Effects of Age on Social Media Use and Happiness

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Abstract

During the Summer of 2020, the pandemic brought everyone's lives into a halt and impacted the way we all live our daily lives. Teenagers during that time relied on technology and social media more than ever to connect with friends and pass their time. This study consisted of 43 teens between the ages of 13-18 who were interviewed and asked to keep video diaries about their daily life and social media use. Having participants of such a wide age variety allows us to look more closely at the different social media apps and activities that the participants partake in and how that varies across age. Social media platforms are where teens are able to express themselves online to friends and strangers. However, heavy social media use as a teen can be associated with poor mental health outcomes (Woods & Scott, 2016). Looking at the information provided in the video diaries and subsequent Qualtrics forms, the participants most used social media platforms and activities performed on them become apparent, as well as what the teens rate their happiness as based on the platforms they used. Results found suggest that 16-year-olds, on average, reported a lower happiness rating compared to the other age groups. Except for the 16-year-old's, all of the other age groups' happiness ratings ranged from approximately 7 to approximately 8.4. Regarding social media use, findings showed that the majority of participants in each age group used Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Streaming Video Services daily.

Methods

The participants in this study were recruited via a survey and consisted of 43 teenagers, aged 13 through 18.

The information was gathered through video diaries, which consisted of a Qualtrics form to document their social media use, activities, and happiness level that day, along with a recording which documents what the participant did that day, how they used social media, and their happiness about their social media.

The average happiness by participants age was calculated by averaging out how the participants rated their happiness throughout the Qualtrics form. Then, the participants were split up and placed into groups by age, where the average of each age's group was then collected, as seen in Figure 4.

The Frequency of Social Media Platform Use by Age was calculated by seeing how each participant described their social media use, ranging from Daily to Rarely, The participants responses were then tallied individually and then put into the corresponding group based on age, as seen in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Acknowledgments

Results

Results found suggest that 16-year-olds, on average, reported a lower happiness rating regarding their social media use compared to the other age groups. Except for the 16-year-old's, all the other age groups' happiness ratings ranged from approximately 7 to approximately 8.4. A positive trend of happiness between 13-15-year old's, along with between 16-18-year-old's was found; however, a negative trend was found between 15-16-year-old's. Regarding social media use, findings showed that most participants in each age group used Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Streaming Video Services daily.
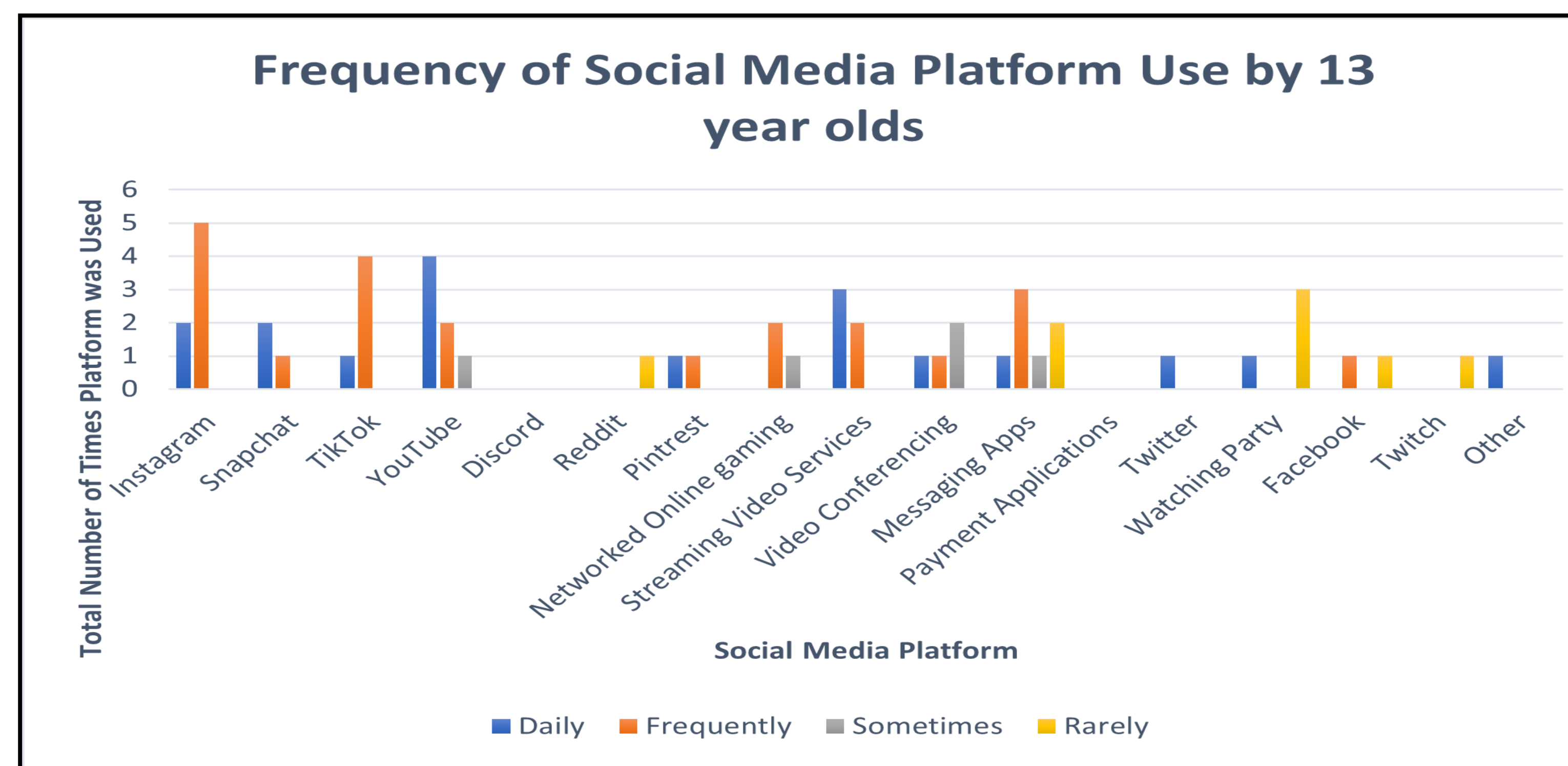
Figure 1

