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# The Relationship Between Social Media Engagement and Psychological Well-Being in College Students at The University of New Hampshire

Emily G. D'Antonio
*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

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Students at The University of New Hampshire

Author: Emily D'Antonio

Advisor: Kevin Pietro

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# Abstract

Social media use has increased substantially in recent years, and for the college-aged population, social media is often the leading method of communication. Research indicates this reliance on digital connection could have a negative impact on the health of young adults (Bagroy et al., 2017). The college years are a time of personal growth and defining actions, yet can also be burdened by mental health issues related to stress, anxiety, and depression (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Acknowledging these trends, the current study explores how college students' specific frequency and intentionality while interacting on social media relates to their psychological well-being. A brief online survey was developed, comprised of questions aiming to quantify student's behavior while engaging on social media, as well as use of the validated *Brief Inventory of Thriving Scale* (BIT) to measure psychological well-being. A total of 177 students were surveyed, with an average age of 20.7, 78.5% female, and 69.5% upperclassmen from a variety of academic majors. Findings from this study indicate that students spent the most amount of time using Snapchat (2.77 avg. hr./day), Instagram (2.26 avg. hr./day), and YouTube (1.28 avg. hr./day). Participants (42.9%) expressed editing some to all of their content before posting, and 73.5% indicated checking social media right before going to bed. A Spearman's rank-order correlation did not identify any significant relationships between the number of hours spent using Instagram or Snapchat and any items of the BIT. Additionally, there was a weak, negative correlation between checking social media both when waking up ($r=-0.263$, $p<0.001$) and before going to bed ($r=-0.247$, $p=0.001$), and the BIT item "*my life has a clear sense of purpose*". Therefore, social media intentionality, compared to frequency, may have a greater impact on psychological well-being than frequency.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Media, College Students, Psychological Well-Being, Frequency, Intentionality, Addiction.

<u>**Literature Review**</u>

**The Growth of Social Media**

Social Media is broadly defined as forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2016). In the past several years, the social media industry has boomed. The Pew Research Center for Information and Technology has been tracking social media use since 2005, wherein just 5% of American adults had used at least one platform. By 2011, that percentage had risen to almost half of all American adults, and today 72% of the population engages on one or more social media sites. Young adults remain the most prominent demographic on social media, with 90% reporting being engaged in 2019 (Jones, 2017). Furthermore, The Pew Research Center has found that for many users, social media is part of their daily routine. Roughly three-quarters of Facebook users, and around six-in-ten Instagram users visit these sites at least once a day. This explosion of use has altered the way many people interact and share information.

**Social Media's Impact on Professional Life**

Recently, many young professionals are capitalizing on the expansion of social media as a predominant method of marketing. This increase in demand for digital marketing experts has opened a new world of job opportunities for business, marketing, and computer science majors alike (McHugh, 2017). Similarly, brands reach out to social media users with a large loyal following to partner with and have promote their products. The social media user is paid to endorse their brand, based on the increase in product revenue from their followers.

Furthermore, social media has become the primary method of marketing for many environmentally conscious companies looking for ways to reduce their paper production and thus their carbon footprint. Research states that sustainable business is incredibly desirable as many are shifting to a more environmentally-friendly lifestyle (Lee, 2008). Following with this trend, many companies are utilizing sites such as LinkedIn and Indeed to advertise job prospects, view resumes, and connect with other employers. LinkedIn proficiency and etiquette is suggested as a topic of study in many high schools and colleges, as the job market is shifting into an online landscape.

## Social Media's Impact on Personal Life

### +Digital vs. Interpersonal Communication

Just as the professional world has become a more virtually connected field, the social media boom has similarly altered personal interactions. Through sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, people are able to share a vast amount of content with their followers. Prior to the expansion of social media, people communicated in person more directly to know what was occurring in another's life. Now through social media, perusing one's profile is all it takes to stay current. Social media is certainly a novel and convenient method of communication, yet, it has been shown to lessen the quality of personal connections (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2018). Before social media, the amount of people one was able to reach was limited. Those relationships were inherently strong because they required an intentional effort to be in touch either through phone calls or in-person interactions. Now, with the wonderful ability to communicate with a large online social community, the quality of each individual relationship is not the primary concern, but rather, the more people engage through digital communication, the

greater the likelihood that interpersonal communication skills may eventually decline (Hankey, 2018).

## Social Media and College Students

**+Mental Health & Well-Being**

College students' mental health is a growing concern. According to the latest Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Survey (2015), ninety-five percent of counseling professionals reported that the number of students with significant psychological problems is an increasing issue on their campus. Seventy percent reported that the number of students with severe psychological problems has increased notably in the previous year. The survey also concluded that anxiety was the top presenting concern among college students, followed by depression and relationship issues. Therefore, today's college students seek campus counseling services more often than any other generation in history. Health professionals are deeming this outbreak a "mental health epidemic" (Rostain, 2016).

The college years are understandably a stressful and uncertain time, however, universities are working to determine why today's students are a concerning anomaly for developing severe mental health issues. Research suggests that students who grew up in the post-9/11 era have been exposed to serious amounts of trauma, both in the media and in their own lives, which may have negatively impacted their mental health at a young age (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). The rise of school shootings, uncertainties of globalization, and major economic concerns have created major shifts in the country's overall cultural climate. Being immersed in a constant news cycle and the growth of the internet itself has created a radically different childhood than many have previously experienced. Therefore, this generation of college students likely has deeply rooted

mental health issues that are exasperated by the whirlwind of transitioning academically, socially, and emotionally to college life. The impact of social media in this relationship is currently undetermined.

**+Fear of Missing Out & Unhealthy Comparisons**

Young adults and college students specifically exhibit a limited capacity for self-regulation and an increased risk of susceptibility to peer pressure. In an attempt to connect with their personal identity, (i.e., values, likes/dislikes, aspirations) it can be easy to get lost in making changes to fit in with others. A recent study describes that this may stem from the innate human desire to connect, along with an intense "fear of missing out", or FOMO (Roberts & David, 2019).  Unfortunately, college students increase their exposure to experience FOMO when they scroll through social media posts. Pictures of other people out having fun while they are alone in the dorm room can create feelings of loneliness and decreased self-worth. "*Why didn't they invite me?" "Am I not good enough?" "Do I not wear the right clothes, do my hair the right way?"* For a vulnerable college student, a single post can spur all of these questions and destructive self-talk (Chai et al., 2019). Furthermore, this phenomenon can be the source of peer pressure to participate in illegal behavior such as drinking or smoking in order to be accepted or seem "cool". This is seen frequently in college freshman who are attempting to navigate the social scene and establish the foundation for future friendships.

