



# Insights: Indian Adolescents' Social Media Usage and Life Satisfaction

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media has users from almost every background irrespective of their age, gender, caste, color, region, and religion. The genesis of social media resulted from the desire to stay connected. Its application got further extended to staying abreast with current events and being better informed in diverse domains. Social media usage is now integrated with modern lifestyle. Its applications are diversifying at an increasing rate. The increasing reach of social media has not only facilitated efficient communication within the existing network but has also contributed towards developing new relationships. Given social media's role in connecting

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with friends, family, co-workers, and communities, a significant part of young people's lives is lived mostly on social media platforms. At the same time, extant research offers contradictory findings on whether or not social media enhances these relationships (Dzogang et al., 2017; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Prior research has found social media behavior to have significant influence on emotional states such as happiness and loneliness (Davis, 2001; Nalwa & Anand, 2003; Pelling & White, 2009). The emotional state of happiness is interpreted as a positive evaluation of the quality of one's life events and experiences (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Happiness consists of an affective and a cognitive part (Diener, 2009; Veenhoven, 1991). Feeling socially connected is the affective content and evaluating the worth of these connections with others is the cognitive content that users' experience on social media platforms. Loneliness, on the other hand, is a negative interpretation when users fail to find a connection with others. Perlman and Peplau (1981) define loneliness as "the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way."

Social networking sites (SNSs) facilitate social sharing either through purely text or through a combination of text and image. Visual images have been found to be more subtle than text. Shaw and Gant (2002) argue, based on an experiment conducted with different age group subjects, that the intention to remember and use an image-based information is more than pure text-based information. Ostensibly, there is a greater traction of SNSs that allow both image- and text-based information rather than only-text-based exchange (Reid & Reid, 2007). However, there is no evidence in extant research of the differential impact of these two types of SNSs on subjective benefits to the users. Therefore, the current research is carried out to fulfill the following objective. The study evaluates how social sharing on text- and image-based SNSs influence the generalized positive emotional state of happiness, generalized negative socially disconnected state of loneliness and its cascading impact on life satisfaction. The rest of the article is divided into following parts: section "Theoretical Paradigm" establishes the theoretical paradigm of the study; section "Research Model" puts forth the research model; section "Methodology" illustrates the methodology; section "Analysis and Results" presents the result and analysis; and finally, section "Discussion" offers insights through discussion, conclusion, and implications of the study.

## THEORETICAL PARADIGM

### *Social Media*

Social media is an online application that allows users to create and share self-generated content and/or content developed by others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With the help of web- or mobile-based technology social media comprises of sharing and organizing sites like YouTube (Pickren & Rutherford, 2010); content creation and editing medium such as blogs (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Leonardi et al., 2013); and social networking sites. The current research is based on social media usage through social networking sites (SNS). These sites facilitate interpersonal communication by providing sharing access with online contacts for different forms of content such as profile, status, private information, etc (Mitchell & Guskin, 2013). Two of the prominent SNSs are Facebook and Twitter (Steinfeld et al., 2013; Stutzman et al., 2012).

### *Uses and Gratification Theory Approach*

The uses and gratification theory (UGT) approach to study social media usage is one of the more widely established methods to understand media consumption behavior (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). It is an audience-oriented approach towards understanding mass communication and emphasizes upon users' choice of technology to fulfill their personal needs (Katz et al., 1973). The UGT approach helps in understanding why users are fond of or averse towards any mass communication technology. Social media, as compared to mass media of twentieth century, has an advantage in terms of greater control and interaction among members and this characteristic is instrumental in its ever-increasing popularity (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Extant research pertaining to UGT approach of understanding social media usage indicate towards various consequences of SNS such as happiness (Krasnova et al., 2013; Lucas & Clark, 2006; Verduyn et al., 2015); satisfaction (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Underwood & Findlay, 2004); loneliness (Bellamy et al., 2010; Cacioppo et al., 2009); and addiction (Basilisco & Cha, 2015; Skues et al., 2012; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). This study uses the UGT approach to understand the relationship between SNS usage, happiness, loneliness, and life satisfaction.