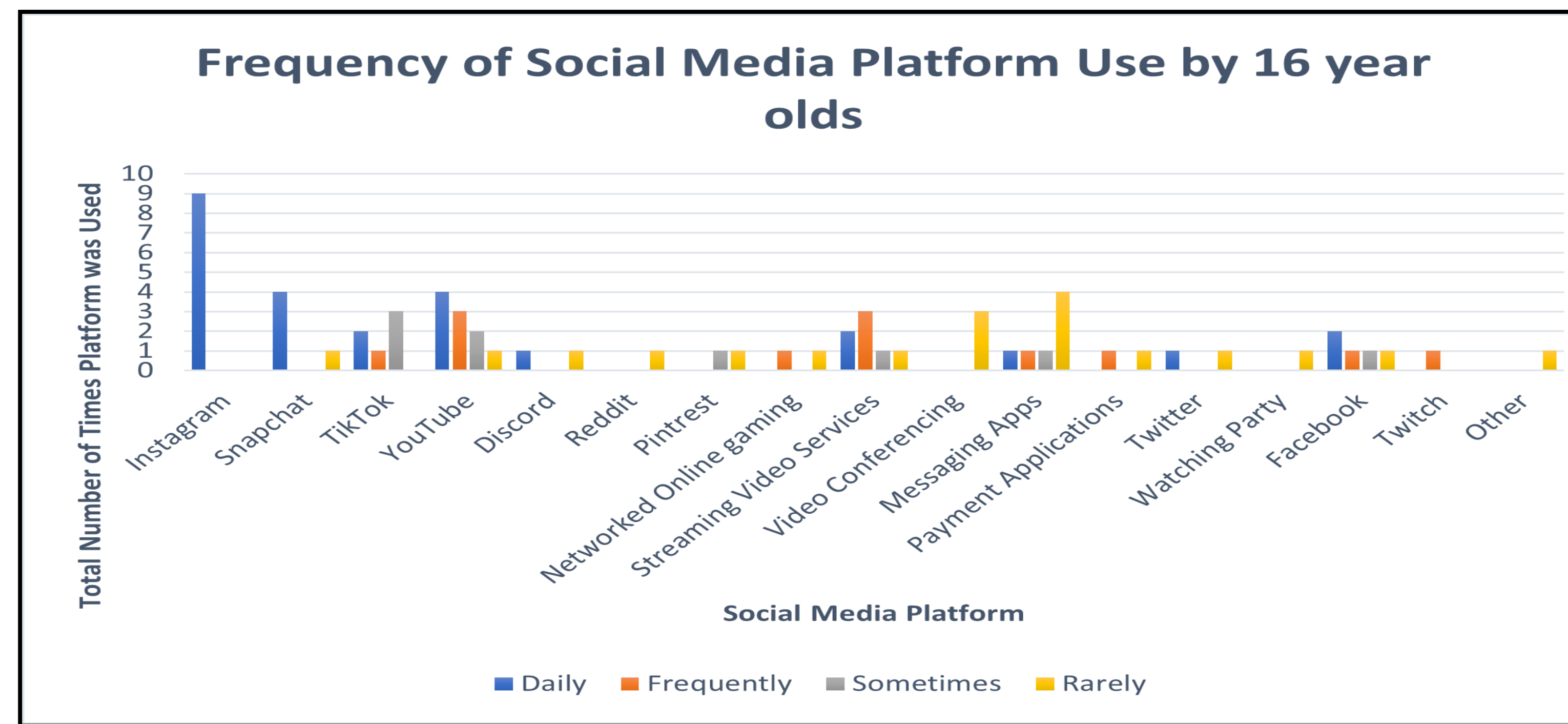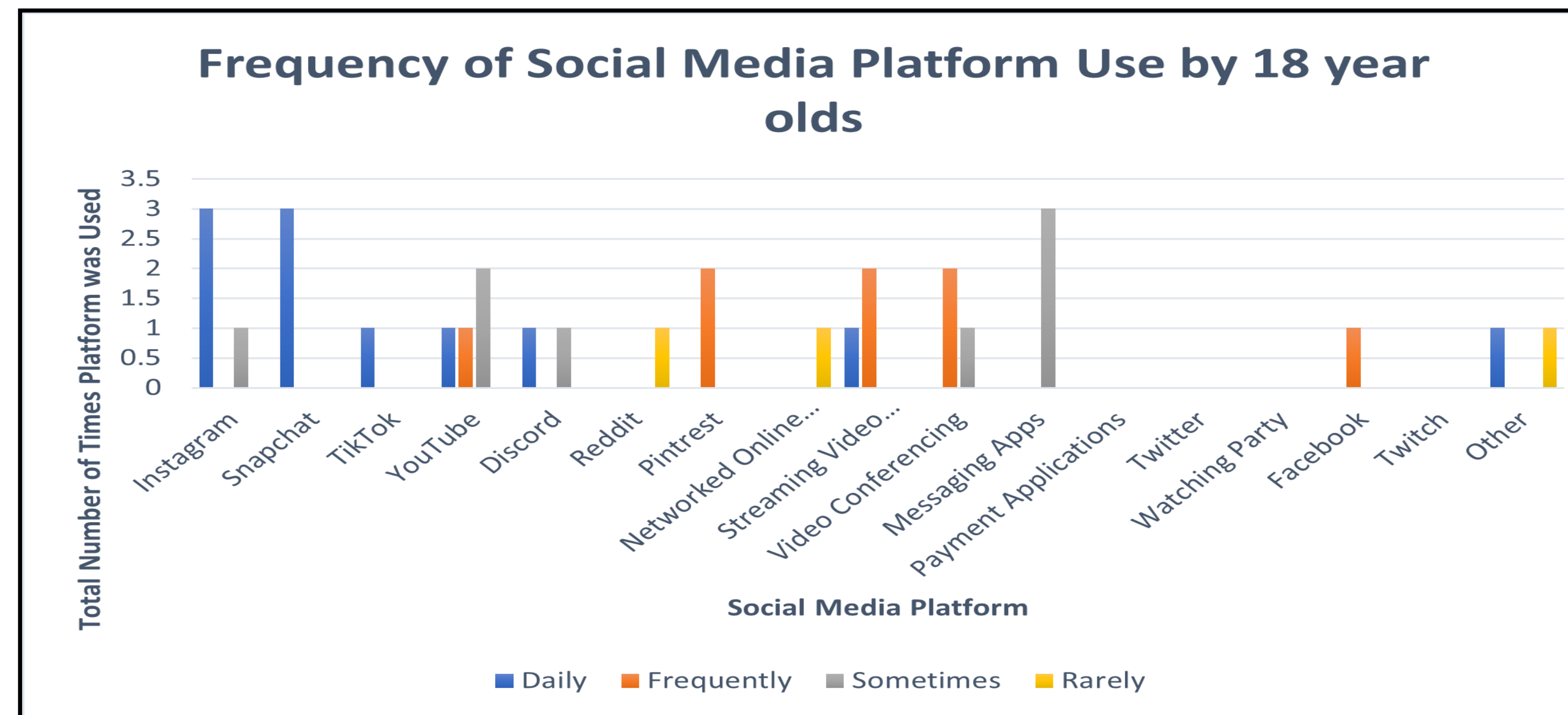Frequency of Social Media Platform Use by 13 year olds

