



Title: The Effect of Social Media on Children's Mental Health in Saudi Arabia

العنوان: تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على الصحة النفسية للأطفال في المملكة العربية السعودية

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Dear Dr. Mahitab,

I wanted to express my heartfelt gratitude for your guidance and support throughout my research thesis. Your insights, feedback, and mentorship have been invaluable in shaping my work. Your dedication to my academic growth has made a thoughtful impact on my journey. Thank you for your unwavering support.

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Introduction:

Social media has become an essential part of our daily lives. It has transformed the way we communicate and interact with each other. However, the excessive use of social media has been linked to various mental health problems, especially among children. The purpose of this thesis project is to investigate and understand the effect of social media on the mental health of children in Saudi Arabia. In recent years, social media platforms have become an essential part of children's lives, with significant consequences for their well-being. This study aims to identify the specific challenges and opportunities modeled by social media and develop strategies to promote positive mental health outcomes among Saudi Arabian children.

Background:

Saudi Arabia has one of the highest rates of social media usage in the world. According to a survey conducted by Hootsuite¹, 75% of the population uses social media. This high usage rate is not limited to adults but also includes children. A study conducted by Alsubaie et al.¹ found that 97% of university students in Saudi Arabia use social media.

Previous Studies:

1. **Al-Mohaimed, A. A., & Siddiqui, A. F. (2017). Association of problematic smartphone use with poor sleep quality, depression, and anxiety: A cross-sectional study among medical students in Saudi Arabia.** In this cross-sectional study, the authors investigate the association between problematic smartphone use and various mental health outcomes, including poor sleep quality, depression, and anxiety, among medical students in Saudi Arabia. The study findings demonstrate a significant link between excessive

smartphone use and adverse mental health effects, highlighting the importance of addressing smartphone-related behaviors to improve the mental well-being of medical students.

2. **BinDhim, N. F., Althumiri, N. A., & Basyouni, M. H. (2018). Internet addiction in students: Prevalence and risk factors.** This study investigates the prevalence of internet addiction among students in Saudi Arabia, including the associated risk factors. The study findings reveal a concerning prevalence of internet addiction among students, with certain risk factors such as excessive social media use, stress, and academic pressures contributing to the problem. The study underscores the need for proactive measures to address internet addiction and its potential impact on students' mental health.
3. **Al-Darmaki, F. R. (2018). Social media addiction and its impact on academic performance and mental health of students in Saudi Arabia.** This study examines the prevalence of social media addiction among students in Saudi Arabia and investigates its impact on academic performance and mental health. The study suggests that addressing social media addiction may be crucial in promoting academic success and well-being among students in Saudi Arabia.
4. **Al-Shaer, A. A., & Alshuraym, H. S. (2020). Investigating the relationship between social media use and self-esteem among children in Saudi Arabia.** This research study explores the link between social media use and self-esteem among children in Saudi Arabia. The study's findings suggest that

excessive social media use may be associated with lower self-esteem levels among children in the Saudi Arabian context. Understanding this relationship could help educators, parents, and policymakers in designing interventions and promoting healthier social media habits for children.

Problem Statement:

The increasing prevalence of social media use among children in Saudi Arabia has raised concerns regarding its potential impact on their mental health. As social media platforms become integral parts of daily life for many Saudi children, it is crucial to investigate the potential effects on their well-being. This study aims to examine the relationship between social media usage and children's mental health in Saudi Arabia, with a specific focus on identifying potential negative consequences and understanding the underlying factors contributing to these effects. By addressing this problem, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into the potential risks and challenges associated with social media use among children in Saudi Arabia, ultimately informing strategies for promoting healthy digital habits and safeguarding their mental well-being.

