The Impact of Facebook on Female Undergraduate Students

Keodara Moua & Abigail Schmitt, Dr. Susan Wolfgram, University of Wisconsin-Stout

Research Question & Hypothesis

How does Facebook impact female college undergraduate students’ sense of identity?

We hypothesized that female college undergraduate students’ sense of identity would be impacted by Facebook, informed by literature and theory. Identity is defined as a role of “self-meaning” in the environment or time in life (Boss, Doherty, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993).

Literature Review

Research by Pettijohn, LaPiere, Pettijohn, and Horling (2012) examined how one’s personality correlated to the usage of Facebook. The purpose of the research was to identify which personality types were attracted to Facebook. The research showed a positive correlation towards Facebook as a strong communication tool and online friends helping to build a sense of confidence but not enough to continue to have friends in reality. In Kaczynski's (2021) research, the purpose of it was to explore how undergraduate students: crafted and refined self-presentations on the social network site Facebook. Findings indicated that norm remained for helping students develop cleaner awareness and more intentional focus in how they use Facebook for personal and academic purposes.

Robins (2024) studied the lived experiences and the psychological impact of victimization from cyberbullying among college students. All participants indicated that their abuse forced them to become more aware of and cautious with its use.

Lee, Moore, Park, and Park’s (2012) study was aimed to provide an insight into the social disruptive function of declining on social sites by investigating the number of Facebook friends a user had. Results found that excessive browsing can possibly lead others to form a negative evaluation of the Friend rich.

Chen and Lee's (2013) conducted research on the evolution of technology and how social networking can affect an individual’s perspective of themselves. By exploring the recent studies, Chen and Lee noticed a trend of a negative correlation between social media and the well-being of college students. They determined that the ability to communicate and interact with others virtually can lead to social media being a healthy outlet.

Method

Participants
• 58 participants at a Midwestern university
• 6 male participants; 52 female participants
• Included 52 female participants in the analysis only

Research Design
• Non-random
• Cross sectional
• Purposive sampling design
• Snowball sampling design

Data collection Instrument
• Paper survey
• Likert scale for statements
• 1-Strongly Agree to 6-Strongly Disagree

Procedure
• The professor was emailed for permission to conduct the surveys in the classroom.

Data Analysis Plan
• Cleaned & coded surveys
• Analyzed data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
• Frequencies, mean comparisons, correlations, and a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability analysis

Theoretical Framework

The Symbolic Interaction Theory was used to help guide our hypothesis.

Symbolic Interaction assumes that one’s self-concept is formed based on the interactions of social groups, individual development, geography, race/ethnicity, class, gender, age, and other identities.

Based on the research question, the Symbolic Interaction Theory would predict that the usage of Facebook would impact a college student’s identity development because of the interpersonal relationships the student is creating online.

(Boss, Doherty, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Frequency Distribution</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>SLA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FBP</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTR</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWI</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBU</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBV</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPI</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNI</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Person Correlation Matrix</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SWI</th>
<th>FBV</th>
<th>RLF</th>
<th>FPI</th>
<th>FNI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FBP</td>
<td>.487**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWI</td>
<td>.530**</td>
<td>.377**</td>
<td>.525**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBE</td>
<td>.495**</td>
<td>.407**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.499**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPI</td>
<td>.510**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.465**</td>
<td>.511**</td>
<td>.739**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNI</td>
<td>.539**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Purpose

The purpose of this study was threefold:
1. Discover if there was a relationship between Facebook and female undergraduate students’ sense of identity.
2. To increase the awareness of how female college students use Facebook as a means to impact their sense of identity.
3. Our research will contribute to early intervention for female students who are using social media and struggling with self-identity throughout college.

Dependent Variables
• FBP: My personal identity, how I feel about myself as a person, is influenced by Facebook
• FRL: How I present myself on Facebook is how I present myself in real life
• SWI: The number of friends I have on Facebook impacts my self-worth
• FBV: I need Facebook to keep up with my friends and family updates
• FBK: I feel valued as a person when friends and family keep me regularly updated on Facebook
• FPU: My relationship with "friends" on Facebook has impacted how I perceive the friends I have in real life
• FPI: Facebook post can positively impact how I feel about myself
• FNI: Facebook post can negatively impact how I feel about myself

Variables
• Demographic Variables
  • AGE (Age)
  • GEN (Gender)
  • STA (Status in College)
  • FBU (Active Facebook Account)

Results Summary

All variables were subjected to frequency distribution analysis; there was no missing data. We omitted all the male participants for the data analysis since we were focused on female undergraduate students for this research.

Our hypothesis was not supported as indicated by the variable: My personal identity, how I feel about myself as a person, is influenced by Facebook (FBP), because many of the female participants chose disagree.

Based on the reliability analysis, Cronbach’s Alpha measured 0.799. This value indicated that the survey questions were a reliable measure of the major concept.

Implications for Practice

Types of practitioners we hope will use our findings are college counselors, researchers, and those in the helping professions.

Although our hypothesis was not supported, helping professionals need to be aware that previous research has demonstrated that many young women struggle with the impact of Facebook on their multiple identities.

Young women, before they get to college, need guidance in strengthening their identity to not be negatively influenced and also encouraged to protect themselves from negative outcomes on social media.

Implications for Future Research

Future research could benefit from qualitative interview to gain in-depth and lived experience about what the relationship is between identity and the use of Facebook.

We found a number of correlations that could benefit from future investigation through qualitative interviews. The largest correlation, .739, was between FPI: A Facebook post can positively impact how I feel about myself and FNI: A Facebook post can negatively impact how I feel about myself. This relationship indicates the power that Facebook has both positively and negatively on a young woman’s feelings about herself.

Conclusion

Social media has a powerful impact on young people and can alter how an individual feels about themselves which can have long-term adult consequences (Chen, & Lee, 2013).

We need to increase awareness of this issue in order to guide young people how to use and manage social media to be a positive influence in their lives and how to prevent the negative attacks on the self.

“I use Facebook to stay connected with my friends and family because they are important to me.” – Anonymous Participant