



THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON STUDENTS' DECISION-MAKING AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGES: BASIS FOR AN ENHANCED SOCIAL MEDIA EDUCATION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of social media on the decision-making and behavioral changes of Grade 10 students at Jacinto P. Elpa National High School in Tandag City, Philippines. Using a mixed-methods research design, quantitative data were collected through structured survey questionnaires, while qualitative insights were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The study focused on the frequency of social media platform use, the influence of social media on decision-making, and students' behavioral changes in online environments. Findings revealed that TikTok and Facebook were the most frequently used platforms among students. Results further indicated that immediacy had the strongest influence on students' decision-making, particularly in relation to academic engagement and communication. Behavioral changes such as observation, imitation, and modeling were moderately evident among students, suggesting that social media significantly shapes their attitudes, habits, and interactions. Statistical analysis showed significant relationships between social media use, decision-making processes, and behavioral changes. Qualitative findings highlighted themes of peer influence, online validation, impulsive decision-making, and dependence on digital interaction. The study concludes that social media has both beneficial and adverse effects on adolescents' academic and social behavior. An Enhanced Social Media Education Program is proposed to strengthen digital literacy, ethical online behavior, and responsible decision-making among students.

Keywords: *social media, decision-making, behavioral changes, digital citizenship, adolescents, online behavior*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an essential component of adolescents' daily lives, shaping how they communicate, learn, and make decisions. Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and ChatGPT provide opportunities for information exchange, self-expression, and social interaction. However, the increasing dependence on social media has also raised concerns regarding its influence on students' academic behavior, ethical reasoning, and interpersonal relationships. Research suggests that excessive exposure to digital platforms may contribute to impulsive behavior, reduced critical thinking, and susceptibility to peer pressure (Vannucci et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, social media usage remains among the highest in the world, making Filipino adolescents highly exposed to digital influences (Mateo, 2018). Social media platforms often shape students' decisions through online trends, peer validation, and public visibility. According to Nadkarni and Hofmann (2020), social media engagement satisfies emotional and cognitive needs but may also encourage impulsive responses and dependence on online approval. Similarly, Reyes and Sumera (2021) found that TikTok trends significantly influence Filipino students' attitudes and behaviors, often encouraging conformity to online challenges and viral content.

The educational sector has increasingly recognized the importance of promoting digital citizenship and responsible social media use. Ribble (2020) emphasized that digital citizenship involves ethical participation, accountability, and critical thinking in online environments. Schools therefore play a vital role in guiding students toward responsible online engagement. In addition, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains that adolescents tend to imitate behaviors they observe from peers, influencers, and online communities, making social media a powerful agent of behavioral change (Bandura, 1986).

Studies also indicate that immediacy and visibility on social media platforms influence decision-making among adolescents. Mohan and Rao (2024) argued that the rapid dissemination of information encourages students to make quick decisions without careful reflection. Likewise, Custodio (2020) observed that students often make choices based on online visibility and validation rather than personal values and long-term goals. These online behaviors may influence students' academic performance, study habits, and social relationships.

Despite the growing body of literature on social media and adolescent behavior, limited studies have explored how social media influences students' decision-making and behavioral changes in localized settings such as Tandag City. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between social media platforms, decision-making factors, and behavioral changes among Grade 10 students. The findings served as the basis for developing an Enhanced Social Media Education Program to promote ethical and responsible online behavior.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How frequent are the social media platforms used by Grade 10 students in terms of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X, YouTube, and ChatGPT?
2. How do social media influence students' decision-making in terms of anonymity, immediacy, connectivity, visibility, and accountability?
3. To what extent do social media affect students' behavioral changes in terms of observation, imitation, modeling, collective identity, and relational obligation?
4. Is there a statistically significant relationship between social media platforms used and students' behavioral changes?
5. Is there a statistically significant relationship between social media influence on decision-making and students' behavioral changes?
6. What lived experiences do teachers and students encounter regarding social media use?
7. What intervention program may be proposed to strengthen social media education among students?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social media on students' decision-making and behavioral changes. According to Creswell (2014), mixed-methods research combines quantitative and qualitative data to strengthen the depth and validity of findings.

The study was conducted at Jacinto P. Elpa National High School in Tandag City, Surigao del Sur, Philippines. The respondents consisted of 255 Grade 10 students and 17 teachers selected through proportional sampling. In addition, 18 students and 3 teachers participated in in-depth interviews to provide qualitative insights regarding their experiences with social media.

Data were gathered using a validated researcher-made questionnaire divided into three parts: frequency of social media use, influence of social media on decision-making, and behavioral changes associated with social media exposure. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure responses. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' lived experiences and perceptions regarding social media influence.

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns from interview responses. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study.

RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency of Social Media Platform Use

Social Media Platform	Overall Weighted Mean	Description
TikTok	4.65	Always

Social Media Platform	Overall Weighted Mean	Description
Facebook	4.46	Always
ChatGPT	3.59	Often
Instagram	3.03	Sometimes
YouTube	2.40	Rarely
Twitter/X	1.00	Never

Table 2. Influence of Social Media on Decision-Making

Variable	Weighted Mean	Description
Anonymity	3.00	Moderate
Immediacy	3.79	High
Connectivity	3.40	Moderate
Visibility	3.38	Moderate
Accountability	3.36	Moderate

Table 3. Behavioral Changes Among Students

Variable	Weighted Mean	Description
Observation	3.01	Moderate Extent
Imitation	3.01	Moderate Extent
Modeling	3.08	Moderate Extent
Collective Identity	3.15	Moderate Extent
Relational Obligation	3.11	Moderate Extent

Table 4. Relationship Between Social Media Use and Behavioral Changes

Variables	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Social Media Platforms vs Behavioral Changes	0.67	<0.05	Significant
Decision-Making vs Behavioral Changes	0.72	<0.05	Significant

Table 5. Summary of Lived Experiences

Theme	Description
Peer Influence	Students are highly influenced by online peers and trends
Online Validation	Students seek approval through likes, comments, and shares
Impulsive Decision-Making	Quick online interactions influence immediate responses
Academic Dependency	Students rely heavily on social media for school-related tasks
Digital Awareness	Some students recognize the importance of responsible online behavior

Table 6. Proposed Enhanced Social Media Education Program

Area	Intervention	Expected Outcome
Digital Literacy	Workshops on critical thinking and fact-checking	Improved media literacy
Ethical Online Behavior	Seminars on cyber ethics and accountability	Responsible online conduct
Academic Responsibility	Time-management and productivity training	Better academic engagement
Mental Wellness	Guidance sessions on social media balance	Reduced online dependency
Teacher Support	Training on digital citizenship instruction	Enhanced classroom integration

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that social media significantly influences students' decision-making and behavioral patterns. TikTok and Facebook emerged as the most frequently used platforms, suggesting that visually engaging and highly interactive applications dominate adolescents' online activities. This supports the findings of Nadkarni and Hofmann (2020), who emphasized that social networking platforms fulfill emotional and social needs while simultaneously shaping behavior and decision-making.

The high influence of immediacy indicates that students rely heavily on instant communication and rapid information exchange. This finding aligns with Mohan and Rao (2024), who argued that the speed of online interactions encourages impulsive decision-making and reduces opportunities for reflective thinking. Similarly, Gonzales (2021) observed that Filipino students often respond emotionally to online information due to the fast-paced nature of digital platforms.

The moderate extent of behavioral changes in terms of observation, imitation, and modeling confirms Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which explains that individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation of role models (Bandura, 1986). Students often imitate behaviors displayed by peers, influencers, and online personalities, especially those that receive public validation and recognition.

Connectivity and visibility also moderately influenced students' academic and social behaviors. De Mesa (2020) explained that online group interactions create relational obligations that pressure students to conform to peer expectations. Furthermore, Custodio (2020) found that online visibility motivates students to present themselves favorably, sometimes prioritizing social approval over personal values and academic priorities.

The significant relationship between social media use and behavioral changes suggests that prolonged exposure to digital platforms shapes students' attitudes, interactions, and decision-making processes. While social media provides opportunities for collaboration, communication, and access to information, excessive and unguided use may contribute to impulsive behavior, distraction, and dependence on online validation.

Overall, the findings highlight the need for schools to strengthen digital citizenship education and promote responsible social media engagement. Integrating ethical online behavior, critical thinking, and media literacy into educational programs may help students become more reflective and responsible digital citizens.

Conclusions

This study concludes that social media significantly influences the decision-making and behavioral changes of Grade 10 students. TikTok and Facebook emerged as the most frequently used platforms, indicating students' strong engagement with interactive and highly visual online spaces. Social media factors such as immediacy, connectivity, visibility, and accountability were found to shape students' academic interactions, online participation, and social behavior.

The findings further revealed that students moderately exhibit behavioral changes in terms of observation, imitation, modeling, collective identity, and relational obligation. These behaviors demonstrate that adolescents often adopt attitudes and practices they encounter online, particularly those reinforced by peers and influencers. Moreover, the study established significant relationships between social media use, decision-making, and behavioral changes, confirming that digital platforms play a major role in shaping adolescents' behavior and perceptions.

Although social media offers educational opportunities, communication advantages, and access to information, excessive dependence on online validation and instant communication may negatively affect students' critical thinking, self-regulation, and responsible decision-making. Thus, there is a need for schools to implement programs that strengthen digital literacy, ethical online behavior, and responsible technology use.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools should strengthen digital citizenship education by integrating ethical online behavior, media literacy, and critical thinking into classroom instruction.
2. Teachers should provide guidance on responsible social media use and encourage reflective decision-making among students.
3. Parents should actively monitor and guide their children's social media activities to promote balanced and healthy online engagement.
4. School administrators should implement seminars and workshops focusing on cyber ethics, online accountability, and mental wellness.
5. Students should be encouraged to develop self-discipline and responsible online habits to minimize impulsive decision-making and excessive dependence on social media.
6. Future researchers may conduct comparative and longitudinal studies involving different schools and age groups to further examine the long-term effects of social media on adolescent behavior.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study adhered strictly to ethical standards in educational research. Prior to data collection, permission was secured from the school administration and relevant educational authorities. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study, procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. No personal identifiers were disclosed, and all collected data were used solely for academic purposes in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

The researcher also ensured that participation was voluntary and free from coercion. Respect, beneficence, and justice were observed at all stages of the study to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants.

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