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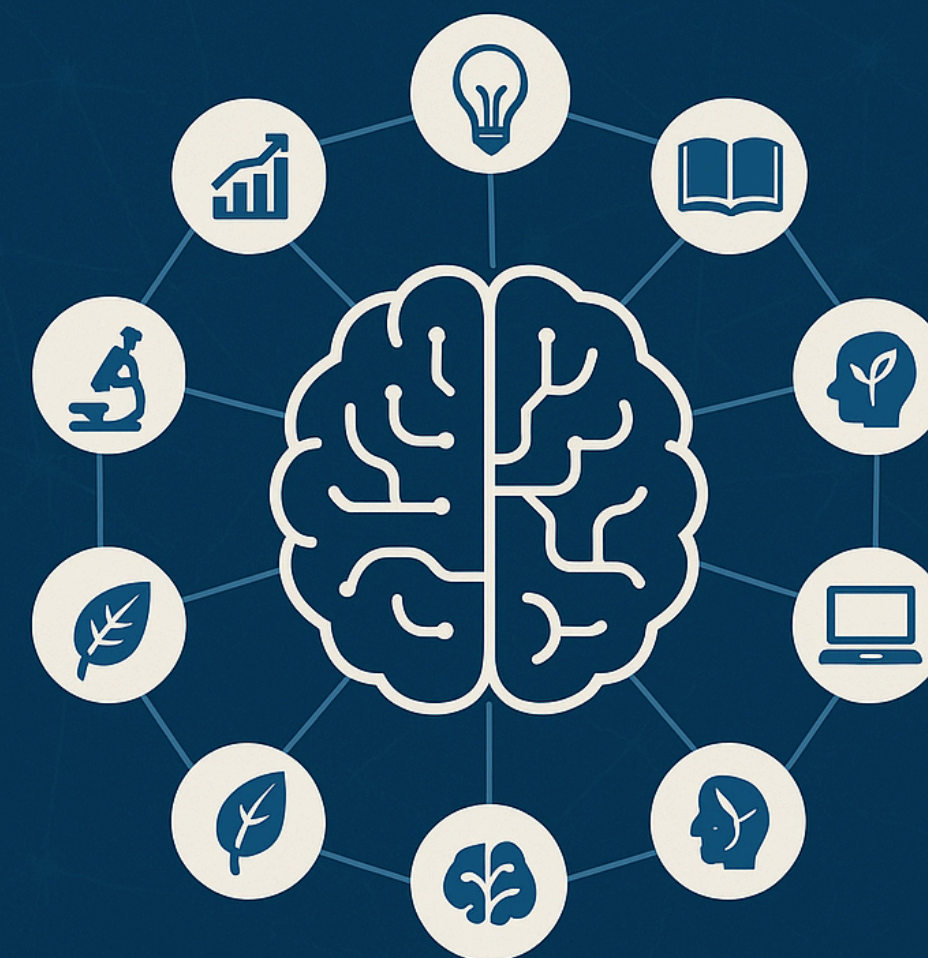
Dr. Amritpal Kaur & Dr. Mahabir Singh

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3. The Positive Impact of Social Media over Socialization among Students in N. Macedonia

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Abstract

We are well aware that we are living in an era of rapid technological development. The advances of technology and its tools have changed and are still changing each aspect of our lives. At present, an enormous number of teenagers, adolescents, college students, check into social media sites and use them on a daily basis. With the invention of the social media, people are now free to share ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures, and videos at unprecedented rate. Furthermore, social media allows people to stay connected with friends and family, as well as meet new people, actively interact with them, and establish social relations, providing a new and different way of socialization. This process of “virtual socialization” is changing the way people, especially the younger generation, interact with each other, and it is also affecting and changing social behavior. The paper will try to identify and discuss these changes, as well as analyze the benefits and negative aspects of “virtual socialization” through the use of social media.

