

The Effects of Subliminal Messages on Mental Health

Gia Susan John¹, Ibtisam Choudhury[#], and Jothsna Kethar[#]

¹Cumberland Valley High School, USA

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

Subliminal messages are words or images presented below the level of conscious awareness. These are short audio or video music clips that users will often listen to in order to attain a specific objective. The most popular messages include alterations in the user's physical appearance, better grades, and materialistic goods such as money. This study focuses on Subliminal Messages, which are growing in popularity among the youth. The purpose of this experiment is to identify whether these messages have an impact on users' mindsets and mental health through the use of a descriptive analysis. The study determined the underlying patterns of the effects of subliminal messages on the users' mental health, which may give evidence for a possible relationship between study of the two variables of interest. The analysis revealed a potential correlation between mental health and subliminal message use, based on patterns found from frequency and bar chart analysis. Data were gathered via anonymous surveys, which included questions about the users' demographic details and their use of subliminal. The study group included 60 respondents above the age of 18. Roughly half of the respondents reported being of Asian descent, with the second majority being Caucasian. Most respondents reported being female within the age range of 18-24. The respondents reported using subliminal messages from sometimes to very often. Most users find subliminal messages helpful and positively impactful on their mindsets, indicating a positive association between use and mental health. From the data, it can be suggested that subliminal messages tend to bring positive changes to users' mindsets. This positive change increases happiness, which correlates with improved mental health.

Subliminal Messages

Subliminal messages are a form of auditory or visual stimuli that are perceived below a person's conscious threshold. They have been used since the early 1900s, primarily in commercials; however, their use in commercials has been questioned for ethical concerns as these messages can be used to manipulate consumers into purchasing goods. Stern et al. found that subliminal messages affect the brain in various ways, including altering activity levels in the amygdala, insula, and hippocampus¹. Yet, there has been no conclusive evidence that subliminal messages alter a user's mental health. A study by Schwartz et al. tested the effects of subliminal messages on the self-esteem of varying participants. This study found a significant improvement in the self-esteem of the participants who were using subliminal stimulants; however, they could not conclude these impacts were a result of subliminal messages, as all participants, even the control group, noticed an improvement in their self-esteem. et al., the effects of subliminal messages were found to vary depending on the user's gender, making gender a considerable factor in the study ³. The researchers aim to evaluate the correlation between mental health and a user's subliminal message use in a young population.

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine and describe the effects of the use of subliminal messages on the user's mental health in younger adults. There has been a recent surge in subliminal message use, which are messages that target a person's conscious mind that they cannot perceive. These messages have been popularized throughout social media, promising users a particular result if they listen to them. This recent surge has been primarily within the younger generation. This study focused primarily on younger generations, particularly age groups of 18 and older. This study further investigates the behavior of the users in terms of their mental health under the intervention of different subliminal messages. A study from Froufe & Schwartz aims specifically towards subliminal messages that claim to improve self-esteem in order to test the effectiveness of these messages. The study finds subliminal messages to increase the participant's self-esteem but counters that the varying effects of subliminal messages do not fully suggest a conclusive effect of these messages. The effects of these messages also vary between genders, making gender an essential variable within the experiment that must be considered when collecting data. This brings up the importance of studying subliminal messages, especially with them rising in popularity among the youth. Some communities across the internet promote the use of subliminal messages to subconsciously achieve a goal without using external sources. It is essential to acknowledge the effects of subliminal messages on mental health before promoting its use.

Materials Used

The research primarily focused on subliminal messages, which require the use of data from subliminal users. Therefore, the research only required the use of a survey, which was created via Google Forms. The research also required the use of volunteers to participate in the survey. The volunteers have gathered anonymously through online subliminal communities in order to gather specific information.

Methods

The research required the use of data from subliminal users. Thus, the data was collected via anonymous surveys. The survey was created by first deciding the major factors within the experiment. In previous studies, it was found that gender was a variable that may impact the results; therefore, the survey required volunteers to state their gender in order to identify trends in data. Furthermore, the survey considered the possible effects of social/cultural differences among users. The survey required users to state their age range, race, and gender in order to collect information regarding demographics. The purpose of the questions was to identify trends within the users. The survey also asked volunteers about their subliminal message use, primarily surrounding the forms of messages they use, the frequency of their message use, and how helpful they find the messages to be. Finding these key factors aids in identifying correlations between subliminal use and demographics.



