

Association between Social Media Addiction and Depression of Students in Colleges of Education on the Copperbelt Province, Zambia

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Abstract: This study investigated the association between social media addiction and depression among students in colleges of education on Zambia's Copperbelt Province. The study utilised the survey method to solicit data from a sample of five hundred and seventy-nine (579) college students who were drawn from three (3) public and three (3) private colleges of education on the Copperbelt. Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS) questionnaires were employed for data collection. Subsequently, Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to determine the relationship between social media addiction and depression. The findings indicated that social media addiction negatively correlates with depression and depression significantly predicts social media addiction.

Keywords: Social Media; College Students; Depression; Copperbelt Zambia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Boyd & Ellison (2007) define social media as web-based services that permit people to construct a public or semi-public profile within the social media system. It also articulates a list of other users with whom they share associations within the social media field. Dollarhide (2020) defines social media as computer-based innovations that encourage sharing of thoughts, contemplations, and data through the structure of virtual organisations and networks. Social media gives users access to electronic content, which incorporates personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Most individuals use social media to make and maintain friendships, to keep in touch with the extended family, to network career opportunities, to identify people with like interests, and share ideas, feelings, insight, and emotions, to access information and entertainment (Dollarhide 2020; Looy, 2016; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Users access social media platforms using various digital devices like the computer, tablet or smartphone.

Social media usage has become an indispensable and inseparable part of many individuals' daily lives (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Looy, 2016; Andreassen et al., 2017; Niranjjan et al., 2017), particularly among young adults. Of late, almost half of the world population (49%; 3.80 billion) actively uses social media, and these figures are rapidly swelling every day (Kemp, 2020). Digital 2020 Zambia reports that there were 4.43 million Internet clients in Zambia in January 2020. The number of Internet users in Zambia expanded by 595 thousand (+16%) between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Zambia remained at 24% in January 2020. Subsequently, there were 2.30 million social media clients in Zambia in January 2020. The quantity of social media users in Zambia expanded by 360 thousand (+19%) between April 2019 and January 2020 (Kemp, 2020). Social media penetration in Zambia stood at 13% in January 2020, and it has been reported to be on the increase among Zambians young adults (Akakandelwa & Walubita, 2017; Kemp, 2020).

Depression is a significant mental health problem that constitutes a severe challenge in personal and public health worldwide (Hankin et al., 1998; WHO, 2020). Depression affects how a person feels, the way one thinks and acts. Common symptoms of depression include loss of pleasure in previously rewarding or enjoyable activities, having a pessimistic view of the future, feeling as though life is ruthless and troublesome. Symptoms also show sleeplessness (insomnia), tiredness, fatigue, feelings

of guilt or low self-worth and low concentration in various activities (Hankin et al., 1998; WHO, 2017). The World Health Organization (WHO) report that more than 264 million people suffer from depression, and surprisingly, only a fraction receive treatment (de Choudhury, 2013; WHO, 2020). The impact of depression can be long-lasting or recurrent and can dramatically affect a person's ability to function and live a rewarding life. It can likewise influence a person's everyday schedule of exercises such as studying, working and family tasks. Furthermore, the extreme degree of sadness can prompt suicidal acts. WHO (2020) reports that approximately 800 000 people commit suicide yearly. Suicide has been recognised as the subsequent driving reason for death among youngsters aged 15-29 years who are prone to excessive social media usage (Akakandelwa and Walubita, 2017).

Social media addiction is characterised as the excessive use of social media. Rahmatullah&Zhao (2020) describe social media addition as excessive social media usage, driven by an uncontrollable urge to use social media, and commit so much time and exertion to social media, a situation that impair other essential life areas. Various studies advanced in the past decade have mainly explored the opportunities provided by social media (Baccarella et al., 2018). Recently, many scholars have begun to examine social media's adverse effects on its user, particularly in relation to depression. While various factors contribute to depression (Costello et al., 2008), evidence from a growing body of literature suggests that excessive social media usage leads individuals to various adverse health problems, including depression (Pantic et al., 2012; Cramer & Inkster, 2017; Kırcaburun, 2018; Baccarella et al., 2018; Bilgin&Taş, 2018; İbrahim, 2019; Kalkan& Bhat, 2020; Rahmatullah& Zhao, 2020). However, very few studies of this nature have been undertaken in less developed countries like Zambia. Therefore, this study's primary objective was to investigate the correlation between social media addiction and depression among students in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia.

