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The Socialization of Social Media: Examining the Impact of Social Media Use on Interpersonal Skills During Face-to-Face Interaction

Tenille Thomas

THE SOCIALIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON INTERPERSONAL SKILLS DURING FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

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Tenille Thomas
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DocuSigned by:
9E153FFD8E754A8...
Chair

DocuSigned by:
Amber Giacona
6320F6352EF14F7...
Committee Member

DocuSigned by:
Sarah Myers
A74E2B868E1E4A1...
Committee Member

DocuSigned by:
Christopher Peters
D6A215704D9A414...
Committee Member

DocuSigned by:
Jennifer Hammonds
EBE3858E068F42D...
Interim Director of the Graduate School

Abstract

THE SOCIALIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON INTERPERSONAL SKILLS DURING FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

Research has well established that the use of social networking sites (SNS) has increased accessibility and connectivity to people with limitless boundaries. SNS have progressively become the preferred source of communication. However, often overlooked is the impact SNS use has on face-to-face interactions, specifically on interpersonal skills. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between SNS use and face-to-face interaction. Specifically, this study examines the participant's ability to recognize and interpret nonverbal cues with increased SNS use. This was a correlational study utilizing a quantitative design of self-reported questionnaires. A total of 178 participants, ranging in age from 18 – 25 years, participated in completing the series of questionnaires. The results indicated that increased social media use negatively correlated with the participant's overall social skills. The results of the current study also revealed a negative association between social media use and the participants' ability to manage verbal and nonverbal communication during social interactions. These results suggested that increased social media use's negative impact on social skills, specifically interpersonal skills, will likely decrease the quantity and quality of in-person interaction. Other implications are discussed, and further research is recommended.

Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation to my beloved who meant and continues to mean the world to me. Though I can no longer hear your voice or see your face, your love and the memories will forever be the fuel of my success.

Mildred “Ann” Farrior, Ruth Brown, Hattie Gillard, and Evelyn Campbell, I miss and love you so much. My angels.

To my Pop, John Thomas, I miss you and wish you could have witnessed and celebrated this achievement with me. You were the first to acknowledge my “sticktoitiveness” spirit. I didn’t even know that was a word before you spoke it over me. What once was an acknowledgment, has now become my expectation. Thank you and love you always.

To my dad (Bad), Bernard Davis, it’s so hard to believe you are not here to share in this success. I dedicate this work to you most of all. I hope that you will always be pleased with me. No matter how high I get, I will still be looking up to you…forever in your shadow. I love and miss you so very much.

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God's infinite wisdom never fails.

Contents

List of Tables

Introduction

Technology has enhanced people's ability to interact with others without the limitation of time or borders with the increased use and accessibility of social networking sites (SNS). SNS are virtual platforms that allow its users to create profiles and instantly exchange various types of content with other users (Watermeyer, 2012). SNS are the most frequented web sites on the internet, facilitating social connection within a digital world (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Subsequently, the ways in which people communicate and their ability to transfer information has drastically changed since the introduction of SNS in the early 2000s (Destiana & Salman, 2015). SNS have not only affected communication connectivity, but other aspects of their users' socialization.

Portable electronic devices and wireless internet connections have contributed to the advancement and accessibility of digital social interaction (Srivastava, 2005). The purpose of a mobile phone has progressed beyond an electronic communication device by becoming a key "social object" that is available for immediate use, providing access to the digital world (Srivastava, 2005). Research suggested that this immediate accessibility to SNS has negatively affected face-to-face (FtF) conversations and interferes with people's ability to engage in a meaningful way (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013).

This study discusses and examines the impact of SNS on socialization, specifically, this study will examine the relationship between increased social media use and the ability to interpret nonverbal cues during FtF interaction. The following literature review discusses the impact of social media use on socialization and interpersonal skills.

Socialization

Socialization refers to the process by which we develop and apply social skills and cultural behaviors (Raeff, 2014). It refers to behaviors demonstrated during social activities and interactions. Socialization is facilitated through multiple forms of communication based on convenience and accessibility. Researchers have assessed the consequences of this convenience versus quality of social interaction (Sherman et al., 2013; Sprecher, 2014). The following studies examined the quality of social connectedness using different forms of communication.

Modes of Communication

The key component in relationship building and maintenance is communication (Braithwaite, 2021). The ability to develop and enhance a relationship has been summed up in research in a term called *bonding* (Sherman et al., 2013). Bonding is facilitated through the communication process and refers to one's emotional feelings and commitment to a relationship (Sherman et al., 2013). This connection is necessary in the process of forming and deepening a relationship (Chan, 2014). Researchers examined the differences in one's ability to bond during an initial interaction using different modalities of communication including texting, audio chat, video chat, and face-to-face (FtF). The researcher was also interested in measuring the extent to which the bonding lasted over a period of time. Bonding was measured examining the variables of responsiveness and other positive interpersonal impressions (Sprecher, 2014, p.192). The researcher questioned whether the interpersonal outcome was dependent on the modality of communication, whether the experience of the initial interaction influenced the second interaction, how much effect the modality had on the second interaction, and the effect of the interaction time of the second interaction on the interpersonal outcome (Sprecher, 2014).

The study consisted of 184 university students, each randomly paired with an interaction partner with whom they were not previously acquainted. Each partner engaged in two interactions. In the initial interaction, each partner was randomly assigned to communicate via texting, audio chat, video chat, or FtF to get acquainted. Those assigned to the first three forms were separated in different rooms. The partners utilizing texting were given six minutes to interact, while the other groups were given five minutes. All the partners were separated in different rooms and communicated via Skype-video. The partners participated in a private, structured, self-disclosure task, which consisted of three sets of increasingly intimate questions. This interaction was either a six- or 12-minute session. After each interaction, the participants completed an online survey measuring the dependent variables of closeness, liking, enjoyment of the interaction, and responsiveness to the other (Sprecher, 2014).

