Available Online
Journal of Education and Social Studies
ISSN: 2789-8075 (Online), 2789-8067 (Print)
https://www.scienceimpactpub.com/jess

DISPARITIES IN LIFE SATISFACTION: EXAMINING SOCIAL MEDIA'S DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS ACROSS DEMOGRAPHICS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the impact of social media usage on life satisfaction. The study uses the globally representative dataset of World Values Survey which covers 66 countries. The analysis covers various subsamples to perform heterogeneity analysis, including whole, male, female, urban, and rural samples. The estimates of the ordinary least square (OLS) model suggest that social media use has a consistent and statistically significant negative association with life satisfaction across all subgroups. For the whole sample, a one-unit increase in social media use is associated with a 0.143-point decrease in life satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10, on average. This negative relationship is more pronounced for males, with a 0.208-point decrease, compared to females, who exhibit a smaller 0.0882-point reduction in life satisfaction. Urban residents also show a stronger negative impact (-0.152) compared to rural residents (-0.127), suggesting that the adverse effects of social media use on life satisfaction are more severe in urban contexts. These findings highlight variations in the strength of the relationship across gender and residency, with males and urban individuals experiencing a greater decline in life satisfaction linked to social media use compared to females and rural individuals. The findings have practical implications for developing evidence-based guidelines that encourage healthier social media habits, fostering a balance between online interactions and real-world connections.

Keywords: Social media; Life satisfaction; Subjective wellbeing; World values survey.
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https://doi.org/10.52223/jess.2024.5242
Received: March 11, 2024; Revised: June 23, 2024; Accepted: June 26, 2024

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the most popular online activity is using social media, individuals spend most of their time on social media. Social media's development has made it feasible for people to stay in touch thoroughly. Undoubtedly, social media has provided a great way to stay in touch with friends, family, and others we might not see often. Alongside the rise in social media use, there are growing concerns that users may create feelings of social anxiety, unrealistic expectations, sleep deprivation, and low self-esteem, because of social media (Kross et al., 2013). Social media is quickly changing the flow of communication and developing trends and agendas on topics that include politics and sustainability in the entertainment industry due to its flexibility, rapidity, and scope (Asur, 2010). People might offer an idealized picture of their selves on social media attractions, which may or may not be a real reflection of themselves.

With electronic gadgets becoming the primary and ultimate notice in the world of today's young; people spend almost 80% of their leisure time online on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, and WhatsApp etc (Olecká et al., 2022). This leads to maintaining relationships, more

connections to their community, provide access valuable information. Individuals have been engaging in social comparison for a very long time, even before social media. Platforms such as social media, however, offer a steady flow of information that enables users to evaluate themselves against others. Excessive expectations and harmful comparisons can result from carefully chosen and edited content, which some users claim causes stress, low self-esteem, or feelings of inadequacy (Kross et al., 2013; Shair et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2023). People frequently compare their social media profiles to those of others, which creates high standards and ineffective emotions.

It has been suggested that using social media lowers a sense of fulfillment, numerous articles about the detrimental effects of social media on well-being have been covered by wide media sources. Reduced life satisfaction results from sleep cycles being halted by screen time and continuous notifications. According to Kurnaz et al. (2020), using social media can have unfavorable effects that lower one's level of life satisfaction. Rather than the absolute amount of wealth, social comparisons in intake are determined by an individual's position in relation to others. People with higher incomes tend to have higher relative incomes, which is a sign of status in society. The study by Abdellatif (2022) suggests that Egyptian youth's frequent use of social media can lead to lower life satisfaction, as it can increase behavioral and social problems. Social comparison and envy play a mediating role in this negative impact. The study also supports the literature on the negative effects of social media on life satisfaction.

