



IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE AMONG OUT OF SCHOOL YOUTH IN LAAK, DAVAO DE ORO

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of social media exposure on out-of-school youth, particularly in Laak, Davao de Oro. As social media becomes a dominant force in communication and information dissemination, its influence on young individuals not engaged in formal education presents opportunities and challenges. This research seeks to explore their experiences, difficulties, and insights gained regarding their social media use.

A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to understand the lived experiences of out-of-school youth regarding social media exposure. The study involved in-depth interviews with eight participants aged 15- 24, selected through purposive sampling. These participants were not enrolled in school or employed at the time of data collection. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method, which identified significant themes across participant narratives.

The results reveal that social media serves as an essential tool for accessing information, providing entertainment, and facilitating social connections. However, prolonged exposure also results in several negative consequences. Participants reported experiencing physical discomfort, including eye strain, headaches, and sleep disturbances due to excessive screen time. The study also highlights the dangers of misinformation, with participants struggling to differentiate credible sources from misleading content, which, in some cases, led to anxiety and social conflicts. Additionally, the study found that social media exacerbates mental health challenges, contributing to feelings of loneliness, depression, and self-doubt due to online interactions and unrealistic portrayals of success.

These findings emphasized the need for interventions that promote digital literacy, responsible online behavior, and mental health awareness. Policymakers, social workers, and educators should collaborate to create programs that guide out-of-school youth in harnessing social media's benefits while mitigating its risks. Parental guidance and community support must also be strengthened to ensure a balanced and productive use of digital platforms. Further research is recommended to explore long-term impacts and effective intervention strategies to safeguard the well-being of vulnerable youth in the digital era.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Out-Of-School Youth, Mental Health, Digital Literacy, Online Engagement, Responsible Use

INTRODUCTION

Social media has significantly transformed the way people communicate, access information, and interact with one another. While it provides numerous benefits, its impact among out-of-school youth (OSY) raises concerns about its potential effects, both positive and negative. The rapid advancement of digital technology has increased accessibility to social media platforms, making it imperative to assess how OSY interact with and are influenced by online spaces (Livingstone & Bober, 2015).

The emergence of social media has created both opportunities and risks for OSY. On one hand, it serves as a tool for self-expression, entertainment, and information access, allowing marginalized youth to stay connected and explore opportunities beyond their immediate environment (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2017). However, it also exposes them to various risks, including misinformation, cyberbullying, and online exploitation, which may have long-term effects on their mental health and social behaviors (Duggan & Page, 2016). Given the lack of formal educational engagement among OSY, their ability to critically assess online content may be limited, making them more susceptible to misleading narratives and harmful online activities (Jacobsen & Forste, 2014).

This study aims to understand the experiences, challenges, and insights of OSY regarding social media exposure in Laak, Davao de Oro. By exploring their interactions with social media, this research seeks to provide a foundation for developing strategies that mitigate adverse effects while maximizing their benefits. Understanding these interactions is crucial in crafting interventions that promote digital literacy, responsible social media use, and overall well-being among OSY.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the experiences of OSY concerning social media exposure.
2. To identify the challenges they face in navigating social media.
3. To analyze insights drawn from their experiences concerning educational management and personal development.



Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for social workers, parents, policymakers, and educators in designing interventions that foster responsible social media engagement among OSY. By identifying the key challenges they face, stakeholders can implement programs that enhance digital literacy, promote safe online practices, and address the negative psychological effects of prolonged social media use (Medina, 2015). Furthermore, the study contributes to existing literature on the digital divide and the social impact of technology on vulnerable populations.

By addressing the complexities of social media exposure among OSY, this research offers recommendations to policymakers and educators on how to balance the opportunities and threats presented by digital platforms. The findings serve as a guide for future initiatives aimed at integrating digital education into community programs, thereby ensuring that OSY can harness the benefits of social media without compromising their well-being.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological design, as it seeks to explore and describe the lived experiences of out-of-school youth (OSY) regarding their exposure to social media. A phenomenological approach was chosen to gain deep insights into how social media influences their daily lives, behaviors, and decision-making processes (Moustakas, 1994). This design allowed the researcher to capture the subjective realities of OSY by analyzing their thoughts, emotions, and challenges related to social media exposure (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Given the exploratory nature of this study, in-depth interviews were conducted as the primary data collection method. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants the freedom to express their thoughts while enabling the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). By using this method, the study aimed to construct a rich, descriptive account of how OSY perceive, engage with, and are affected by social media platforms.