Figure 2

Frequency of Social Media Platform Use by 16 year olds

Figure 3

Frequency of Social Media Platform Use by 18 year olds

Discussion/Conclusion

This study looked to find the affects that age has on social media use and happiness. By using Qualtrics forms the participant submitted, I was able to tally and calculate the participants average happiness and frequency of social media platform use. The results gathered concerning the participants happiness contradicts my hypothesis: As age increases, happiness will increase as well. Except for the 16-year-old's, my hypothesis seem to be proven accurate. However, the dip present in Figure 1 showcases that this is not the case. There are several factors that could possibly explain the reason for this dip: There were more 16-year old's than 15-year old's that participated in the study; not going on social media as much on one or more of the days during that time period; having a negative experience while on social media; or dealing with the stress of school and/or work.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 showcase the platforms use, ranging from daily-rarely, by the participants aged 13, 16, and 18, respectfully. Within each age group, there is a similar trend among what social media platforms were used. Daily, most 13–18-year-olds were on social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Streaming Video Services. However, they were rarely on social media platforms such as Watching Party, Facebook, Reddit, Twitter, and Messaging Apps. Another study by Anderson and Jiang found similar results regarding teens social media use: "roughly one-third say they visit Snapchat (35%) or YouTube (32%) most often, while 15% say the same of Instagram. By comparison, 10% of teens say Facebook is their most-used online platform, and even fewer cite Twitter, Reddit or Tumblr as the site they visit most often" (Anderson & Jaing, 2018).

Figure 4

Average Happiness by Participants Age
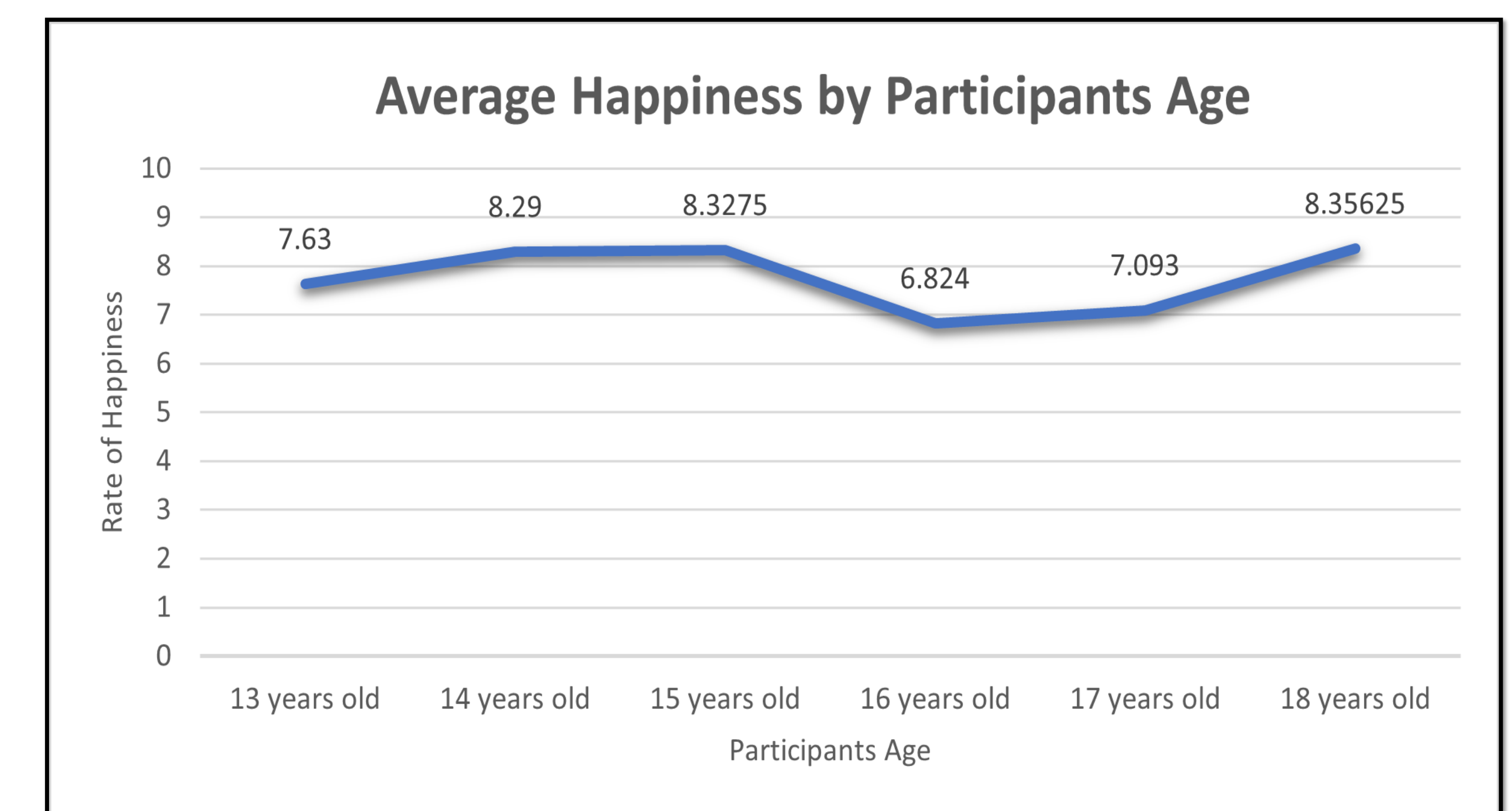
References

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