2. STUDY OBJECTIVES

This study's main objective was to investigate whether there was an association between social media addiction and depression among students in colleges of education on the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the level to which college students are addicted to social media usage.
2. Determine the level of depression due to social media addiction among the students.
3. Establish the association between social media addiction and depression among students.

2.1. Significant of the Study

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding students' use of social media and its associated effects on their depression. It is also expected that this study's findings will increase awareness of the adverse effects of excessive use of social. Besides, this study's results can be used to advocate for designing counselling programs to mitigate the adverse effects of excessive use of social media among students in colleges of education. Finally, it is anticipated that this study will stimulate further studies regarding social media and its impact on students' depression levels in tertiary learning institutions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Six hundred respondents were randomly selected from six colleges of education on the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) was used to collect data on students' use of social media and to measure the extent to which students were addicted to social media (Andreassen et al., 2017). Subsequently, Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS) was a tool that provided self-report assessments of multiple mental, physical, and social domains and it offered researchers access to reliable, valid, and flexible measures of depression. The scale has been correlated and validated with other commonly used depression instruments, including the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) (Choi et al., 2014). Use of the PROMIS in this study seems significant because the scale aims to grade the severity of depression (Choi et al., 2014). Subsequently, the scale has of late proven its effectiveness in measuring depression by various researchers across the globe (Pilkonis et al., 2011; Lin et al., 2016; Shensa et al., 2018 Yan et al., 2020). Conversely, its measure

has greater precision (less error) than most conventional measurements (NIH, 2018). PROMIS depression scale asked participants how much of the time in the previous seven days, they had encountered depression, including feeling hopeless, worthless, helpless, or depressed (Pilkonis et al., 2011). The data obtained were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science, Version 23. The strength of the correlation between social media addiction and depression effects was measured based on Akoglu (2018) guidelines. Thus, precisely -1 revealed a perfect negative relationship, a correlation of -0.70, showed a strong negative relationship between variables. Additionally, a correlation of -0.50, revealed a moderate negative association, a correlation of -0.30 and -0.20 revealed a weak negative relationship while 0.0 indicated a no linear relationship.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Respondent’s Demographic Characteristics

Six hundred questionnaires were distributed; out of which 579 were returned, giving a response rate of 96.5%. Table 1 presents the demographics of the respondents. Four hundred and thirty-four (74.9%) of the respondents were from public colleges, and 145 (25.1%) were from private colleges. Two hundred and ninety-two (50.4%) of the total respondents were females, and 287 (49.6%) were males. Ninety-two (15.9%) were aged 19-20 years, 327 (56.5%) were aged 21-25 years, and 160 (27.6%) were aged above 26 years. The majority of the respondents (73.7%) were single, while only 26.3% were married. One hundred and ninety-five (33.7%) of the respondents were in their first year, 197 (34.0%) were in their second year, and 187 (32.3%) were in their third year.

Table1. Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Values	Frequency (n=579)	Percentage
College status	Public	434	74.9%
	Private	145	25.1%
Gender	Male	287	49.6%
	Female	292	50.4%
Age in years	19-20	92	15.9%
	21-25	327	56.5%
	Above 26	160	27.6%
Marital Status	Married	152	26.3%
	Single	427	73.7%
Year of Study	Year One	195	33.7%
	Year Two	197	34.0%
	Year Three	187	32.3%

4.2. Level of Social Media Usage Among College Students

The level usage of social media among the student was measured using duration (time, months and the years) and frequency use. The results revealed that 35 (6.0%) respondents had been actively using social media for less than six months; 131 (22.6%) respondents for 6-12 months; 305 (53.4%) respondents for 2-5 years; and 105 (18.0%) respondents for more than five years (Figure 1).