Additionally, FOMO can result in unhealthy comparison. According to the social comparison theory, self-worth is based on comparison to others (Brooks, 2015). For young adults who grew up in the digital age, social media is ingrained in their culture, and developing a perfect online version of oneself is standard. However, it can be difficult to determine what

aspects of one's profile are genuine versus fabricated. Social media is often described as a "highlight reel" of one's life, as photos are edited, cropped, and touched up before posting to present a certain pristine image (Pantic, 2014). People rarely post unfiltered content that depicts any kind of hardship. Therefore, many feel that they have to live up to certain impossible standards of beauty, fitness, and/or financial status. College students are severely influenced by such content in their media-driven world, and this pressure can generate unhealthy depressive thoughts, and even lead to serious psychological concerns such as eating disorders (Rasmussen et al., 2020). Theodore Roosevelt once said "comparison is the thief of joy", which may represent many college students' experience with social media.

**+Social Capital**

Although there are very apparent negative aspects of social media use in college students, there are also positive elements. A considerable body of research indicates that social support plays an important role in determining students' successful adjustment to college life. In a 2012 study, a student-centered social media site was found beneficial in enhancing students' perceptions of social support prior to their arrival on campus (DeAndrea et al.,). The site allowed for interaction between a vast number of students and established a sense of community without the need for face-to-face interaction. This sense of community is also often described as social capital, or connections among individuals and the trustworthiness that arise from them (Carmichael et al., 2015). Social media sites have the unique ability to allow people with similar interests to communicate and share information that fosters relationships despite the lack of physical contact. This is an extremely important safety net as students navigate through uncertain times in college.

<center>**Social Media's Impact on Students' Productivity**</center>

**+Distraction & Addiction**

   Almost anything can have an addictive nature, and social media is no exception. In fact, social media addiction is neurologically identical to an addiction to harmful substances such as drugs or alcohol. The use of an addictive substance or the experience of something rewarding causes neurons in the principle dopamine-producing centers of the brain to be activated and increase dopamine levels. (Hawi, 2016). Consequently, the brain is rewarded, and associates the substance/experience with a favorable outcome. This phenomenon is observed in social media usage when an individual receives a notification such as a 'like', 'mention', or 'follow', the increase of dopamine received by the brain results in a sense of pleasure for the user. Social media in particular provides a multitude of small, regular rewards that require little effort. Thus, the brain essentially rewires itself based on these reward sensations and causes the individual to desire positive reinforcements through social media use. It is incredibly easy for this process to occur, as college students in particular are engaging on social media with such high frequency.

   This addiction-like experience can become problematic in terms of managing time and productivity. Ideally, a college students' top priority is academic success, however, research reports that this neurological craving for scrolling through social media sites is a serious distraction (Hormes et al., 2014). Many are described as "pathological scrollers", and mindlessly refresh social media pages, unintentionally enacting the brain's reward system to promote further use (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Researchers surveyed a large sample of undergraduate students ($n$=568), 46% female, ~19 years old, from a vast range of academic majors regarding their productivity in college (Perrault et al., 2019). Forty-three percent of the students surveyed reported that social media use was a major time-consuming distraction while attempting to

complete academic assignments. It was ranked above studying with friends as a source of distraction.

As a result of the addictive and consuming nature of social media use, researchers promote regular social media "detoxes" (Syvertsen, 2017). Detoxes may be for a few hours, a day, or a few days depending on the frequency of use. After a detox, the user may realize their level of addiction, how much time they actually spend scrolling[1], or notice that their mind is clearer and more focused on their responsibilities rather than the actions of others.

## Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is a positively framed, comprehensive measure of an individuals' overall wellness (Diener & Chan, 2011). There are many different yet interconnected aspects of psychological well-being such as: satisfaction with life, optimism, positivity, self-worth, self-efficacy, accomplishment, and belonging. There are a variety of measurement tools that have been developed in order to evaluate psychological well-being. Examples of the most widely used tools include the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Self Mastery Scale, the Life Orientation Test, and the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009). Each of these scales focuses specifically on one or more aspects of psychological well-being such as self-acceptance, positive emotions, satisfaction with life, and sense of community.

However, while these measures are precise in the aspect of psychological well-being they quantify, they are not comprehensive. Thus, they do not provide a clear summary of one's *overall* psychological well-being, which is essential to gather a holistic perspective. However, a more comprehensive tool is The *Brief Inventory of Thriving Scale (BIT)* created by Dr. Ed

Diener offers a broader picture of psychological well-being. This 10-item Likert style questionnaire measures a broad range of interconnected psychological well-being constructs and represents an inclusive view of well-being status to predict important health outcomes (Su et al., 2014). Each of the statements on the BIT corresponds to a specific component of psychological well-being, as explained in Table 1. In this measure, the term thriving "denotes the state of positive functioning at its fullest range – mentally, physically, and socially" (Su et al., 2014, p. 4). The BIT is the most appropriate measurement of psychological well-being for this study's sample because of its comprehensive nature, brevity to foster reduced survey burden, and previous validation in college students.

**Table 1.** *BIT Items and Specific Components of Well-Being*

| *Item* | *Corresponding Component of Well-Being* |
|---|---|
| My life has a clear sense of purpose. | Meaning & Life Satisfaction |
| I am optimistic about my future. | Optimism |
| I feel good most of the time. | Positive Affect |
| What I do in life is valuable and worthwhile. | Self-Worth |
| I can succeed if I put my mind to it. | Self-Efficacy |
| I am achieving most of my goals. | Accomplishment |
| In most activities I do, I feel energized. | Flow |
| There are people who appreciate me as a person. | Support |
| I feel a sense of belonging in my community. | Belonging |

[1]In the context of this study, scrolling is defined as the physical act of continually viewing and moving through content (images or text) on a social media site either in a horizontal or vertical direction.

