International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling (IJEPC)

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SELF-ESTEEM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG PRE-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Faieza Samat[1*], Tengku Elmi Azlina Tengku Muda[2], Syafiqah Mohd Yusof[3], Aina Afiqah Abdul Halim[4]

[1] GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: faiezasamat@ukm.edu.my
[2] GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: elmiazlina@ukm.edu.my
[3] GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: syfqh208@gmail.com
[4] GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: ainanana44@gmail.com
[*] Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Abstract:

This research aimed to determine the level of social media use among pre-university students and the association between social media use with self-esteem and psychological distress. Participants of this study were 173 students from ASASIpintar pre-university program in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Instruments used were three sets of questionnaires obtained from Gupta and Bashir (2018), Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), and Rosenberg (1965). This study showed that the level of social media use among ASASIpintar students was moderate while social media use was positively associated with self-esteem and psychological distress.

Keywords:

Social Media Usage, Self-Esteem, Psychological Distress, Adolescents

Introduction

Social media is a form of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share thoughts, daily life and other contents such as videos and pictures. People knew that the internet made everything easy for human beings as all the information is at the tip of fingers. Social media sites such as 'Facebook and Twitter' have rapidly become a central part of young people's lives, with over 90% now using social media, day and night (Duggan & Smith, 2013)

Teenagers nowadays seem to be lost in the unrealistic virtual world of the internet that possibly misses out on critical social skill development like face to face interaction. Findings from Farahani, Kazemi, Aghamohamadi, Bakhtiarvand & Ansari (2011) indicated that individuals who were Facebook users had higher stress and anxiety compared to the non-users. This result shows that online social media may put users on a potential mental health risk. Psychological distress is a common mental problem where there are no two people feeling the same experience with the same cause. This problem can be defined as an unpleasant feeling or emotions often characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety. Keles, McCrae & Grealish (2020) found that addiction, investment, time spent, and activity of social media were correlated with psychological distress in adolescents. Other than that, Ybarra & Mitchell (2008) found that thirty-three percent out of 1588 youth participants aged 10-15-year-old, had experienced online harassment. Sengupta & Chaudhuri (2011) indicated that female teenagers were 63% more likely than male teenagers to set up a profile on one of the many available social networking sites which led to female teenagers being vulnerable to online harassment. On the other hand, there are also positive sides of social media use. For example, a study done by Trifiro (2018) stated that users who engage with Instagram more intensely exhibit higher levels of self-esteem and well-being than users who do not use the application intensely. It is intensity of use, not usage patterns, that determine user outcomes (Trifiro 2018).

There are few problems related to social media on self-esteem and psychological distress. The primary problem is the period of time for students that use social media every day. A study stated that teenagers that use social media for a long time will communicate with each other more freely in social media compared to real life (Ardi & Maison, 2014). This situation will lead them to be uncomfortable when they meet someone face to face and lower their self-esteem or self-confidence to interact with each other. This will also affect the students' communication skills due to their discomfort to talk to real people. This research attempts to find out the level of social media use and whether or not it can lead to high self-esteem and increased psychological distress among ASASIpintar students. The research questions and research objectives are as follows:

Research Questions
1. What is the level of social media use among students?
2. What is the correlation between social media use and self-esteem among students?
3. What is the correlation between social media use and psychological distress among students?

Research Objectives
1. To determine the level of social media use among students.
2. To determine the correlation between social media use and self-esteem among students.
3. To determine the correlation between social media use and psychological distress among students.

Literature Review

Social media is the collective of online communications platforms that enables people to share or create content, as well as helping people engage in social networking globally. People especially teenagers can speak up their mind, read others' opinions and share their thoughts on one of the platforms. Besides, social media users have access to all of the information at just a click away. The question of whether the effect of social media use is positive or negative differs in various studies. "Positive feedback on the profiles enhanced adolescents' social self-esteem and well-being, whereas negative feedback decreased their self-esteem and well-being," (Valkenburg, 2006). Moreover, "Depression and low self-esteem have been consistently linked in social comparison research and low self-concept clarity has been strongly associated with lower levels of self-esteem" (Durkin, Paxton, Sorbello, 2007).