The results indicated that there was a significant difference in the mode of communication and the variables of closeness and perceived responsiveness. In comparison to FtF, texting indicated a more impoverished interaction based on the assessment of the variables. No significant changes in the variables were found in the second interaction compared to the initial interaction (Sprecher, 2014).

In a similar study consisting of 58 participants, researchers examined the difference in the bonding experience of pre-existing female friends during FtF and several modes of communication, including audio chat, video chat, and texting. In this study, bonding was measured by self-report and nonverbal behaviors demonstrating an emotional bonding experience (Sherman et al., 2013). Results suggested that levels of emotional connectedness, nonverbal behaviors, and liking and bonding self-reports were higher during FtF interaction in comparison to the other forms of communication (Sherman et al., 2013).

It is important to note that, in both studies, as the dissimilarities of FtF in the forms of communication increased, the levels of affiliation cues, nonverbal behaviors associated with bonding, significantly decreased (Sherman et al., 2013; Sprecher, 2014). In addition, the results of these studies give evidence of what is lacking in mediated forms of communication, which is indicated by the results associated with nonverbal behaviors and responsiveness to others.

Social Media Sites

Social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become popular platforms on the internet to facilitate social integration and build social capital (Chou & Edge, 2012). SNS target a particular audience and serve different functions, which are predominantly, to maintain connection with family, friends, and acquaintances (Destiana & Salman, 2015). However, while SNS are primarily utilized to maintain connections, it is necessary to consider the impact it has on the socialization of its user.

Negative impact. SNS affords its users the ability to connect and socialize with people. However, its users have access to capabilities on the site that feel social but are not interactive, such as perusing profiles or passively viewing feeds and posts (Clark et al., 2018). These activities afford users the opportunity to discover personal information, thoughts, and behaviors of others; but they fail to contribute to or facilitate interpersonal connections.

Another negative impact of SNS use is the inevitable decrease and presumed need for FtF interaction. SNS users are able to express thoughts and feelings without having to engage in FtF interactions. The lack of FtF communication affects the ability to strengthen and deepen the relationship resulting in weak ties and a false sense of friendship (Chou & Edge, 2012).

Lastly, social networking sites provide constant opportunities for social comparison, social media obsession, and dependency (Baek et al., 2013). When users compare their realities to other

people's experiences or filtered self-presentations, they are more likely to experience a sense of inadequacy, resulting in feelings of loneliness (Baek et al., 2013), envy, and depression (Clark et al., 2018).

Positive impact. A benefit associated with SNS use is its ability to meet the need of acceptance and belonging (Clark et al., 2018). A study, consisting of 35 first year and 35 upper-class undergraduate students, examined the relationship between Facebook use and adjustment to college and attitudes (Kalpidou et al., 2011). The researchers hypothesized that Facebook variables would be negatively associated with self-esteem and emotional adjustment to college, positively associated with social adjustment to college, and would predict the types of adjustment for each group of classmen. The participants completed a series of questionnaires that measured Facebook usage, self-esteem, and student adjustment to college. Social adjustment was conceptualized as reported feelings of belonging (Kalpidou et al., 2011).

The results indicated that the upper-class students' number of Facebook friends positively correlated with social adjustment and attachment to the institution. In addition, the upper-class students reported having significantly more friends on Facebook in comparison to the first-year students. First-year students had significantly more friends from home, had a stronger emotional connection to Facebook, and spent more time on Facebook than the upper-class students. Their number of Facebook friends was negatively associated with emotional adjustment to college (Kalpidou et al., 2011).

The results emphasize the double-edged impact of SNS use. On one hand, SNS use is beneficial in that it increases feelings of belonging when utilized to build new social connections. However, when SNS are used to maintain social connections, such as in the case of the first-year

students, they become a hindrance to the development of social and emotional connections when the social environment has changed (Clark et al., 2018; Kalpidou et al., 2011).

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills refer to one's ability to relate and process an interaction, focusing on the effect of the communicative exchange during social activities and interactions (Duffy et al., 2004). Examples of interpersonal skills are self-awareness, self-management, problem solving, and listening skills (Mims et al., 2013). FtF interaction involves interpersonal skills, which consists of both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, and are essential in relationship building (Mims et al., 2013). Interpersonal skills are not simply learned but rather are competencies which are developed and improved over time.

Social mediums do not present its users the opportunity to practice these competencies, subsequently delaying or decreasing fundamental skills of interpersonal communication that are necessary for FtF social interactions, especially during the process of relationship building (Mims et al., 2013). Increased use of SNS decreases utilization of interpersonal skills that are typically activated during FtF interactions, and risks users becoming dependent on this mode of communication to facilitate social interaction (Kujath, 2011).

Kujath (2011) examined the extent to which SNS, such as Facebook and MySpace, can initiate relationships, facilitate dependency and become a replacement for FtF interaction. Kujath (2011) performed a study that consisted of 183 college students, who completed a survey to measure how these SNS maintain interpersonal relationships, the frequency of SNS use to maintain contact, and the amount of time spent on SNS (Kujath, 2011). The results indicated that 8% of the participants reported that they frequently used Facebook and/or MySpace to meet new people, and 75% reported that they used these SNS to maintain contact with previously established friends and

relatives. In addition, 55% of the participants reported that they frequently used Facebook and/or MySpace to interact rather than FtF (Kujath, 2011). These results support the argument that SNS use is beneficial when used as an extension to FtF interaction, as opposed to a substitute for FtF interaction.

