of social media use, researches about the subject were made in several countries, among them was a study in the USA which found that nearly 8 in 10 Americans use social media, and, on average, social media interactions constituted 28% of the time spent in using the Internet⁴.

Indeed, there are many benefits related to social media use such as easy access to the latest information, raised awareness, empowerment of mental health, easy access to resources, and positive outlet to diminish stresses. However, several studies link social media use with several psychiatric disorders, including anxiety, depressive symptoms, and low self-esteem⁴.

Obviously, adolescents and young adults are the main strata of the population that spent excessive time on the social media for the purposes of studying, gaming ...etc.⁵. Consequently, concerns are raised regarding the possible negative influences due to addiction to social media⁶, predominantly on the psychological, educational, and social well-being as revealed by several researches⁷⁻¹⁰. For instance, Damota¹¹ found that prolonged and excessive use of social media

among children and teen aged made them suffering from mental health problems.

Because of their susceptibility to peer pressures and limited capacity for self-regulation, adolescents and young people are at increased risk of navigate experiments with social media which later on interfere with their educational performance¹¹. So, there is an increased need to cover this matter in our locality to exhibit the various effects of social media on populations' life.

AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the effects of social media on the psychological, social, and educational aspects of populations' life.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Family and Community Medicine, College of Medicine/ University of Mosul before conducting the study. Brief information regarding objectives and benefits of this research were explained to participants and informed consents were obtained before filling the online research questionnaires. All information were kept confidential and used only for research's purposes.

The study was conducted in Nineveh Governorate for a period of 6 months starting at January 2023. A cross-sectional design has been adopted in order to achieve study objectives. All population with age of ≥ 15 years who accepted to participate in the study were included in this research to analyze the effects of social media on their psychological and social aspects of life in addition to the effects of social media on educational aspects of students among the study participants.

A special questionnaire form has been prepared by the investigators utilizing the available resources concerned with this subject in addition to questions valid for the studied community.

The questionnaire distributed in Google Form and distributed to large number of residents in Nineveh Governorate's districts and sub-districts.

The questionnaire was structured and modified to include basic demographic data, questions about psychological, social and educational effects of social media on the studied population.

The data were analyzed by Microsoft Office Excel 2016 and Mini-tab program. The responses were analyzed as categorical variable. The score of the questions were analyzed as percentage, and χ^2 -test was used to determine the P-value with a 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that both sexes were responding equally to the questionnaire form, most of them (87.6%) in the age group 15 – 25 years, living in the urban areas (77%), single, students, and with a university level of education among student group (86.1%, 86.5%, 91.2% respectively).

Table (1): Socio-demographic characteristics and general information of the study sample (n= 512)

Socio-demographic Characteristics		No.	%
Sex	Male	259	50.6
	Female	253	49.4
Age group (years)	15 – 25	449	87.66
	25 – 35	50	9.8
	35 – 45	7	1.4
	> 45	6	1.2
Residence	Urban	394	77
	Rural	118	23
Occupation	Student	443	86.5
	Employee	43	8.4
	Housewife	6	1.2
	Freelancing business / Others	20	3.9
Marital Status	Single	441	86.1
	Married	68	13.3
	Divorced / Widow	3	0.6
Educational level	Primary school	6	1.2
	Secondary school	39	7.6
	University and more	467	91.2

Table (2) — The effects of social media on the psychological status of the study sample (n=512)

Psychological topics	Yes		No		Sometimes		P-value
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Suffer from anxiety or depression while using social platforms	110	21.5	144	28.1	258	50.4	<0.001
Feel lonely and isolated	149	29.1	192	37.5	171	33.4	<0.001
Negatively affected due to negative comments on some posts	194	37.9	146	28.5	172	33.6	<0.001
Social media contribute to increasing suicide rates among youth and adolescent	188	36.7	111	21.7	213	41.6	<0.001
Social media use lead to addiction	206	40.2	185	36.1	121	23.6	<0.001
Reducing social platforms use contribute to reduce mental disorders	301	58.8	87	17	124	24.2	<0.001

Table 2 reveals that half of the respondents (50.4%) suffered occasionally from anxiety or depression due to the use of social media, about one third of them (29.1%) feel isolated and another third (37.9%) affected negatively when they received negative responses on their posts. Approximately, four in every ten (36.7%) believed that social media may lead to suicide, and (40.2%) of respondents reached the level of addiction of using these platforms, however, most respondents (58.8%) agreed that reducing platforms use will contribute to reduce mental disorders. All these variables have highly significant differences ($P < 0.001$).

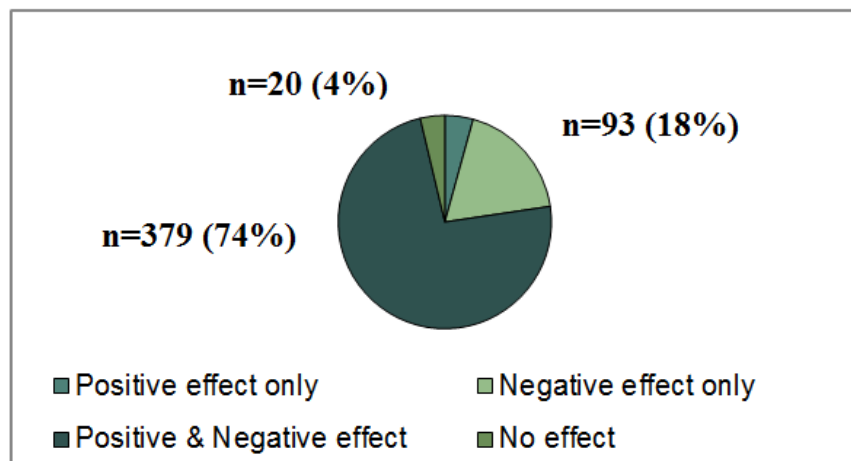


Figure (1) - The degree of social media effect on mental health

Figure 1 demonstrates that three quarters (74%) of the respondents were affected both positively and negatively by the social media.