Some researchers have conducted studies to assess the effects of social media on the self-esteem of people. Based on Gonzales & Hancock (2011), social media serves as an encouragement to enable its users to develop their own expectations based on the information they are exposed to online and thus compare themselves to those standards. People on Facebook can compare many aspects including appearance, fashion sense, personal life and the longer spending time on Facebook, the greater their tendency to compare with others which has caused users to start feeling negatively about themselves, self-satisfaction and self-image (Schufreider, 2015). However, according to Gonzales and Hancock (2011), because people can manage their comments on social networking sites, they can choose to show information that has a positive influence on their identity and filter out inappropriate data. Such limited self-representations inevitably affect how people see themselves-a phenomenon called identity shift It seems that when people present their ideal image online, they often experience a positive change in their self-esteem. From those researches, we can conclude that there is a correlation between the period of social media usage and their self-esteem. This is because the students that use social media more often than others will have more time to compare themselves to others' lives such as their achievement and wealth. This will affect their self-esteem which they will lose their confidence and they will always feel like they are not good enough because they cannot get what other people have.

Psychological distress is being referred to as symptoms of depression and anxiety (Mirowsky & Ross, 2002) while anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like the increasing of blood pressure. It is said that people who suffer from anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts which is a thought that leaves behind unsettling feelings whereby a person may manifest them into a serious crisis or concerns (Association, 2018). Depression is a common mental illness that is characterized by persistent sadness and a lack of interest or pleasure in previously rewarding or enjoyable activities. (World Health Organization, 2020). Teenagers who use online mediums to connect with each other are the most vulnerable group that suffer from social isolation which is a state of complete lack of contact between individual and society. This can lead to depression and anxiety due to excess use of social media (Fleming & Rickwood, 2004). This study is supported Kuss & Griffths (2011) stating that negative impacts of social media include the decrease in real life social community participation and academic achievement as well as relationship problems. Psychological distress occurs due to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) where people tend to compare themselves to others to assess their opinions and abilities. Interestingly, such behavior is more common in teenagers than in younger children and adults (Krayer, Ingledew & Iphofen, 2008; Myers & Crowther, 2009). This may be due to the fact that teenage years are the period of personal and social identity formation (Erikson, 1950). Much of this development now relies on social media since the addiction of teenagers towards

social media. Due to teenagers' limited capacity for self-regulation, teenagers are vulnerable to the potentially adverse effects of social media, and consequently, there are greater risks for them to develop a mental disorder at a young age. In conclusion, social media can give negative impacts to teenagers' mental health due to it can give anxiety and depression which are the characteristics of psychological distress to teenagers that use social media in their daily life.

Methodology

Participants
Participants of study comprise of students from the ASASIpintar pre-university program in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). 173 students out of a total 199 ASASIpintar student population of batch 2019/2020 have taken part in this study. Three sets of questionnaires were distributed and answered by all students who were available in the class on the day and on the specific time of the survey.

Research Design
For this analysis, a correlational model is used to assess if there is any association between self-esteem and social media use. The independent variable is the social media use, measured using social media survey. The dependent variables are self-esteem and psychological distress.

Instrumentation
This study uses the questionnaires developed by Gupta and Bashir (2018) to measure the participants' social media use. Some items are added to the original in order for the questionnaires to suit the research context. The second set of the questionnaires consisting of 7 items is obtained from the Rosenberg self-esteem scale in Rosenberg (1965). The third set of questionnaires is the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21) developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) consisting of items for depression, anxiety and stress criteria. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale and DASS-21 respectively are used to measure the self-esteem and psychological distress among ASASIpintar students.