Research Questions:

1. What is the relationship between social media usage and mental health problems among children in Saudi Arabia?
2. What are the most common mental health problems associated with social media usage among children in Saudi Arabia?
3. What are the factors that contribute to excessive social media usage among children in Saudi Arabia?
4. What are the best practices for parents and educators to help children use social media in a healthy way?
5. How does the duration and frequency of social media usage impact the mental well-being of children in Saudi Arabia?
6. What are the coping strategies employed by children in Saudi Arabia to deal with negative experiences on social media platforms?
7. What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of social media use among children in Saudi Arabia as reported by the children themselves?

Objectives:

1. To examine the patterns of social media usage among children in Saudi Arabia.
2. To examine the relationship between social media usage and mental health issues, such as depression and self-esteem.
3. To identify the factors that influence the impact of social media on children's mental health.

4. To explore the role of parental involvement and digital knowledge in justifying the negative effects of social media and what are the best practices for parents and educators to help children use social media in a healthy way.
5. To investigate the prevalence of cyberbullying and online harassment among children in Saudi Arabia and its association with social media use.
6. To assess the relationship between the duration of daily social media usage and its effect on sleep patterns and overall well-being in children.
7. To compare the differences in social media usage and its effects on mental health between different age groups of children in Saudi Arabia.
8. To develop recommendations and strategies for promoting positive mental health outcomes in the context of social media use among children in Saudi Arabia.

Importance of the Study:

The study investigating the effect of social media on children's mental health in Saudi Arabia holds significant importance due to several reasons.

Firstly, with the increasing use of social media platforms among children in Saudi Arabia, there is a pressing need to understand the potential impact on their mental well-being. Saudi Arabia has one of the highest social media penetration rates globally (Al-Qahtani, Al-Mutairi, & Alenezi, 2020), making it crucial to assess the implications of this widespread digital engagement on the mental health of its young population. By examining this relationship, the study will contribute to a better understanding of the specific challenges and risks faced by Saudi children in the digital age.

Secondly, while existing research on social media's impact on mental health is abundant, most studies have been conducted in Western countries. Given the

cultural, societal, and religious differences in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to investigate the unique context of this country and its potential influence on the relationship between social media use and children's mental health (Al-Deen, Hendricks, & Huang, 2019). This study will fill the gap in the literature by providing insights specific to Saudi Arabian children, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Thirdly, the study will contribute to the field of research by identifying the potential negative consequences of social media use on children's mental health in Saudi Arabia. It will explore factors such as cyberbullying (Almutairi, 2018), excessive screen time (Al-Hazaa et al., 2019), social comparison (Alshahrani, Al-Khlaiwi, & Khan, 2021), and the impact of idealized portrayals on self-esteem and body image (Al-Rezq et al., 2020). The findings will shed light on the underlying mechanisms that contribute to mental health challenges, enabling researchers and policymakers to develop targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media.

Ultimately, this study's significance lies in its potential to inform evidence-based interventions and policies that promote healthy social media habits among children in Saudi Arabia. By generating empirical data and highlighting the specific challenges faced by Saudi Arabian children, the study aims to safeguard their mental well-being and contribute to the broader discourse on children's mental health in the digital era.

Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework guiding this study is an integration of three prominent theories: the Social Cognitive Theory, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, and the Social Comparison Theory. These theories collectively provide a

comprehensive foundation for understanding the complex relationship between social media use and children's mental health within the context of Saudi Arabia.

1. **Social Cognitive Theory:** This theory emphasizes the significance of observational learning, self-regulation, and self-efficacy in shaping human behavior. In the kingdom of social media, children actively observe and imitate behaviors and attitudes modeled by influencers, peers, and online communities. Additionally, their beliefs in their ability to regulate their social media use (self-efficacy) play a fundamental role in influencing their behaviors and the resulting outcomes.
2. **Uses and Gratifications Theory:** This theory suggests that individuals consciously select and engage with media to fulfill specific needs and gratifications. In the context of this study, Saudi Arabian children are driven by various satisfactions such as social interaction, information sharing, entertainment, and identity formation. Understanding these motivations is crucial in separating the dynamics between social media use and its impact on mental health.
3. **Social Comparison Theory:** This theory examines how individuals evaluate themselves through comparisons with others. In the context of social media, children are exposed to idealized representations of their peers and influencers, leading to upward social comparisons. These comparisons can significantly influence aspects like self-esteem and body image, impacting their overall mental well-being.

