

Social Media Use in Relation to College Student's Mental Health During COVID-19

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INTRO

- Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have shown that college students experience high and increasing rates of mental health conditions, especially depression and anxiety.
- Due to lockdown and social distancing measures, individuals have increasingly turned to social media as a way of maintaining connection.
- Previous research has found associations between social media use and adverse mental health outcomes, though findings have been mixed.
- Hypothesis: Increased social media use will be associated with increased depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms during a period of high stress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODS

- College students participated in this study during the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The sample ($N = 319$) was primarily female (63.6%) and white (72.7%).
- Independent t-tests were conducted to evaluate the differences in psychological symptoms experienced by low and high social media users on the DASS-21.

RESULTS

- 58.9% of the sample self-reported as low social media users (0-4 hours/day), while 41.1% self-reported as high social media users (5-20 hours/day).

Using social media for more than 5 hours a day is associated with *higher* depression, anxiety, and stress.



How much time do YOU spend on social media per day?



Figure 1: Mean differences in depressive symptoms

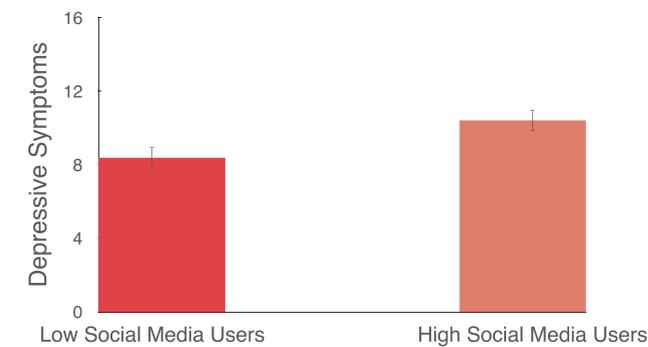


Figure 2: Mean differences in anxiety symptoms

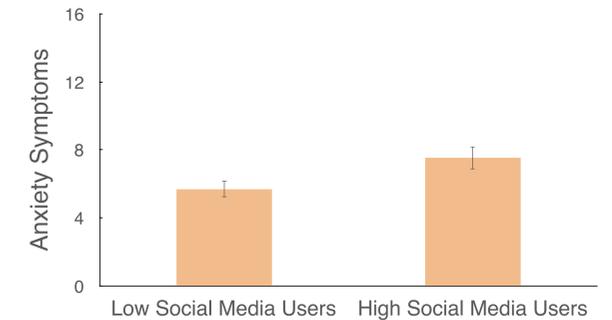
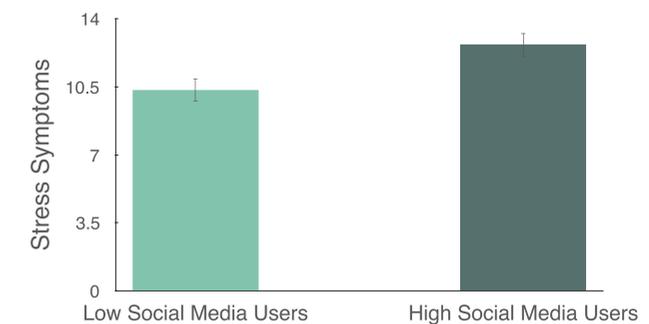


Figure 3: Mean differences in stress symptoms



- High social media users reported significantly higher depression ($t(315) = 2.16, p = .031$), anxiety ($t(315) = 2.32, p = .021$) and stress ($t(315) = 2.48, p = .014$) symptoms compared to low social media users. See Figures 1-3.

DISCUSSION

- The findings indicate that college students with high social media usage report higher depression, stress, and anxiety, highlighting the need for increased awareness of the potential harms of social media use.
- Future studies could benefit from surveying usage of specific social media platforms, diverse samples and using a longitudinal study design to determine the extent social media affects mental health symptoms across time and populations.