**Introduction to the Current Study**

The emergence and rapid expansion of social media sites has drastically altered the way people interact. With nearly 75% of the adult and 90% of the young adult population engaging on social media, the world is a much more connected place (Rainie et al., 2017). Diverse information can now be shared rapidly and to a seemingly infinite network. Young adults and college students in particular who grew up in the digital age have adopted social media as their primary platform for communication. Unfortunately, serious psychological well-being concerns are increasing at a similar rate among this population. Nearly 50% of college students rate their mental health as below average according to the 2015 National College Health Assessment. Therefore, health professionals are currently investigating plausible causes of this "mental health epidemic".

Previous generations of college students have not experienced this intense immersion in digital connection, and research indicates there may be a correlation between extensive social media use and the outbreak of psychological well-being concerns in this population (Saiphoo et al., 2020). Recent studies argue that social media is beneficial in its ability to increase one's social capital and sense of community, while also allowing for the expedited sharing of information (DeAndrea et al., 2012). Alternately, a substantial body of research presents the negative implications of social media use, including its addictive nature, stimulus for unhealthy comparison, and unrealistically curated content (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017).

With the goal of further understanding the intricacies of this relationship, the present study explores how college students' specific frequency and intentionality of social media engagement relates to their psychological well-being.

## Methods

**+Participants and Recruitment**

This research closely examined the specific social media frequency and intentionality of college students at The University of New Hampshire. Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, recruitment of students occurred via email communication with professors describing the research rationale and specific aims. In order to recruit a diverse sample of participants, professors from all academic colleges (Liberal Arts, Life Science and Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Business and Economics, Engineering and Physical Sciences) were contacted. The exact email that was shared with the professors is shown in Appendix A. In sum, the research was shared with fifteen professors of large (65+) class sizes, with all academic colleges and years represented. After the initial email explaining the research objectives, ten professors responded, agreeing to advertise the study directly to their students. This includes outlining the research aims as well as distributing the link to an online, self-administered Qualtrics survey. A total of ($n$=177) students completed the survey, with an average age of 20.71, 78.5% female, and 69.5% upperclassmen from a variety of academic majors.

For analysis purposes, the academic majors were divided into two groups: "Nutrition" and "Other" primarily because there was a notable percentage (41.1%) of surveyed students enrolled in one of the three Nutrition options.  Furthermore, the results were analyzed in this manner in order to examine how a preexisting knowledge of well-being topics acquired through the Nutrition Program would influence responses to the BIT. The Nutrition group included the following major options available at UNH: Nutrition + Dietetics, Nutrition + Wellness, and Nutritional Sciences.

There was no incentive or compensation in place for completing the survey, and no personal identifying information was collected. The Qualtrics survey did not save any IP addresses and no encrypting of transmission data occurred. The informed consent was obtained from the students via the online survey following the web-based survey format provided on the informed consent template from the IRB. Finally, to help protect the confidentiality of students' information, all data is reported using anonymity of participants.

**+Survey Development**

An online, self-administered Qualtrics survey was created to collect data on social media habits and psychological well-being. Following informed consent, the survey was comprised of four main sections: demographics (age, gender, race/ethnicity, academic major, and year in college), social media frequency, social media intentionality, and psychological well-being. For the purposes of this study, frequency refers to the total amount of time and the particular time of day spent engaging on social media. While intentionality refers to the specific purposes for engaging and how certain social media related actions may influence one's emotional states. In addition, the term "social media engagement" used within this study encompasses both frequency and intentionality components.

The questions pertaining to social media engagement were broken down into two categories (frequency and intentionality) in order to obtain a comprehensive depiction of one's social media habits. The questions regarding frequency asked participants to self-report how much time they spend on social media daily, as well as the specific time of day (upon waking up, before going to bed, while attempting to complete other tasks, etc.). The intentionality-focused questions were crafted to quantify the influence of various aspects of social media on physical

emotional states. For example: Do 'likes', 'comments', or 'follows' on posts constitute happiness? Is there a feeling of loneliness after viewing a post of a group of friends? Does the heavily edited and sometimes unrealistic content insinuate negative self-talk? This portion of the survey was comprised of four multiple-choice, two fill-in-the-blank, and four 5-point Likert scale style questions. Each of the Likert scale questions contained 10 statements with options for response ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Several examples of the questions included in the survey are shown in Appendix B. Following the questions regarding social media engagement (both frequency and intentionality), the survey proceeded with the 10-item *Brief Inventory of Thriving* (BIT) Likert scale (Su et al., 2014). The participants were promoted to report their agreement with each of the statements regarding psychological well-being ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

For the purpose of this study, social media is defined as: sites that allow individuals to articulate their social networks, establish, and maintain connections with others. From this, the categories of sites included in the survey are: work-related, romantic relationships, connecting through shared interests (music, design, current events, etc.), and sharing personal content such as photos videos or short phrases. The specific twelve sites included on the survey are as follows: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Spotify, YouTube, TikTok, Tinder, and VSCO. These sites were identified based on the most commonly used sites for the college-aged population with the goal of featuring a wide-range of platform genres.

**+Statistical Analysis**

The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v. 25) Program. In addition to descriptive and frequency statistics, the Spearman's rank-order

correlation was used to measure the strength and direct correlation between the specific questions regarding social media behavior and the individual BIT items. The Spearman's rank-order correlation was the optimal measure of association for this data because the variables were ordinal, and the scatterplot indicated a monotonic rather than linear relationship. As opposed to the Pearson correlations, the Spearman's correlation more accurately represents the levels of association.

## Results

The overarching aim of this research is to explore the relationship between social media engagement (frequency and intentionality) and psychological well-being. The self-reported responses to the Qualtrics survey were thoroughly analyzed to describe students' specific social media behavior and illustrate meaningful correlations.

**+Demographics**

The surveyed population (n=177) was comprised of primarily Caucasian (92.7%) females (78.5%) with an average age of 20.71 years old (M=20.71, SD=3.01) In terms of academic status, the participants were predominantly upperclassman (69.5%) with 40.1% enrolled in the Nutrition program of study. The remaining 59.9% enrolled in a wide range of majors representing all of the academic colleges at UNH (College of Life Sciences and Agriculture, College of Health and Human Services, College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, College of Liberal Arts, and Paul College of Business and Economics).