### *Image and Text*

UGT approach is a consumer centric approach that gives emphasis on what needs are satisfied by using a particular media (Rubin et al., 2009). This helps in analyzing the medium through which users are exchanging information (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Differential usage of social media is natural since gratification is based on belief about the information that has been exchanged. Most of the SNSs are delivering the users' content either in the form of text, or in the form of image, or both simultaneously. The attention theories, however, emphasize that only-text information has lesser impact than image-based information. An image is said to have a better representation of fact, much louder than a bunch of words. This has led the researchers to differentiate users on the basis of only-text (Twitter) in contrast to text- and image-based (Facebook, WhatsApp) SNSs.

### *Life Satisfaction*

Life satisfaction is the general evaluation of one's surroundings which may be positive or negative (Scheufele & Shah, 2000). This is usually interpreted as subjective happiness (Diener et al., 1985). Literature highlights that life satisfaction is an outcome of social ties (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006). Life satisfaction is a feeling that results from happiness due to having friends (Leary & Kowalski, 1990); happiness of family members (Clore & Palmer, 2009); and frequent interpersonal communications (Diener et al., 1991). A sociable and extraverted personality also contributes towards greater life satisfaction (Francis, 1999). SNSs provide an opportunity to actively interact, experience connectedness, and feel happier thereby contributing towards greater life satisfaction (Valkenburg et al., 2006). The present research explores a feeling of life satisfaction derived out of SNS usage.

## RESEARCH MODEL

SNSs allow users to create and share content related to both personal and public happenings either in the form of only-text or both image-and-text. Text- and image-based media offer a relatively more real and intimate interpersonal experience (Pittman & Reich, 2016). As image grabs more attention and generates greater trust in the content, the use of SNSs

offering a combination of image and text sharing facility is likely to be higher among the users.

Extant research indicates greater happiness among users of SNSs as a result of improved communication and enhanced social support (Tosun, 2012; Verduyn et al., 2017). On the contrary, loneliness as an emotional state has been reported to exhibit a decreasing trend due to the opportunity to have social interaction through SNSs (Shaw & Gant, 2002). The preceding discourse leads us to propose following hypotheses:

**H1:** Social media usage through SNSs increases the happiness of the users.

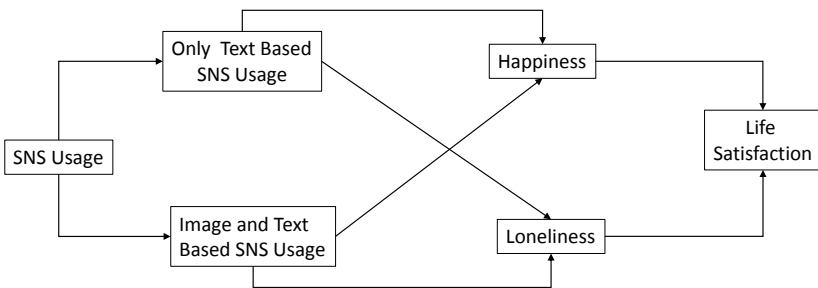
**H2:** Social media usage through SNSs decreases the loneliness of the users.

Prior research suggests that in the context of usage of SNSs, life satisfaction as an evaluation of personal life experiences is contingent upon enhanced happiness and diminished loneliness (Ellison et al., 2011; Longstreet & Brooks, 2017; Turel & Serenko, 2012). Based on the aforementioned arguments, we hypothesized that:

**H3:** Enhanced happiness due to SNS usage will increase life satisfaction.

**H4:** Diminished loneliness due to SNS usage will increase life satisfaction.

The proposed model is shown below (Fig. 6.1).