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of social media usage on life satisfaction by using the globally representative dataset. The analysis covers various subsamples to perform heterogeneity analysis, including whole, male, female, urban, and rural samples. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the interplay between social media use and life satisfaction, offering critical insights into how digital engagement influences individuals' well-being. The findings have practical implications for developing evidence-based guidelines that encourage healthier social media habits, fostering a balance between online interactions and real-world connections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to certain research, using social media might have negative consequences like low self-esteem, sadness, and a reduction in life satisfaction. Brooks (2015) investigates how social media use affects satisfaction and efficacy. Using a direct empirical methodology, the study concludes that there are no long-term advantages to using social media. Examining possible outcomes, the study looks at how students use social media in the classroom. The findings indicate that increased social media use has negatively connected with contentment and negatively correlated with task performance. It also has a favorable connection with techno-stress. The effect of internet and social media use on the wellbeing of German teenagers has been investigated in the study by Schemer et al. (2021). The study discovered no discernible relationship between the frequency of internet and social media use and subjective well-being. A TV watching variable has also been found to have an inverse correlation with life satisfaction, albeit a weak one.

Social media use has a major impact on users' personal satisfaction, according to Bao et al. (2019). News reading, opinion leaders, and stranger content have a greater negative impact on low incomes, whereas friend updates have a greater positive impact on high earners. According to the study, reading briefly might boost happiness and lower stress levels when working or waiting. Social comparison is the main factor causing these detrimental impacts, and usage patterns and culture may also be a factor in cross-national differences. Giagkou et al. (2018), explored that Facebook passive following, social comparison, age, self-esteem, and FOMO did not significantly correlate with life satisfaction, according to the study. It implied that some SNS usage patterns, such as compulsive use, can have an impact on life happiness. Nonetheless, research discovered that life satisfaction and social comparison were positively correlated and that even after controlling for age and passive Facebook following, life satisfaction was significantly predicted by social comparison, FoMO, and self-esteem. The study by Gerson et al. (2016) emphasizes how individual

personality characteristics can impact social comparison on Facebook and the influence of social networking sites (SNS) on subjective well-being. Instead of using Facebook in ways that could be detrimental to their wellbeing, it advises users to efficiently manage their time in order to get the most out of social networking. Facebook users can maximize their utilization and general well-being using this knowledge.

According to the Abdellatif (2022) study, regular social media use among Egyptian young may result in decreased life satisfaction since it fosters social comparison and jealousy. While demographic characteristics like age and sex have little bearing, self-esteem can lessen this detrimental effect. There is also little impact from other factors like platform type and monthly revenue. The results are consistent with earlier research that suggests frequent usage of social media may lead to behavioral and social issues. Furthermore, Sim and Prihadi (2020) study investigates the relationship between life satisfaction and social media comparisons. It investigates the idea that the relationship between life satisfaction and social comparison has mediated by mattering and state self-esteem. The findings indicated that whereas state self-esteem completely mediated the effect of mattering, social comparison made a considerable contribution to life satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of the study is to estimate the impact of social media usage on the life satisfaction and financial satisfaction of individuals. For empirical analysis, this study applied a simple OLS method as directed by (Bruni & Stanca, 2006; Bruni & Stanca, 2008; Lohmann, 2015; Stutzer, 2004; Schalembier et al., 2020). This simple OLS estimation technique is used to evaluate the impact of social media usage and other covariates on subjective well-being (SWB). The SWB of individuals which is an indicator of life satisfaction and financial satisfaction can be written as a function:

$$LS_i = f(SM_i, X_i) \quad (1)$$

Whereas LS is life satisfaction, FS represents financial satisfaction. SM is the social media usage and X is the vector of covariate that affects the life satisfaction and financial satisfaction. Following Bruni and Stanca (2006), the econometric model used to measure SWB for this study is:

$$LS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 social\ media_i + \beta_2 Male_i + \beta_3 Age_i + \beta_4 Urban_i + \beta_5 Married_i + \beta_6 Education_i + \beta_7 Income_i + \beta_8 Unemployed_i + \beta_9 Health_i + \beta_{10} Family_i + \beta_{11} Friend_i + \beta_{12} Leisure_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

In the above subjective well-being equations, life satisfaction and financial satisfaction is dependent variable. While key variable is social media usage. The other covariates are demographics, and socioeconomic variables. The definition of the variables used in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Definition of variables.