**Table 2.** *Participant Demographics*

| Variable | *n*=177 | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | |
|     18-21 | 150 | 84.8% |
|     22-26 | 24 | 13.7% |
|     34-51 | 3 | 1.8% |
| | | |
| **Race/Ethnicity** | | |
|     Asian | 3 | 1.7% |
|     Black/African American | 2 | 1.1% |
|     Caucasian | 164 | 92.7% |
|     Hispanic/Latin | 3 | 1.7% |
|     Pacific Islander | 1 | 0.6% |
|     Prefer Not to Answer | 1 | 0.6% |
|     Multiple Ethnicities | 3 | 1.7% |
| | | |
| **Gender** | | |
|     Male | 38 | 21.5% |
|     Female | 139 | 78.5% |
| | | |
| **Academic Year** | | |
|     Freshman | 13 | 7.3% |
|     Sophomore | 37 | 20.9% |
|     Junior | 48 | 27.1% |
|     Senior | 75 | 42.4% |
|     Graduate student | 3 | 1.7% |
|     Non-traditional student | 1 | 0.6% |
| | | |
| **Academic Major** | | |
|     Nutrition | 71 | 40.1% |
|     Other | 106 | 59.9% |

### +*Brief Inventory of Thriving Scale* (BIT) Analysis

Prior to analyzing possible correlations between the BIT items and the various aspects of social media engagement, each of the BIT items were examined independently to demonstrate participants' frequency of responses to the BIT, as shown in Table 3. Tables 4 displays the

frequency of responses to the BIT for Nutrition majors, while Table 5 displays the frequency of responses to the BIT for *Non*-Nutrition majors. As described earlier, the BIT is a Likert style questionnaire with responses ranging from a minimum of one ("strongly agree") to a maximum of five ("strongly disagree").

**Table 3.** *Frequency of BIT Responses*

| BIT Item | *n*=177 | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **_"Life has purpose"_** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 43 | 24.3% |
| Agree | 82 | 43.6% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 29 | 16.6% |
| Disagree | 15 | 8.6% |
| Strongly Disagree | 6 | 3.4% |
| **_"Optimistic about future"_** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 64 | 36.2% |
| Agree | 84 | 47.5% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 15 | 8.5% |
| Disagree | 7 | 4.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 5 | 2.8% |
| **_"Feel good mostly"_** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 32 | 18.1% |
| Agree | 93 | 52.5% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 30 | 16.9% |
| Disagree | 14 | 7.9% |
| Strongly Disagree | 6 | 3.4% |
| **_"Life's work has value"_** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 47 | 26.6% |
| Agree | 93 | 52.5% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 26 | 14.7% |
| Disagree | 4 | 2.3% |
| Strongly Disagree | 5 | 2.8% |
| **_"I can succeed"_** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 90 | 50.8% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Agree | 72 | 40.7% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 7 | 4.0% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 6 | 3.4% |

**"Achieving most goals"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 31 | 7.5% |
| Agree | 102 | 57.6% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 28 | 27.1% |
| Disagree | 10 | 9.6% |
| Strongly Disagree | 4 | 2.8% |

**"I feel energized"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 23 | 13.0% |
| Agree | 82 | 46.3% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 48 | 27.1% |
| Disagree | 17 | 9.6% |
| Strongly Disagree | 5 | 2.8% |

**"People appreciate me"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 89 | 50.3% |
| Agree | 74 | 41.8% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 6 | 3.4% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 6 | 3.4% |

**"Feel a sense of community"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 56 | 31.6% |
| Agree | 70 | 39.5% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 34 | 19.5% |
| Disagree | 8 | 4.2% |
| Strongly Disagree | 7 | 4.0% |

**Table 4.** *Frequency of BIT Responses – **Nutrition Majors***

| BIT Item | *n*=71 | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **"Life has purpose"** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 17 | 23.9% |
| Agree | 34 | 47.9% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 9 | 12.7% |
| Disagree | 9 | 12.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |

*"Optimistic about future"*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 26 | 36.6% |
| Agree | 34 | 47.9% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 6 | 8.5% |
| Disagree | 3 | 4.2% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |

*"Feel good mostly"*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 12 | 16.9% |
| Agree | 42 | 59.2% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 11 | 15.5% |
| Disagree | 4 | 5.6% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |

*"Life's work has value"*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 18 | 25.4% |
| Agree | 37 | 52.1% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 13 | 18.3% |
| Disagree | 1 | 1.4% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |

*"I can succeed"*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 40 | 56.3% |
| Agree | 25 | 35.2% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 4 | 5.6% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |

*"Achieving most goals"*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 11 | 15.5% |
| Agree | 44 | 62.0% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 10 | 14.1% |
| Disagree | 4 | 5.6% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |

*"I feel energized"*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 8 | 11.3% |
| Agree | 37 | 52.1% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 16 | 22.5% |
| Disagree | 7 | 9.9% |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 4.2% |

**"People appreciate me"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 37 | 52.1% |
| Agree | 30 | 46.5% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |

**"Feel a sense of community"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 20 | 28.2% |
| Agree | 33 | 46.5% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 11 | 15.5% |
| Disagree | 5 | 7.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 2.8% |

**Table 5.** *Frequency of BIT Responses –* ***Non-Nutrition Majors***

| BIT Item | *n*=104 | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **"Life has purpose"** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 26 | 24.5% |
| Agree | 48 | 45.3% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 20 | 18.9% |
| Disagree | 6 | 5.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 4 | 3.8% |
| **"Optimistic about future"** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 38 | 35.8% |
| Agree | 50 | 47.2% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 9 | 8.5% |
| Disagree | 4 | 3.8% |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 2.8% |
| **"Feel good mostly"** | | |
| Strongly Agree | 20 | 18.9% |
| Agree | 51 | 48.1% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 19 | 17.9% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Disagree | 10 | 9.4% |
| Strongly Disagree | 4 | 3.8% |

**"Life's work has value"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 29 | 27.4% |
| Agree | 56 | 52.8% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 13 | 12.3% |
| Disagree | 3 | 2.8% |
| Strongly Disagree | 3 | 2.8% |

**"I can succeed"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 50 | 47.2% |
| Agree | 47 | 44.3% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 3 | 2.8% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 4 | 3.8% |

