

The Influence of Social Media Usage on College Students' Happiness

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Abstract: *Social media is a platform based on the Internet that allows users to create, share content and participate in social interactions. It has changed people's social patterns and the way information is disseminated. Happiness is an individual's subjective positive evaluation of the overall quality of life, covering emotional experience and cognitive judgment. In the wave of the digital age, social media has been deeply integrated into the lives of college students, becoming an important tool for their socializing, obtaining information and self-expression, and may have multi-dimensional influences on the happiness of college students. A total of 53 valid sample data were collected through the questionnaire survey method in this study. The research results show that: First, College student users present different usage intensities, usage effects, changes in social circles and displays of real information on different social media. Secondly, overall, the use of social media has a positive impact on the happiness of college students. Thirdly, passive browsing, addiction to virtual social interaction and other behaviors are negatively correlated with happiness.*

Keywords: *Social Media; College Students; Happiness; Usage Behavior*

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of science and technology and communication tools, the influence and intervention of media on people's lives are becoming increasingly profound. All kinds of media have begun to play the role of extenders of human limbs and senses.

College students, as an important group among Internet users in China, frequently use social media for communication, information sharing and activity organization. However, such usage behavior may have an impact on their daily life and social interaction, and may even lead to media dependence. Given that college students are in a crucial period of socialization, their personality traits, behavioral patterns and worldviews are vulnerable to external factors, and social media plays a key role in this process.

Happiness is a key indicator for measuring the sound personality of college students. Although previous domestic studies on the factors influencing college students' subjective well-being have been quite extensive, covering aspects such as social support, most of them have overlooked the increasingly important factor of social media usage.

Furthermore, due to the differences in cultural background and social environment, the research results from abroad cannot fully reflect the happiness status of Chinese college students.

This study aims to explore the relationship between the use of social media and the happiness of college students. Through the methods of literature review and questionnaire survey, it is not only hoped to reveal the association between the use of social media and happiness, but also aimed to propose directions for the future development of social media in China and enhance its positive impact on the happiness of college students.

2. Literature Review

Current scholars commonly agree with the research conclusion listed in Table 1 regarding the influence of Social Media Usage on College Students' Happiness. However, there are also some deficiencies in the study, such as the limitation of the sample size and the difficulty in elaborately reflecting the multiple complexities of a variable in the study.

Table 1: Literature Review

Year	Scholars	Category	Sample	Conclusion
2014	Tang	Negative influence	401 college students from ten universities in Guangzhou University Town	The longer and more frequently college student users use social media, the lower their sense of happiness
2022	Hu	Negative influence	667 female college students aged 18 to 30	Advocating diversified body aesthetics on social media and increasing health education can enhance the subjective well-being of female college students
2023	Liu	Negative influence	355 female social media users	A high level of physical appreciation can buffer the negative impact on physical satisfaction that young women experience during the use of social media

3. Hypothesis

Social interaction — such as direct messaging, group discussions, or collaborative activities—fulfills social needs by fostering real-time emotional exchange and support, which aligns with social support theory to enhance well-being. In contrast, information browsing often involves passive exposure to curate content (e.g., friends' posts, public updates), which may trigger upward social comparisons or information overload. Prior research has shown that active interaction positively correlates with well-being, whereas passive browsing is associated with decreased self-satisfaction, illustrating how usage types shape psychological outcomes through distinct mechanisms.

To summarize, good social media use can make college students gain a certain degree of satisfaction in information exchange and interaction, thus effectively enhancing their own sense of happiness.

H1: Social media use has a positive impact on the sense of happiness of college students.

4. Research Design

4.1 Sample and Data

This study conducted a pre-survey on a small sample of data collected mainly through the "Questionnaire Star" platform, selecting college students from different regions and schools as the target research. A total of 60 questionnaires were sent out during the research period, and 59 questionnaires were collected, with a recovery rate of 98.3%. After excluding invalid questionnaires, there were 53 valid questionnaires, with an effective response rate of 89.8%.

4.2 Variables

The independent variable in this paper is social media use. According to the connotation of social media use adopted in this paper, social media use is the various types of activities people carry out through social media platforms and the behavioral logic and social meanings behind them, with a total of 11 items, such as "Using social media has become a part of my daily activities". It is representative and has high reliability and validity.

The dependent variable in this paper is the sense of happiness of college students. According to the connotation of college students' well-being adopted in this paper, well-being is an individual's subjective positive evaluation of the overall quality of life, covering both emotional experience and cognitive judgment, and in this study, we chose one of the dimensions in Diener's Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): life satisfaction with a total of five question items, such as "My life is generally in line with my ideals", It is a very mature scale with high reliability and validity and is widely used by scholars.

The control variables in this paper are consisted of seven categories of information: students' gender, place of origin, status of being the only child in the family, education, major, personality tendency, and hours of daily sleep duration.

4.3 Model

$$\text{Happiness} = b + a_1\text{Use} + a_2\text{Gender} + a_3\text{Origin} + a_4\text{child} + a_5\text{Education} + a_6\text{Major} + a_7\text{Personality} + a_8\text{Sleep}$$

Happiness: The sense of happiness of college students

Use: Social media use

Gender: The gender of students

Origin: Place of Origin of students

Only child: Only child status in the family

Education: Educational background and study status

Major: The major of students

Personality: Personality tendency

Sleep: Daily sleep duration

b: constant

a: coefficient

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The results of descriptive statistics for research sample are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Use	53	2.000	5.000	3.647	0.678
Happiness	53	1.000	5.000	3.423	0.870
Gender	53	0.000	1.000	0.604	0.494
Origin	53	1.000	3.000	1.792	0.840
Child	53	0.000	1.000	0.415	0.497
Education	53	1.000	3.000	1.264	0.836
Major	53	1.000	6.000	2.057	1.262
Personality	53	1.000	3.000	2.321	0.850
Sleep	53	2.000	4.000	2.415	0.633

5.2 Correlation Analysis

The correlation coefficient between all variables is less than 0.3, and there is no collinearity problem.

5.3 Regression Results

Social media use had a significant positive impact on college students' happiness ($\beta=0.542$, $p<0.001$), indicating that social media was the core driving force, and the assumption H1 was true. The difference in happiness is not related to factors such as the student's place of origin, the status of the only child, and personality traits.

6. Conclusion

The results show that media use has a significant positive impact on college students' well-being. When college students consume moderate media through social media, video platforms and other channels, they can effectively enhance their sense of social connection, enhance their confidence in self-expression, and obtain psychological satisfaction in information acquisition and interaction, thereby improving their subjective well-being. The study found that active participation (e.g., content creation, interactive communication) was particularly effective in promoting well-being. However, it is worth noting that excessive use of media can lead to diminishing marginal benefits and even trigger negative emotions. Therefore, reasonable control of media use time and focus on high-quality content interaction are the keys to maximizing the happiness gain of media use.

Colleges and universities should incorporate digital literacy education into the general education curriculum system, help students master "active participatory" media use strategies (such as content creation and in-depth interaction) through case studies and scenario simulations, and establish a "media use-offline life" balance mechanism (such as setting daily reminders). Studies have shown that active participation behaviors can improve self-efficacy (Zhang et al., 2020), and such practical training needs to be strengthened. At the same time, the research also provides a development direction for the development of social media platforms in China, and the core sense is participation. Social media platforms can optimize the algorithm recommendation mechanism, reduce passive information overload, and encourage users to participate in active content creation and interaction, so as to further improve the psychological well-being of college students.

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