While SNS provide users with some sense of socialization, there seems to be a deficiency in the user's ability to emotionally connect with others. Based on the discussion of the previous studies, the deficiency of computer mediated communication may be attributed to the deprivation of interpersonal skills that are naturally activated during FtF interactions.

Personality

Interpersonal interactions are mediated by individual differences, such as personality traits, which contribute to the quality and quantity of the interaction (Nezlek et al., 2011). For instance, in a cross-cultural study with samples from the United States and Germany, Nezlek et al. (2011) used the Five-Factor Model of personality (i.e., Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness; Costa & McCrae, 1995) to examine the relationship between personality traits and the quality and quantity of social interaction. Agreeableness refers to traits associated with being helpful and unselfish. Conscientiousness is associated with traits of being self-aware and disciplined. Openness on an interpersonal domain refers to experiential openness. Extroversion refers to being friendly and outgoing. Neuroticism refers to emotional instability and negative affect (Costa & McCrae, 1995; Nezlek et al., 2011).

Results of the study indicated that social interactions are positively associated with the personality traits of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness in both samples and Extraversion and Openness were positively related to the quality of social interaction in the United States sample only. There was no significant relationship between Neuroticism for either sample (Nezlek et al.,

2011). The results in this study give some clarity and understanding of how personalities contribute to the quality and quantity of interpersonal interactions. Individuals who tend to be unselfish, helpful, and who experience low social anxiety are more likely to engage in social interactions in comparison to other personality traits. Individuals who are open, friendly, and outgoing tend to have more meaningful interactions. Further review of literature was completed to give clarity on the influences of personality traits and the intensity of SNS use.

Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Hudiburgh (2012) conducted a study that investigated how the personality characteristics of Facebook users were associated with the intensity of Facebook use as well as their perception of interpersonal competency. The study consisted of 463 participants who completed a questionnaire measuring Facebook use, self-esteem, attachment, the Five Factor Model of personality traits, and interpersonal competence (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012).

The results suggested that high scores on Extraversion were positively associated with intense use of Facebook. In addition, the results suggested that greater intensity of Facebook use was associated with perceptions of decreased interpersonal competency at initiating relationships (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012). In other words, the more users increase their SNS use, the more perceived inadequacy in interpersonal competence they feel when initiating a relationship.

Nonverbal Cues

Personality traits cannot be identified solely by sensory input; they must be inferred through observable cues demonstrated by the observed person (Hartung & Renner, 2011). According to Brunswik's lens model (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Brunswick, 1952; Hartung & Renner, 2011), the ability to connect an observable cue with a personality trait is called *cue validity*. In addition, the ability to make a judgment about the personality based on the observable

cue is called *cue utilization*. Observable, nonverbal cues assist individuals in making accurate assessments and valid judgements about the personality of the observed individual.

Nonverbal communication is defined as one's ability to convey a message without words. It includes behaviors, known as nonverbal cues, such as facial expression, eye contact, tone of voice, and even how one may be standing (Uhls et al., 2014). The ability to assess and judge nonverbal cues is essential in relationship formation by increasing understanding and perception of the exchange provoking accurate response and reaction of each participant (Uhls et al., 2014).

According to the realistic accuracy model (Funder, 1995; Hartung & Renner, 2011), in order to make an accurate interpersonal perception, the individual has to display relevant cues of his or her personality, the cues have to be visible for the judge, the judge must be able to detect the cues, and the judge must be able to use the information to make an accurate assessment.

Hartung and Renner (2011) examined the relationship between individual differences in social curiosity and the ability to assess and judge interpersonal perceptions during an initial interaction. The study consisted of 182 participants, who were asked to complete a series of questionnaires including a self-report to measure personality traits. The participants were paired with partners. The participants participated in an initial interaction with their partner for 10 minutes. After the interaction, the participants relocated to separate rooms where they completed a questionnaire evaluating the personality traits of their partner by rating a list of physical attributes and verbal and nonverbal cues (Hartung & Renner, 2011).

Results indicated that the participants were able to accurately judge the personality traits of Extraversion and Openness but were significantly low in judgment accuracy for the personality traits of Neuroticism and Agreeableness. Judges who were high in social curiosity were higher in

judgment accuracy and utilization of valid cues than individuals low in social curiosity (Hartung & Renner, 2011).

Social information processing theory (SIP) proposed an explanation for how an individual can develop interpersonal impressions and relationships with the use of computer-mediated communication mediums, such as SNS. SIP contends that interpersonal impressions and relational formation are developed by the user's ability to adapt to the deficiency of nonverbal cues. It further suggests that nonverbal cues are replaced with textual symbols (such as emojis) to convey emotions (Ramirez, 2009). When nonverbal cue replacement occurs, theorists suggest that the development of interpersonal impressions and relationship formation takes longer (Ramirez, 2009). The adaptation explained by this theory may have a negative effect on FtF connection, specifically with the inability to communicate utilizing nonverbal cues.

Limitations of Existing Research

Social networking sites have increased their users' ability to connect with others, whether to formulate relationships, maintain relationships with family, friends, and acquaintances or to engage in other forms of socialization. While SNS use has benefitted its users, previous research (Baek et al., 2013; Chou & Edge, 2012; Clark et al., 2018) has demonstrated the negative impact of overuse of SNS and SNS used as a substitute for FtF interaction.

