



Social Media and Happiness During COVID-19

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Introduction

- Our definition of social media includes websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.
- It's been found that varying degrees of social media use in teenage participants had no significant difference in overall well-being. In past research, social media is thought to be more of a neutral effect. It's suggested that feelings of social connectedness through online platforms contribute to these findings (Mitev et al., 2021).
- A positive correlation between *active Instagram use, and higher reports of self-esteem and well-being has been found in other studies. These two aspects of mental health are heavily emphasized current day (Trifiro et al., 2021).
- The majority of teenagers in the United States use social media, so conducting this type of research is necessary in order to see how social media impacts happiness which can be a predictor of mental health.
- All of the data from our study has been collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is important to factor in the impact of the pandemic on the lives of teenagers.
*Behaviors facilitating social exchanges: liking, commenting, sharing, uploading, etc.

Methods

Participants:

- Participants were reached out to through advertisements distributed on Facebook and Instagram, and word of mouth.
- Ages range from 13-19 years old, and reside in a midsize city in the Southeastern United States.
- 43 teenagers participated in the study, with 25 females, and 18 males respectively. Demographics were made to imitate those of the general population within the city.
- Incentive of \$100 gift card provided to encourage participation for full length of study.

Procedure:

- Participants were preliminarily interviewed on social media use, COVID-19 response, and general activities. Interviews lasted around an hour and were held over Zoom in 2020.
- The following 5-7 days, participants were asked to submit a video diary of activities and experience using social media for that day. This consisted of two parts: a form to document experiences and happiness rating, and a 3-5 minute video.
- Proceeding the completion of these video diaries, participants were interviewed again on if or how the video diaries affected them, as well as following up on social media use and the effect social media had on the participant throughout the week.
- All interviews and video recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai. Data from interviews and video diaries are being coded using a general participant profile created through Qualtrics. This information was later added to Nvivo for quantitative analysis.
- Any qualitative data, such as correlations or comparative mean testing, was run through Excel or SPSS.

Results

- While still analyzing the data from the happiness surveys, we expect to find participants feeling happier when engaging with social media than without despite the fact most participants rate overall happiness as lower than prior to the pandemic.
- After compiling data from the 2020 Qualtrics surveys, an average happiness score for each participant was used to calculate a mean happiness score ($M= 7.54, n=43$). The number of social media platforms used as reported by each participant was recorded and averaged ($M= 7.767, n=43$). A weak positive correlation ($r=.213$) correlation was found between average happiness score and number of social media platforms used (Figure 1).

*It is important to note that data collected here conveys preliminary results. Due to the ongoing nature of data analysis, no concrete conclusions can be drawn at this time.