Introduction

Social media can be defined as a set of web applications that enables users to create and share content from multiple sources using social networks as platforms. Any website that allows social interaction can be considered as a social media site. This includes social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, gaming sites, such as Sims, World of Warcraft, as well as blogs (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). One can think of the vast field of social media as “relationships that exist between network of people” (Wang, et al., 2011). Through social media, people can find quickly accessible information on the Internet, and engage in discussing and sharing that information with the help of a common virtual medium (Sawyer, 2011). Social media are so widely spread, that they can be viewed as a type of replacement for television, newspapers, radios. Furthermore, social networks are also used as means of communication and socialization, thus affecting interpersonal exchanges and relationships between people. The use of social media is very appealing to the younger generation – teenagers, adolescents, students. They use the Internet and social media for various different reasons such as getting information on current events, exploring topics that interest them, but also communicating with other people, and establishing a virtual rapport with others. This means that young people are now using social media for socialization. Social media allows them to meet people in a virtual world, where they can talk to each other, discuss their common interests, share their views and opinions, exchange ideas, thoughts, information, even play games. Basically, the Internet has made it possible to have socialization without face-to face interaction (Sawyer, 2011).

Literature review

A preliminary literature review recognizes the immense influence of social media in the socialization process of today’s younger generations. This study will first focus on the advantages that social media provides in regards to socialization, including providing a safe environment, help develop social skills, relieving social anxiety, and resolving the problem of geographical distance as an obstacle in communication and socialization.

Since the Internet provides its users with a place where they can share their thoughts, ideas, experiences, people can benefit from an online interaction with others who have similar viewpoints by learning to relate to others, empathize with others, tolerate different opinions, discuss different

viewpoints and develop critical thought (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). In this regard, online interaction helps people to learn important social skills. Also, individuals may find support and understanding within this virtual society. Being a part of this internet society, or a participating in social network groups can also provide users with a feeling of belonging. Users can even part-take in virtual group activities such as playing games, making conversation, etc., virtual activities that are an imitation of real-life group activities. Furthermore, being able to establish relationships that provide information, mutual assistance, and support with the help of social networking can give individuals a sense of empowerment (Drussel, 2012; Giffords, 2009).

Another beneficial side of social media is that it enables socialization for those who have difficulties with face-to-face communication. The Internet provides a space where they can feel safe and comfortable to engage in communication with their peers (Drussel, 2012). These benefits of the social media and networks can help people, especially teens and adolescents not only practice their social skills, but also explore their self-identity and find out who they are as individuals (Drussel, 2012). Finally, social media and social networking connect people from all parts of the world regardless of geographic distance and borders, enabling quick access to information they can share, comment, and discuss.

The next part of the paper will focus on the negative effect social media and their tools can have on the social lives of college students. Topics such as insufficiently developed social skills, privacy issues, and cyber-abuse will be discussed.

A well-known study conducted by Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukophadhyay and Scherlis (1998), although controversial, showed that increased use of the Internet can lead to decreased social involvement, and increased feeling of loneliness and depression. Social media can be very time-consuming and even become addictive, thus shortening the time of face-to-face communication, which is necessary for acquiring basic social skills. While it is easy and convenient to communicate with people through social networks, personal reactions and facial expressions cannot be transmitted in the process of online communication, along with the ability to learn how to react in such situations, which is another important social skill.

Then, there is the issue of privacy. Sharing information has become easier than ever, but at the same time that information is often exposed and public for everyone to see. Posting and sharing private information is a common practice among social media users, making it difficult for them to maintain a level of privacy and intimacy in their lives. Moreover, the content viewed, shared, posed on social media can often be subject to abuse, and can lead to psychological and social issues for young people, since it can threaten their social status within a certain social group. Not only that, but such invasion of privacy can also have ramifications in regards to their future, jeopardizing for instance a job application (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Finally, we shouldn’t disregard the issue of cyber abuse (bullying, stalking, inappropriate comments and unwanted sexual advances) which, like social media is on the rise. Unfortunately, the openness of the Internet and social media as a platform for socialization has also left a door for cyber abuse. This serious issue can be very detrimental for those who are exposed to it and can cause feelings of shame, guilt, depression, as well as isolation from friends and family members and self-harm (Drussel, 2012).

Research Instruments

The research method for the purpose of collecting data was to perform group research on how social media affects positive on students’ life. In this research questionnaire the collected data which is the standard survey collection method which can be seen in the appendix 1 below this paper. According to the number of respondents who answered the questionnaire there were 100 respondents in total, 36% males and 64% females were involved in this survey. Afterwards, other relevant questions were developed to carry out the research connected to the everyday lives of the students and their feelings while they were using different social media. For example, “How many hours you spend on social

media?” and “Are you part of a social group on Facebook made by university students?” Also, at the end of the questionnaire, two open questions related to the gender of the students where it can be seen whether more male or female students use social media for studying and socializing.