Procedure
Questionnaires were being administered to ASASIpintar students over a span of several weeks. Then, the researchers asked the participants if they want to take part in the study. The researchers also explained to them that the study was for academic purposes only, that their name should not be put on any of the questionnaires because it was completely confidential, and all the participants would be unidentifiable. On the front page of the questionnaire, the respondents were also being given written instructions. The participants also had the opportunity to ask some questions to the researcher.

Data Analysis
The data were analysed using frequencies and descriptive statistics. For the correlational design, the independent variable is social media and the dependent variable is self-esteem and psychological distress. In order to achieve the correlational score, the researcher used bivariate correlations using a two-tailed Pearson correlation coefficient in SPSS software version 25.

Results
A total of 173 ASASIpintar students of batch 2019/2020 had participated in this study. Table 1 provides the demographic frequencies of the participants.

Table 1: ASASIpintar Students' Demographic Frequencies

Gender		Age		
Male	Female	18 year-old	19 year-old	20 year-old
64	109	6	166	1
37%	63%	3.5%	96%	0.5%

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social media use	173	3.6457	0.48288
Self-esteem	173	1.7737	0.38016
Psychological distress	172	1.0850	0.52855
Valid N (listwise)	172		

From Table 2, it is observed that, for 173 participants, the level of social media use is moderate while the level of self-esteem is low. For 172 participants, the psychological distress is low. Table 3 displays the value of Cronbach's Alpha for each variable.

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Variable	Number of item	Cronbach's Alpha
Social media use	24	0.859
Self-esteem	5	0.753
Psychological distress	21	0.919

Table 4: Correlation between Social Media Use and Self-Esteem

		Social media use	Self-esteem
Social media use	Pearson correlation	1	0.158[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.038
	N	173	173
Self-esteem	Pearson correlation	0.158[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.038	
	N	173	173

[*]Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows that the Pearson correlation value between social media use and self-esteem is 0.158. This value is significant at the 0.05 level. Hence, the relationship between social media use and self-esteem is positive and significant.

Table 5: Correlation between Social Media Use and Psychological Distress

		Social media use	Psychological Distress
Social media use	Pearson correlation	1	0.156*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.042
	N	173	172
Psychological distress	Pearson correlation	0.156*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.042	
	N	172	172

[*]Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows that the Pearson correlation value between social media use and psychological distress is 0.156 and is significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the relationship between social media use and psychological distress is positive and significant.

Discussion

The study investigated the level of social media use and the correlation between the social media use with self-esteem and psychological distress among ASASIpintar students. The level of social media use for the students were reported to be moderate. The correlation between social media use with self-esteem and psychological distress are weak positive but significant. Hence, the results confirm that there is a correlation between social media use with self-esteem and psychological distress. Besides, the results suggest that social media use gives positive effects on students' self-esteem and students also experience psychological distress when using social media. It is predictable as many students utilize social media to socialize and interact with each other and by that, social media act as a platform that allowing them to connect with friends and families, make new friends, post pictures and exchange ideas. Through this, students are able to build their social identity and flourish special social skills. They develop their social skills and communicate well with their visual peers by utilizing social networking as their interaction tools. Apart from this, the students do utilize social media on a regular daily basis as a platform to connect with each other on homework and group projects. Social networking sites such as WhatsApp and Twitter enable students to meet outside class time to share information regarding their assignments. Students also spend a lot of their time on social media such as YouTube for their informal learning. It really helps the students with quizzes and assignments as it enhances the understanding of a subject by expanding the knowledge beyond the boundaries of classroom.