Previous studies examined the impact of socialization as it related to different modalities of communication. The results supported the idea that FtF is the preferred mode of communication to increase levels of emotional connectedness and affiliation cues (Sherman et al., 2013). While SNS have become popular mediums for socialization, increased use inevitably decreases FtF interaction, hindering the development of social and emotional connections (Kalpidou et al., 2011).

Previous research has not established how increased use of SNS negatively impacts FtF interaction beyond interaction time.

In addition, the aforementioned studies were interested in examining the use and effects of Facebook (Chan, 2014; Chou & Edge, 2012; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012; Kalpidou et al., 2011; Kujath, 2011) due to its popularity at the time of the study. Although Facebook continues to be the biggest social networking service based on global reach and total active users (Price, 2023), the function of other SNS (such as Twitter, Instagram, etc.) are similar in that they facilitate social integration (Chou & Edge, 2012). Therefore, increased use of any SNS would likely have a similar effect on FtF interaction.

The Current Study

This study further investigates the relationship between SNS and in-person social interaction. Social networking sites include other networks beyond Facebook. In this study, SNS refers to an online platform that allows its users to: 1. create a public or semi-public profile within a bound system; 2. identify or select a list of other users with whom they transfer information and share a connection; and 3. view and peruse through their list of connections and others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2009). A distinct concern with increased use of SNS is the effect associated with FtF interaction, specifically the deficiency of nonverbal forms of communication. Nonverbal cues are essential in the formation of relationships and responding to the reaction of others (Uhls et al., 2014), and accuracy in evaluating personalities (Hartung & Renner, 2011), especially during the initial interaction. This study examines the extent of the deficiency in recognizing and interpreting nonverbal cues with increased SNS use. Thus, the following hypotheses will be evaluated:

H1: Previous research (Kujath, 2011) suggests that there is a risk of dependency to facilitate social interaction, negatively impacting interpersonal skills. Therefore, it is hypothesized that there will be a negative relationship between SNS use and perceived interpersonal competence.

H2: One of the limitations of SNS use is the inability to communicate utilizing nonverbal behaviors. As such, it is hypothesized that there will be a negative relationship between SNS use and the ability to recognize and interpret nonverbal communication cues.

Chapter Two

Methods

Participants

The current study recruited 202 participants, 86 females and 116 males through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform. In order for the volunteer to meet criteria for eligibility, his or her age had to range between 18 to 25 years old and had to have an active SNS account. Researchers (i.e., Lenhart et al., 2010) suggest that young adults under the age of 25 years old are the predominant SNS users, representing 75% of adult internet users who have a profile on a SNS. All participants' data were used in the study, but some participants returned missing or incomplete data, (N = 24), so they might be excluded from certain analyses based on availability of the data. Of the participants with completed data (N = 178), 76 identified as females, 101 identified as males, and one declined to identify any gender. The participants' demographic frequencies are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency of Demographic Variables

		N	Percent
Gender	Female	76	42.7
	Male	101	56.7
	No Response	1	.6
	Total	178	100.0
Age	18 – 20	1	.6
	21 - 23	95	53.4
	24 - 25	82	46.1
	Total	178	100.0
Ethnicity	Caucasian	160	89.9
	African American	1	.6
	Latino or Hispanic	4	2.2
	Asian	3	1.7
	Native American	10	5.6
	Total	178	100.0
SNS	Facebook	162	91.5
	Messenger	86	48.6
	Instagram	161	91.0
	TikTok	77	43.5
	Twitter	106	60.0
	LinkedIn	50	28.2
	Snapchat	58	33.0
	Other	04	2.3
	Total	704	398.1

Note, SNS = Social Networking Sites

Measurements

Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). The SMUIS was developed to measure the degree to which social media is incorporated in an individual's daily activity and social behavior and the emotional connection associated with the use. The SMUIS is divided into two subscales: 1. social integration and emotional connection; and 2. integration into social routine (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). This scale consists of 10 items that are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

The SMUIS demonstrated good reliability and validity. Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013) conducted a study consisting of 616 undergraduate students to determine psychometric support and validity evidence. The results demonstrated very good internal consistency for the total scale score ($\alpha = .91$) and both subscale scores, $\alpha = .89$ for subscale 1 and $\alpha = .83$ for subscale 2 (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). Test-retest reliability was assessed over a three-week interval, with a Pearson *r* of .80 for the total scale. The SMUIS subscales and total scale score were positively correlated with the Facebook Use Intensity Scale (FBI; Ellison et al., 2007), providing evidence for convergent and discriminant validity (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). See Appendix A for the SMUIS.

Social Media Use Supplemental Questions. Participants were asked additional questions to determine the social media platform(s) used and the amount of time spent on SNS in the past 30 days. Item response regarding time spent is open ended and allows participants to indicate on average how many hours are spent on SNS per day. Participants are informed that calculation of time should include time spent creating posts, checking posts, posting photos, looking at photos, updating status, commenting on other's posts, and chatting on SNS. See Appendix B for additional social media use questions.

Social Skills Inventory, Brief Form (SSI; Riggio,1986). The SSI measures a person's perceived nonverbal communication and social skills as they relate to his or her social competency. This inventory is a 30-item, self-report that participants respond to on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all like me*) to 5 (*Exactly like me*; Riggio, 2005).

The SSI consists of two dimensions on which communications skills are measured: emotional (nonverbal) and social (verbal) (Riggio, 2005). The communication skills in the inventory are identified by three types: expressivity, sensitivity, and control over communication.

Expressivity refers to the ability to communicate or send messages to others; sensitivity refers to the ability to receive and interpret the communicated message; and control refers to the ability to regulate and manage the communication process (Riggio, 2005). These skills are evaluated in each dimension, forming the six subscales of the SSI (Riggio, 2005).