**Fig. 6.1** Proposed model (Source Authors)

## METHODOLOGY

The study investigates the linkage between different types of SNSs and the consequent constructs of happiness, loneliness, and life satisfaction. Specifically, the study assessed the usage of exclusively image-based platform (Instagram), exclusively text-based platform (Twitter), and one generalized mixed platform (Facebook). Using pre-established scales, this study captures loneliness, happiness, and life satisfaction among SNS users.

### *Sample*

Data was collected from 255 university students from Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, enrolled in undergraduate programs. After scrutiny, on the basis of non-response of major items, the final sample comprised 183 participants. The sample comprised 60% female and 40% male respondents. The respondents have a mean age of 20.22 years with a standard deviation of 3.32 years.

### *Instruments*

All constructs of interest in this study were measured with previously used and validated instruments. In addition, age and gender are included as control variables in the model. Happiness was assessed using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) comprising of eight questions on a six-point Likert scale (Hills & Argyle, 2002). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient for the scale stands at 0.667. The respondent scores for happiness ranged between 17 and 46 with a mean (M) of 29.43 and standard deviation (SD) of 4.82. Hughes et al.'s (2004) shortened three-item loneliness instrument measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale was used to measure loneliness. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability score stands at 0.801 and the respondent scores range from 3 to 21 with M = 11.46 and SD = 5.01. Life satisfaction was operationalized with the help of a life satisfaction scale comprising of 11 questions on a seven-point Likert scale (Diener et al., 1985). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability for the scale stands at 0.753. The life satisfaction score of respondents ranges between 8 and 35, with M = 23.08 and SD = 5.59. Social media usage is measured using six items on a seven-point Likert scale borrowed from Pittman and Reich (2016). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability score for the

scale stands at 0.992. The usage scores range between 11 and 45 and have  $M = 37.68$  and  $SD = 9.22$ .

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Prior to proceeding with the assessment of relationships, the relative usage of different SNSs was evaluated. To find out the usage of different SNSs each participant was asked to respond either in “yes” or “no” regarding a particular text-based (Twitter), image-based (Instagram), and text- and image-based (Facebook) platform. In case of a “yes” response, the respondent’s usage pattern was gauged using the Pittman and Reich (2016) scale. Table 6.1 presents the number of responses in case of each type of SNS. The figures in Table 6.1 suggest that use of only-text-based SNS (Twitter) is very low in comparison to use of SNS that allows image-based (Instagram) or both image- and text-based SNS (Facebook). Due to lower number of only-text-based SNS users, further analysis was carried out only on image-based and text- and image-based user responses.

The relationships were investigated using correlation analysis. Table 6.2 provides the internal consistency reliability of scales and correlation coefficients between constructs used in the study. The internal consistency reliability for each construct is above the acceptability thresholds. SNS usage was found to be significantly positively related to happiness but has a significantly negative relationship with loneliness. This finding provides support for H1 and H2. The correlation value for loneliness and happiness confirms that these two constructs are totally independent of each other. A positively significant relationship between happiness and life satisfaction leads us to surmise a positive impact of happiness on life satisfaction. Thus, there is a support for H3. On the other hand, the significantly negative correlation between loneliness and life satisfaction suggests that with increased loneliness, life satisfaction diminishes.

**Table 6.1** SNS users for different platforms

<i>Platform used</i>	<i>Number of responses</i>
Twitter	23
Instagram	97
Facebook	122

*Source* Authors’ research

**Table 6.2** Correlation analysis

	<i>Internal consistency reliability</i>	<i>Social media usage</i>	<i>Loneliness</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Life satisfaction</i>
Social media usage	0.890	1			
Loneliness	0.667	-0.312**	1		
Happiness	0.801	0.440**	0.000	1	
Life satisfaction	0.753	NA	-0.205**	0.290**	1

$p < 0.01$ ; NA: not applicable

A statistically significant negative correlation between loneliness and life satisfaction provides evidence in support of H4.