This study found that social media gives a positive impact on students' self-esteem This means an increase in social media use implies an increase in the self-esteem of students. It might be likewise that social media helps with boosting most of ASASIpintar student's self-confidence as they are able to visualize themselves as how they want other people to view them in a positive way. We can also suggest that they are social media users with a high level of well-being because they are able to set up an authentic self-presentation, expressing their positive feelings and process to improve engagement in the sense of social media (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). Reinecke & Trepte (2014) also stated that, "an effective social media user is able to interact effectively with positive expectations in the sense of social media, the outcome must be about various degrees of credibility in self-presentation offers with high and low psychological well-being". This finding is also supported by a study by Zhan (2016). He stated that social networking can boost lives of the individuals through the benefit of expanded social support, importance social encouragement or enhanced self-confidence. Other than that, Omolayo, Balogun & Omole (2013) also stated that having a lot of friends in social media such as Facebook or Twitter can improve communication skills and then they will be improving their self-esteem or self-confidence if they have a skill to communicate with other people. The results may suggest that social media gives a positive impact on self-esteem. However, based on similar studies, a study from Muqaddas et al. (2017) stated that individuals who use social media make upward comparisons with others which results in negative feelings of themselves. The negative feelings give an impact on self-esteem. It has been found that upward comparisons make people feel inadequate and have negative opinions of themselves (Morse & Gergen, 1970). These upward comparisons in most of the cases have a negative effect on the self-esteem of people (Vogel, Rose, Roberts and Eckles, 2014).

From the result, we can say that most ASASIpintar students have experienced psychological distress when using social media because the results give directly proportional relationships between social media use and psychological distress. ASASIpintar students are considered as intelligent students as the main entry to ASASIpintar UKM consists of achieving all A's in their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination. It is quite stressful being a high achiever student that they typically use much of their time on social media to release stress. They can watch funny videos and watch movies on social media. Spending too much time on social media may lead to loneliness and reduction in the amount of face-to-face interaction between other people. While using social media boosts the students' self-esteem, this research is an evidence that social media usage raises the amount of distress among adolescents. Social media users who enter social media platforms on a daily basis face major psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. This result is similar to previous study research by Waqas et al. (2018) and they also stated based on their study findings that individuals with distress prefer to make greater use of online networking. Finally, our study only reviewed the general impact and relationship on social media with self-esteem and psychological distress among ASASIpintar students. It is necessary to note that there are various forms of variables that may exist when using a specific social media platform and results might be different if the participants are students enrolled in different pre-university program. Thus, future research should take into account particular social media sites used by adolescents that has strong correlation with psychological distress.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has found that the level of social media use among ASASIpintar students is moderate while social media use has weak positive correlations with self-esteem and psychological distress. Parents and teachers should play an active role by guiding students regarding self-esteem, self-recognition, self-actualization and self-confidence to avoid them from getting any mental illness including psychological distress. Parents should also limit the access of their children on social media sites and raise awareness in their children regarding the negative repercussions of social media.

References

Andreassen, C. S., Pallesen, S., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem: Findings from a large national survey. *Addictive behaviors*, *64*, 287-293.

Ardi, R., & Maison, D. (2014). How do Polish and Indonesian disclose in Facebook? : Differences in online self-disclosure, need for popularity, need to belong and self-esteem. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 12(3), 195-218.

Association, A. P. (2018, March 1). Anxiety. Retrieved March 3, 2018, from www.apa.org: http://www.apa.org/topics/anxiety/index.aspx

Bashir, L. & Gupta, S. (2018). Social networking usage questionnaire: development and validation in an Indian higher education context. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 19 (4): 214-227.

Dohrenwend, B., & Dohrenwend, B. (1982). Perspectives on the past and future of psychiatric epidemiology. *American Journal of Public Health*, 1271-1279.

Duggan, M., & Smith, A. (2013). Demographics of key social networking platforms. Pew Internet & American Life Project. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/01/09/demographics-of-key-social-networking-platforms-2/

Durkin, S. J., Paxton, S. J., & Sorbello, M. (2007). An Integrative Model of the Impact of Exposure to Idealized Female Images on Adolescent Girls' Body Satisfaction 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *37*(5), 1092-1117.

Erikson, E. H. (1950). Childhood and society. New York: Norton.