**"Achieving most goals"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 20 | 18.9% |
| Agree | 58 | 54.7% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 18 | 17.0% |
| Disagree | 6 | 5.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 1.9% |

**"I feel energized"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 15 | 14.2% |
| Agree | 45 | 42.5% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 32 | 30.2% |
| Disagree | 10 | 9.4% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 1.9% |

**"People appreciate me"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 52 | 49.1% |
| Agree | 44 | 41.5% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 4 | 3.8% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 4 | 3.8% |

**"Feel a sense of community"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 36 | 34.0% |
| Agree | 37 | 34.9% |
| Neither Agree/Disagree | 22 | 20.8% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Disagree | 3 | 2.8% |
| Strongly Disagree | 5 | 4.7% |

**+Frequency of Social Media Engagement**

In order to quantify participants' frequency of social media use, the Qualtrics survey included a sliding scale (ranging from 0-24) to represent estimated time (hours/day) spent engaging on the indicated social media sites. Through this measurement, participants reported using Snapchat most frequently (M=2.77 hours/day, SD=3.08) followed by Instagram (M=2.26 hours/day, SD=1.63), and Spotify (M=2.38 hours/day, SD=2.38).

Furthermore, there was notable variation within the reported hours of social media use. Therefore, it was relevant to note the percentage of participants who reported using a social media site for more than four hours/day, which is considered a high frequency in the current study. Additionally, 18.7% of Instagram users engage on the application for 4 hours or longer. Only 5.7% of Facebook users engage on the application for 4 hours or longer. Similarly, 2.8% of Twitter users spend 4 hours or longer engaging on the application. However, 83% of Snapchat users report spending 4 hours or longer on the application. Collectively less than 1% of Pinterest, LinkedIn, Dating Applications, VSCO and Tumblr users reported spending 4 hours or longer on the application. Finally, 20% of YouTube and Spotify users reported spending 4 hours or longer on the application.

**Table 6.** *Frequency of Social Media Usage (Hours/Day)*

| Social Media Platform | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instagram | 0.00 | 12.00 | 2.26 | 1.63 |
| Facebook | 0.00 | 6.00 | 0.97 | 1.25 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Twitter | 0.00 | 12.00 | 0.63 | 1.37 |
| Snapchat | 0.00 | 24.00 | 2.77 | 3.08 |
| Pinterest | 0.00 | 4.00 | 0.10 | 0.42 |
| LinkedIn | 0.00 | 3.00 | 0.17 | 0.47 |
| Dating Apps | 0.00 | 7.00 | 0.19 | 0.73 |
| Tumblr | 0.00 | 4.00 | 0.04 | 0.34 |
| Spotify | 0.00 | 24.00 | 2.38 | 3.12 |
| YouTube | 0.00 | 17.00 | 1.28 | 2.23 |
| TikTok | 0.00 | 24.00 | 0.74 | 2.22 |
| VSCO | 0.00 | 4.00 | 0.28 | 0.61 |

Furthermore, a Spearman's rank-order correlation identified weak, negative correlations between the BIT item *"My life has a clear sense of purpose",* and "using social media upon waking up" (r= -0.263, $p < 0.01$), "using social media constantly" (r= -0.212, $p < 0.01$), and "using social media right before bed" (r= -0.247, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, a weak, negative correlation was identified between the BIT item *"I feel good most of the time",* and "using social media constantly" (r= -0.152, $p < 0.05$), and "using social media upon waking up" (r= -0.207, $p < 0.01$). Finally, a weak, negative correlation was identified between the BIT item *"In most activities I do, I feel energized"* and "using social media upon waking up" (r= -0.222, $p < 0.01$).

**Table 7.** *Social Media Frequency and BIT Items -* ***Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation***

| BIT Item | Frequency | Correlation |
|---|---|---|
| ***"Life has purpose"*** | | |
| | Wake-up usage | -0.263** |
| | Before bed usage | -0.212** |
| | Constant usage | -0.247** |
| ***"Optimistic about future"*** | | |
| | Wake-up usage | -0.121 |

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | Before bed usage | -0.054 |
|  | Constant usage | -0.121 |

**"Feel good mostly"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | Wake-up usage | -0.207** |
|  | Before bed usage | -0.152* |
|  | Constant usage | -0.162* |

**"Life's work has value"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | Wake-up usage | -0.211** |
|  | Before bed usage | -0.178* |
|  | Constant usage | -0.175* |

**"I can succeed"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | Wake-up usage | -0.191* |
|  | Before bed usage | -0.132 |
|  | Constant usage | -0.152* |

**"Achieving goals"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | Wake-up usage | -0.139 |
|  | Before bed usage | -0.016 |
|  | Constant usage | -0.138 |

**"Feel energized"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | Wake-up usage | -0.222** |
|  | Before bed usage | -0.138 |
|  | Constant usage | -0.090 |

**"I am appreciated"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | Wake-up usage | -0.111 |
|  | Before bed usage | -0.032 |
|  | Constant usage | -0.023 |

**"Feel a sense of community"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | Wake-up usage | -0.098 |
|  | Before bed usage | -0.060 |
|  | Constant usage | -0.063 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**+Intentionality of Social Media Engagement**

In order to quantify participants' intentionality of social media use, the Qualtrics survey included several Likert scale style questions which presented various scenarios of how specific behavior on social media may effect emotional states. Participants were prompted to respond with an accurate level of agreement with the statement (1= "strongly disagree" to 5= "strongly agree").

In addition to frequency of social media use, there were several significant weak negative correlations - identified through a Spearman's rank-order correlation - among the questions pertaining to intentionality of engagement and the items expressing participants' well-being through the BIT.

Firstly, there were weak negative correlations between the BIT item *"My life has a clear sense of purpose"*, and "feeling distracted by social media when attempting to complete tasks" (r= -0.190, $p < 0.05$), "having difficulty appreciating one's body image after viewing unrealistic pictures on social media (poor body image)" (r= -0.156, $p < 0.05$), and feeling left out when viewing images of people in groups on social media (r= -0.187, $p < 0.05$).