The emotional or nonverbal communication subscales are Emotional Expressivity (EE), Emotional Sensitivity (ES), and Emotional Control (EC) (Riggio, 2005). EE refers to the general ability to send nonverbal attitudes and cues. ES refers to the ability to receive nonverbal cues and attitudes from others. EC refers to the ability to regulate nonverbal displays during social interactions (Riggio, 1986).

The social (verbal) subscales of the SSI are Social Expressivity (SE), Social Sensitivity (SS), and Social Control (SC) (Riggio, 1986). SE refers to the general ability to verbally engage others in social interaction. SS refers to the ability to understand the verbal exchange and a demonstrated knowledge of social norms that governs the behavior during social interactions. SC refers to the ability to adjust and present acceptable behavior according to the social situation (Riggio, 1986). Higher scores in each domain of the SSI are an indication of higher level of competence in social skills, and the total score represents global social competence (Riggio, 2005).

The SSI demonstrates acceptable to good reliability. As noted in the manual (*see* Riggio & Carney, 2003), a study consisting of a sample of 549 employed adults from a variety of work organizations, the reliability coefficients of the subscales ranged from .65 to .88 (Riggio, 2005). In another study consisting of 389 undergraduate students, the alpha coefficient of the scales ranged from .64 to .89 (Riggio, 1986). The SSI also demonstrated good test-retest reliability in a study consisting of 40 undergraduate students who were administered the SSI in a two-week interval. Results indicated reliability coefficients ranging from .81 to .96 (Riggio, 1986). The SSI

demonstrated good convergent and discriminant validity with trait measures of personality and other measures of communication skill (Riggio, 1986). See Appendix C for the SSI.

Demographics questionnaire. The demographics questionnaire consists of face valid, self-reported questions identifying age, gender, and race. See Appendix D.

Procedure

Prior to the solicitation of participants and conducting research, this research proposal was submitted to Western Kentucky University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. No data was collected prior to obtaining IRB approval. Once approved by the IRB, each participant completed an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E). The Informed Consent Form included the purpose and explanation for the study, risks and benefits of participation, and instructions for completing the questionnaire. Participants were given the opportunity to read, consent, and affirm participation prior to proceeding with survey questions. To maintain anonymity, the only piece of identifying information was the generated number given to each participant at the completion of the survey. No identifiers can be linked back to survey participants.

For the purpose of this study, participants were recruited to complete an online survey using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk has become increasingly popular for conducting online research due to its accessibility to a large and diverse participant pool (Buhrmester et al., 2011). The participants were asked to provide demographic information and respond to questions regarding their frequency of SNS use. Participants also completed the SSI and the SMUIS, which will be counterbalanced to avoid order effects. The surveys were compiled on Qualtrics XM, a premier online survey platform. The participants were redirected from MTurk to the uploaded survey on Qualtrics XM.

Chapter Three

Results

Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between social networking systems use and nonverbal interpersonal skills during FtF interaction. A descriptive correlational research design was used for this study to determine an association between the two variables. This design is effective in describing the desired characteristics of a single sample (Omair, 2015). In this study, the single sample refers to SNS users.

As a descriptive correlational study, the data were collected utilizing the quantitative design of self-reported questionnaires. In comparison to FtF interviewing and observation, self-reported questionnaires are structured, reduce biasing errors, and provide greater anonymity for the respondents increasing reliability in responses (Phellas et al., 2011). In addition, this approach also affords flexibility in administration to include computer-based, widening the geographical area for recruiting participants.

Preliminary Analyses

To begin, two variables of interest were identified as social media use and social skills. The SMUIS is scored by summing the scores for each individual item according to the corresponding number i.e.: *Strongly disagree* = 1 to *Strongly agree* = 5. The SMUIS scores ranged from 10 to 40 (M = 26.94, SD = 5.79). The SSI, brief form, is scored by summing the scores for each individual item according to the corresponding number i.e.: *Not at all like me* = 1 to *Exactly like me* = 5. The SSI scores ranged from 57 to 122 (M = 106.07, SD = 17.54).

An analysis of the three variables, social media use, social skills score, and time spent on social media, was performed. An analysis of the two dimensions of the SSI was also performed by

reviewing the six subscales to determine distinctions between verbal and nonverbal communication. The descriptive analyses of the variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Preliminary Analysis Data

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media Use	196	10	40	26.94	5.79
Social Skills Score	183	55	148	106.07	17.54
Time Spent on SNS (in hours)	202	0	2	1.82	.40

SSI Subscales	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Expressivity	196	7	21	13.42	2.45
Emotional Sensitivity	199	9	23	15.25	3.04
Emotional Control	196	11	24	15.55	2.57
Social Expressivity	200	5	25	18.72	3.58
Social Sensitivity	199	5	25	17.89	3.53
Social Control	198	7	24	16.14	2.51

Hypothesis Testing

The main hypothesis stated that the increase of SNS usage is negatively associated with interpersonal skills. The correlational analysis among social skills and social media use and time spent on social networking systems are presented in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, the relationship

between SMUIS and SSI scores were statistically significant; however, time spent on SNS and SSI scores approached statistical significance but was not significant.

Table 3

Correlational Analysis of Social Skills and Social Media Use and Time on SNS

		Social Media Use	Time on SNS
Social Skills	Pearson Correlation	-.34	.12
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.07

The second hypothesis stated that there will be a negative relationship between SNS use and the ability to recognize and interpret nonverbal communication cues. The correlational analysis of the social skills subscales and social media use are presented in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, the subscales of SSI that were significant demonstrated a low to moderate correlation with SMUIS.

