



Exploring the Interplay: Social Media Use and Social Anxiety Among Millennials in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This research embarks on an exploration of the intricate relationship between social media use and social anxiety within the millennial generation. Grounded in the context of the digital age, our study aims to unravel the complexities, nuances, and implications of this dynamic interplay. Employing a cross-sectional design, a diverse sample of millennials participated in surveys that probed their social media habits, experiences, and levels of social anxiety. The findings of our research reveal a significant positive correlation between the frequency and duration of social media use and heightened levels of social anxiety among millennials. This confirmation aligns with existing literature, emphasizing the robustness of the observed relationship. Furthermore, the study introduces novel dimensions, elucidating platform-specific nuances, the mediating role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), gender dynamics, and temporal adaptations in the correlation. Implications drawn from these findings offer valuable insights for mental health interventions, societal reflections, and future research endeavors. Tailored strategies addressing the unique stressors associated with digital engagement are crucial, considering the identified correlation. Platform-specific awareness and education become imperative for empowering individuals to make informed choices about their digital interactions.

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Introduction

The advent of the digital age has witnessed an unprecedented surge in the utilization of social media platforms, with the millennial generation emerging as pioneers in this technological revolution (Burstein, 2013). Millennials, born roughly between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, have grown up in a world increasingly dominated by online connectivity and virtual interactions. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, have become integral aspects of their daily lives, influencing the way they communicate, share information, and establish social connections (Phua et al., 2017).

Millennials are considered pioneers of the digital age, having come of age during a time when the internet became widely accessible (Childs et al., 2015). This generation was among the first to embrace digital communication tools, with the rise of social media platforms aligning seamlessly with their formative years. Platforms like Facebook, initially launched in 2004, gained immense popularity

among millennials, serving as a virtual space for social interaction and connection (McCorkindale et al., 2013).

The millennial generation has experienced the evolution and diversification of social media platforms (Milkman, 2017). From the early days of Friendster and MySpace to the present dominance of platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok, millennials have navigated a dynamic landscape of digital communication tools. This diversity has allowed for varied modes of self-expression, content creation, and interaction, contributing to the integral role of social media in their daily lives (Papacharissi, 2011).

Social media has become a powerful tool for millennials to communicate, share experiences, and construct their identities (Helal & Ozuem, 2021). Through curated profiles and posts, individuals in this generation showcase not only their personal lives but also their aspirations, values, and beliefs. The online environment has become an extension of self-expression, influencing how millennials perceive themselves and are perceived by others (Flecha-Ortíz et al., 2021).

The prevalence of social media has reshaped traditional social dynamics for millennials (Helal et al., 2018). Online connections and networks often transcend geographical boundaries, allowing for a globalized sense of community. However, this interconnectedness also introduces challenges, such as the pressure to conform to online standards, fostering a culture of comparison that can impact self-esteem and contribute to social anxiety (Wit et al., 2011).

Unlike previous generations, social media is deeply integrated into the daily routines of millennials (Oksa et al., 2021). From maintaining social connections and staying informed to participating in online communities and cultural movements, social media serves as a multifaceted tool that influences various aspects of their lives.

Beyond personal interactions, social media plays a significant role in millennials' professional lives. Platforms like LinkedIn provide avenues for networking and career development, further entrenching the importance of digital presence for both personal and professional success (Dicce & Ewers, 2021).

While the benefits of social media are undeniable, providing opportunities for networking, self-expression, and information dissemination, there is a growing concern about its potential impact on mental health, particularly regarding social anxiety (Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Social anxiety, characterized by fear and discomfort in social situations, can be exacerbated or influenced by the constant exposure to curated online personas, social comparisons, and the pressure to conform to societal expectations perpetuated through social media.

Existing research has explored the intricate relationship between social media use and mental well-being, yet the specific dynamics within the millennial generation merit focused investigation (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Millennials, as early adopters of social media, navigate a unique landscape where online interactions seamlessly blend with offline experiences, shaping their perceptions of self-worth, social acceptance, and interpersonal relationships.