Gender of Participants

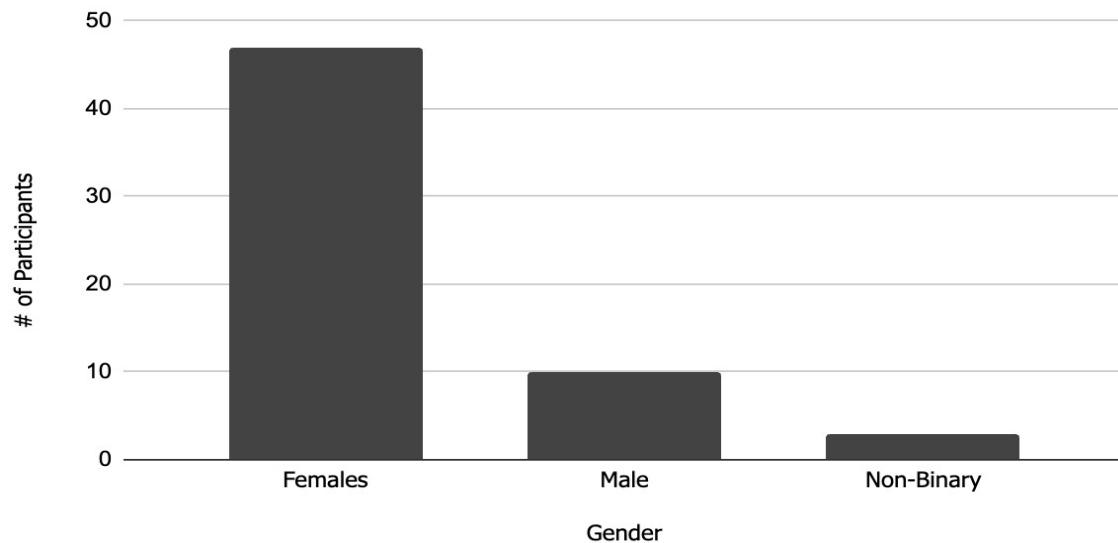


Figure 1. There are 46 of the participants identifying as females while 10 identified as male and 4 as non-binary.

Age Range of Participants

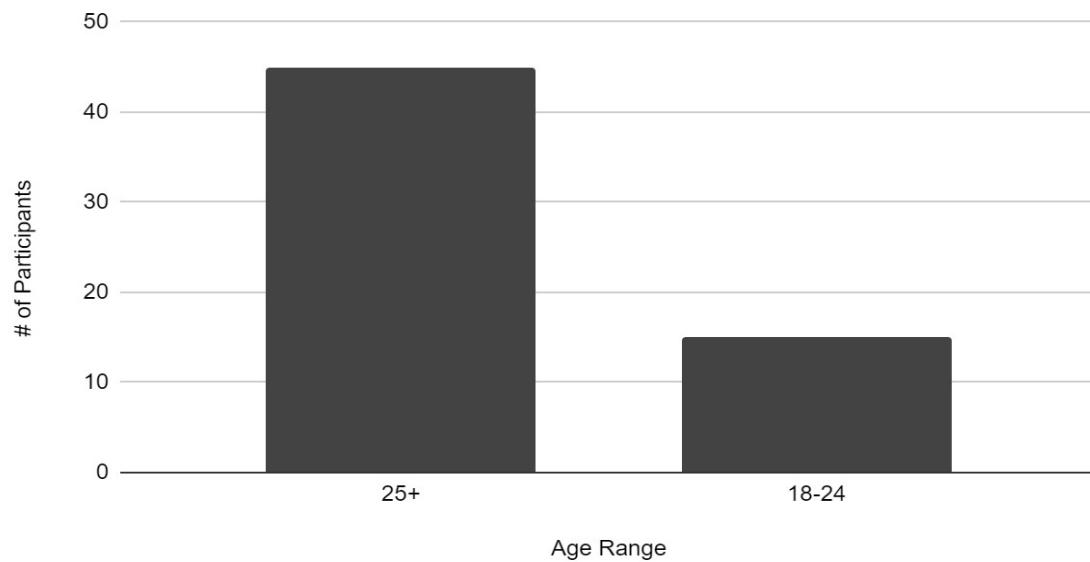


Figure 2. There are 44 of the participants were over the age of 25 while 16 were between the ages 18 to 24.



