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The Impact of social media on psychological well-being and social comparison on nursing students in UBT

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Social networking sites are now essential in daily life. In the ever-evolving landscape of communication, social media has emerged as a dominant force that shapes how nursing students connect, share, and perceive ourselves and others. While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for virtual interaction, they also raise important questions about their influence on nursing students' psychological well-being and the phenomenon of social comparison. The aim of this study is to gain a contemporary understanding of the impact of social media on students' psychological well-being, focusing on aspects such as stress, anxiety and depression, and the phenomenon of social comparison.

Methodology: Cross-sectional survey was carried out on a sample of 128 nursing students at University for Business and Technology (UBT). Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique in which questionnaires were sent through a link to the targeted population. The questionnaire included information on demographics, social media use, social comparison, and a section on standard tools for Depression, Anxiety, and Stress (DASS-21), and the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) to measure social comparison orientation. The data were analyzed by using SPSS.

Results: On this research participated 128 respondents of the online survey, 49 (38.3%) were male and 79 (61.7%) were female. The mean age was 19.8 years. Most of students were in the second year of studies 74 (57.8%). The respondents several times a day 113 (88.3%) check social media and, most of the respondents spent more than 180 minutes per day at social media. WhatsApp and Instagram were the two platforms that all participants reported to have access on them, 126 (98.4%) of respondents reported that are using Snapchat, and 125 (97.6%) of them reported to have TikTok. Level of anxiety is 15.78 which indicates “extremely severe”, depression is 12.77 which indicates “severe”, and the mean value of stress is 14.25 which indicates “severe”, too. Psychological well-being had a negative relationship between social comparison, and social media platforms.

Conclusion: Uses of social media is widespread among nursing students and negatively affects their mental health and social comparison.

Keywords: social comparison, psychological well-being, social media, nursing, students.

The Impact of social media on Psychological Well-Being and Social Comparison on nursing students in UBT

In today's digitally connected world, social media platforms have emerged as significant tools that shape how nursing students communicate, share experiences, and perceive themselves and others. While these platforms provide avenues for virtual interaction, they also raise crucial questions about their impact on nursing students' psychological well-being and their propensity for social comparison. This exploration delves into the complex interplay between social media use, psychological well-being, and the phenomenon of social comparison among nursing students, aiming to uncover the intricacies of their digital experiences.

Nursing students find social media platforms deeply ingrained in their daily routines, providing them with the ability to instantly connect, communicate, and share moments. These platforms offer a diverse range of advantages, including facilitating academic collaboration, creating networking opportunities, and fostering community engagement. On one hand, they cultivate a sense of belonging and connection, especially valuable to students who are far from home or grappling with academic pressures. Nevertheless, the omnipresence of social media has ushered in distinct challenges to the psychological well-being of nursing students. These platforms have experienced an exponential surge in users worldwide, engaging in a myriad of online interactions on a daily basis (Kemp, 2021). While they offer unparalleled connectivity, they also introduce novel challenges to our psychological equilibrium. Scholars have delved into the consequences of prolonged social media use on mental health, underscoring concerns such as an elevated risk of depression, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness (Primack et al., 2017; Kross et al., 2013). The allure of perpetual connectivity has the potential to blur the boundaries between personal and digital lives, which may contribute to feelings of isolation despite the illusion of social engagement (Kross et al., 2013).

A cornerstone of social media's impact on nursing students is the concept of social comparison. Festinger's social comparison theory posits that individuals evaluate their own abilities, traits, and overall well-being by comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). Students often find themselves engaging in upward social comparison, comparing their achievements, appearance, and lifestyles to those of their peers. In the realm of social media, this

phenomenon takes on new dimensions, as users are exposed not only to their immediate peers but also to a global network of individuals selectively presenting curated versions of their lives. The tendency to engage in upward social comparison—comparing oneself to those perceived as more successful or attractive—can give rise to feelings of inadequacy and lowered self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014). The pervasive nature of social media allows individuals to construct a carefully curated digital identity, often emphasizing positive aspects of their lives while minimizing challenges. This digital self-presentation can lead to a phenomenon known as "selective self-presentation," where users present an idealized version of themselves. Students may feel compelled to present themselves as successful and constantly happy, neglecting the struggles and challenges that are inherent to university life. Consequently, the dissonance between this idealized online self and real-life experiences can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Hawi & Samaha, 2020).

Moreover, the presentation of idealized lives on social media platforms can foster unrealistic nursing students' expectations and perceptions of others' happiness, leading to the "Facebook envy" phenomenon (Krasnova et al., 2013). This discrepancy between perceived virtual lives and personal experiences can fuel negative emotions and intensify the desire to project an equally idealized version of oneself online. The pressure to conform to these virtual standards may erode authentic self-expression and contribute to the phenomenon of "impression management," where students' meticulously craft their online personas (Zhao et al., 2008).