Table 4

Correlational Analysis of Social Skills Subscales and Social Media Use

		Nonverbal Subscales			Verbal Subscales		
		EE	ES	EC	SE	SS	SC
Social Media Use	Pearson Correlation	.17	.21	-.29	-.25	-.07	-.33
	Sig (2-tailed)	.02	.004	<.001	<.001	.31	<.001
	N	190	194	190	194	193	193

Note. EE = Emotional Expressivity, ES = Emotional Sensitivity, EC = Emotional Control, SE = Social Expressivity, SS = Social Sensitivity, SC = Social Control.

Exploratory Analysis

An exploratory analysis of the demographic variables was performed to investigate any underlying patterns and gain insight on correlational outcomes. The exploratory analysis of gender, age, and ethnicity are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Exploratory Analysis of Demographic Variables

		Time on SNS	SMUIS	SSI
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.01	-.24	.22
	Sig (2-tailed)	.95	.001	.002
	N	201	195	182
Age	Pearson Correlation	-.13	.16	-.24
	Sig (2-tailed)	.07	.02	.001
	N	202	196	183
Ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	-.03	-.04	-.19
	Sig (2-tailed)	.64	.61	.01
	N	202	196	183

Chapter Four

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between social media usage and social skills. Specifically, this study sought to examine whether there is a link between the frequency of SNS usage and interpersonal competence skills as evidenced by the evaluation of

verbal and nonverbal communication. Two hypotheses were tested in this study. First, it was hypothesized that there would be a negative relationship between SNS use and perceived interpersonal competence. Secondly, it was hypothesized that there would be a negative relationship between SNS use and the ability to recognize and interpret nonverbal communication cues. Both hypotheses were supported by the data with certain exceptions.

The results of the study suggested that there was a negative relationship between the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) scores and the Social Skills Inventory (SSI) scores. Participants with higher scores in interpersonal and social communication skills used social media in their daily activities and social behavior less than those with lower interpersonal and social communication skills. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggested that SNS excessive users tend to self-disclose and share personal information resulting in avoidance of FtF communications, which inevitably jeopardizes interpersonal communication (Chasombat, 2014; Taylor, 2020). A quantitative study conducted by Taylor (2020) found that the majority of the participants believed that their social media use negatively affected their ability to communicate FtF and their desire to form personal relationships outside of social media. Subramanian (2017) stated that social media use as a primary form of communication is detrimental to relationship building and interpersonal skills in that its users tend to disclose personal information, have difficulty deepening social connections, and only interact with people who share similar viewpoints.

Most of the participants in the current study (77%) indicated that they prefer to communicate through social media. This result is evidence that communication via social media is progressively replacing the need and desire for FtF socialization. While the use of SNS affords

its users the benefit of quick and frequent access to global connections, it facilitates isolation and alienation from peers and family (Dredge & Schreurs, 2020; Subramanian, 2017).

The results of the current study indicated that there was no significant correlation between time spent on social network sites and social skills. This was largely due to the lack of variance in the self-reported time of social media use. The participants' responses ranged between 0 and 2 hours per day. The current study utilized a single estimate measure of assessing time spent on social media. This is one of the most common methods (Griffioen, 2020). However, it is fairly evident that the respondents minimized their time spent on social networks. According to statistics recorded in 2022, young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years old spend an average of five hours or more per day on SNS (Georgiev, 2023), which is much higher than the time participants in the current study reported.

The second hypothesis asserted that there would be a negative correlation between SNS use and the ability to recognize and interpret nonverbal cues. The results of the current study had positive correlations between social media use and emotional expressivity and sensitivity sub-scales and a negative correlation between social media use and the emotional control subscale. In addition, the results suggested that there was a negative correlation between social media use and social expressivity and control, and no association with social sensitivity.

The results from the current study suggested that participants with increased use and incorporation of social media in their daily activity have an increased ability to send and receive nonverbal cues. This result appears to contradict the present hypothesis. However, researchers suggest that nonverbal cues during communication may no longer be defined solely as indicators measured during FtF encounters, but rather include nonverbal components incorporated through computer mediated communication (CMC, Venter, 2017).

The use of abstract facial expressions such as emoticons and emojis are often incorporated in CMC to convey emotions (Venter, 2017). Like nonverbal cues during FtF interactions, emoticons and emojis are combined with words, increasing their effectiveness, and serve as a visual representation of the intentional emotion and attitude of the communicator. According to the Channel Expansion Theory (Carlson & Zmud, 1999), these communicative strategies were developed to reduce the negative effects of not having nonverbal cues in written communication (Venter, 2017). Therefore, emoticons and emojis are utilized to provide the necessary emotional enhancement to convey nonverbal cues in CMC.

The negative correlations between social media use and the other subscales, emotional and social control and social expressivity, present a better picture and give more credence to the suggestion that the more an individual utilizes social media, the less inept they are in social interactions, specifically during FtF interactions. The responses of the participants in the present study indicate an inadequacy in the ability to manage the nonverbal and verbal exchange during the social encounters. In addition, the results suggested that the participants with higher SMUIS scores have more difficulty expressing themselves during the social exchange than those with lower SMUIS scores.