By combining these theoretical perspectives, this study aims to investigate deeper into the complex interplay between social media usage and children's mental health in Saudi Arabia. The Social Cognitive Theory underscores the role of

observed behaviors and beliefs in influencing actions. The Uses and Gratifications Theory sheds light on the motivations driving children's engagement with social media. The Social Comparison Theory clarifies the influence of comparisons on their self-perception and mental well-being. This integrated framework enables a more comprehensive analysis of the mechanisms and factors at play, ultimately guiding the development of strategies to promote positive mental health outcomes among Saudi Arabian children in the digital age.

Methodology:

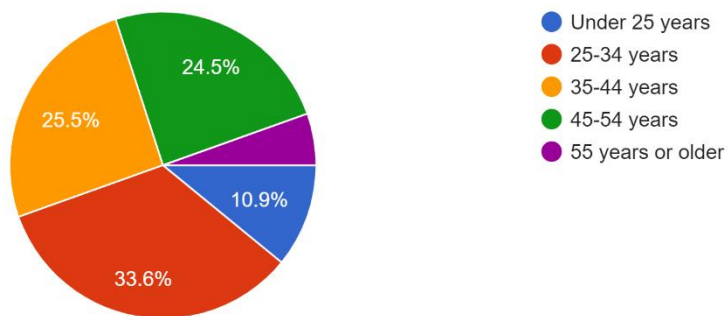
Literature review: Conduct a full review of existing research on the relationship between social media and children's mental health within the Saudi Arabian context. This research will also use a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The quantitative data will be collected through an online survey that will be distributed to parents and educators across Saudi Arabia. The survey will include questions about Saudi Arabian children's social media usage, mental health problems, and factors that contribute to excessive usage. The qualitative data will be collected through focus group discussions with Saudi Arabian children aged 10-18 who use social media regularly.

The study will focus on a sample of children in Saudi Arabia who actively use social media platforms. It may be determined that a sample size of at least 100 participants.

Results:

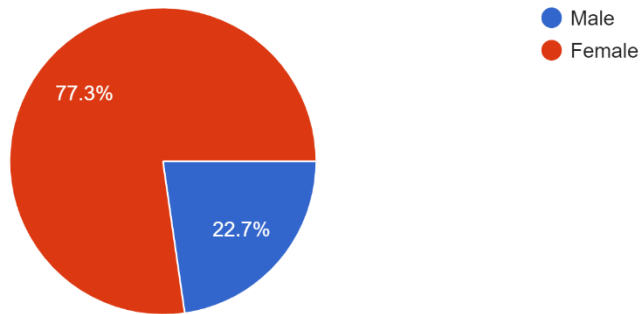
This section presents the comprehensive findings derived from the survey conducted to investigate the perceptions, behaviors, and concerns of participants regarding their children's use of social media platforms. The survey involved various aspects, including demographic information, awareness levels, observed behaviors, rules and restrictions, impact on mental health, and communication patterns. The subsequent subsections delve into the detailed analysis of each aspect, providing insights into participants' viewpoints and shedding light on the relationship between social media use and its potential effects on children's well-being. The collected data offers valuable insights into the broader context of social media's influence on young individuals and provides a foundation for understanding the dynamic between technology, parenting practices, and mental health.