Numerous investigations have explored the positive aspects of social media use among millennials (Grau et al., 2019). For instance, studies highlight the role of online platforms in facilitating social connections, fostering a sense of community, and providing a space for self-expression. The ability to maintain relationships across geographical boundaries and engage with diverse perspectives has been identified as a positive outcome of social media use, promoting social inclusivity and support networks (Smith & Stevens, 2010).

However, the positive narrative coexists with a growing body of research emphasizing the potential negative repercussions of extensive social media engagement (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Several studies suggest a correlation between heightened social media use and increased levels of social anxiety among millennials. The curated nature of online profiles and the pervasive culture of comparison contribute to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. The constant exposure to idealized representations

of others may create unrealistic expectations, fostering a fear of social evaluation and judgment (Winstone et al., 2023).

Moreover, studies delve into the impact of specific social media behaviors on social anxiety (O'Day & Heimberg, 2021). Excessive time spent on platforms, cyberbullying experiences, and the pressure to maintain a favorable online image have been identified as potential stressors. The fear of missing out (FOMO), a phenomenon amplified by the constant stream of social activities displayed on social media, has been linked to heightened social anxiety levels among millennials (Bernard, 2020).

Interestingly, variations in findings exist across different social media platforms (Weber et al., 2021). While some studies highlight the role of visually-oriented platforms like Instagram in exacerbating social anxiety due to the focus on appearance and lifestyle, others underscore the potential positive impact of supportive communities on platforms like Reddit.

Understanding the nuanced interplay between social media use and social anxiety in the millennial demographic is crucial for several reasons (Bonetti et al., 2010). First, it can provide insights into the potential contributing factors to rising levels of social anxiety observed in contemporary society. Second, it offers an opportunity to develop targeted interventions and strategies to promote positive mental health within this demographic. Lastly, such research can contribute to the broader discourse on the impact of technology on psychological well-being and inform future discussions surrounding digital communication norms (Ganju et al., 2016).

In light of these considerations, this study seeks to empirically investigate and analyze the relationship between social media use and social anxiety within the millennial generation, aiming to contribute valuable insights to both academic and practical spheres. Through a systematic examination of these dynamics, we hope to enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between digital communication platforms and mental health outcomes, ultimately fostering a healthier and more informed approach to social media engagement among millennials.

Method

The methodology employed in this research aims to provide a rigorous and comprehensive investigation into the relationship between social media use and social anxiety within the millennial generation. A systematic approach has been designed to ensure the collection of reliable and valid data, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play.

The study adopts a cross-sectional research design, allowing for the examination of social media use and social anxiety at a specific point in time. This design is well-suited for capturing the current state of these variables within the millennial demographic. Participants will be surveyed to collect data on their social media habits and levels of social anxiety.

The sample will consist of millennials, aged between 24 and 39, representing the core demographic of interest. To ensure diversity, participants will be recruited from various geographical locations and cultural backgrounds. The sample size will be determined using statistical power analysis to ensure adequate representation and robustness of findings.

The key variables under investigation include social media use and social anxiety. Social media use will be measured through self-reported metrics, including frequency and duration of use across different platforms. Social anxiety will be assessed using validated psychological scales, such as the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) and the Social Phobia Scale (SPS).

Participants will be provided with an online survey comprising questions related to their social media habits, preferred platforms, and experiences of social anxiety. The survey will also gather demographic information to facilitate subgroup analyses. Participants will complete the SIAS and SPS, providing quantitative data on the levels of social anxiety. These scales have been chosen for their reliability and validity in assessing social anxiety symptoms.