Additionally, there were weak, negative correlations between the BIT item *"I am optimistic about my future"*, and "poor body image" (r= -0.188, $p < 0.05$), and "feeling left out" (r= -0.175, $p < 0.05$). A similar weak, negative correlation was observed between the BIT item *"I feel good most of the time"*, and "poor body image" (r= -0.179, $p < 0.05$), and "feeling left out" (r= -0.176, $p < 0.05$). This item also demonstrated a weak, negative correlation with "feeling jealous of others that receive more likes on their social media posts" (r= -0.151, $p < 0.05$).

Furthermore, there were weak, negative correlations between the BIT item *"In most activities I do, I feel energized",* and "poor body image" (r= -0.241, $p < 0.01$), "feeling left out" (r= -0.197, $p < 0.01$), "feeling jealous of others that receive more likes on their posts" (r= -0.151, $p < 0.05$), and "feeling sad when one's posts do not receive many likes" (r= -0.161, $p < 0.05$).

Finally, there were weak, negative correlations between the BIT item *"I can succeed if I put my mind to it",* and "editing content before posting" (r= -0.154, $p < 0.05$), "feeling jealous of others that receive more likes on their posts" (r= -0.278, $p < 0.01$), and "deleting posts that do not receive the desired amount of likes" (r= -0.162, $p < 0.05$).

**Table 8.** *Social Media Intentionality -* ***Frequency of Responses***

| Intentionality Item | *n*=177 | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| ***"Happy with likes on shared content"*** | | |
| Strongly agree | 58 | 32.9% |
| Agree | 78 | 44.1% |
| Neither agree/disagree | 27 | 15.3% |
| Disagree | 7 | 4.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 5 | 2.8% |
| ***"Jealously of other accounts"*** | | |
| Strongly agree | 8 | 4.5% |
| Agree | 16 | 9.0% |
| Neither agree/disagree | 23 | 13.0% |
| Disagree | 39 | 22.0% |
| Strongly Disagree | 89 | 50.3% |
| ***"Edit content before sharing"*** | | |
| Strongly agree | 39 | 22.0% |
| Agree | 37 | 20.9% |
| Neither agree/disagree | 29 | 16.4% |
| Disagree | 22 | 12.4% |
| Strongly Disagree | 48 | 27.1% |
| ***"Social media is a highlight Reel"*** | | |
| Strongly agree | 32 | 18.1% |
| Agree | 45 | 25.4% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Neither agree/disagree | 38 | 21.5% |
| Disagree | 26 | 14.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 35 | 19.8% |

**"Use social media to relax"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 46 | 26.0% |
| Agree | 66 | 37.3% |
| Neither agree/disagree | 27 | 15.3% |
| Disagree | 20 | 11.3% |
| Strongly Disagree | 14 | 7.9% |

**"Feel left out"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 10 | 5.6% |
| Agree | 34 | 19.2% |
| Neither agree/disagree | 31 | 17.5% |
| Disagree | 42 | 23.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 58 | 32.8% |

**"Poor body image"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 30 | 16.9% |
| Agree | 33 | 18.6% |
| Neither agree/disagree | 28 | 15.8% |
| Disagree | 37 | 20.9% |
| Strongly Disagree | 48 | 27.1% |

**Table 9.** *Social Media Intentionality and BIT Items – **Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation***

| BIT Item | Intentionality | Correlation |
|---|---|---|
| ***"Life has purpose"*** | | |
| | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.011 |
| | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.127 |
| | "Edit content before posting" | -0.011 |
| | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.048 |
| | "Use social media to relax" | -0.089 |
| | "Feel left out" | -0.187* |
| | "Poor body image" | -0.156* |
| ***"Optimistic about future"*** | | |
| | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.036 |
| | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.191* |

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | "Edit content before posting" | -0.082 |
|  | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.079 |
|  | "Use social media to relax" | -0.034 |
|  | "Feel left out" | -0.175* |
|  | "Poor body image" | -0.188* |

**"Feel good mostly"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.022 |
|  | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.151* |
|  | "Edit content before posting" | -0.058 |
|  | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.047 |
|  | "Use social media to relax" | -0.078 |
|  | "Feel left out" | -0.176* |
|  | "Poor body image" | -0.179* |

**"Life's work has value"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.000 |
|  | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.132 |
|  | "Edit content before posting" | -0.098 |
|  | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.006 |
|  | "Use social media to relax" | -0.050 |
|  | "Feel left out" | -0.064 |
|  | "Poor body image" | -0.123 |

**"I can succeed"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.052 |
|  | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.278** |
|  | "Edit content before posting" | -0.154* |
|  | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.069 |
|  | "Use social media to relax" | -0.049 |
|  | "Feel left out" | -0.167* |
|  | "Poor body image" | -0.136 |

**"Achieving goals"**

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
|  | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.097 |
|  | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.186* |
|  | "Edit content before posting" | -0.001 |
|  | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.094 |
|  | "Use social media to relax" | -0.037 |
|  | "Feel left out" | -0.087 |
|  | "Poor body image" | -0.035 |

**"I feel energized"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.099 |
| | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.151* |
| | "Edit content before posting" | -0.113 |
| | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.059 |
| | "Use social media to relax" | -0.025 |
| | "Feel left out" | -0.197** |
| | "Poor body image" | -0.241** |
| *"I feel appreciated"* | | |
| | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.002 |
| | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.147 |
| | "Edit content before posting" | -0.056 |
| | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.022 |
| | "Use social media to relax" | -0.128 |
| | "Feel left out" | -0.093 |
| | "Poor body image" | -0.011 |
| *"Sense of community"* | | |
| | "Happy with likes on shared content" | -0.061 |
| | "Jealousy of other accounts" | -0.129 |
| | "Edit content before posting" | -0.024 |
| | "Social media is a highlight reel" | -0.066 |
| | "Use social media to relax" | -0.059 |
| | "Feel left out" | -0.233** |
| | "Poor body image" | -0.077 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## Discussion

**+Purpose of the study**

The overarching aim of this research was to explore how the psychological well-being of college students using the *Brief Inventory of Thriving Scale* (BIT) relates to social media engagement. Recently, college students in particular have been noted to experience an increased prevalence of psychological well-being concerns, and the literature has deemed this rise a "mental health epidemic" (Rostain, 2016). Research has pinpointed the extreme "media diet" that

this generation of college students has been exposed to since a young age as a notable negative influence upon aspects of psychological well-being (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Growing up in the "digital age" with a constant immersion in news, technology, and social media is unprecedented and largely unexplored. Therefore, the survey created in this study was designed to understand the relationship between college students' frequency and intentionality in social media use and psychological well-being.