Participant's Race

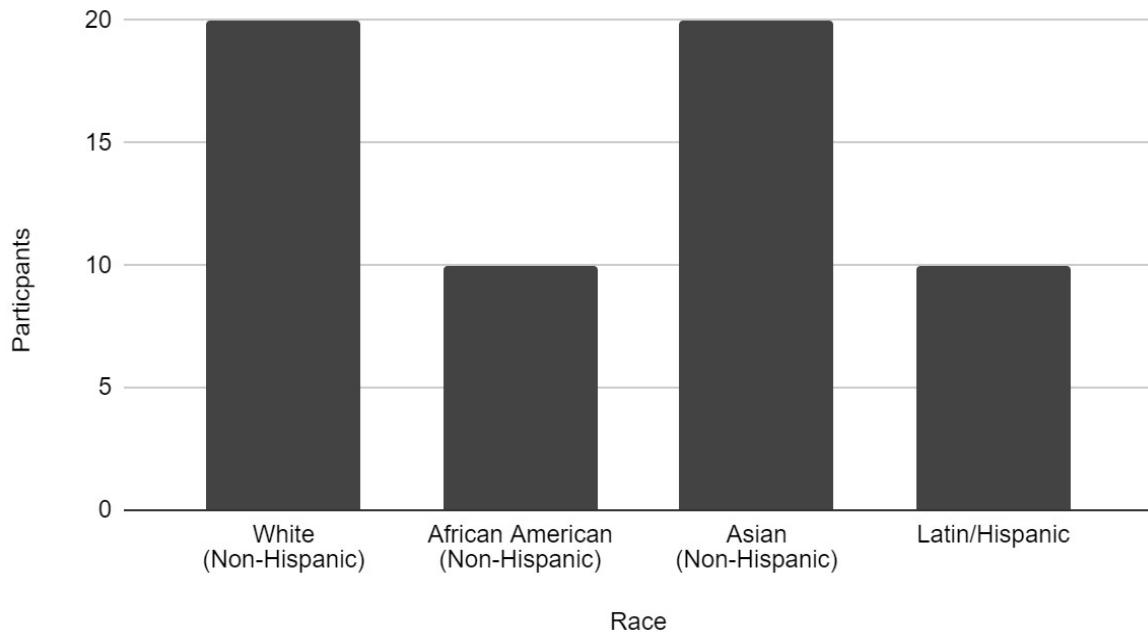


Figure 3. There are 20 participants identified as Non-Hispanic White, 20 as Asian, 10 as African American, and 10 as Hispanic.

Results and Discussion

Around 61.7% of respondents used subliminal messages frequently, while roughly 5% used messages somewhat frequently. From the data, more than 50% of the respondents reported being female, with males being the minority, suggesting that subliminal messages are more prominently used amongst females in our study group. Roughly 75% of respondents found subliminal messages to be leading to an increase in their mindset/mental health, while 9.5% found messages to have a negative impact on their mental health. However, 100% of users found subliminal messages to be very useful. The most popular subliminal messages amongst users are regarding physical appearance, with the second most common being goals/affirmations. All participants found subliminal messages to be helpful, as they reported them ranging from somewhat helpful to very helpful. However, considering the 6.7% that reported the messages having a negative effect on their mindset, there is a possibility that these messages do not provide several users with their desired outcome.