Variables	Definition
Dependent variable:	
Life satisfaction	An ordinal variable rages on a ladder of 1 to 10, where 1 indicates not at all satisfied with life and 10 indicates highest level of life satisfaction.
Key variable:	
Social media	Binary variable coded 1 if individual responded the use of social media and 0 otherwise.
Covariates	
Male	Binary variable coded 1 for the male respondent and 0 otherwise.
Age	A continuous variable for the age of individual in year old.
Rural	Binary variable coded 1 for the respondent belonging to rural area and 0 otherwise.
Married	Binary variable coded 1 for the married respondent and 0 otherwise.
Education	An ordinal categorical variable which follows primary, middle, and higher education categories.

Income	An ordinal variable on a scale of 1 to 10. Where 1 is the lowest step and 10 is highest.
Unemployed	Binary variable coded 1 for the unemployed respondent and 0 otherwise.
Health	An ordinal variable on the state of health of individual which follow: 1 for very poor, 2 for poor, 3 for fair, 4 for good, 5 for very good.
Family	An ordinal variable on the importance of family in individual's life. It follows 1 for not at all important, 2 for not very important, 3 for rather important, 4 for very important.
Friend	An ordinal variable on the importance of family in individual's life. It follows 1 for not at all important, 2 for not very important, 3 for rather important, 4 for very important.
Leisure	An ordinal variable on the importance of family in individual's life. It follows 1 for not at all important, 2 for not very important, 3 for rather important, 4 for very important.

Data and Descriptive analysis

Data source

This study is based on secondary data and uses the World Value Survey wave-7. The current data available for distribution and all associated survey documents, along with the data, are available on the WVS website. The survey data is collected from an increase in the number of countries covered from 66 countries by the WVS-7, which were collected in 2022 with the socio-economic and demographic variables. The 7th wave study is also helping to track the aims and Sustainable Development Goals established by the 2015 UN Post-Agenda. For the researcher to conduct an analysis of the impact of social media usage and income aspiration on subjective well-being, the data from the 66 countries was collected by World Value Survey Wave-7, analyzed, and conducted.

Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study are presented in Table 2. In the table, life satisfaction is a dependent variable is life satisfaction, which measures the overall contentment with life on a scale from 1 to 10. Financial satisfaction: Measures satisfaction with financial status, also on a scale from 1 to 10. Social media: This appears to be a binary variable, likely indicating whether individuals use social media (1) or not (0). Life satisfaction has an average of 7.06213, suggesting a relatively high level of contentment among the respondents. Financial satisfaction has a lower average of 6.208986, indicating a slightly lesser degree of satisfaction financially compared to life in general. Social media usage has a mean of 0.6459679, suggesting that approximately 64.6% of the sample reports using social media. For Life satisfaction, the standard deviation is 2.239034, indicating how spread out the responses are around the mean (average) value. For Financial satisfaction, the standard deviation is 2.427157, slightly higher than for life satisfaction, which shows more variability in how people feel about their financial situation.

The male is a binary variable (0 or 1), about 47.3% of the sampled population are males. The age of respondents, ranged from 16 to 103 years old, with an average age of approximately 43 years. A binary variable indicates whether the respondent lives in an urban area (1) or not (0). About 67.8% of respondents are from urban areas. A binary variable indicates marital status, where '1' represents married. Approximately 63.2% of respondents are married. In the sample, 31.7% have primary education as their highest level, 34.9% have middle school education, and 33.4% have a higher level of education (beyond middle school).