Participants

The study involved eight (8) out-of-school youth (OSY) residing in Laak, Davao de Oro. The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling strategy, ensuring that individuals included in the study met the following criteria:

- Aged 16 to 24 years old
- Not currently enrolled in formal education
- Unemployed or informally employed
- Active users of social media for at least six months before the study
- Willing to participate in interviews and share personal experiences

Purposive sampling was chosen because it allowed for the selection of individuals who had firsthand experiences with social media exposure, thereby providing rich and meaningful data (Palinkas et al., 2015). Additionally, efforts were made to ensure diversity in terms of gender, socioeconomic background, and the types of social media platforms commonly used by participants.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over two months, during which each participant engaged in one-on-one, face-to-face interviews lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a neutral, private location to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives about participants' social media usage, the challenges they faced, and their insights regarding its influence on their lives. Some sample questions included:

- Can you describe your typical social media usage in a day?
- What are the positive and negative effects of social media on your personal life?
- Have you ever encountered any harmful or misleading content on social media? How did you respond?
- How do you think social media has influenced your relationships, decision-making, or self-perception?

All interviews were audio-recorded (with participant consent) and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and reliability. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and participant reactions, which provided additional layers of interpretation.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method, which ensures a systematic and rigorous approach to phenomenological data interpretation. The steps followed were:

1. Reading and re-reading all interview transcripts to familiarize with the data.
2. Extracting significant statements relevant to the research objectives.
3. Formulating meanings from the extracted statements by identifying underlying thoughts and emotions.
4. Organizing formulated meanings into clusters of common themes.
5. Developing an exhaustive description of participant experiences, highlighting key insights.
6. Returning the findings to participants for member-checking, ensuring that their views were accurately represented.
7. Synthesizing the findings into an overall thematic framework that captures the essence of OSY's experiences with social



media.

To enhance data validity and reliability, triangulation was employed by cross-referencing participant responses with existing literature and secondary sources.

Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted with research experts to ensure the credibility of thematic interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to ethical research guidelines to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of all participants. The following ethical measures were implemented:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were provided with written and verbal explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks before signing a consent form.
- **Confidentiality:** To maintain anonymity, participants were assigned coded identifiers (e.g., P1, P2, etc.), and personal information was stored securely.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences.
- **Minimization of Risk:** The study posed minimal risk, but participants were offered mental health referrals in case any topics caused emotional distress.

RESULTS

The findings of this study revealed three major themes regarding out-of-school youth (OSY) social media exposure: (1) Access to Information, (2) Creating Entertainment, and (3) Experiencing Physical Discomfort. The data collected from interviews were analyzed and organized into these themes, supported by participant narratives, frequency distributions, and visual representations for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

1. Access to Information

Participants acknowledged that social media served as a primary source of information, allowing them to stay updated on news, job opportunities, and emerging trends. Many OSY expressed those social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok provided them with educational content, skill development resources, and access to information beyond traditional means.

Facebook emerged as the most frequently accessed platform, with participants relying on it for job searches, news updates, and educational content. Many OSY reported that they frequently browsed Facebook job groups and marketplace listings to find potential employment. YouTube was another essential platform for acquiring skills and self-improvement, as participants utilized tutorials on topics such as language learning, business strategies, and practical skills like repairing electronic devices.

TikTok, while widely regarded as an entertainment platform, also played an educational role for some OSY, with algorithm-driven content exposing them to financial literacy, small business ideas, and health-related topics. Messenger was primarily used for communication, with participants noting that they relied on it for job referrals, networking, and maintaining connections with family and friends. Instagram was the least used for direct information access, though some participants followed business accounts and influencers to stay updated on trends and market demands.

Participant Insights

- *"I love using Facebook because it helps me find jobs and know what to bring during interviews."* (P3)
- *"Through social media, I improved my skills because of innovations I discovered online."* (P5)

These findings suggest that social media is an important tool for OSY in acquiring knowledge and accessing employment opportunities. However, the study also revealed concerns regarding the credibility of information, as some participants admitted difficulty in distinguishing reliable sources from misinformation.

2. Creating Entertainment

Social media was identified as a significant source of entertainment among OSY, serving as an escape from reality and boredom. Many participants engaged in online gaming, watching videos, and socializing on different platforms.

Watching videos was the most popular form of entertainment, with YouTube and TikTok being the primary sources of video content. Participants shared that they enjoyed watching comedic skits, vlogs, and live streams, which provided relaxation and amusement. Online gaming was another dominant activity, with multiplayer games such as Mobile Legends and Call of Duty being particularly popular among male participants. Gaming not only served as entertainment but also allowed OSY to interact and compete with peers.

Messaging apps, particularly Facebook Messenger, were heavily used for social interactions. Many OSY engaged in conversations with friends and family through chat groups, with some even participating in online communities related to their interests. A smaller percentage of OSY engaged in content creation, such as posting videos on TikTok or streaming live gameplay on Facebook Gaming.