Results

The research involved 100 students from 4 universities in the Republic of North Macedonia. The total number of participants, 86% are 25 years old, 10% are up to 34 years old. According to the gender representation, 56% of the participants are male and 41% female. From the survey 47% reported as Macedonians, 45% as Albanians, and a total of 4% belong to participants who are declared themselves Turks, Bosniaks, Serbs, Montenegrins, etc. From the respondents, there is one representative from the following places: Strumica, Stip, Kumanovo, Ohrid, Gevgelija, Veles. From the results 70% said they did not follow the trends, so with the emergence of new social networks do not create new profiles. About the habits for which purpose and to what extent are they using social media, did they prefer in terms of traditional, 65.6% of respondents said that they are more informed through social rather than traditional media. This is due to the fact that the respondents consider that social media are more accessible, i.e. they provide quick, easy and timely information from any place at any time. The rest of the responses can be seen in the appendix below this paper.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the use of social media is booming, allowing to go beyond the traditional media as a source of information and sharing information. However, young people do not pay enough attention how their data is used by the websites whose users are they are not even careful enough to protect their privacy, and so often share personal information online. Students are aware of the benefits that social media can have as well for self-promotion and promotion of a brand or product, but not enough use social media as an opportunity to reach employment. For scientific purposes, the Internet takes the primacy as a resource, so the results indicate the fact that students are less likely to use books as a resource in the making of their seminary and scientific papers. Young people should also be given the other functions of social media, versus entertainment fun, because with proper use these media can provide them with a sufficient measure of fun, education, resources, communication, contacts and a sense of security with regard to their personal data. It is also necessary to emphasize the existence of other networks other than Facebook and Twitter, that can use them and be useful for their scientific work and for private purposes, including the Flickr service for storing and sharing photos; Slide-shower/Canva for sharing presentations, but also a resource where it can find presentations on various topics.

Previously, the conveying and free sharing of information among individuals was confined by long distances and lack of facilities. In any case, now, even these obstructions are unable to stop the flow of data and information. The new universe of social media networking permits free sharing of thoughts, pictures, videos, news, business, brands and other updates. In a recent study, when students were asked if they think there is any privacy issue identified with utilizing social networking websites, more than half of them agree to this. Especially, according to male students this issue was found to be the biggest disadvantage of using social media. On the other hand, according to the female students, the biggest disadvantage of using social media is that it has a negative impact on their grades and studies. It can be concluded that male students are aware of the problems related to privacy of their personal data with the usage of social media. The female students are more concerned about their grades than male students. The usage of social media does not significantly impact on the students' real social life and grades as well. As a matter of fact, this study showed that social media can prove to be a helpful research tool for students and can help them in their studies. However, the results of the current study, majority of the students spend at least 2 to 5 hours on social media daily. When students were asked about whether using some kind of social networking is essential for today's life or not, more than 80% of the students agreed. The Social media addiction can be an issue that needs to be addressed somehow. The study indicated that automatic software program that will shut down after a certain time, should

be used to control its utilization by students. Also, teachers who need to use social media in their courses to upgrade students learning capacity should be organized to empower students and make them active individuals in the learning process. The thought that students know how to use social media appropriately may act as a hindrance for those students who may require closer supervision. An e-learning system can play a very important role for students in order to cooperate and work together through the social media channel.

Finally, it can be concluded that, if appropriately used, the use of social media can prove to be a very useful source of learning, sharing and healthy activities. In the future, although the percentage of young people using social media is large, attention should be paid to educating young people about the opportunities that they have offer these media as well as the risks that come with their use, above all, because social media is not just a means of entertainment and information, but rather can be used in a wider context. One thing is certain, the social media are here to stay. Good or bad, we cannot ignore that they have an enormous impact on the social and cultural life of the younger generation of college students. There is no denying, the social media have facilitated and changed the way we communicate, the way we acquire, share, and discuss information, the way we form and nurture new interpersonal relationships. The popularity of social media is particularly important for those who have problems and feel uncomfortable with face-to-face communication. However, real-life face-to-face interaction must not be disregarded. It is still a crucial part of the process of socialization. Now more than ever young people should be reminded of the importance of interaction outside of the virtual realm, because that will enable them to acquire very important social skills necessary for their development into well-adapted individuals that can function in their social environment.

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