Frequency of Different Types of Subliminal Messages

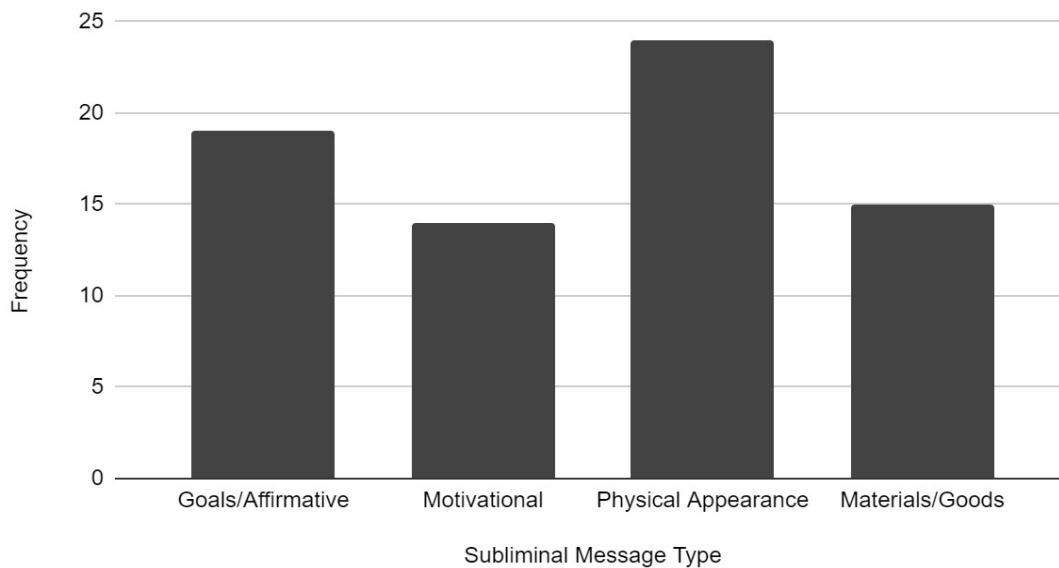


Figure 4. The predominant use for subliminal messages across users is for physical appearance.

Effect of Subliminals on Mindset

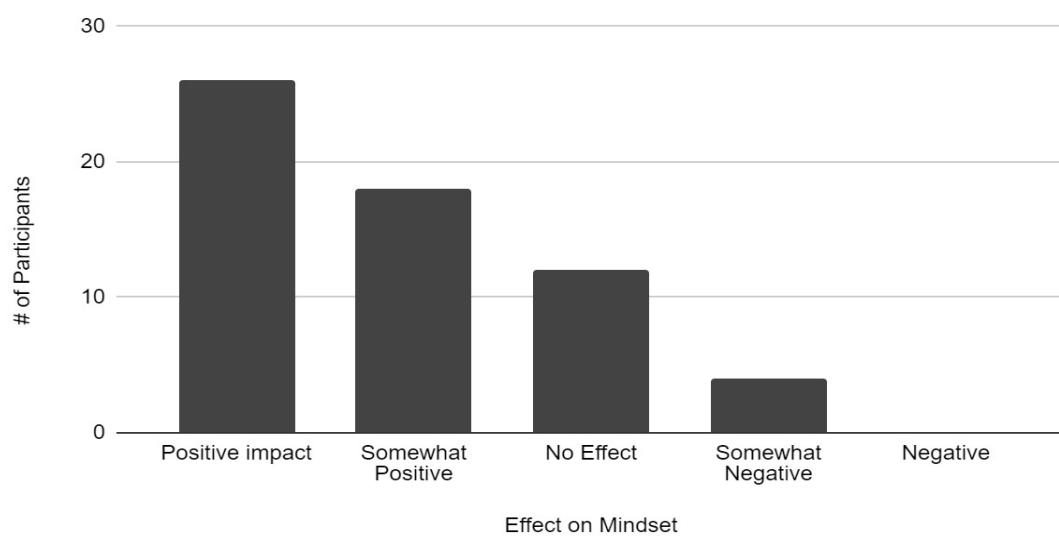


Figure 5. Majority of the participants found the subliminals to have an impact on their mindset, with many identifying a positive impact.

The data shows that roughly 75% of users found that using subliminal media had a positive impact on their mental health and mindset. Along with this, 100% of respondents found the usefulness of subliminals to range from sometimes to very often.