Farahani, H. A., Kazemi, Z., Aghamohamadi, S., Bakhtiarvand, F. & Ansari, M. (2011). Examining mental health indices in students using Facebook in Iran. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 28: 811-814.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human relations*, *7*(2), 117-140.

Fleming, M., & Rickwood, D. (2004). Teens in Cyberspace: Do they encounter friend or foe? *Youth Studies Australia*, *23*(3), 46.

Gallagher, M. S. (2017). The Influence of Social Media on Teens' Self-Esteem. (Master's thesis, Rowan University, Stratford, New Jersey, United States). Retrieved from https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/2438/

Gonzales, A. L., & Hancock, J. T. (2011). Mirror, Mirror on My Facebook Wall: Effects of Exposure to Facebook on Self-Esteem. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14, 79-83. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2009.0411

Keles, B., McCrae, N. & Grealish (2020). A systematic review: the influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 25(1): 79-93.

Krayer, A., Ingledew, D. K., & Iphofen, R. (2007). Social comparison and body image in adolescence: a grounded theory approach. *Health Education Research*, *23*(5), 892-903.

Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2011). Online social networking and addiction—a review of the psychological literature. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *8*(9), 3528-3552.

Lovibond, S.H. & Lovibond, P.F. (1995). Manual for the Depression Anxiety & Stress Scales. (2nd Ed.) Sydney: *Psychology Foundation*.

Mirowsky, J., & Ross, C. E. (2003). Social causes of psychological distress. New York: Walter De Gruyter, Inc.

Morse, S., & Gergen, K. J. (1970). Social comparison, selfconsistency, and the concept of self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 16, 148–156.

Myers, T. A., & Crowther, J. H. (2009). Social comparison as a predictor of body dissatisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of abnormal psychology*, *118*(4), 683.

Omolayo, B. O., Balogun, S. K., & Omole, O. C. (2013). Influence of exposure to Facebook on self-esteem. *European Scientific Journal*, 9(11).

Reinecke, L., & Trepte, S. (2014). Authenticity and well-being on social network sites: a two-wave longitudinal study on the effects of online authenticity and the positivity bias in SNS communication. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 30, 95-102, doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2013.07.030

Rosenberg, M. (1965). Society and the adolescent self-image. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sampasa-Kanyinga, H., & Lewis, R. F. (2015). Frequent use of social networking sites is associated with poor psychological functioning among children and adolescents. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *18*(7), 380-385.

Schufreider, M. M. (2015). Relationship of Facebook usage and Facebook belongingness to emerging adulthood's self-esteem and social identity. (Unpublished master's thesis). Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, United States.

Sengupta, A. & Chaudhuri, A. (2011). Are social networking sites a source of online harassment for teens? Evidence from survey data. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(2): 284-290.

Trifiro, B. (2018). Instagram use and its effect on well-being and self-esteem. (Master's thesis, Bryant University, Rhode Island, United States). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.bryant.edu/macomm/4

Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., & Schouten, A. P. (2006). Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' well-being and social self-esteem. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *9*(5), 584-590.

Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, *3*(4), 206.

Vogel, E., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research*, 2(1), 87-92.

Waqas, Ali & Khurshid, Zamurd & Ali, Mohsin & Khaliq, Habiba. (2018). Association Between Usage of Social Media and Depression Among Young Adults. Journal of Management Info. 5. 26-30. 10.31580/jmi. v5i4.115.

World Health Organization (2020). https://www.who.int/health-topics/depression#tab=tab_1. Accessed on June 26, 2020.

Ybarra, M. L. & Mitchell, K. J. (2008). How risky are social networking sites? A comparison of places online where youth sexual solicitation and harassment occurs. *Pediatrics*, 121(2): e350-357.

Zhan, L., Sun, Y., Wang, N., & Zhang, X. (2016). Understanding the influence of social media on people's life satisfaction through two competing explanatory mechanisms. Aslib *Journal of Information Management*, 68(3), 347-361, doi: 10.1108/AJIM-12-2015-0195