Nursing students must develop digital literacy and critical thinking skills to navigate the digital landscape effectively. Encouraging open conversations about the effects of social media, fostering self-awareness, and promoting self-compassion are crucial steps. Establishing healthy usage boundaries and embracing the imperfections of both online and offline lives can lead to a more balanced and positive digital experience. As researchers continue to explore the psychological implications of digital interactions, a growing body of literature underscores the importance of cultivating digital literacy, self-awareness, and setting healthy boundaries to mitigate potential negative effects (Vogel et al., 2014; Primack et al., 2017).

Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was used. The nursing students at University for Business and Technology (UBT) were invited to participate in the study. A Google link was sent via email to all nursing students. The research was conducted in March-April 2023. We used the convenience sampling method through a structured questionnaire on the pattern of social media use, social comparison orientation, and the effect of addictive use of social media on student well-being with the help of the DASS 21 scale, by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995). Five Point DASS-21 scores have been used to measure the Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Levels in which 1 represents “Normal”, 2 represents “Mild”, 3 represents “Moderate”, 4 represents “Severe” and 5 represents “Extremely Severe”. And, to measure social comparison orientation a questionnaire the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM), 11 items, by Gibbons and Bunk (1999), using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was developed.

Results

Of the 128 respondents of the online survey, 49 (38.3%) were male and 79 (61.7%) were female. The mean age was 20.8 years. Most of students were in the second year of studies 74 (57.8%). The respondents often check social media, if we look around the table; most of the respondents are shown her/his interest to check social media several times a day 113 (88.3%) of them, and 10 (7.8%) check social media several time a week, students are dominant in our study and spend time per app on social media frequently. If we look at the spending time per app; most of the respondents 78 (60.9%) spent more than 180 minutes per day at social media, only 9 (7.1%) of the nursing students spent 30-60min per day on social media. WhatsApp and Instagram were the two platforms that all participants reported to have access on them, 126 (98.4%) of respondents reported that are using snapchat, and 125 (97.6%) of them reported to have TikTok, LinkedIn was the digital platform that was used the least by students with 32 (25.0%) of them. The descriptive characteristics of study participants are shown in Table 1.

Table1. Descriptive characteristics of the nursing students, UBT

Modalities	Nursing students	
	N=128	%
Sex		
M	49	38.3
F	79	61.7
Age	18-25 years	
Average Age	20.8±10.7	
University year		
First	42	32.8
Second	74	57.8
Final year	12	9.4
Often check social media		
Once a day	5	3.9
Several times a day	113	88.3
Once a week	0	0
Several times a week	10	7.8
Time spends per App on social media		
30-60 minutes	9	7.1
61-120 minutes	12	9.3
121-180 minutes	29	22.7
>180 minutes	78	60.9
Social Media Platforms		
Facebook	98	76.6
WhatsApp	128	100.0
Instagram	128	100.0
Snapchat	126	98.4
Twitter	57	44.5
TikTok	125	97.6
LinkedIn	32	25.0

Table 2. Responses on different categories and level of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale among nursing students in UBT

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Stress		
Never	15	11.7
Sometimes	59	46.1
Often	32	25.0
Always	22	17.2
Total	128	100.0
Anxiety		
Never	52	40.6
Sometimes	33	25.8
Often	33	35.8
Always	10	7.8
Total	128	100.0
Depression		
Never	57	44.5
Sometimes	57	44.5
Often	9	7.1
Always	5	3.9
Total	128	100.0
Mean value of Stress	Mean value of Anxiety	Mean value of Depression
Stress score: 14.25	Anxiety score: 15.78	Depression score: 12.77

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the respondent's responses in every category of the DASS scale, and level of depression, anxiety, and stress. So, stress was reported sometimes at 59 (45.1%) of respondents. Anxiety, 52 (40.6%) of respondent's response never. Mostly, "never" and "sometimes" side category was reported by 57 (44.5%) of respondents in depression. Table 2 indicates that one category sometimes is highly marked by students in stress, and depression, and never in anxiety. The analysis from 128 respondents show the mean value of depression is 12.77

which indicates “severe”, the mean value of anxiety is 15.78 which indicates “extremely severe”, and the mean value of stress is 14.25 which indicates “severe”. The results of respondents show high level of depression, anxiety, and stress among nursing students due to extensive use of social media.

Table 3. AVE, correlations, and squared correlation coefficients

	1.	2.	3.
1. Psychological well-being	.54	.17	.27**
2. Social comparison	-.42**	.65	.05
3. Social Media Platforms	-.20**	.53	.07

Notes: * - $p < .05$. ** - $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. The diagonal elements (bold) represent the AVE values. Upper diagonal represents squared correlations of each construct.

Finally, the results of revealed analysis that psychological well-being had a negative relationship between social comparison, and social media platforms. This implies that as students' psychological well-being increases, their tendency for social comparison decreases. Higher levels of social comparison are linked to lower levels of psychological well-being among nursing students. The squared correlation coefficient of 0.05 indicates that 5% of the variance in Social Comparison is related to Psychological Well-Being, indicating a moderate but distinct connection between these two constructs ($\beta = -.02$, $p < .05$, 95% CI (-.06, -.01)). The negative correlation signifies a moderate negative relationship between Social Comparison and Psychological Well-Being.