**+Key Findings**

The data illustrates several significant, negative, weak correlations between the survey questions regarding intentionality of social media use and the BIT items. Therefore, those who indicated stronger agreement with certain emotional intentions on social media such as feeling left out, poor body image, jealousy, and curating content, also reported slightly lower agreement with the well-being components addressed throughout the BIT. The correlations were weak, however, the average BIT response was "agree" or "strongly agree", indicating a higher and healthier level of psychological well-being overall. All variables were correlated, containing a value, only some were significant including: editing content, poor body image, feeling left out, jealousy, and amount of likes on a post dictating emotions. Therefore, the unhealthy comparisons and jealousy that result from exposure to curated content on social media have more of an influence on the components of psychological well-being as opposed to general frequency of use.

The frequency related questions also presented several significant, negative, weak correlations. The outright amount of time per site (hours/day) was not significantly correlated with any of the BIT items. Although, the questions pertaining to time of day of use (upon wake up, before bed, constant usage) were all negatively correlated with several of the BIT items such

as feeling energized, appreciated, and successful. Therefore, it appears from this data that the specific time of social media engagement is a greater predictor of components of psychological well-being as opposed to the general amount of time spent engaging.

Furthermore, the summarizing question on the survey *"do you associate social media with positivity or negativity"* presented a fairly even split of the surveyed population, with 44.5% associating social media as a whole with negativity, and 55.5% associating social media with positivity. Therefore, it is evident that participants' view on social media aligns with much of the conflicting regarding the positive and negative aspects of social media engagement.

Finally, the frequency results were analyzed with respect to the varying academic majors and years represented in the population. There was a substantial percentage (41%) of students enrolled in the nutrition program. Therefore, the nutrition majors were grouped together, and mean responses were compared to the other areas of study. It was interesting to compare nutrition majors with a specific knowledge of health and wellness topics to other business or engineering majors with less formal expertise in this field. There was no notable difference when comparing these two groups. Furthermore, when comparing social media frequency by academic year, the surveyed Freshman reported using Snapchat (3.08 hours/day) and TikTok (1.15 hours/day) more frequently than the Juniors (2.7 hours/day, 0.75 hours/day) and Seniors (2.59 hours/day, 0.28 hours/day). There were no other notable differences when comparing social media use by academic year.

**+Interpretations and Implications**

The results of this study suggest that there are several key aspects of intentionality in social media engagement that are correlated with components of psychological well-being. As

described earlier, the major themes that were correlated include: editing content, feeling left out, poor body image, and jealousy.

Social media is often described as a "highlight reel" of one's curated life. Social media posts are typically edited and depict the idealistic of one's self or life activities (Poling, 2015). Unfortunately, there is often very little genuineness on social media, as individuals strives to portray an almost perfect version of themselves. Although many people may appear to have the picture perfect life on social media, in actuality they most likely do not. Regardless, it is difficult to not compare oneself to another's publicized flawless life. Especially for the college-aged population as they continue to discover who they are, become comfortable in their own skin, and feel accepted by others. This is where feelings of jealousy, missing out, and unhealthy comparison originate.

Many participants (41%) reported that they strongly agree with having a difficult time appreciating their own body when they view edited, sometimes unrealistic images of others'. Research presents that when these curated images are idealized by others on social media, women and men feel less positive about their own body, and sometimes engage in unhealthy behavior in attempt to lose weight (Perloff, 2014). However, there has been a wonderful movement of "#bodypositvity" supported by many social media influencers (Sobczak, 2020). The idea is to post unedited photos of yourself, regardless of your shape or size. This movement has inspired many to feel more comfortable in their own body, reduce weight stigma, and debunk the idea that you need to be skinny to be beautiful.

Furthermore, many participants reported that they "strongly agree" with *"engaging on social media upon waking up"* ($n$=41), *"right before going to bed"* ($n$=72), and *"constantly throughout the day"* ($n$=37). Although the data presented weak, negative correlations, this

repetitive and frequent usage suggests possible addictive tendencies, and is consistent with as previous research (Hormes et al., 2014). This behavior was also significantly, negatively correlated with the BIT item *"In most activities I do, I feel energized"*, which may suggest the emotionally tiresome nature of constantly being exposed to others' lives via social media.

Beyond the data provided, the survey was intended to serve as a self-reflective experience for the participant. This was supported by presenting the questions regarding social media engagement first, followed by the BIT. The survey probed for behavior on social media that is often mindless to many, but in actuality may be the root of less than optimal aspects of psychological well-being. It is important to check-in regularly with emotional well-being, as important as it is to exercise in support of physical well-being.

**+Strengths**

One of the major strengths of the study design was the comprehensiveness of the survey questions. The questions were very thorough yet concise, and targeted a vast amount of topics related to intentionality of social media use, as noted in Appendix B.  Social media is a very broad subject, and the design of the survey questions was effective in summarizing and pinpointing key aspects to unlock participants' honest answers. Another strength of the study design was the online format of the survey, powered by Qualtrics which created ease of transmission and minimal subject burden. Finally, the use of the *Brief Inventory of Thriving Scale* was a strength of this study. This tool was validated in the college-aged population, and captures an accurate, concise measure of the various components of psychological well-being.

**+Limitations**

There were several limitations to consider when reviewing the study design. Firstly, the data was collected via an online survey in which participants self-reported their average social media use and agreement with the statements pertaining to intentionality. Therefore, the accuracy of the information provided is weakened because it was self-reported rather than objectively and unbiasedly measured. A more objective measurement of this variable would have been the data from the "Screen Time" feature available on Apple phones, which calculates the exact time one spends on each application. Previous research describes participants who report "mindlessly scrolling" through social media sites, and therefore may not have the best estimate of the actual time spent engaged. Furthermore, research. has found that college students in particular have decreased validity in terms of reporting truthful information on surveys or polls (Brenner & DeLamater, 2016). Thus, the data received through the survey may be skewed as a result of the tendency of the young adult population to misreport or dishonestly respond to questions. This underreporting may stem from participants feeling guilty or shameful of the amount of time spent on social media.