The variable income is ordinal, with values from 1 to 10, where a higher number might indicate a higher income bracket. The average income category is around 4.91. Unemployed is A binary variable that represents that 7.6% of the respondents are unemployed. A categorical variable with values ranging from 1 to 5, likely indicates the perception of health status, with '1' being the poorest and '5' the best. The average is around 3.81. A high average of 3.89 indicates that family is very important to most respondents. Lower

average of 3.29 suggests a lesser, but still significant, importance. With an average of 3.22, leisure is considered important, though slightly less so than family or friends.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Observation	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Life satisfaction	96,700	7.06213	2.239034	1	10
Social media	97,220	.6459679	.4782214	0	1
Male	97,220	.4731022	.4992786	0	1
Age	96,709	43.17765	16.58287	16	103
Urban	97,183	.6781742	.467179	0	1
Married	97,220	.6321333	.4822273	0	1
Primary	96,149	.317112	.4653539	0	1
Middle	96,149	.3489896	.4766531	0	1
Higher	96,149	.3338984	.4716064	0	1
Income	94,259	4.910375	2.090321	1	10
Unemployed	97,220	.075972	.2649547	0	1
Health	96,953	3.810042	.8755166	1	5
Family	97,065	3.886859	.3650019	1	4
Friend	96,908	3.29107	.7436065	1	4
Leisure	96,685	3.215204	.7870537	1	4

Bivariate analysis

Figure 1 compares the proportions of individuals who use social media versus those who do not, across different levels of life satisfaction ranging from 1 to 10. The levels represent scores of life satisfaction, from 1 (least satisfied) to 10 (most satisfied). The y-axis measures the proportion of respondents, ranging from 0 to 0.2. This indicates the fraction of the total participants that fall into each category of social media use and non-use for each life satisfaction score. Each life satisfaction level has two bars: one blue for 'use social media' and one red for 'not use social media'. The height of each bar indicates the proportion of individuals in each category.

As life satisfaction increases (from left to right), the proportion of people who use social media consistently remains higher than those who do not across all levels, except for the highest level of life satisfaction (score of 10). The proportion of social media users tends to increase with higher levels of life satisfaction, peaking at levels 9 and 10. Interestingly, the highest life satisfaction level (10) shows a slight dip in social media usage compared to level 9, suggesting a potential plateau or slight decrease in the relationship between high life satisfaction and social media usage. Notably, the proportion of individuals not using social media is higher at the highest level of life satisfaction, depicting the role of social media in shaping the life satisfaction of individuals.

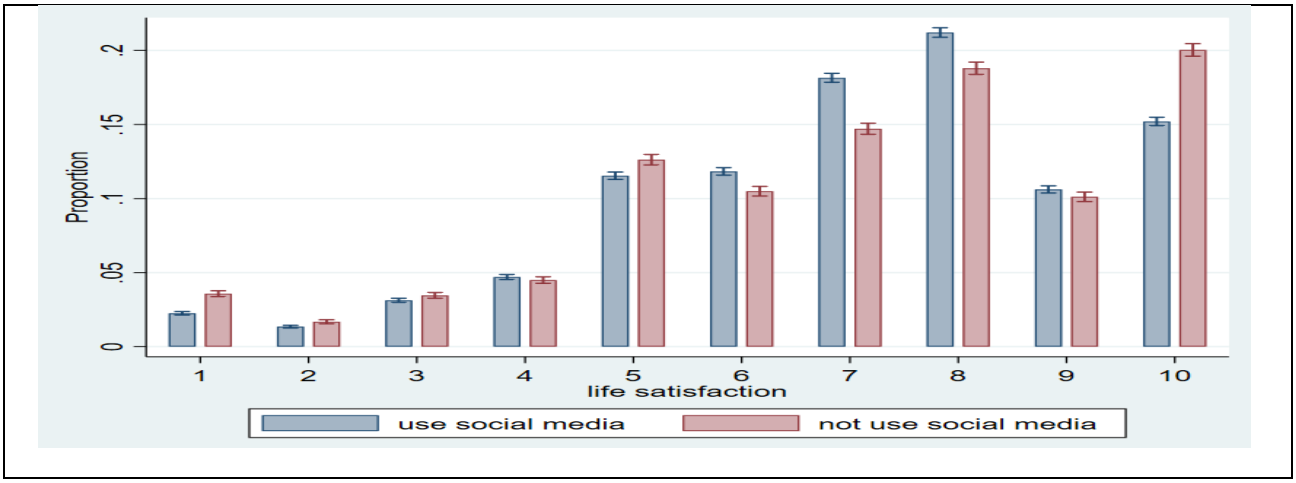

Figure 1. Life satisfaction of proportion of individuals use social media and not use social media.