Section 1: Demographic Information Age:
110 responses



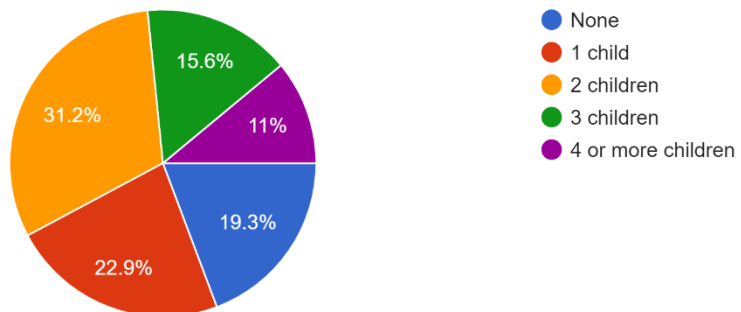
Gender:

110 responses



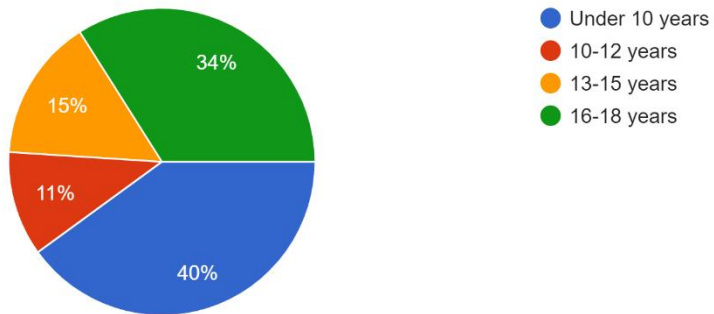
How many children do you have who use social media regularly?

109 responses



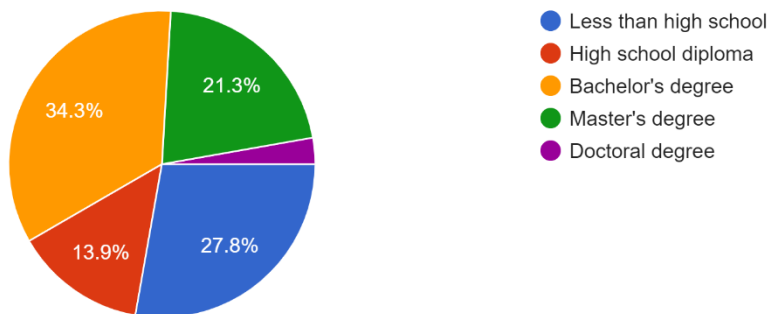
Age of the Oldest Child Using Social Media:

100 responses



Education Level:

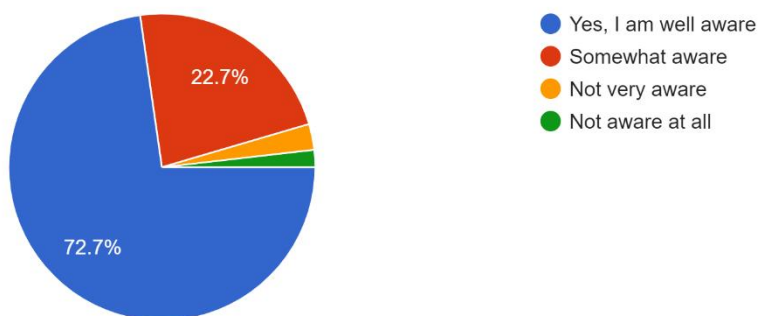
108 responses



Section 2: Awareness and Concerns

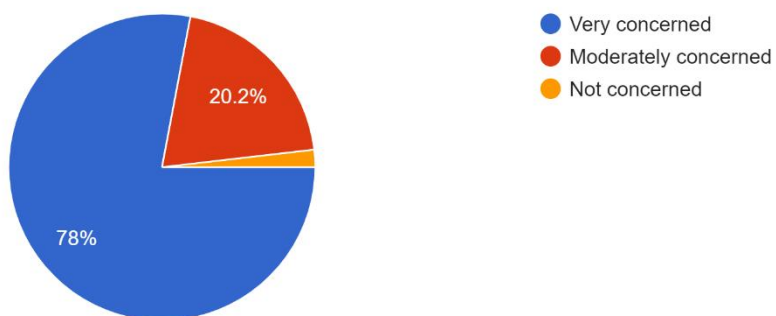
Are you aware of the potential impact of social media on children's mental health?