Participant Insights

- "I go to malls just to use free Wi-Fi and enjoy social media. It gives me happiness." (P4)
- "I play Mobile Legends with my friends to pass time and avoid conflicts at home." (P1 & P5)

While entertainment through social media provided a positive outlet for OSY, excessive engagement was also noted as a concern. Some participants admitted to spending long hours consuming content or gaming, which sometimes led to neglect of personal responsibilities and potential social isolation.

3. Experiencing Physical Discomfort

Excessive social media use was linked to various physical health issues among OSY, including headaches, eye strain, and sleep disturbances. Participants reported experiencing fatigue, poor posture, and disrupted sleep due to prolonged screen exposure.

Many participants acknowledged spending extended hours on their mobile devices, particularly late at night. This behavior contributed to irregular sleep patterns, with some reporting difficulty falling asleep due to prolonged exposure to blue light. Eye strain and headaches were frequently mentioned, as continuous scrolling and screen time led to discomfort and reduced concentration during the day. Some participants also reported experiencing fatigue and body aches due to prolonged sitting and poor posture while using their phones.

Participant Insights

- "My fingers hurt from prolonged phone use, and I was even taken to the hospital." (P2 & P6)
- "I struggle to sleep because of my phone. I keep scrolling until late at night."

(P3 & P6)

These findings highlight the negative health consequences of excessive social media exposure, emphasizing the need for awareness campaigns promoting responsible and balanced digital habits.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study identified three major themes in OSY social media exposure: (1) Access to Information, (2) Creating Entertainment, and (3) Experiencing Physical Discomfort. The findings indicate that social media provides both opportunities for learning and skill enhancement while also posing challenges in terms of physical well-being and overindulgence in entertainment.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have significant implications for various stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, social workers, and parents. The impact of social media on OSY is multifaceted, offering both opportunities and challenges that require well-structured interventions to ensure positive outcomes.

The following recommendations aim to enhance the benefits of social media while mitigating its negative effects among OSY:

1. Promoting Digital Literacy Programs

Digital literacy is crucial in equipping OSY with the ability to navigate social media responsibly. Many OSY rely on social media for information, but their ability to assess the credibility of online sources remains limited. The proliferation of misinformation and fake news can have serious consequences on their decision-making and perceptions. Therefore, it is essential to implement digital literacy programs that focus on:

- Teaching OSY how to critically evaluate online information and identify credible sources.
- Raising awareness on misinformation, clickbait tactics, and online scams that often target vulnerable youth.
- Training OSY in fact-checking strategies and the responsible sharing of information to prevent the spread of false narratives.
- Introducing OSY to media literacy tools and resources that help them assess online content objectively.

Educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government agencies should collaborate to integrate digital literacy training into community-based programs tailored for OSY. These initiatives should include interactive workshops, simulations, and real-life case studies to enhance learning effectiveness.

2. Encouraging Healthy Social Media Habits

The study found that OSY engage in excessive social media use, often resulting in physical discomfort, sleep disturbances, and mental health concerns. Without proper guidance, social media addiction may lead to long-term negative effects on their well-being. To promote healthier social media habits, the following strategies should be considered:

- Launching awareness campaigns that educate OSY about the impact of excessive screen time on mental and physical health.
- Encouraging self-regulation strategies, such as setting screen time limits, taking breaks, and engaging in offline activities.
- Promoting the use of social media in productive ways, such as engaging in educational content, skill-building, and community engagement rather than passive scrolling.
- Providing mental health support systems that address social media-related stress, anxiety, and self-esteem issues.



Community-based programs should emphasize the importance of balance, encouraging OSY to participate in physical activities, social interactions, and productive offline engagements. Schools, local health organizations, and advocacy groups should collaborate to design behavioral intervention programs that promote healthy digital habits among OSY.

3. Strengthening Community and Parental Guidance

Parental involvement and community support play a significant role in guiding OSY towards responsible social media use. Many OSY lack direct supervision, increasing their exposure to harmful online content and potential exploitation.

Strengthening the role of parents, guardians, social workers, and community leaders in digital education and intervention can provide OSY with a more structured support system. Recommended actions include:

- Conducting digital parenting workshops to educate caregivers on monitoring and guiding OSY's social media use.
- Encouraging open communication between OSY and their families to address online risks such as cyberbullying, online predators, and negative peer influences.
- Establishing community-based support groups that facilitate peer discussions, mentorship, and guidance on responsible social media behavior.
- Collaborating with local government units to implement community-driven initiatives, such as safe online spaces, counseling programs, and youth development centers.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the dual impact of social media exposure on out-of-school youth (OSY) in Laak, Davao de Oro. The findings confirm that while social media serves as a valuable tool for information dissemination and entertainment, excessive and unregulated use also presents significant challenges that can affect their well-being.

Access to Information: A Double-Edged Sword

The study revealed that social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube are widely used among OSY as primary sources of information. The accessibility of digital content allows youth to remain updated on current events, job opportunities, and skill-building initiatives. Participants acknowledged that social media enhanced their digital literacy and broadened their knowledge base. This supports the claims of Bawden and Robinson (2009), who argue that search engines and digital platforms simplify the process of acquiring relevant information.