Spatial distribution of life satisfaction

Figure 2 represents the spatial distribution which shows the proportion of each participating country in the World Value Survey in terms of life satisfaction. World Values Survey Wave-7 (2017-2022) results in % by country weighted. The dark purple part of the bar represents the higher life satisfaction, the mean value of more than 8 that are satisfied with individuals' life. The countries that are completely satisfied with more than 35% of their lives are Kyrgyzstan 59.1%, Puerto Rico 46.2%, Colombia 41%, Libya 38.8%, Nicaragua 38%, Mexico 37.5%, and Pakistan 37.2%. Furthermore, in some countries individuals have a small part in being completely satisfied with their individual's lives.

The life satisfaction ranges from 4.46 to 8.4 across the countries. It depicts that developed countries generally exhibit higher levels of satisfaction, both in life and financially, than developing countries. For example, countries like the USA, Canada, and Australia appear in darker shades on maps. North America and Western Europe generally exhibit high levels of both life satisfaction. Latin America shows moderate to high levels of life satisfaction. African and South Asian countries typically show lower satisfaction levels, likely reflecting economic challenges and other socio-political factors affecting quality of life and financial stability.

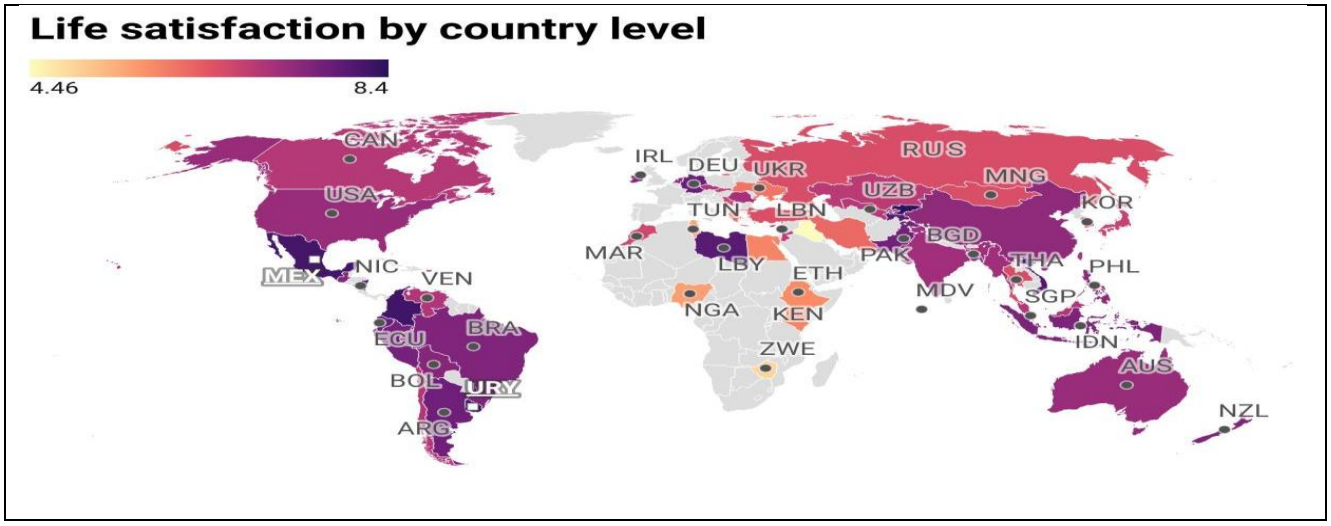

Figure 2. Spatial distribution of life satisfaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The estimates of the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model are presented in Table 3 and Figure 3. The objective of the study is to examine the impact of social media use on life satisfaction, an ordinal variable ranging from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (fully satisfied). The analysis covers various subsamples to perform heterogeneity analysis, including whole, male, female, urban, and rural samples. The regression coefficients indicate that social media use negatively impacts life satisfaction across all demographics, with the effect being particularly strong among males and urban dwellers compared to their counterparts.