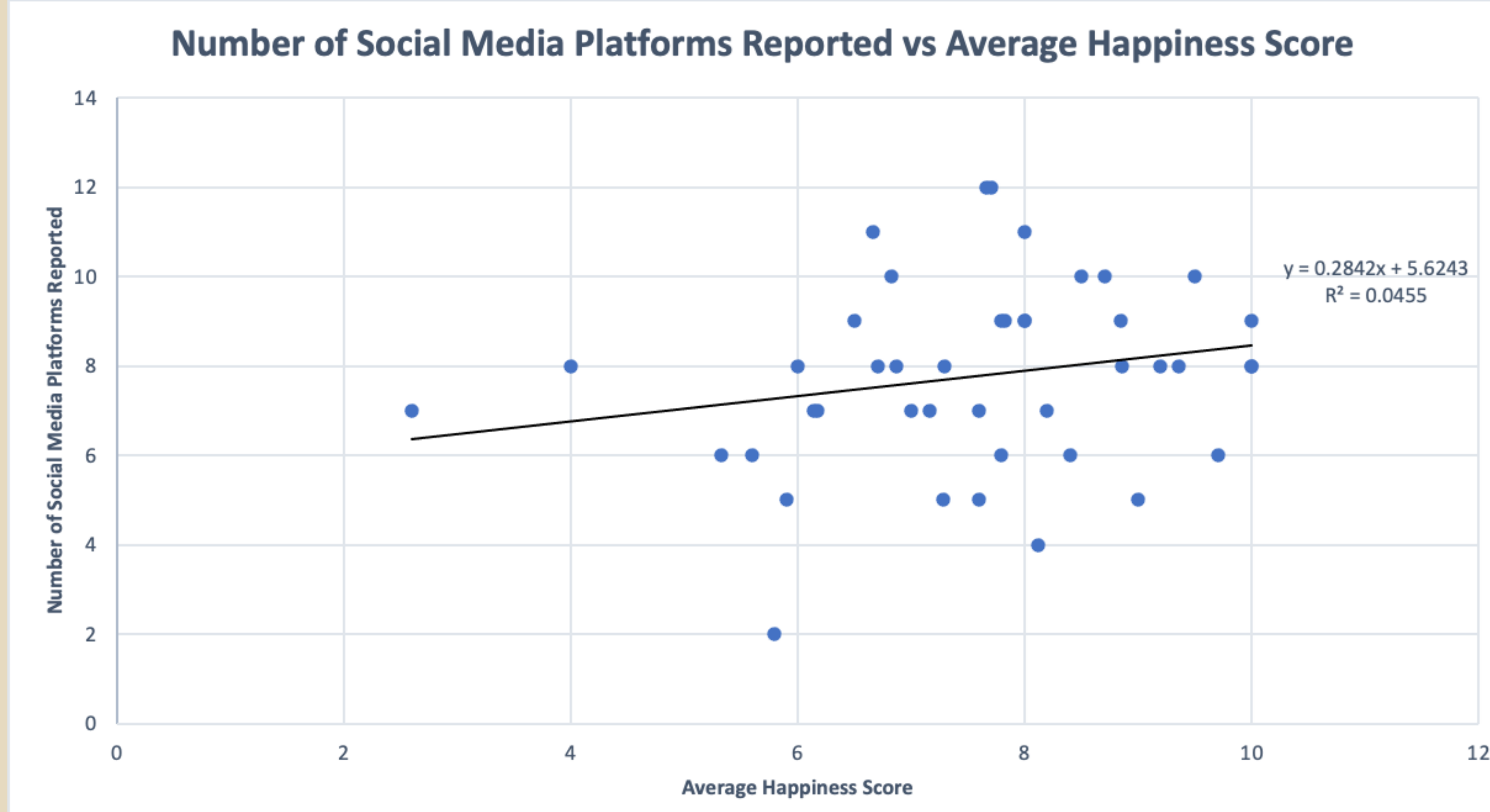


Figure 1: This is a scatterplot displaying the relationship between average happiness score and number of social media platforms used. There is a weak positive correlation shown by the line of best fit and the spread of data points around this line.

Conclusions

Teenagers are finding social media to be ever more important in staying connected when separated due to the pandemic. The world has become entrenched rather quickly in a new norm dependent on access to technology, some of these new normalcies will be adopted by society after the pandemic subsides. This research will lead us to understand how social media plays a role in that future, and will be used to develop better systems and policies for our youth to make connections in that new world. Most participants find social media to be a relation tool but can experience increased stress and screen fatigue when engaging in social media for extended periods each day. Our correlation coefficient ($r=0.213$) indicates a weak positive relationship between the number of social media platforms used and participant's average perceived happiness rating. While we can not definitively prove a cause and effect relationship between social media and happiness, it can be a contributing factor to increased happiness scores. Many of the teens who were interviewed for our research spoke about how COVID-19 affected their social media use, typically increasing the amount of time spent on social media. This increase could be explained by the increased need to use social media as a form of communication during quarantine. We hope to gain more data on a specific platform commonly used by participants--such as Instagram or Tiktok-- and run a correlation on how the frequency of use for the app relates to happiness score.

References

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Images



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