Frequency of Subliminal Use

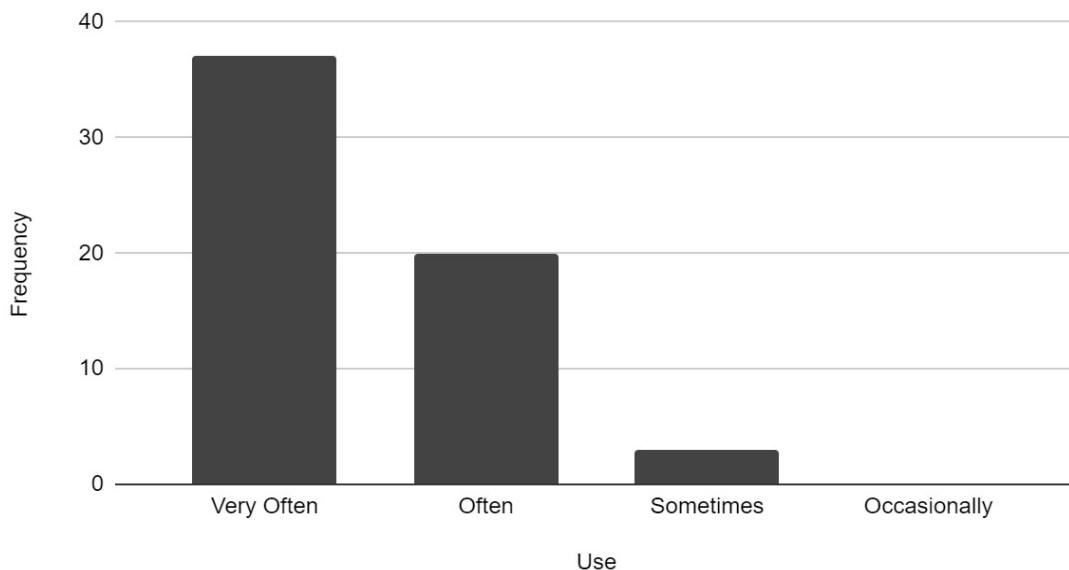


Figure 6. The graph demonstrates that many users use subliminals at varying frequencies, with many using them very often.

This suggests that subliminal messages have a positive effect on mental health, considering the possible existence of a relationship between the mental health of the users and the subliminal messages based on frequency distributions. With over 40% of users using subliminal concerning physical appearance, it can be deduced that subliminal messages regarding physical appearance are the most popular and beneficial for many users. The subliminal message use varied across users, suggesting demographics do not play a vital role in subliminal use. The popularity of messages regarding physical appearance implies possible external factors, such as beauty standards, pushing users to alter their appearance.

With the data found by Froufe and Schwartz, in which they found affirmative subliminal to improve self-esteem, it can be suggested that these subliminal messages regarding physical appearance help users feel more satisfied. This gives descriptive evidence of the benefits of subliminal messages that users find on their mental health. As users believe these messages are providing them with their desired income, they are more likely to feel happier as a result. However, there are several risks of errors in the study. The use of anonymous surveys pointed to a potential source of error in the experiment due to the probability of misinformation. The surveys clarified the aim towards adults and were administered in a forum consisting primarily of adults; however, due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it cannot be accounted that all information is accurate. Another issue that arises is that the positive or negative growth accounted for by these messages might result from an external factor the user is undergoing. The survey did not ask the respondents if they were undergoing other forms of affirmatives or self-care. Therefore, this incline in mental health can be connected to external factors. This possible error was also reported in a study by Manuel Froufe and Cecilia Schwartz, who found that external factors could have altered their findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this investigation was to determine any descriptive evidence that a correlation may exist between the subliminal messages and mental health. The study found evidence of a possible relationship, as most participants found that using these messages improved their mindset. The data shows that 75% of respondents found subliminal to be positively impactful on their mental health, while 100% of users did find subliminally helpful overall. The independent variables, such as gender and age range, affect the users' use of subliminal messages and how frequently they find these messages to impact their mindset. The results found that frequencies of users were different under interventions of subliminal messages, suggesting evidence that a correlation may exist between subliminal message use and mental health. Extensive use of social media has an impact on the emotional aspects of users, so digital platforms are being developed to capture more information on the behavioral aspects of social media users and address mental health issues using digital psychiatry. With subliminal messages rising in popularity, the study implies that subliminal messages improve users' mental health and mindset, therefore suggesting they are safe to use to attain a specific goal.

Limitation

In the future, surveys could consider using a larger controlled group to compare the results of the surveys. Having a controlled group would aid in attaining more accurate and specific results about users' mental health before and after using these messages. Another limitation is the low number of respondents/participants involved in the study. Since the study only contained roughly 60 respondents, the number is low enough to generalize subliminal messages and their impacts on a large population. Another limitation is that the study did not consider the possibility of outside factors that may skew results for users. The survey did not ask users whether they used any external forms of self-care or affirmations, suggesting that these benefits or negatives they find may not be directly caused by their use of subliminal messages. Another possible external factor is the placebo effect, in which users may believe these subliminal messages are providing them with benefits when, in reality, these messages do not have a proven effect. Lastly, this study only used descriptive analysis. It did not use any formal test to investigate the relationship, such as correlation analysis using Pearson's *r* or Spearman *rs* (for quantitative data), contingency tables, or the chi-square test of independence (for categorical data). These concerns must be addressed in future studies to find more substantial evidence of correlations and accurate data.

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