Similarly, the negative correlation coefficient of -0.20^{**} reveals a moderate negative association between Social Media Platforms and Psychological Well-Being. As students engage more with social media, their psychological well-being tends to decrease. On the other hand, the positive correlation coefficient of 0.53 indicates a moderate positive relationship between Social Media Platforms and Social Comparison. This suggests that as social media usage increases, so does the tendency for social comparison among nursing students.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to gain a contemporary understanding of the impact of social media on students' psychological well-being, focusing on aspects such as stress, anxiety and depression, and the phenomenon of social comparison. The research endeavors to shed light on potential negative outcomes arising from extensive social media usage in the present context.

This investigation has uncovered a noteworthy insight: individuals who engage with multiple social media platforms tend to exhibit elevated scores on the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21). Furthermore, the study identifies a significant and positive correlation between the number of daily social media interactions and scores on the DASS-21 subscale. Also, the students who utilize multiple social media platforms tend to exhibit higher level of social comparison on the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM). Moreover, the study identifies a significant and negative correlation between the number of daily social media interactions and scores on the INCOM.

Previous research has frequently linked problematic social media usage with elevated levels of depression and anxiety. Individuals who perceive their own addictive behaviors, particularly those associated with online content consumption, have shown an increased likelihood of experiencing psychological distress and a decline in self-esteem (Casale, S., 2022). Notably, the correlation between depression and the perception of addiction nearly achieved significance at an alpha level of .058, although this association has not been extended to anxiety. Another study conducted on students in a private medical school yielded comparable outcomes. This study echoed findings observed among many other medical students, revealing a heightened prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress attributed to their utilization of social media platforms (Lenhart, A., 2010). With over 70% of adolescents engaging with Social Networking Sites (SNSs), the widespread use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp among the younger demographic has been flagged for its likely correlation with increased utilization rates and an augmented risk of encountering social media-related distress. This is consistent with existing and previous research findings.

This observed significance can be attributed to research indicating that Facebook tends to create an overly positive portrayal of one's friends, thereby prompting unfavorable social comparisons. Such comparisons, in turn, elevate the likelihood of negative self-appraisal and, over extended

periods, raise the vulnerability to developing depression (Blease, 2015). Moreover, investigations have demonstrated a notable rise in depression rates among adolescents and young adults, strongly linked to their patterns of social media use (Nguyen, 2022). A substantial number of individuals within this age bracket predominantly engage with various forms of social media, rendering it an opportune domain for investigating potential connections between the increasing prevalence of poorer psychological well-being. A previous study underscored that social media's impact has been linked to heightened levels of anxiety. Users' tendencies to measure relationships and gain instantaneous access to social events outside their personal sphere can foster significant anxiety, potentially leading to prolonged social anxiety (Markham, 2016). This noteworthy discovery aligns seamlessly with existing literature, as it corroborates the notion that increased usage of multiple social media platforms aligns with higher anxiety scores. These findings are likely attributed to the concept that excessive engagement with numerous platforms can contribute to intensified levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which, in turn, serves as a potential driver for elevated levels of social anxiety (Baker, 2016).

Depression among young individuals has garnered substantial attention in contemporary times, often serving as a focal point for media discussions. Within this context, various viewpoints have emerged, indicating that social media might pose a partial burden on the younger generation. The question remains a subject of ongoing debate: does online media have adverse effects on the psychological well-being of teenagers? To date, research on this subject has been somewhat limited (Griffiths, 2000). A handful of studies have illuminated a diverse range of perspectives. Some suggest that judiciously engaging with online communities can be beneficial for teenagers, while others assert that the use of social media leads to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and sadness (Wilcox, & Stephen, 2013).

Finally, this study found that psychological well-being had a negative relationship between social comparison, and social media platforms. Research has shown that phenomenon of social comparison, self-esteem sequentially mediate the relationship between active SNS use and loneliness (Lin et al. 2020). This result is in line with our finding that perceived social support and self-esteem are closely interconnected.

In summary, the debate surrounding the interplay between social media and psychological well-being in young individuals remains complex, characterized by contrasting perspectives. While

some studies suggest potential benefits, others draw attention to the risks associated with extensive social media engagement. The interplay between sleep patterns, digital addiction, and the perception of push notifications further deepens the understanding of this intricate relationship.

Conclusion

The relationship between social media and nursing students' psychological well-being and social comparison unveils layers of challenge and opportunity. By acknowledging the potential pitfalls and leveraging the benefits, nursing students can forge a balanced digital presence. We identified that every other student these days has been operating social platforms for various purposes including socializing, academic and educational purposes. By fostering a culture of digital awareness, resilience, and ethical responsibility, nursing education can prepare students to embrace the transformative potential of social media while safeguarding their mental well-being.

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