Thus, the findings can be gainfully interpreted as follows. An enhanced usage of image-based and image- and text-based social networking sites reduces loneliness and enhances happiness among the users. Further, the heightened happiness and diminished loneliness have a positive effect on life satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

Social media usage is found to be addictive (Fox & Moreland, 2015; Kross et al., 2013), and yet very prevalent. This study endeavored to identify the various consequences of image-based and image-and-text-based SNS usage. The study hypothesized that SNS usage increases happiness and decreases loneliness. Further, the increased happiness and decreased loneliness are expected to reflect in increased life satisfaction among adolescents. Accordingly, data were collected from adolescents using survey method with the help of established scales. With respect to image-based and image- and text-based SNS users, the study offers the following insights: (1) SNS usage is positively related to happiness but negatively related to loneliness; (2) increasing happiness contributes towards enhanced life satisfaction; and (3) decreasing loneliness boosts life satisfaction. Thus, the study found evidence in support of all the four hypotheses proposed.

The findings of this study are in alignment with the extant research. SNS usage helps the users to communicate virtually. The time spent on



SNS helps the users to stay connected with their friends and relatives (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). Social media not only helps in interpersonal interconnectivity but is also a source of entertainment (Cheung et al., 2011). Social sharing is also known to significantly contribute towards users' well-being (Grieve et al., 2013; Shaw & Gant, 2002). The findings from present research build on these prior results to put forth more specific outcomes of SNS usage in terms of increased happiness, diminished loneliness, and enhanced life satisfaction. The feeling of connectedness due to active membership of an SNS platform facilitates happiness. On the other hand, the confidence of not being left out of the social circles decreases the sense of loneliness and thereby, enhances life satisfaction. Overall, staying connected and contributing, directly or indirectly, to the platform makes users feel happy and satisfied (McKenna et al., 2002; Oh et al., 2014).

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Social media usage has been widely studied to identify consequences at both ends of the spectrum. Some studies have brought out the negative repercussions such as reduced attention span, increased sensitivity, mood swings, depression, social comparison, and social displacement (Donnelly & Kuss, 2016; Kabasakal, 2015; Samaha & Hawi, 2016; Van Deursen et al., 2015). On the other hand, there are studies that have argued in favor of positive outcomes of social media usage such as pleasant feeling, freedom to share, learning without barrier, and happiness (Das et al., 2018; Kim, 2014; Przybylski et al., 2013; Song et al., 2014). In this context, the present brought a fresh perspective by endeavoring to explore the mechanism for attainment of life satisfaction due to SNS usage. Though life satisfaction is a very multifaceted concept and people interpret it from myriad perspectives, this study established its connection with lowered loneliness and higher happiness in the context of SNS usage. Sharing content and receiving the content shared on social media platforms makes the users feel connected, lowers loneliness, heightens happiness, eventually leading towards greater satisfaction in life. Therefore, the objective of SNS platforms should be to facilitate greater sharing.

The study provides a platform for future research pertaining to SNS platforms. Researchers would be able to immensely contribute to the domain by exploring the consequences of SNS usage in greater detail

by including not just observable but various intrinsic outcomes as well. There is also a need to delve deeper into SNS platforms and understand motives as well as consequences for the users. The reasons for greater usage of image-based SNS platforms in comparison to pure text-based platforms also need to be investigated by researchers. Going beyond survey methods, researchers also need to use unstructured data available on SNS platforms to derive insights. Even as the study contributes towards our understanding of SNS platforms, it is not free from limitations. The study has not taken into consideration pure text-based SNS platforms which are a major outlet for opinion sharing. Inclusion of antecedent constructs of SNS usage would have made the model more holistic. And finally, multivariate data analysis would have offered more insights pertaining to the relationships between the constructs. Nevertheless, the current study has provided insights related to SNS usage, loneliness, happiness, and life satisfaction. Even more importantly, insights are generated from an adolescent population. Our study sets the stage for future research involving adolescents, a vulnerable demographic group, on the mechanism for non-addictive gratification through SNS usage.

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