

# The Effect of Facebook on College Student's

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**Abstract** The Social Networking System (SNS), Facebook, launched in 2004 by the founder Mark Zuckerberg, is one of the most important breakthroughs in the 21st century. Facebook is now an integrated part of every college student's life. Facebook is used by more than 800 million people around the world yet little do people know of the profound effect that Facebook has on their physical, emotional, and mental health. A collection of studies that include surveys, interviews, and questionnaires will reveal the effect of Facebook on students well-being. Studies indicate that Facebook can impact physical health by increasing the chance of Upper Respiratory Infection (URI), mental health by leading to web addiction, feelings of loneliness, narcissism, stress, and body dissatisfaction, and socially altering the traditional familial systems that has existed since the beginning of human life.

**Keywords** Social Networking System, Facebook, Addiction

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Facebook is an evolutionary technology of the 21st century that changed social relationships, provides opportunity for individuals to share their ideas and opinions, and establishes and maintains relationships with others. Facebook allows a user to create a profile, display personal information, upload pictures, access other users profile, display personal information, accumulate friends, and interact with friends via messages and gifts [5]. An average time of 30 minutes to 2 hours is spent on Facebook daily [5]. Only recently are studies beginning to examine the effects of Facebook on physical, mental, and family health. Current studies conducted in college campuses reveal that Facebook can cause similar symptoms to drug addiction, effect familial systems and patterns, contribute to upper respiratory infection, cause feelings of loneliness, depression, and narcissism, and can lead to less body satisfaction and worse time management.

Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg and his roommates at Harvard University and it was initially launched in 2004 [7]. Facebook was initially limited to Harvard students but later expanded to other Ivy league colleges in the Boston area and gradually spread to most universities in Canada and the United States [7]. Zuckerberg hoped to create an SNS that would make Harvard more open [7]. Today about 728 million people around the world use Facebook every day and roughly 80% of university students believe Facebook is vital to their University social culture [4].

Social Networking Systems (SNS) like Facebook can impact people's physical health. Studies show that Facebook

and other types of SNS can increase the chance of Upper Respiratory Infection (URI). One study at a undergraduate institution measured the incidence of URI's among 88 students from ages 18-24 with no history of chronic or acute illnesses [2]. The college student participants completed a web-based survey and then they were instructed to do a 10 week follow up recording symptoms of URI [2]. The survey contained a set of questions in order to rate the students on the level of Facebook induced stress [2]. The results indicated that 58% of the participants are experiencing URI [2]. The symptoms included cough, runny nose, headache, sneezing, and nasal congestion [2]. The study also revealed that increasing one's internet-based social network size was associated with increased rate of URI [2]. Among the few factors associated with Facebook stress include feelings of anxiousness due to delayed replying to a friend request, feelings of guilt when rejecting friend requests, and un-friending a friend [2]. Of the 88 undergraduate students, 31.7% of respondents stated that unplugging from technology will result in less stress and 43.9% of respondents stated that increased use of technology has made it harder to feel close to people [2]. The feelings of stress experienced through the use of Facebook lead to a weak immune system thus leading to higher chance URI.

Furthermore, Facebook can impact the mental health of Facebook users. Various studies indicate that spending a lot of time online can make users potential addict to specific internet activities. In some extreme cases, some researchers conceptualized it as an internet spectrum addiction disorder, listing them along other internet uses such as game addiction and internet sex addiction [4]. Additionally, the symptoms of social network addiction are similar to those experienced by individuals addicted to substances such as drugs [4]. These symptoms include mood-repair experience, concealment of

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addictive behavior, tolerance in the sense of increasing usage of SNSs to an excessive amount, withdrawal in the means of experiencing physical and emotional symptoms when one's usage of SNS is restricted or blocked, interpersonal and psychological problems due to usage of SNSs, and relapse which is quick returning to overuse of SNSs after a period of abstinence [4]. A study in Taiwan University aimed to analyze the correlations between Facebook usage and Facebook addiction [4]. The measured variables of Facebook addiction included withdrawal, tolerance, life problems, and satisfaction [4]. Facebook usage included time span on apps like games, browsing newsfeeds, and chat rooms [4]. The study utilized statistical tools to analyze the self-reported psychological traits of university students [4]. Overall, the results illustrate that having a depressive character and Facebook usage could significantly predict Facebook Addiction [4]. The study proves that Facebook can act like a drug drawing many people across the world into the virtual world of communication. Likewise, a similar study was conducted in Turkey, where students from a College Institution reported personal info on Facebook usage and completed the Facebook Addiction Scale (FAS) and General health questionnaire [6]. The sample consisted of 447 students of whom 78% are male and 22% are females [6]. Ages ranged from 18-30 [6]. The FAS comprises eight items related to symptoms of cognitive and behavioral salience, conflict with other activities, euphoria, loss of control, withdrawal, and relapse and reinstatement [6]. The results show that weekly time commitment, social motives, severe depression, and anxiety and insomnia positively predict Facebook addiction (FA) [6]. However, the prediction does not necessarily imply causation. Before this study was conducted, research reviews on internet addiction suggested that people may develop disturbed patterns of use to specific online activities such as online gaming and social networking [6]. Specific addictive usage may be related to behaviors such as pathological gambling [6]. One case study in the U.S. reported a 24 year old female who used facebook excessively and thus was dismissed from her job and developed anxiety and insomnia [6]. The two studies indicate that Facebook can have a negative impact on heavy users and could lead to deviations from normal healthy behavior.