110 responses



Are you concerned about the effect of social media on your child's mental health?

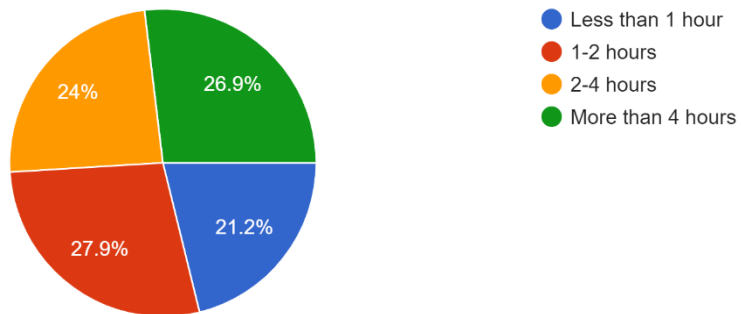
109 responses



Section 3: Observations and Rules

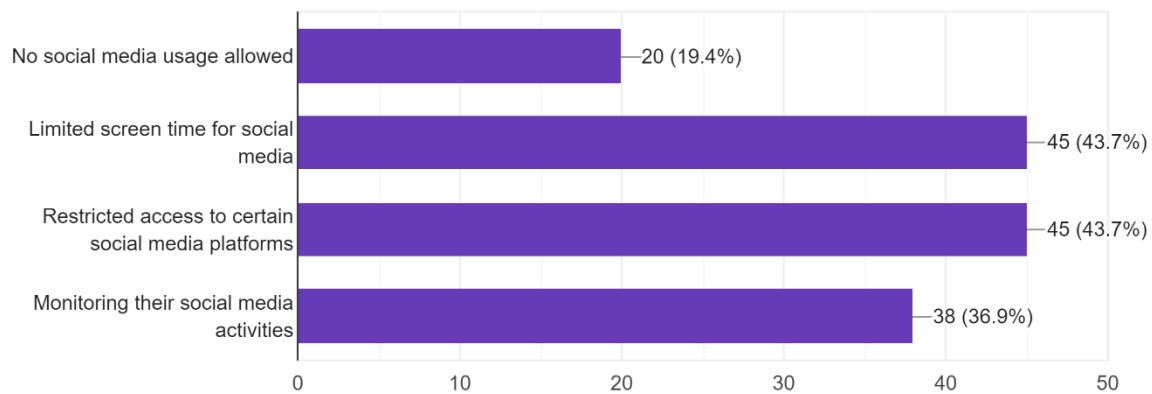
How many hours per day do you estimate your child spends on social media?

104 responses



Do you have any rules or restrictions for your child's social media usage? (Check all that apply)