Table 3 shows that nearly half of the respondents (46.3%) didn't prefer social media over visiting relatives or practicing hobbies, another half (47.1%) were prioritized talking with family over responding on messages. Four in every ten of respondents (40.4%) didn't irritate while using the social media, and 56.6% prefer face to face contact with others, thus (46.3%) of users' exhibit that the social media didn't affect their personal relationships. All of these variables have highly significant association ($P < 0.001$).

Table (3) — The effects of social media on the social life of the participants (n=512)

Social topics	Yes		No		Sometimes		P-value
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Using social media is more preferable than visiting a relative, reading a book, playing sports	142	27.7	237	46.3	133	26	<0.001
You give priority to messages and posts on social media than talking with family	101	19.7	241	47.1	170	33.2	<0.001
Become irritated when someone talks to you while using social media	149	29.1	207	40.4	156	30.5	<0.001
Prefer to be in touch with relatives on social media than face to face communication	117	22.9	291	56.8	104	20.3	<0.001
Have you ever been subjected to electronic extortion?	49	9.6	447	87.2	16	3.2	<0.001
Social media affect your interpersonal relationships	171	33.4	237	46.3	104	20.3	<0.001
Your relatives complain from neglecting while you are busy with social media	121	23.6	259	50.6	132	25.8	<0.001

Table (4) explores the effects of social media on the educational level of students. It's clear that most participants benefit positively while using these platforms for studying (85.8%) and communicating with colleagues (81.9%), but at the same time they were associated with wasting time in (63.8%), reduce focusing in study (45.5%). So, most students (79%) agreed that reducing the use of these platforms will positively enhance their academic level. All these variables show highly significant association (P < 0.001).

Table (4): The effects of social media on the educational level of students (n=486)

Educational topics	Yes		No		Sometimes		P-value
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Social media are useful as a study resource	416	85.8	33	6.6	37	7.6	<0.001
Social media are used to communicate with colleagues in matters related to study duties	398	81.8	30	6.2	58	12	<0.001
Social media use lead to exceeding the planned time for studying	310	63.8	58	11.9	118	24.3	<0.001
Social media negatively affect the focus in studying	221	45.5	76	15.6	189	38.9	<0.001
Reduce the hours of using and browsing social media will enhance academic level	384	79	49	10	53	11	<0.001
Social media use lead to postponing studies and duties	188	38.7	131	26.9	167	34.4	<0.001
Social media use facilitate studying	300	61.7	54	11.1	132	27.2	<0.001

DISCUSSION

Human resources of today's world have become more social but less practical since the emergence of the internet and social networks. This virtual life isolates users, affecting their balance and overall (mental and physical) health. The increasing use of social networks has special concerns among parents, society and researchers due to the positive and negative impacts of these platforms. Exploring and understanding the means by which social media influence the lives of the current generation is a vital step that can shed the light on the connections between these variables.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the study sample showed that the majority of respondents (87.6%) were in the age group 15 - 25 years with equal responses among both sexes, and had university level of education. Similar results were found among students at the University of Princess Nourah and at the University of Mosul^{12,13}.

Social media may increase and feed mental health problems. In the present study, about half of the respondents experienced some forms of anxiety or depression; others feel loneliness, in addition to negative moods while using the social media. According to a study published in Clinical Psychological Science during 2018, two cross-sectional surveys of 506,820 American high school students found that digital media use was associated with higher rates of depressive symptoms and suicides¹⁴. Similarly, a quarter of users identified anxiety as a key response to increased social media exposure⁴. Also, other researches revealed associations between social media use and depression, loneliness, anxiety^{15,16}, and social isolation^{17,18}.

Around 40% of the respondents in the present study believed that the use of social media platforms had reached the level of addiction. A higher proportion (75%) was seen among medical students at Princess Nourah University¹² in contrast to only 29.2% of Wah Medical College students¹⁹. The differences in these results could be due to different methods of measuring Internet addiction or different cultures in the studied communities.

Regarding the impact of social media on the social life, around half of the respondents did not prioritize using social media on other activities such as visiting relatives, reading books, and making exercises and they did not get irritated while using social media just similar to the results of Baluchistan University study²⁰.

More than half (56.8%) of respondents prefer face to face communication with relatives and 33.4% believed that social media has influenced their interpersonal relationships, while in Saudi Arabia

where more than half (59%) of respondents reported that excessive social media use had a negative impact on their family and friends relationships²¹. This depends on the duration of platforms use, as long as extended; it will affect social relationships negatively.

Social media can affect the academic level of students positively or negatively, depending on the way, duration and purpose of use. This explains the contradiction in the participants' opinions as 61% of them found that social media enrich their study due to the ease of access to the internet and the availability of many options for students at different levels and academic specializations. At the same time, 79% supposed that reducing the hours of social media use will enhance their academic performance. Similar results were found by Zaru¹ and Koehler and Parrell⁴ who revealed that most participants believed that social media has negative consequences on their academic level and performance.

CONCLUSION

The present study indicated that the use of social media platforms can have negative effects on a person's mental health by increasing anxiety and depressive symptoms. On the other hand, these platforms have relatively no effects on participants' social life and they seem to be a useful tool for students in improving their learning process if they control their time of use.

Recommendation

As social media become one of the life necessities, it's important to educate publics about their adverse outcomes especially those associated with psychological consequences. People should have better control of using media and limit their use to the beneficial platforms.

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Conflict of Interest

"The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript".

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