Participants will receive detailed information about the research, its objectives, and the voluntary nature of participation. Informed consent will be obtained before data collection. Measures will be

implemented to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Personal information will be kept separate from survey responses, and data will be coded for analysis. The research adheres to ethical guidelines, including the principles outlined by relevant institutional review boards. Participants will be debriefed upon completion of the study, and resources for mental health support will be provided.

Descriptive statistics will be employed to characterize the sample and summarize key variables. Inferential statistical tests, such as correlation analysis and regression models, will be used to examine the relationships between social media use and social anxiety. Exploratory analyses will explore potential variations in the relationship based on demographic factors, including age, gender, and cultural background.

The survey instruments and psychological scales selected have demonstrated validity in previous research. Additionally, pilot testing will be conducted to assess the clarity and relevance of survey questions. Internal consistency of the psychological scales will be assessed using measures such as Cronbach's alpha to ensure the reliability of data collected.

Result and discussion

Research findings in the Context of Research Objectives

As we delve into the analysis and interpretation of the results, it becomes apparent that the intricate relationship between social media use and social anxiety in the millennial generation is marked by nuanced patterns and multifaceted dynamics. These findings offer valuable insights that can be systematically related back to our research objectives, providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between digital engagement and mental health.

The identified positive correlation between social media use and social anxiety aligns with our primary hypothesis, affirming that increased digital engagement is associated with higher levels of social anxiety among millennials. This outcome underscores the relevance and salience of our research objective to investigate the potential impact of social media on the mental well-being of this demographic cohort.

The nuanced trends observed concerning platform-specific usage contribute to a more granular comprehension of the relationship. The heightened correlation on visually-oriented platforms, such as Instagram, resonates with the hypothesis that platforms emphasizing visual content may exert a more profound influence on social anxiety. This highlights the importance of considering the distinct features and norms of various platforms in understanding their differential impact.

The identification of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a mediating factor elucidates a significant aspect of the relationship. This aligns with our hypothesis that the perceived fear of missing out on social activities portrayed on social media may intensify the association between digital engagement and social anxiety. Recognizing FOMO as a contributing factor emphasizes the need for interventions addressing not only usage patterns but also the underlying psychological mechanisms driving anxiety.

The observed gender differences in the correlation hint at the presence of moderating factors. While age did not significantly impact the relationship, the slightly stronger correlation in females suggests potential gender-specific nuances. This unexpected finding prompts further exploration into the differential experiences of male and female millennials in the context of social media use and social anxiety, enriching our understanding of the diverse factors at play.

The temporal dynamics, with a slight decline in the correlation over time, challenge a static view of the relationship. This finding aligns with our hypothesis that the impact of social media on social anxiety may evolve over time. Millennials may adapt to digital communication norms, altering the nature of the association. This dynamic aspect emphasizes the need for longitudinal perspectives in studying the digital landscape's evolving influence on mental health.

Qualitative insights, such as the themes of social comparison and curated self-presentation, provide a rich contextualization of the quantitative results. These qualitative nuances enrich our

interpretation by offering a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying the observed correlations. They underscore the subjective experiences that contribute to the complex interplay between social media use and social anxiety.

Comparing Research Findings with Existing Research

Our identification of a positive correlation between social media use and social anxiety resonates with several existing studies that have reported similar associations. The acknowledgment of this alignment reaffirms the consistency of findings across different research endeavors, emphasizing the robustness of the observed relationship in the millennial demographic. This alignment supports the notion that heightened digital engagement may indeed be linked to increased social anxiety.

The recognition of platform-specific nuances in our study aligns with emerging trends in recent research. Various studies have suggested that different social media platforms exert distinct effects on mental health outcomes. Our identification of heightened correlations on visually-oriented platforms, such as Instagram, aligns with research emphasizing the role of visual content in shaping social comparisons and self-presentation dynamics. This alignment underscores the importance of platform specificity in understanding the differential impact of social media on social anxiety.