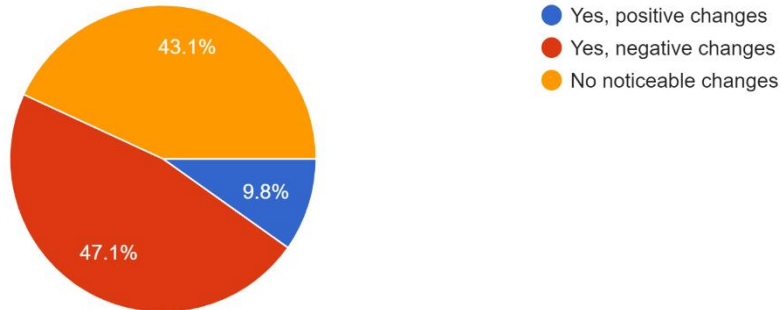
103 responses



Section 4: Impact on Mental Health

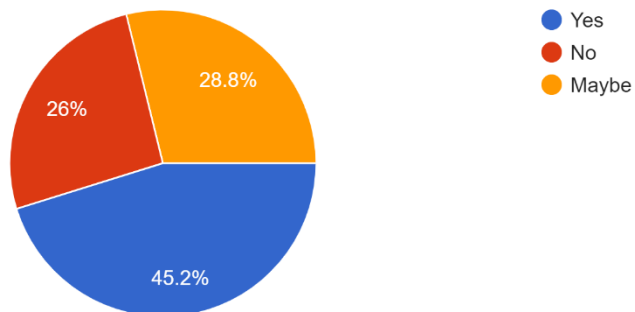
Have you noticed any changes in your child's behavior or mood after using social media?

102 responses



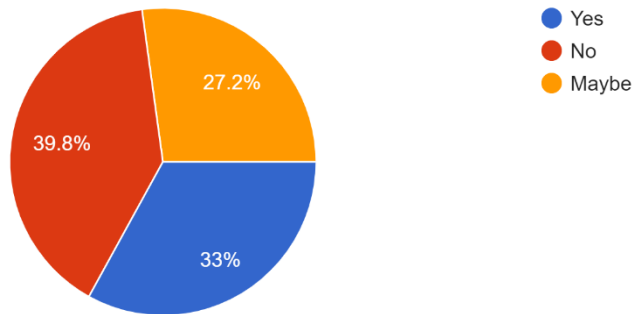
Do you believe that social media usage has affected your child's sleep patterns?

104 responses



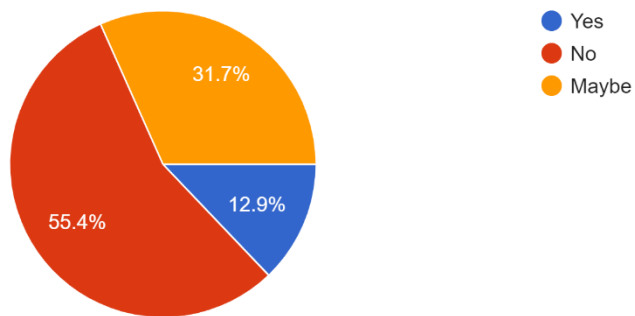
Has your child ever expressed feelings of anxiety, stress, or depression related to social media use?

103 responses



Have you noticed any signs of cyberbullying affecting your child's well-being?

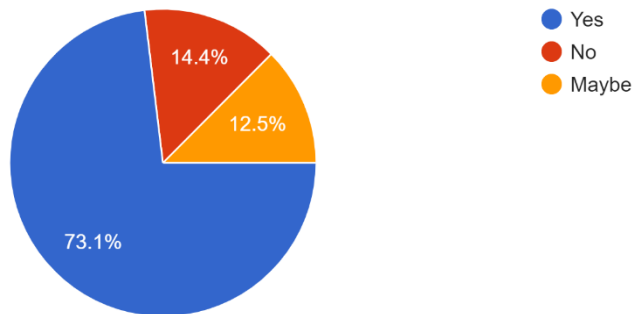
101 responses



Section 5: Communication and Support

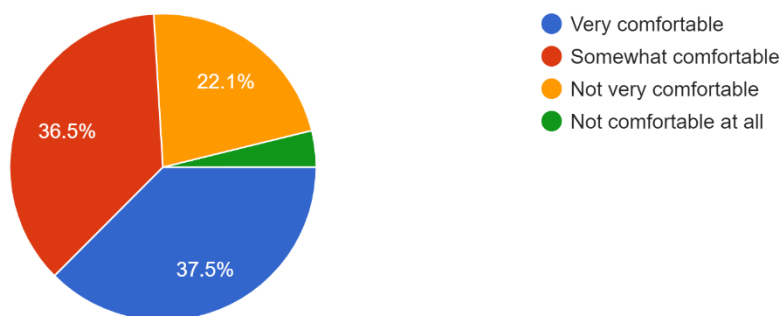
Do you actively discuss social media use and its potential effects with your child?