Additionally, the question probing for the frequency of use of individual social media sites was limited in its accuracy as a result of the Qualtrics question design. The question was formatted using a sliding scale ranging from 0 through 24 in which participants could easily slide the marker to the amount of time they felt they spent engaged on the particular site. However, the question accepted both zero and not moving the marker at all as a response. Therefore, it was difficult to determine whether the participant was indicating zero hours spent using a site, or whether they had avoided or simply missed the site. If the participant responded to other sliding scales on this question, non-movement was considered zero, or no used of the site. However, if

the participant did not respond to the other parts of the question, their response was not included in the analyses.

Finally, the BIT served as an effective measure of participants' level of psychological well-being based on the described components. However, the tool did not include a method of combining responses to establish a complete "score" of overall well-being. This broader, composite measurement would have been helpful in analyzing correlations between social media engagement and comprehensive psychological well-being. Additionally, there are several other components of psychological well-being that are notable, yet were not included in the BIT in order to maintain brevity and reduced participant burden.

**+Recommendations**

As many previous studies have found, the relationship between social media engagement and psychological well-being is complicated. As previously observed, there is an equal representation of both positive and negative aspects of social media use. Additionally, the perception of social media as a whole is very subjectively based upon the individual and their intentions of use. However, the results of this study do present several significant correlations to components of psychological well-being, which indicate that there is an underlying relationship to further understand.

Therefore, future research is necessary to complement this study through the use of an objective measure (ex: Screen Time on Apple phones) to present an unbiased and pragmatic report of individual social media use. This information will further identify exact amount and time of day of usage, which will present a clearer picture of possible addiction to social media. Additionally, the use of in-person Focus Groups to connect and understand specific

intentions/purposes for use and how they may influence emotions may be more effective in understanding the specific "whys" of the questions as opposed to an online survey. Finally, a similar study should be completed at a variety of colleges other than the University of New Hampshire, to obtain a more diverse sample and establish a broader scope of understanding social media uses' relationship to psychological well-being.

## Conclusion

This research aimed to identify and understand the relationship between social media engagement and psychological well-being in college students at the University of New Hampshire. An online survey comprised of four main sections (demographics, social media frequency, social media intentionality, and psychological well-being BIT) was completed by 177 students. The results indicate that social media intentionality was more strongly correlated with psychological well-being, although the notable participant agreement with using social media constantly throughout the day, upon waking up, and right before going to bed suggest possible unhealthy addictive tendencies that require further exploration. Therefore, the relationship between overall social media engagement and psychological well-being was found to be very individualized. The specific frequency and intentionality with which one engages upon social media dictates the influence that aspects such as unhealthy comparisons, fear of missing out, and addictive behavior may have upon psychological well-being.

**Appendix A. Email Correspondence with Professors Regarding Research Promotion**

Hello Professor _____,

   My name is Emily D'Antonio and I was a student in your "_____" course a few semesters back. I am currently a Senior Nutrition and Wellness major here at UNH, and I am working with Professor Pietro in the Nutrition Department to conduct my Honors Thesis Research Project. I am reaching out to you today to explain my research goals in hopes that you might consider administering a brief survey in your classes.

   When choosing a research topic, I wanted to focus on something that is pertinent while also lacking research knowledge. As I thought, I looked around and saw almost everyone sitting on the same bus as me on their phone with their heads down, unbothered by the world around them. In that moment I realized that I see more people with their heads buried in their phone throughout my day than not. I began to wonder what kind of effect this has on our health? Growing up in the digital age, it has been interesting to watch the world slowly become addicted to these handheld devices that have the power to connect us in so many ways. One of the most prominent ways is through social media. Almost everyone interacts on some kind of social media site, and I began to wonder how this constant connection may influence our well-being.

   After looking into the topic, I found that college students are the most frequent users of social media sites, with 80% of the population engaged in some way. Knowing this, I have decided to examine the specifics of college students' interactions on social media, and how they may be correlated with their overall wellness. I will use this information to understand the magnitude of social media use and its relationship to well-being.

I have included a link to the survey below, and would greatly appreciate if you would share it with your students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Emily D'Antonio

## Appendix B. Sample of Qualtrics Survey Questions
(https://unh.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3faw9tVdpU2hcu9)

## Frequency:

Please indicate the amount of time (hours/day) that you spend on each of the listed social media sites.

```
0    2    4    6    8    10   12   14   16   18   20   22   24
```

Instagram

●——————————————————————————————————————

Facebook

●——————————————————————————————————————

Twitter

●——————————————————————————————————————

Snapchat

●——————————————————————————————————————

Pinterest

●——————————————————————————————————————

LinkedIn

●——————————————————————————————————————

Dating Apps

●——————————————————————————————————————

Tumblr

●——————————————————————————————————————

Spotify

●——————————————————————————————————————

YouTube

●——————————————————————————————————————

TikTok

●——————————————————————————————————————

VSCO

●——————————————————————————————————————

# Intentionality:

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding the specifics of your social media engagement. (1 being the least agreement).

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am happy when people like my posts. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I am sad when my posts don't get many likes. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I delete posts that don't receive a certain number of likes. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I only post at times in the day when I know people will be active to like my posts. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I am jealous of people who have more followers than me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I am jealous of people that get more likes on their posts than me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I edit all of my content before posting (filter, brightness, color, etc.) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I only post pictures that I know will acquire likes. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I would describe my social media profile as a "highlight reel" of the good in my life. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding your social media use throughout the day. (1 being the least agreement).

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Whenever I go somewhere new, I am excited to post about it. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I check social media right when I wake up. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I use social media constantly throughout the day. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I feel distracted by social media when trying to complete tasks. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I use social media to relax after a busy day. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I check social media right before I go to bed. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## *Brief Inventory of Thriving Scale:*

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about your well-being.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My life has a clear sense of purpose | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I am optimistic about my future | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I feel good most of the time | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| What I do in life is valuable and worthwhile | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I can succeed if I put my mind to it | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I am achieving most of my goals | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| In most activities I do, I feel energized | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| There are people who appreciate me as a person | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I feel a sense of belonging in my community | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

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