However, the unfiltered nature of online information presents a challenge, as misinformation and fake news frequently circulate on social media (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). Participants expressed concerns about encountering misleading content, especially regarding employment opportunities and financial scams. This highlights the importance of digital literacy initiatives to equip OSY with critical thinking skills to discern credible sources from unreliable ones.

Additionally, the study found that many participants used social media to engage in online learning. Platforms like YouTube were particularly beneficial in providing tutorials on vocational skills such as cooking, carpentry, and small-scale entrepreneurship. This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of social media in self-directed learning and skill enhancement (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

Social Media as an Entertainment Hub

Another major theme identified in this study is the role of social media as a primary source of entertainment for OSY. Participants reported spending significant time on video streaming, online gaming, and social networking. Platforms like TikTok and Facebook provided them with a means of self-expression and social interaction, reinforcing the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Sangwan, 2005), which suggests that people actively seek media content that fulfills specific personal needs.

However, excessive engagement in entertainment content was also linked to procrastination and reduced productivity. Many OSY admitted that they struggled to balance entertainment with more productive activities. This supports the findings of Cinelli, M., (2021), who noted that social media and online gaming could contribute to time mismanagement and behavioral issues among youth.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of escapism was evident, as some participants reported using social media to cope with personal challenges such as family conflicts and financial stress. While social media provided temporary relief from their struggles, it also contributed to social withdrawal, as some participants preferred virtual interactions over real-life engagement. This echoes the findings of Pittman and Reich (2019), who emphasized that while social media can enhance connectivity, it can also lead to isolation and a decline in face-to-face interactions.

Physical Discomfort and Health Implications

The study also uncovered several negative physical effects associated with prolonged social media use among OSY. Participants frequently reported experiencing eye strain, headaches, and sleep disturbances. The blue light emitted by digital screens has been found to disrupt sleep cycles, leading to poor rest and increased fatigue (Gruzd, A. et al., 2016). Additionally, poor posture and



physical inactivity were reported due to extended screen time. Many participants admitted that they spent long hours on social media without engaging in physical movement. This aligns with previous research suggests that excessive screen use contributes to sedentary lifestyles and associated health risks, such as obesity and musculoskeletal problems (Tremblay et al., 2011).

Moreover, some participants mentioned experiencing anxiety and stress due to social media pressures. Exposure to curated online personas and unrealistic lifestyle portrayals led to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, supporting research by Chou and Edge (2012), which found that social comparison on social media platforms could negatively impact self-esteem and mental health.

The Need for Intervention and Responsible Social Media Use

The findings of this study underscore the need for interventions that promote responsible social media usage among OSY. Several recommendations emerge from this study:

1. Digital Literacy Training – Policymakers and educators should implement programs that teach OSY how to critically evaluate online information and recognize misinformation.
2. Parental and Community Support – Parents and community leaders should guide youth in maintaining a healthy balance between online and offline activities.
3. Health Awareness Campaigns – Efforts should be made to educate OSY on the potential physical and mental health risks associated with excessive screen time and online engagement.

By addressing these concerns, stakeholders can help OSY maximize the benefits of social media while minimizing its negative effects. Future research could explore interventions and policies that promote healthy digital habits among vulnerable youth populations.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the significant role of social media in the lives of out-of-school youth (OSY), highlighting both its advantages and challenges. Social media serves as a crucial platform for accessing information, entertainment, and social interaction, yet its excessive and unregulated use presents risks such as misinformation, social isolation, and physical discomfort. The findings reveal that OSY rely heavily on social media for knowledge acquisition, skill enhancement, and maintaining social connections. However, their susceptibility to digital misinformation, online exploitation, and the adverse health effects of prolonged screen exposure raises concerns that demand urgent intervention.

Stakeholders—including parents, educators, social workers, and policymakers—must collaborate in developing strategies that foster responsible social media engagement. Digital literacy programs should be strengthened to equip OSY with the ability to critically assess online information and distinguish credible sources from deceptive content. Additionally, efforts should focus on promoting balanced social media habits to mitigate its negative impact on physical and mental well-being. Awareness campaigns highlighting the risks of excessive screen time, online scams, and cyberbullying should be incorporated into community outreach programs.

Furthermore, parental guidance and community support systems must be reinforced to provide OSY with a structured and nurturing environment. By integrating digital education initiatives, mental health advocacy, and social support networks, OSY can maximize the positive aspects of social media while safeguarding themselves from its potential dangers. Future research may explore intervention programs and policy frameworks aimed at balancing the benefits and risks of social media exposure, ensuring that OSY can harness technology as a tool for personal growth, skill development, and meaningful social engagement.

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