This is consistent with the belief that social media has negatively changed social interactions, over time, in that its users deny the need for FtF interaction. The decrease in FtF interactions will subsequently demonstrate a decline in interpersonal skills because these skills are best facilitated during in person interactions (Subramanian, 2017). It has become difficult for people to carry on a conversation and interact in person because of the dependency on social media (Subramanian, 2017). Researchers discussed the impact of *phubbing*, which is the act of paying more attention to one's phone instead of the person directly in one's presence (Chotpitayasunondh

& Douglas, 2018). Phubbing reduces the quality of social interaction and inadvertently leads to feelings of rejection and jealousy (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018; Garrido et al., 2021). The findings of the current study provide more insight on the prevalence of socially unacceptable behaviors, such as phubbing. While this behavior is considered disrespectful, the phubber is likely engaging in this behavior due to the inability to maintain and manage the conversation, subsequently desiring to avoid or discontinue the interpersonal interaction (Okdie et al., 2011). The phubbee, inadvertently, misinterprets the behavior as rejection or disinterest, and does not have the social skillset or desire to reengage.

The exploratory analysis revealed some expected and unexpected associations as well. Gender was negatively associated with social media, and positively correlated with social skills. Female participants incorporated social media use in their daily activities more than the male participants. The male participants demonstrated higher levels of social skills than the female participants. This result is contradictory of prior knowledge regarding gender differences and social skills, which determined that females have consistently demonstrated higher levels of social skills than males. The higher scores yielded by the male participants in social skills could be related to the poor variance in the sample (the overrepresentation of males in this study).

Age was negatively associated with time spent on social media and social skills, and positively associated with social media use. The age of the participants in the current study ranged between 18 and 25 years old. The younger the participant, the more time was spent on social media and the more they demonstrated increased social skills. The older participants had a lower amount of social media use. This result is consistent with the common misconception of SNS users that social media use share similarities to FtF socialization. Thus, while the younger participants incorporate social media use in their daily activity than the older participants, their perception of

social skills is likely to be skewed and evaluated by the quantity of social media use rather than FtF interactions.

Finally, ethnicity was only associated with social skills, demonstrating a negative correlation. Minorities were associated with higher levels of social skills in comparison to the Caucasian participants.

Limitations

The current study has some limitations for consideration for future research. First, the method of research chosen, quantitative approach, gives respondents the ability to not be forthcoming with accurate responses. Using a qualitative method would give more insight and understanding of the underlying reasoning and motivations of the SNS users and their experiences during FtF social interactions. Secondly, the participants were recruited through Amazon Turk, which yielded a homogenous sample, limiting generalizability of the findings. Future studies should include more gender and ethnic diversity to increase external validity.

The current study relied on self-report to assess the quantity and duration of the participant's social media use and his or her experience during FtF interaction, which limited the ability to observe behaviors in a more natural environment. Previous studies suggested that people tend to inaccurately report their overall SNS use (Deng et al., 2019; Ernala et al., 2020; Sewall et al., 2020). Others may argue that it would be challenging to get an accurate, definitive account of SNS use because it is often an extension of internet and mobile phone use. Future research would benefit from the use of a more objective measurement of SNS use, such as reporting the amount of time noted on the iOS screen. Also, incorporating an assessment tool that observed the participant in a more natural social environment would increase objectivity.

The data represented in this study was based on a correlational design and cannot determine whether social media use is responsible for lower interpersonal skills. Other contributing factors may influence the increased social media use and the decline in interpersonal skills during FtF interactions, such as personality traits.

Implications

Social media use does not appear to be going away. It has become increasingly evident that social media has progressed to be the preferred medium of communication (Subramanian, 2017). Its growth will continue to evolve, and its users will be motivated to log in for fear of missing out on something. The use of social media offers a variety of conveniences and provides access and connectivity for its users to a large group of people despite geographical distances. However, this is at the expense of FtF socialization. The discomfort and decline of social skills will likely impact and facilitate a change in the quantity of in-person interactions. Face-to-face gatherings will become a thing of the past, replaced by Zoom meetings and FaceTime calls to avoid conflict, feelings of rejection, and discomfort. These platforms, and others of the like, encourage engagement and inclusion with the ability to visually see the users. However, the users have the option of not remaining in view or turning on the camera, decreasing ability to receive and send interpersonal communication cues.

Numerous research studies have revealed the importance of interpersonal skills in sustaining and deepening relationships (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). The implications of the current study suggest that social media users desire to be social and maintain connections and even initiate relationships as evident by their excessive integration in their daily activity. However, the excessive use and dependency of social media will likely prove to be counterproductive in the progression of the relationship. As SNS continue to advance and evolve into the preferred social

tool that incorporates verbal and nonverbal communication, it is necessary to be intentional about engaging in activities that develop, enhance, and facilitate effective interpersonal skills during FtF interactions.

Previous research has made compelling arguments for the efficiency of telemental health services (Molfenter et al., 2021), which has influenced mental health clinician's continued utilization post COVID-19. However, limited research addresses potential barriers to treatment, or the effectiveness of mental health services provided via telehealth. According to the results of the current study, the participants would likely prefer telehealth as opposed to in-person mental health services. However, the effectiveness of telehealth to positively impact patient care outcomes is dependent on interpersonal attributes which are essential in fostering the therapeutic relationship. Patients similar to the participants in the current study would likely disclose personal information easily but would have some difficulty deepening the therapeutic relationship due to their inability to manage the verbal and nonverbal exchanges.

The excessive integration of SNS in its users' daily activity has some additional positive, clinical implications. The medical field has transitioned to incorporating social media in its daily practice, development, and communication with colleagues and patients, particularly in oncology (Mano & Morgan, 2022). Similarly, there are advantages to incorporating social media in the treatment of mental illness and disorders. Some of the benefits of incorporating social media in mental health care include: 1. the promotion of mental health care, providing access to professional information; 2. the ability for its users to participate in groups or communities, which would provide a sense of belonging and emotional support from people who are experiencing similar challenges; 3. the dissemination of mental health information, consequently raising awareness and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness; and 4. access to applications that developed

digital intervention programs, such as online therapy, self-management tools, and emotional support programs (Herrera-Peco et al., 2023). The accessibility of these resources can play a vital role in the prevention and treatment of mental disorders.