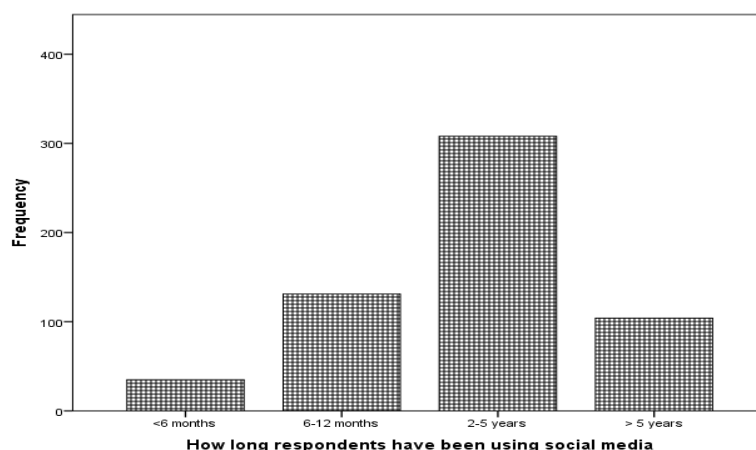


Figure1. How long respondents have been actively using social media

Table 3 below shows that 271 (46.8%) respondents reported that they visited social media platforms several times in a day, 181 (31.3%) respondents visited social media platforms once a day, 57 (9.8%) visited social media platforms at least twice a week, 43 (7.4%) visited social media platforms once a week, and 27 (4.6%) respondents rarely visited social media platforms. Furthermore, 246 (42.5%) respondents reported that they spent about 30-60 minutes on social media every day, 213 (36.9%) respondents reported that they spent about 2-3 hours per day on social media, and 120 (20.7%) respondents spent four or more hours on social media per day.

Table3. *Level of Social Media usage*

Variables	Values	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency of visits on social media sites	Several times a day	271	46.8
	Once a day	181	31.3
	Twice a week	57	9.8
	Once a week	43	7.4
	Rarely	27	4.6
Time spent on social media	30-60 minutes	246	42.5
	2-3 hours	213	36.9
	≤ 4 hours	120	20.7

When asked to rate themselves regarding the levels to which they were using social media. Twenty-four (4.1%) respondents rated themselves rare users; 85 (14.7%) respondents rated themselves moderate users; 150 (25.9%) respondents rated themselves heavy users; and 320 (55.3%) respondents rated themselves very heavy users (Table 4).

Table4. *Degree of social media use*

	Frequency	Percentage
Rare user	24	4.1
Moderate user	85	14.7
Heavy user	150	25.9
Very heavy user	320	55.3
Total	579	100.0

4.3. Level of Addiction to Social Media Among Students

As earlier stated, social media addiction level was measured using BSMAS. The scale utilizes an eight (8) item Likert scale which was scored 1-5. The scores were totaled, the minimum score being 8, and the maximum being 40. Thus, 1-15 was rated *normal*; 16–23 was rated *mild*; 24–31 was rated *moderate*; and 32–40 was rated *high*. The results revealed that 1.2% of the respondents were rated normal, 5.9% were rated mild, 35.6% were rated moderate, and 57.3% were rated high (Table 5).

Table5. *Level of addiction among participants*

Addiction level	Frequency	Percentage
Normal	7	1.2
Mild	34	5.9
Moderate	206	35.6
High	332	57.3
Total	579	100.0

4.4. Level of Depression Among Students

With the PROMIS depression scale aid, eight different questions were asked to investigate whether addiction to social media could trigger students' depression. The results are summarized in Figure 2 below. The study established that 79.7% of the respondents felt depressed when not logged on social media; 73.6% indicated that people's comments left them helpless and confused; 72.9% felt upset when trying to cut down time on social media; 71.3% reported that people's posts used to disturb them; 67.2% felt emotionally exhausted; 61.7% often lost interest in the activities they previously used to enjoy; 57.6% felt that life was meaningless or worthless; whereas 54.1% wanted to give up on everything.