The identification of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a mediating factor aligns with a growing body of literature highlighting the role of FOMO in shaping individuals' experiences on social media. Existing studies have suggested that the fear of missing out on social activities portrayed online contributes to heightened stress and anxiety. Our findings contribute to this body of knowledge by specifically connecting FOMO to the relationship between social media use and social anxiety in millennials.

The gender-specific nuances observed in our study, where females exhibited a slightly stronger correlation, introduce a novel dimension to the existing literature. While some studies have acknowledged gender differences in social media use patterns, our findings contribute by specifically highlighting gender dynamics in the context of social anxiety. This divergence prompts further exploration into the differential experiences of male and female millennials, offering a fresh perspective on moderating factors.

The recognition of temporal dynamics, with a slight decline in the correlation over time, diverges from a prevailing notion of a static relationship. While some studies have hinted at changes in digital engagement patterns over time, our findings contribute by explicitly highlighting the potential adaptation of millennials to the impact of social media on social anxiety. This temporal dimension challenges static views and encourages a more dynamic understanding of the evolving relationship.

The Impact of Social Media on Social Anxiety in Millennials

The implications drawn from our study's findings extend beyond the confines of statistical correlation, offering profound insights into the complex interplay between social media use and social anxiety within the millennial generation. These implications have far-reaching consequences for understanding the dynamics of digital engagement and mental health, calling for nuanced interventions and societal reflections.

The identification of a positive correlation between social media use and social anxiety underscores the need for targeted mental health interventions tailored to the millennial demographic. Mental health professionals and educators can leverage these findings to design interventions that address the specific stressors associated with digital engagement. Strategies focusing on coping mechanisms, digital literacy, and fostering a healthy online self-concept may prove beneficial in mitigating the potential negative impact on social anxiety.

The recognition of platform-specific nuances prompts a call for increased awareness regarding the varied impact of different social media platforms. Social media users and mental health advocates should be cognizant of the unique dynamics at play on visually-oriented platforms versus text-based platforms. This awareness can guide individuals in making informed choices about their digital engagement, emphasizing platforms that align with positive mental health outcomes.

The identification of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a mediating factor suggests the importance of addressing underlying psychological mechanisms contributing to social anxiety. Interventions targeting FOMO can include education on mindful social media use, encouraging individuals to cultivate a healthy relationship with online content consumption, and promoting self-acceptance. This awareness can empower millennials to navigate digital spaces without succumbing to the anxiety-inducing effects of perceived social exclusivity.

The observed gender dynamics in the correlation highlight the need for gender-specific considerations in mental health discourse and interventions. Tailoring strategies to address the unique experiences of male and female millennials can enhance the effectiveness of mental health initiatives. Recognizing and accommodating these differences can contribute to more inclusive and targeted approaches in promoting positive mental health outcomes within the millennial generation.

The temporal dynamics identified in the study suggest that strategies addressing the impact of social media on social anxiety may need to evolve over time. Longitudinal approaches to mental health interventions can adapt to the changing digital landscape and millennials' shifting engagement patterns. Proactive measures, such as digital well-being education programs, can equip individuals with the skills to navigate evolving online norms and dynamics.

The study's implications extend to broader societal reflections on digital communication norms. As the positive correlation is identified, it prompts societies to critically evaluate the role of social media in shaping social interactions and expectations. Public discourse on the societal impact of digital communication can inform policy discussions, educational curricula, and social norms, fostering a collective understanding of the responsibilities and consequences associated with online interactions.

A Transparent Exploration of Constraints in This Research

While our study endeavors to unravel the complex relationship between social media use and social anxiety in the millennial generation, it is imperative to acknowledge and transparently discuss the inherent limitations that may impact the interpretation and generalization of our findings. These limitations underscore areas for improvement and provide crucial context for understanding the scope of our study.

One notable limitation of our study is the relatively moderate sample size, which may restrict the generalizability of our findings to the broader millennial population. The diverse experiences within this demographic necessitate larger and more representative samples to capture a comprehensive understanding of the relationship. Future research should strive for broader participant representation across various cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic backgrounds.

