

The Dark Side of Social Media

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English 1121: College Writing and Critical Reading

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3/9/25

Imagine waking up every morning to a flood of notifications, each one a reminder of the perfect lives' others seem to portray. They say that while social media can connect us, it also has the potential to harm our mental health if not used mindfully. As we navigate this digital age; it's crucial to understand the impact it has on our wellbeing and on our mental health. According to Lawrence Robinson and Melinda Smith (2025), "social media has a complex relationship with mental health". From Robinson and Smith (2025). The article states that social media can pose serious risks to mental well-being when used excessively. Robinson and Smith highlight aspects of increased anxiety, depression, and sleep disruption. I agree with the author's argument and believe that a balanced perspective is crucial, and you need to look at the negative aspects of social media and see its dark side.

Robinson and Smith, (2025), argue that social media, despite its potential advantages, can have detrimental effects on mental health. I strongly agree with their assertion; while staying connected with friends and family within social media can provide a sense of belonging, the habit of social media can often lead to unrealistic comparisons, feelings of inadequacy, and having constant exposure that highlights others' lives can foster a sense of missing out and increase self-doubt. Moreover, the addictive nature of social media can consume time and energy that could be spent on meaningful in-person interactions and help promote wellbeing in the real world. A study published by Jeffrey Gottfried (2024), shows that social media use has a significant impact on the mental health of young adults, particularly Gen Z and Millennials. The study that was conducted in the national public opinion reference survey (NPORS), the Center used address-based sampling and a multimode protocol that included both web and mail. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The survey is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race and ethnicity, education and other categories, and was conducted between May 19th and Sept. 5th 2023. Continuing; Jeffery states "Despite the

benefits of staying connected, high social media use is associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and feelings of loneliness among Gen Z and Millennials". I agree with these findings. The constant exposure to curated and idealized images on social media can create unrealistic expectations and pressure to conform to certain standards. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem among young adults. Additionally, this stems from something I have experienced during my time growing as a young adult, always looking at my body and myself and comparing it to other girls my age, and the way they looked made me feel inadequate, and made me hate the image of myself. This led me to contently posting on my social media page looking cute or "dolloed up" as one would say while also hiding my body, or sucking in my stomach; however, that was only the beginning for me. I would make it my goal to post a good picture of me at least twice a week, and follow-up on others post and what they posted and try to get better at my own social media page. This critical information can help us see why it's crucial to use social media mindfully. Encouraging young adults to limit their time on these platforms and to engage in more face-to-face interactions can help lower these negative effects.

(FOMO), or the Fear of Missing Out, is a significant issue that can have harmful effects on mental health as well. Robinson and Smith, (2025), argue that (FOMO) is one of the negative impacts of social media, leading to anxiety and depression. I agree with their assertion and believe that (FOMO) can cause major health issues. Robinson and Smith, (2025), explain that "(FOMO) is the feeling or perception that others are having more fun, experiencing new things, or living better lives than you." This constant comparison can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. According to Robinson and Smith, "The fear of missing out can lead to a cycle of checking social media more frequently, which in turn increases feelings of anxiety and depression". Which I believe that (FOMO) can be particularly harmful to individuals who are

constantly on their phones, as it can lead to obsessive behavior and a negative impact on their mental state, and while it's important to stay aware of the use of your social media, I agree that it's like an addiction one that stems from the idea that you're missing out on certain things can have a crucial impact on yourself and trigger anxiety, and fuel even greater social media use, a feeling that I was all too familiar with when being a young adult engrossed in my own self-esteem and image by contently posing and smiling, making content that was only serving as a decoy of my life. Another source, an article from *ScienceDaily*, University of Nottingham, (2024), highlights that (FOMO) can lead to significant mental health issues. The article states, "(FOMO) is linked to higher levels of social anxiety and depression, as individuals feel pressured to keep up with the perceived experiences of others". This underscores the harmful effects of (FOMO) on mental wellbeing. The evidence from both the main article and the outside source clearly shows that (FOMO) can be detrimental to mental health. Constantly comparing oneself to others on social media can lead to negative feelings, which can exacerbate anxiety and depression. Additionally, the addictive nature of social media can result in neglecting real-life interactions and activities that promote well-being.

In contrast, the use of social media can disrupt sleep patterns, causing restlessness throughout the night as individuals try to stay updated on the latest news. As Robinson and Smith, (2025), explain, "Exposure to blue light from your phone or computer screen can suppress melatonin production, making it harder to fall asleep. Additionally, engaging with social media can be mentally stimulating, making it difficult to unwind and relax before bed". I believe that excessive use of social media can disrupt sleep patterns and lead to restlessness. The blue light from screens and the mental stimulation from engaging with social media can make it difficult to fall asleep, which can cause mood swings. "*The Impact of Social Media Use on Sleep and Mental Health in Youth*", by Danny J. Yu, Yun Kwok Wing, Tim M. H. Li, and Ngan Yin Chan,

(2024), supports this view. The review highlights that "social media use is associated with poor sleep and mental health issues in youth". The study found that high social media use before bedtime is linked to sleep disruptions, which can negatively affect mental health. The findings from the study by Danny J. Yu, Yun Kwok Wing, Tim M. H. Li, and Ngan Yin Chan (2024), underscore the widespread impact of social media on sleep among young adults. The blue light emitted by screens can interfere with the body's natural sleep-wake cycle, making it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep. Additionally, the mental stimulation from engaging with social media can keep the brain active, preventing relaxation and rest. This disruption in sleep can lead to mood swings, increased anxiety, and depression. I know firsthand how it feels to not get enough sleep, when I was a senior in high-school I was up during late hours on my cellular device and I had noticed constant mood swings such as anger, sadness, and even moments of guilt; I also endured frequent anxiety moments during test taking or during my games when I was getting yelled at by my coaches. Furthermore, some interventions that will help reduce social media use before bedtime by applying bedtime routines, using technology wisely, and being Mindful about what's the best time for your sleep, and not wanting to stay up for more screen time. These could be beneficial in improving sleep quality and overall well-being,

While social media can provide numerous benefits, such as staying connected with friends and accessing information quickly, it can also cause significant issues, particularly when it comes to self-doubt feeling inadequate to others body image online and dealing with (FOMO) and sleep patterns among young adults. While writing this essay, I've learned that the impact of social media on sleep and mental health is more profound than I initially thought. The blue light emitted from screens and the mental stimulation from engaging with social media can severely disrupt sleep patterns. Additionally, I came across this research highlighting that young adults are especially vulnerable to these effects due to their high engagement with social media. This

has made me more mindful of my own social media habits, and if I were a parent I would limit screen time for my kids each day, I would engage with my kids by doing family activities outside to help boost the family's wellness, get them to be more active and enjoy the outside world of nature, while also creating, and empowering my kids to handle real life skills.

While social media offers a platform for connection and information, it's crucial to recognize and mitigate its potential downsides. By being aware of the impact on sleep and mental health, we can take proactive steps to ensure that our digital habits do not compromise our well-being. Ultimately, mindful usage can help us enjoy the advantages of social media while safeguarding our health and happiness overall.

References

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