For the whole sample, a unit increase in social media usage leads to a 0.143-point decrease in life satisfaction, a result that holds substantial statistical significance as highlighted by the triple asterisks (***). In the male sample, the decrease is more pronounced at 0.208 points per unit increase in social media use. Conversely, females experience a smaller decrease in life satisfaction of 0.0882 points. Urban users see a reduction of 0.152 points, while rural users experience a slightly less severe impact, with a decrease of 0.127 points.

These findings are robust across different demographics, suggesting a broadly negative influence of social media on life satisfaction. The significant differences in the magnitude of impact between genders and residence locations underscore the potential for social media to affect groups differently. The relationship

between social media use and life satisfaction is multifaceted, influenced by numerous factors that can lead to lower satisfaction in users compared to non-users. Social comparison on these platforms often triggers feelings of inadequacy, as users view idealized versions of others' lives (Cramer, 2016). The vast amount of information and constant updates can cause overwhelming stress and cognitive overload (Caliskan et al., 2024). Social interactions on these platforms tend to be superficial, lacking the depth of face-to-face communication, which can heighten feelings of loneliness (Ghaffar et al., 2024; Pedalino & Camerini, 2022).

Social media also serves as a significant distraction, consuming time that could be used for more fulfilling activities, potentially leading to regret and a sense of wasted time (Carraturo et al., 2023). Moreover, usage before bedtime can disrupt sleep patterns, adversely affecting overall well-being (Whelan et al., 2020). Privacy concerns and exposure to cyberbullying or toxicity on social media can also contribute to anxiety and decreased life satisfaction. However, the impact of social media varies significantly among individuals and is moderated by factors like self-esteem, the nature of social media engagement, and one's ability to integrate its use healthily into daily life (Chen et al., 2022).