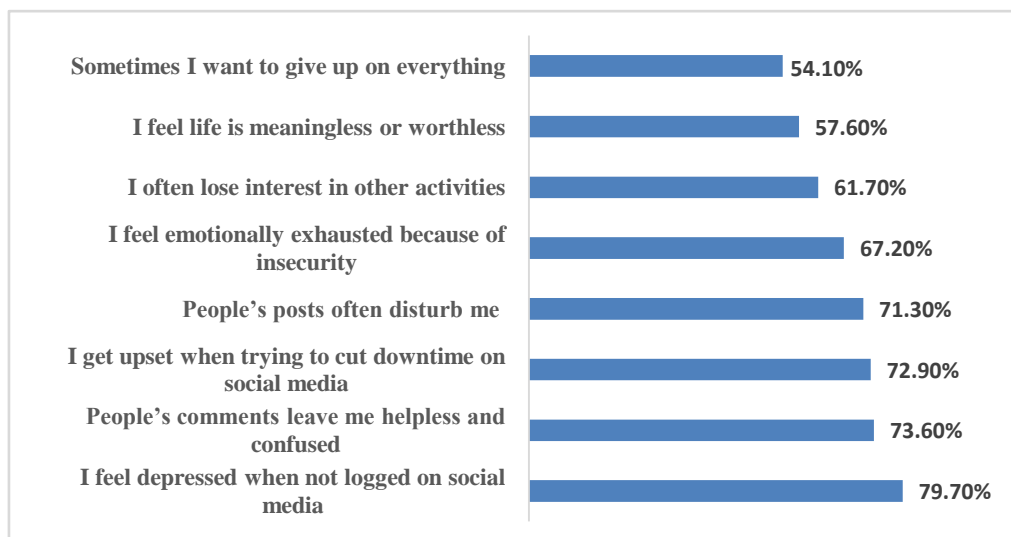


Figure2. Depression construct and SM use

Depression among respondents was determined using eight items which was scored 1-5 scale. These categories were spaced equally between the minimum and maximum points. Hence, the maximum score was 40, while the minimum score was 8. Thus, depression levels were further categorized as Very high (32-40), high (24-31), Moderate (16-23), and Low (15-22). The results are summarized in Table 6 and it reveal that 38.3% of the respondents scored very high, 36.4% scored high, 18.5% scored moderate, and 6.7% scored low depression levels. When very high and high are combined, the results show that 74.7% of the respondents experienced high levels of depression behaviour.

Table6. Table Degree of Depression

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very High	211	36.4	36.4
High	222	38.3	74.8
Moderate	107	18.5	93.3
Low	39	6.7	100.0
Total	579	100.0	

4.5. Association Between Social Media Addiction and Depression

Pearson correlation test was conducted at alpha = 0.01 to test the null hypothesis (H₀): A correlation does exist between levels of social media addiction and students' depression. Results are presented in table 7 below. The results revealed that the level of addiction was negatively correlated with depression (rho = -0.158, p = 0.001).

Table7. Hypothesis 2 Test Results correlations (N=579)

Health conditions	Mean	SD	Pearson Correlation	P-Value	Comment
Degree of Depression	18.82	7.433	-.158*	.000	Negative correlation; ∴ Accept H ₁

5. DISCUSSION

Social media has changed the way college students interact as such; it portrays a trend which affects their depression levels. Yet, the perceived association has not been explored among Zambian college students. Thus, the current study strives to fill up this gap.

In this regard, the study brought out notable variation in social media usage compared to their past experiences, more importantly; students were spending more time on social media than before. The results coincide with prior studies that found almost similar trends (Akakandelwa & Walubita, 2017; Shilip&Arun-Kanti, 2019; Alnjadat et al., 2019; Nyagah et al., 2019). The proceeding observations indicate that students' acquisition of advanced phones with many advanced features drives them to spend more time on social media platforms than before.

The results suggest that college students spend a significant portion of their daily lives on social media websites. This has resulted in high addiction levels of social media usage and higher depression levels among the students. These findings confirm previous studies (Idubor, 2015; Groth et al., 2017; Kalkan& Bhat, 2020).

A correlation between students' addictive usage of social media and depression yielded a complicated relationship. In line with other prior studies (Shaw & Gant, 2002; Elhai et al. 2016; Bilgin&Taş, 2018; İbrahim, 2019), the results showed a negative correlation. The results have revealed a possible inhibiting of depression, the more a student engages in social media. Precious studies have observed that the more students stay away from addictive social media usage, the more they get depressed (Kırcaburun, 2018). From this viewpoint, students' time on social media might be related to subsequent depressive symptoms. This may imply that students' quest to stay longer hours on social media might serve as a compensation approach. Students may turn to social media to make up for real or perceived depression problems. Therefore, it can be argued that students may be caught on two webs: to continue surfacing using the same social media platform heavily, which appear to provide refuge as they attempt to offset higher depression level or to abandon in an attempt to reduce usage heavily but end up getting depressed. Since social media is quite captive (Niranjjan et al., 2017), students may not stay longer on the minimal use level but end up opting again to continue using social media heavily. They are therefore caught up in a spiral web. These results taken together indicate the possibility that these processes could be cyclical in nature, and that excessive use of social media may result from a combination of some or all of these overriding factors. These results seem to suggest that social media is carrying both positive and negative effects (Andreassen et al., 2017; Niranjjan et al., 2017). As such, it is contended that social media is beneficial as it can minimize depression, where it enhances effective collaboration. On the other hand, it may be detrimental if excessive usage brings about depression and other psychological problems (Kırcaburun, 2018; Rahmatullah& Zhao, 2020).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has established high usage levels of social media among college education students on the Copperbelt Province of Zambia, resulting in higher social media addiction. Furthermore, the study has established evidence of high levels of depression among the students resulting from social media. The results indicate a negative correlation between social media addiction and depression among the students. Therefore, this study recommends that college authorities establish awareness, guidance, and counselling programs to mitigate the adverse effects of excessive use of social media among students.

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