104 responses



If your child were experiencing negative effects from social media, how comfortable would they be discussing it with you?

104 responses



Discussion:

The analysis of the survey results offers valuable insights into the intricate relationship between children's social media usage and its potential impact on their mental health. The findings provide a comprehensive view of participants' demographics, awareness levels, concerns, observed behaviors, rules, and communication patterns. This discussion delves into the key patterns and implications revealed by the survey.

Demographic Trends and Social Media Usage

The survey's demographic information highlights an interesting distribution of participants across age groups and education levels. A significant proportion of respondents fall within the younger age brackets, underlining the relevance of the topic in today's digital age. The diverse educational backgrounds of participants also contribute to a holistic understanding of the issue. Moreover, the distribution of children's ages and social media usage patterns sheds light on the age at which children start engaging with these platforms.

Awareness and Concerns

The survey revealed a notable divide between participants' awareness levels and their concerns regarding the impact of social media on children's mental health. While a substantial majority indicated being well aware of the potential consequences, a significant portion reported being moderately or not concerned. This discrepancy raises questions about the factors that contribute to this

divergence, such as differing perceptions of the severity of the issue or varying levels of exposure to relevant information.

Observed Behaviors and Rules

The data on children's estimated time spent on social media platforms per day and the presence of rules or restrictions indicate a complex landscape of parental oversight. A substantial percentage of respondents reported implementing rules, such as limiting screen time and monitoring activities, reflecting the awareness of potential risks. This observation aligns with the prevailing discourse on the need for balanced engagement and parental guidance in the digital realm.

Impact on Mental Health

Perhaps one of the most critical aspects of the survey pertains to the impact of social media on children's mental health. A significant proportion of respondents noted observing negative changes in their children's behavior and mood after using social media, which raises concerns about the potential influence of these platforms on emotional well-being. Additionally, the perceived effect on sleep patterns and the incidence of feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression further highlight the need for a nuanced exploration of these effects.

Communication and Support

The survey results emphasize the pivotal role of communication between parents and children concerning social media usage and its potential consequences. While a considerable number of respondents indicated actively discussing these matters with their children, the comfort level for open dialogue varied. A significant percentage of respondents expressed a degree of discomfort in discussing negative effects, potentially signaling a gap in effective communication strategies or a need for increased awareness among parents about fostering open discussions.

Implications and Future Research

The insights gleaned from this survey hold relevance for various stakeholders, including parents, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the relationship between social media and children's mental health. As technology continues to evolve, future research could delve deeper into the specifics of certain age groups, specific social media platforms, and cultural influences, providing a more nuanced understanding of the factors at play.

1. **Positive Effects:** Social media can provide opportunities for children to connect with friends, share interests, and learn about new cultures and perspectives. It can also be a platform for self-expression and creativity, allowing children to showcase their talents and ideas.
2. **Negative Effects:** Excessive use of social media has been linked to a range of mental health issues in children, including anxiety, depression, loneliness, and

low self-esteem. The pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards, cyberbullying, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) can contribute to negative emotions.

3. **Body Image Concerns:** Saudi Arabia has a unique cultural context where traditional values and modern influences sometimes clash. The exposure to heavily curated images on social media can contribute to body dissatisfaction and influence children's perceptions of beauty and self-worth.
4. **Comparison and Envy:** Social media can lead to unhealthy comparisons with others, as children might see peers posting their best moments and achievements. This can result in feelings of inadequacy and jealousy.
5. **Addiction and Sleep Disruption:** Excessive screen time, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to fatigue and mood disturbances among children.