In conclusion, while social media use has its obvious advantages, it is necessary to consider detrimental impact it may have on FtF interactions and the implications of a deficit in interpersonal skills. The current study provided evidence that suggests that the use and incorporation of social media sites have impacted the quality and quantity of face-to-interaction. Research maintains that FtF interaction remains the preferred mode of communication to strengthen relationship bonds, accurately assess nonverbal communication, and facilitate overall mental wellbeing.

The current study examined the relationship between social media use and interpersonal skills during FtF interaction. The results of the current study revealed a negative association between the integration of social media use in the participants' daily activity and the participants' overall social skills. The results of the current study also revealed a negative association between social media use and the participants' ability to manage verbal and nonverbal communication during social interactions. In summary, the participants of the current study are afforded quick and frequent access to global connections by integrating social media in their daily activity. However, the results of the current study revealed that the participants who used social media more demonstrated a decline in social skills in comparison to the participants who integrated social media use less in their daily activity. The results of the current study suggest that the increased use of social media risks the quantity and, more importantly, the quality of communication during FtF interaction.

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APPENDIX A

SOCIAL MEDIA USE INTEGRATION SCALE

Circle the number that best matches your agreement with the statement.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5-Strongly Agree

1. I feel disconnected from friends when I have not used social media.
2. I would like it if everyone used social media to communicate
3. I would be disappointed if I could not use social media at all.
4. I get upset when I can't use social media.
5. I prefer to communicate with others mainly through social media.
6. Social media plays an important role in my social relationships.
7. I enjoy checking my social media account(s).
8. I don't like to use social media.
9. Using social media is part of my everyday routine.
10. I respond to content that others share using social media.

APPENDIX B

SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

Please select the social media platforms in which you have an account and login (Select all that applies).

Facebook

Messenger

Instagram

TikTok

Twitter

LinkedIn

Snapchat

Other

In the last 30 days, on average, please indicate how much time was spent on social networking sites per day. Your calculation of time should include time spent creating posts, checking posts, posting photos, looking at photos, updating status, commenting on other's posts, and chatting

_____ hour(s) per day

APPENDIX C

SOCIAL SKILLS INVENTORY

www.mindgarden.com

To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

Social Skills Inventory

The three sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below.
Sample Items:

I usually feel uncomfortable touching other people.

I am interested in knowing what makes people tick.

I love to socialize.

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC

Age: What is your age? Select the number that identifies your age within the given range.

1. 18 – 20
2. 21 – 23
3. 24 – 25

Gender: What gender do you identify as?

Female
Male
Transgender
Non-binary
Prefer not to answer
Other

Ethnicity: Please specify your ethnicity (check all that apply)

Caucasian
African American
Latino or Hispanic
Asian
Native American
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
Other/Unknown
Prefer not to say

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT

The Impact of Social Media Use (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) on Interpersonal Skills

Thank you for participating in this study. I am conducting this study as a part of my dissertation research at Western Kentucky University. Please read the following information prior to beginning your interview.

Purpose: I have agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Tenille Thomas, M.A. The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of social media use on interpersonal skills during in person interactions.

Procedures: I understand that participation will involve completion of a brief, online survey. Your participation in this online survey is completely anonymous. Your participation in the survey indicates you read this consent information and agreed to participate in this anonymous survey. Depending on the depth of your response, completion time varies up to approximately 20 minutes.

Refusal or Withdrawal from Participation: There is always the possibility of tampering from an outside source when using the internet for collecting information. While the confidentiality of your responses will be protected once the data are downloaded from the internet, there is always a possibility of hacking or other security breaches that could threaten the confidentiality of your responses. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate in any portion of the study. I understand that I may withdraw my consent to participate at any time during or after the collection of any research data and materials. I understand that I may skip any question that I would prefer not to answer and that I can withdraw from the study or refuse to participate in any portion of the research without consequence.

Privacy and Confidentiality: I understand that my participation is anonymous. No information I shared can be traced electronically to me, the computer I used, nor can I be traced by any information I provide. I understand that my anonymity will be maintained in all research reports, publications, and presentations. I understand that the data obtained from the survey will be incorporated into the final research reports and presentations based on this study.

Risks and Discomforts: I understand that this study involves low risk associated with participation in this study and that I am free to discontinue my participation at any time. There is a chance that the survey questions might spark questions, concerns, or some discomfort for participants. Resources for support are listed on the last page of the survey.

Benefits: While there are no direct benefits for me in participating in this study, I understand that my participation in this study may contribute to greater understanding of the ways in which

social media use impacts our social interactions during face-to-face encounters. Participants may also develop insight into their own social media behavior and its impact.

Use of Data for Publication and/or Teaching: I understand that the results of this study will be used primarily for the completion of Tenille Thomas' doctoral project but may also be used in future publications, presentations, and/or for professional and educational purposes.

This study has been reviewed and approved for use by the Western Kentucky University's Institutional Review Board (WKU IRB). If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the IRB chair.

By continuing, participants are consenting to participate, and agree that they have read and agree to the terms above. Participants are also agreeing they understand that there is no way to predict all risk factors associated with a research study but understand that measures have been taken to limit known and unknown potential risks

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Name: Thomas, Tenille

Email (to receive future readership statistics): tenille.thomas060@topper.wku.edu

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Committee Chair: Dr. Rick Grieve

Additional Committee Members: Dr. Christopher Peters Dr. Amber Giacona Dr. Sarah Myers

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