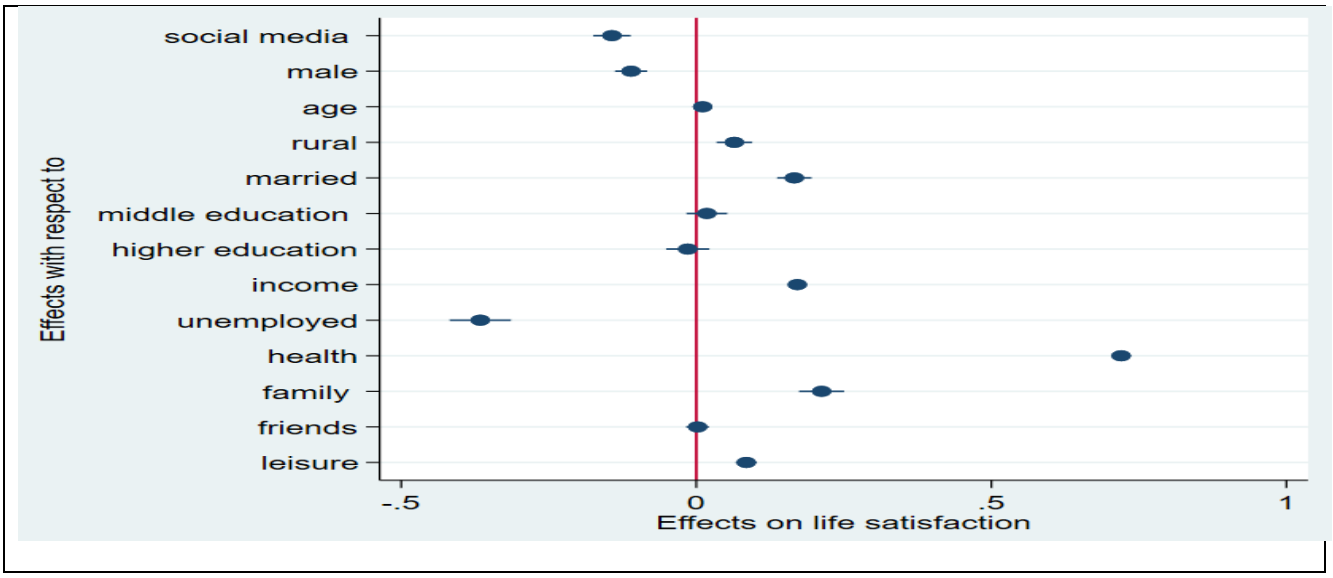

Figure 3. Coefficients plot of the whole sample.

For the factor labeled "Male," the analysis shows negative coefficients across the whole sample, and both urban and rural subsets (-0.111, -0.113, and -0.104 respectively). This suggests that males, relative to females, tend to report lower levels of life satisfaction, with precise estimations indicated by the small standard errors (0.0139, 0.0161, and 0.0266). Age, however, positively correlates with life satisfaction across all groups, with coefficients ranging from 0.00933 in rural samples to 0.0113 in urban samples, again noted with high precision due to low standard errors. This implies that life satisfaction tends to increase with age. In terms of residency, individuals living in rural areas reported higher life satisfaction than their urban counterparts, as shown by positive coefficients in all rural analyses (whole sample: 0.0645, male: 0.0620, female: 0.0685).

The marital status "Married" also exhibits a positive relationship with life satisfaction across all samples, particularly noted in the rural subgroup (0.250), suggesting that married individuals generally experience higher life satisfaction. The coefficient of middle education is insignificant in the whole sample, male sample, and female sample. Conversely, it has a small, negative, and significant impact in urban areas (-0.0392). The coefficient of higher education shows a negative impact on life satisfaction across all samples, with a more substantial and significant negative effect in urban areas (-0.0493, $p < 0.01$). This might indicate that higher expectations associated with higher education could lead to lower satisfaction levels, especially in urban settings.

Income coefficient across all samples, higher income levels are strongly associated with increased life satisfaction, with coefficients ranging from 0.165 to 0.178, all significant at the 0.1% level. The consistent positive impact of income suggests that financial well-being is a crucial contributor to life satisfaction. Negative coefficients across all groups indicate that unemployment significantly reduces life satisfaction, with the strongest impact seen in the rural sample (-0.454, $p < 0.001$). Unemployment's uniformly negative effect underscores the importance of employment for life satisfaction, particularly in rural areas where the negative impact is more pronounced.

The coefficient of health is strong and positive across all samples, ranging from 0.679 to 0.740. Health appears as a significant determinant of life satisfaction, with better health conditions strongly correlating with higher life satisfaction in every group. Also positive across all samples but varies more between groups. The coefficient of variable 'family' ranges from 0.128 in rural samples to 0.241 in urban samples. Very significant in all cases, showing that the importance of family plays an essential role in determining life satisfaction, although the magnitude of its impact differs between urban and rural settings. The variable importance of friends in life shows an insignificant relationship with life satisfaction. The variable importance of leisure in life is positive across all groups, with urban samples showing the highest impact (0.106) and rural the lowest (0.0497). It demonstrates that the importance of leisure activities contributes positively to life satisfaction across different demographics.

In a nutshell, key findings indicate that social media usage is significantly negatively associated with life satisfaction. Being male or being unemployed also negatively affects life satisfaction, albeit to a lesser extent. Conversely, positive factors increasing life satisfaction include age, rural residency, marital status, income, health, the importance of family, and leisure in life. Education and the importance of friends in life has insignificant impacts on life satisfaction. The results underscore the complex interplay of social, economic, and personal factors in determining life satisfaction.