Best Practices for Parents and Educators:

1. **Open Communication:** Encourage open and non-judgmental conversations about social media with children. Create an environment where they feel comfortable discussing their online experiences and any challenges they may be facing.
2. **Digital Literacy Education:** Teach children critical thinking skills to assess the credibility of information and media they encounter online. This includes understanding the concept of filters and the difference between real life and online personas.
3. **Setting Boundaries:** Collaboratively establish rules and time limits for social media usage. Encourage children to balance online activities with other hobbies, physical activities, and face-to-face interactions.

4. **Role Modeling:** Parents and educators should lead by example by demonstrating healthy social media behaviors. Show children the importance of taking breaks from screens, engaging in real-world interactions, and valuing their own self-worth beyond online validation.
5. **Promote Self-Esteem:** Help children develop a strong sense of self-esteem by focusing on their strengths and unique qualities. Encourage them to pursue activities that promote a positive self-image.
6. **Monitoring and Privacy:** While respecting children's privacy, it's important to monitor their online activities to ensure they are engaging in safe and appropriate interactions. Familiarize yourself with the privacy settings of various platforms and guide children on protecting their personal information.
7. **Digital Detox:** Encourage regular breaks from social media. Engage in family activities that don't involve screens to promote bonding and reduce dependency on online platforms.
8. **Seek Professional Help:** If you notice significant changes in a child's behavior, mood, or mental well-being, consider seeking the assistance of a mental health professional who specializes in working with children and adolescents.

In conclusion, social media can have both positive and negative effects on children's mental health in Saudi Arabia. This survey contributes to the ongoing dialogue surrounding children's social media usage and its potential implications for mental health. The insights gathered underscore the need for a balanced approach that considers both the benefits and risks of digital engagement, while emphasizing the importance of effective communication and parental guidance in navigating this increasingly digital landscape.

By adopting best practices for parents and educators, it's possible to guide children in using social media in a healthy and responsible manner, while also promoting their overall well-being and mental health

Conclusion:

This research has investigated into the intricate relationship between children's social media usage and its potential effects on their mental health within the context of Saudi Arabia. Through an in-depth survey analysis, a comprehensive understanding has emerged, shedding light on the dynamics between digital engagement and psychological well-being among Saudi youth. The synthesized findings underscore the multifaceted nature of this complex issue and provide a foundation for informed discussions, interventions, and further research.

The demographic insights revealed a technologically immersed generation, where young individuals actively engage with social media platforms. The prevalence of digital adoption, particularly among the youth, emphasizes the relevance of studying the consequences of such widespread connectivity on mental health. As Saudi Arabia transitions into an increasingly digital society, the study's findings provide critical baseline information to address the evolving needs of this demographic. Awareness among parents and caregivers about the potential mental health impacts of social media usage on their children was evident. However, the variance in levels of concern points to the complexity of evaluating these effects. The evolving digital landscape presents challenges that necessitate a balanced approach: one that

acknowledges the benefits of connectivity while proactively addressing the risks to mental well-being.

The survey results further highlighted the importance of parental guidance and communication in managing potential negative outcomes. While rules and restrictions were observed, the reported negative changes in behavior and mood after social media use underscore the need for ongoing vigilance and effective communication strategies. Parents and guardians play a pivotal role in helping children navigate the digital realm while fostering open dialogues that address concerns and promote healthy online behaviors.

As Saudi Arabia continues its journey of technological transformation, these findings hold implications for policymakers, educators, mental health professionals, and families alike. The cultural nuances unique to Saudi society warrant tailored approaches to promote responsible digital engagement. Longitudinal studies and further research can unveil the evolving landscape of social media's effects on mental health and inform the development of targeted interventions.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of technology and mental health, particularly within the Saudi Arabian context. By acknowledging the complexities, embracing the benefits, and addressing the challenges, Saudi society can forge a path that leverages digital connectivity while safeguarding the mental well-being of its youngest members. Through concerted efforts, education, and open dialogue, Saudi Arabia can position itself to navigate the digital era in a way that prioritizes the holistic development and mental health of its children and youth.

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