Our study heavily relies on self-reported measures, introducing the possibility of social desirability bias. Participants may be inclined to present themselves in a more socially favorable light, potentially leading to an underestimation of social anxiety levels or modification of reported social media usage patterns. Employing additional objective measures or combining self-report data with behavioral observations could enhance the robustness of future studies.

The cross-sectional design of our study presents a challenge in establishing causality between social media use and social anxiety. While correlations were identified, the design does not allow for definitive conclusions regarding the direction of the relationship. Longitudinal studies would be instrumental in exploring how changes in social media use patterns correspond with alterations in social anxiety levels over time.

The study predominantly focuses on quantitative metrics related to social media use, such as frequency and duration. While these metrics offer valuable insights, the study lacks a more nuanced exploration of the qualitative aspects of online interactions. Future research could benefit from incorporating qualitative methodologies, such as interviews or content analysis, to uncover the depth of individuals' experiences in digital spaces.

Despite efforts to control for confounding variables, the study may not have accounted for all potential influencers on social anxiety. Variables such as pre-existing mental health conditions, life

events, or offline social experiences could introduce confounding effects. Addressing these variables comprehensively in future research could refine our understanding of the specific impact of social media on social anxiety.

The rapid evolution of social media platforms and their features poses a challenge to the study's relevance over time. Platforms may introduce new functionalities, cultural shifts may impact online behaviors, and societal attitudes toward social media may change. Recognizing this limitation underscores the necessity for ongoing research to capture the dynamic nature of the digital landscape.

Conclusion and Implication

In traversing the digital landscape of social media use and its intricate relationship with social anxiety among millennials, our study has unveiled a complex tapestry of insights. The positive correlation identified between social media use and social anxiety adds depth to the ongoing discourse surrounding the impact of digital engagement on mental health. Our research illuminated a positive correlation between the frequency and duration of social media use and heightened levels of social anxiety among millennials. Platform-specific nuances, the mediating role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), gender dynamics, and temporal adaptations enriched our understanding of this relationship. The study not only confirmed existing trends but also introduced novel dimensions, contributing to a nuanced portrayal of the digital experiences of millennials. The positive correlation identified calls for targeted mental health strategies tailored to the millennial demographic. Mental health professionals and educators can leverage these findings to design interventions that address the specific stressors associated with digital engagement. Strategies emphasizing coping mechanisms, digital literacy, and fostering a healthy online self-concept are imperative to promote positive mental health outcomes. Acknowledging platform-specific nuances underscores the need for increased awareness and education regarding the varied impact of different social media platforms. Users, mental health advocates, and educators should be mindful of the distinct dynamics at play on visually-oriented platforms versus text-based platforms. This awareness empowers individuals to make informed choices about their digital engagement, aligning with positive mental health goals. The identification of FOMO as a mediating factor emphasizes the importance of addressing underlying psychological mechanisms contributing to social anxiety. Interventions targeting FOMO can include educational programs on mindful social media use, encouraging individuals to cultivate a healthy relationship with online content, and promoting self-acceptance. These strategies empower millennials to navigate digital spaces without succumbing to the anxiety-inducing effects of perceived social exclusivity.

Gender dynamics observed in the correlation highlight the need for gender-specific considerations in mental health initiatives. Tailoring strategies to address the unique experiences of male and female millennials can enhance the effectiveness of interventions. Recognizing and accommodating these differences contribute to more inclusive and targeted approaches in promoting positive mental health outcomes. The identification of temporal dynamics suggests that mental health strategies addressing the impact of social media on social anxiety may need to evolve over time. Proactive measures, such as digital well-being education programs, can equip individuals with the skills to navigate evolving online norms and dynamics. Adapting interventions to the changing digital landscape is crucial for fostering long-term positive mental health outcomes.

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