Table 3. Social media and life satisfaction.

Variables	(1) whole sample	(2) male sample	(3) female sample	(4) urban sample	(5) rural sample
Social media	-0.143***	-0.208***	-0.0882***	-0.152***	-0.127***
	(0.0162)	(0.0238)	(0.0221)	(0.0193)	(0.0294)
Male	-0.111***			-0.113***	-0.104***
	(0.0139)			(0.0161)	(0.0266)
Age	0.0107***	0.0104***	0.0109***	0.0113***	0.00933***
	(0.000474)	(0.000714)	(0.000650)	(0.000547)	(0.000930)
Rural	0.0645***	0.0620***	0.0685***		
	(0.0154)	(0.0223)	(0.0213)		
Married	0.166***	0.170***	0.160***	0.131***	0.250***
	(0.0149)	(0.0229)	(0.0201)	(0.0170)	(0.0297)
Education: Primary (base)					
Middle	0.0179	0.00545	0.0256	-0.0392*	0.116***
	(0.0176)	(0.0256)	(0.0242)	(0.0213)	(0.0314)
Higher	-0.0146	-0.0146	-0.0201	-0.0493**	0.0341
	(0.0187)	(0.0271)	(0.0259)	(0.0218)	(0.0369)
Income	0.171***	0.178***	0.165***	0.173***	0.169***
	(0.00351)	(0.00509)	(0.00485)	(0.00417)	(0.00643)
Unemployed	-0.366***	-0.371***	-0.362***	-0.316***	-0.454***
	(0.0265)	(0.0369)	(0.0381)	(0.0320)	(0.0471)
Health	0.720***	0.718***	0.721***	0.740***	0.679***
	(0.00829)	(0.0121)	(0.0114)	(0.00974)	(0.0155)
Family	0.212***	0.239***	0.182***	0.241***	0.128***
	(0.0195)	(0.0266)	(0.0288)	(0.0217)	(0.0413)
Friend	0.00217	-0.00182	0.00468	-0.00788	0.0237

	(0.00982)	(0.0144)	(0.0134)	(0.0114)	(0.0187)
Leisure	0.0848***	0.0691***	0.0997***	0.106***	0.0497***
	(0.00914)	(0.0131)	(0.0128)	(0.0110)	(0.0164)
Constant	1.953***	1.840***	1.997***	1.761***	2.508***
	(0.0886)	(0.123)	(0.128)	(0.0999)	(0.183)
Observations	92,144	43,835	48,309	62,250	29,894
R-squared	0.126	0.128	0.125	0.139	0.107

Standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of social media usage on life satisfaction by using the globally representative dataset. The analysis covers various subsamples to perform heterogeneity analysis, including whole, male, female, urban, and rural samples. The estimates of the ordinary least square (OLS) model suggest that social media use has a consistent and statistically significant negative association with life satisfaction across all subgroups. For the whole sample, a one-unit increase in social media use is associated with a 0.143-point decrease in life satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10, on average. This negative relationship is more pronounced for males, with a 0.208-point decrease, compared to females, who exhibit a smaller 0.0882-point reduction in life satisfaction. Urban residents also show a stronger negative impact (-0.152) compared to rural residents (-0.127), suggesting that the adverse effects of social media use on life satisfaction are more severe in urban contexts. These findings highlight variations in the strength of the relationship across gender and residency, with males and urban individuals experiencing a greater decline in life satisfaction linked to social media use compared to females and rural individuals.

To address the negative impact of social media on life satisfaction, a range of policy measures can be implemented. Digital well-being campaigns and literacy programs can educate individuals on responsible social media use and promote healthier digital habits. The psychological effects of social media require fostering awareness among younger generations. Encouraging offline community engagement through local events and hobby groups can provide meaningful alternatives to online interactions. Mental health support, including subsidized counseling services, should be expanded to address social media-induced stress. Parental guidance programs can equip families with tools to monitor children's digital habits.

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