Additionally, Facebook can impact people's ego and lead to false self concept. Several studies examined the association between usage of SNS and narcissism. According to Buffordi and Campbell (2008), "Narcissism refers to a personality trait reflecting a grandiose and inflated self-concept. The narcissist tends to view him or herself as intelligent, powerful, physically attractive, unique, and entitled" [8]. Higher levels of narcissism are associated with a larger number of Facebook friends and with the number of self-focused tweets an individual sends [8]. A questionnaire was completed by 233 undergraduate students from a Northern and Southern University [8]. Results indicate that attitudes toward being open about sharing information about oneself is significantly related to frequency of using

Facebook. According to other studies such as Beging, Fearington, Davenport, and Bergmon (2011), it was concluded that narcissism is positively related to the number, and desire to have, many SNSs friends as well as the belief that others are interested in ones activities and a desire to let others know what one is doing [8]. Moreover, studies indicate that over and above extroversion, narcissism was positively related to self-ratings of the attractiveness of Facebook profile pictures and to the frequency of status updates [8].

Moreover, Facebook can lower adolescent's body satisfaction. Body dissatisfaction has become widespread among adolescent girls due to the current abnormal thin body ideal. A study was conducted on 1,087 girls in their first two years of high school to examine the relationship between Facebook exposure and body image concern [14]. The adolescent participants complete a questionnaire measure of internet consumption and body image concerns [14]. The findings of the study clearly illustrate that SNS is associated with the internalization of the thin body ideal, body surveillance, and drive for thinness [14]. Facebook activity was strongly associated with negative body image [14]. Also heavy users scored significantly higher in all indicators of body image concerns than their non-user counterparts [14]. This is due to the ease with which girls can connect with peers thus providing opportunity for social comparisons, which is associated with poorer body image [14]. Therefore, there is a link between the use of SNS and declining self-concept which has and will continue to impact the young generations to come.

Most importantly, Facebook is stealing time. College students are facing problems with time management yet they still manage to overspend time on Facebook. Panek suggests that "users low in self-control presented with leisure options will tend to eschew tasks that provide delayed benefit in favor of immediate gratification and will experience guilt for doing so" [10]. A survey of 458 college students indicates that users are aware of overuse of leisure media because of deficits in self-control in particular with SNS and online video [10]. Evidence suggests that high media environment account for decline in learning among college students [10]. Transitioning from high school to college is a profound change in the lives of students from highly structured and supervised home environment to unsupervised, unstructured campus environment [10]. Therefore, college students are free to spend their time as they wish. With the beginning of 21st century, there are a number of activities to do with leisure time. Evidence suggest that the amount of media use a student engages in can affect the student's academic performance [10]. According to Kaiser Family Foundation, "children aged 8-18 who spend less time using media do better in school than those who use more media [10]. Many students do not deliberately choose to spend less time on school work but may end up doing so due to student's low self-control [10]. Most students admit that Facebook can take up from their quality time. However, this awareness does not stop students from logging on to Facebook.

Because Facebook steals time, it is not surprising that traditional familial systems deteriorate. Studies prove that greater internet use lead to a decline in family communications and an increase in distant network size. The results of the HomeNet project illustrate that participants who spend a significant amount of time social networking report higher levels of loneliness and greater number of daily stresses than people who do not use the internet as much [5]. Additionally, it is reported that high levels of social networking is associated with low levels of social loneliness but high levels of emotional loneliness which suggests that online interactions does not satisfy one's emotional needs [5]. The pervasiveness of media within the modern homes in the last 10 years is impacting family interactions and may even be redefining family systems, patterns, and rules [9]. In the past, it was easy for a family to gather for breakfast, dinner, and popcorn to enjoy a good movie. Today, we have many distractions such as texting and SNS. A study was conducted in Northwestern City by utilizing parent and adolescent reports to examine whether SNS is associated with high levels of family connectedness [9]. The study included data collection, interviews, and questionnaire compiled from 453 people including both adolescents and parents [9]. The data collected provides proof that SNSs is negatively related to family connection from the viewpoint of adolescents [9].

Still, the studies discussed contain several flaws. For example, the study on URI does not take into account other stressors in a student's life. Upper Respiratory Infection could be caused by stressors such as exams, projects, university clubs, and homesickness. Furthermore, studies should focus more on the scientific side of Facebook addiction by studying changes in brain activity. It is important to note that there are not many effective social network addiction evaluations and standards. Most of the studies conducted depend on surveys, questionnaires, an interviews. There should be more studies that dig deeper into examining the anatomical, psychological, and sociological changes. Surveys and questionnaires are only effective in obtaining a broader understanding of the issue, but it does not dig deep into the roots of the matter.

Overall, the paper seems to urge the boycotting of Facebook and SNS. Facebook does have positive impacts on people's life. However, it is important to be aware of some of the downsides of Facebook in order to avoid falling a victim to its unhealthy uses. Many people are unaware of the great impact of Facebook on their life. Sometimes people are subconsciously scrolling down the homepage not realizing how much time they have spent on it or how much they are addicted to it. It is important to not lose oneself when surfing the web. People should be driving the web, not let it drive them. Everyone should be taking the wheel and steering themselves. Unfortunately, the web is driving us and controlling us in a very scary way. People find themselves scrolling endlessly through Facebook homepage with no sense of direction. Facebook can change the very nature of humans and human interactions which is a concern knowing that humans are social beings. With the new virtual world of

today, it is important to not lose oneself, confidence, family connections, and to maintain a healthy body and mind.

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