The Relation Between Crocheting, Social Media, and Social Isolation

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital age, excessive social media use among teenagers is a growing concern, particularly regarding its negative effects on social interaction and mental health. Research has shown that social media can lead to increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem, often due to negative self-comparisons and feelings of inadequacy. In response, this multidisciplinary study explores the potential of creative activity, specifically crocheting, as a coping mechanism to mitigate these negative effects. This study utilizes qualitative analysis through interviews with members of a school crochet club to answer the question of whether crocheting leads to improved mental health and reduced social media use. The study's findings suggest that crocheting can, indeed, improve mental health by reducing social media use as well as promoting relaxation, fostering a sense of accomplishment, and facilitating meaningful social connections. This study contributes to the fields of psychology, sociology, and education by highlighting the importance of creative interventions in promoting mental well-being among adolescents. These insights can inform practical recommendations for parents and educators seeking to enhance mental health and reduce the negative impact of social media on young people.

Introduction

In the modern technological era, where social media has become an integral part of our lives, there is a growing concern about its potential negative effects on teenagers' social interaction and mental health. One of the most discussed consequences is the impact on self-perception, as individuals often compare their online friendships to those in person, leading to feelings of inadequacy and loneliness.

Teenagers are daily consumers of social media platforms, spending a significant amount of time engaging with content and connecting with their peers. The overall perception of social media usage varies among different age groups, with teenagers often viewed as more active and immersed in these platforms compared to adults. This can be attributed to factors such as peer influence, the desire for social validation, and the need for self-expression. Adults are less likely be dependent on social media than teens because they did not grow up with it. While social media offers numerous benefits in terms of connectivity and information sharing, it also raises concerns about privacy, mental health, and the impact of excessive screen time on adolescents. It is essential for both teenagers and adults to be mindful of their social media usage and to maintain a healthy balance between online and offline activities.

In response to these concerns, researchers have explored alternative methods to combat the negative effects of social media consumption. Crafting, such as crocheting, has emerged as a promising avenue for promoting mental health and well-being among adolescents. Studies have shown that engaging in crafting activities can reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance overall mental health. Through conversations with members of my crochet club, I have observed firsthand the positive impacts of crafting on individuals' well-being. This led me to create a research study focusing on the relationship between social media use, mental health, and the benefits of crafting as a coping mechanism.

This qualitative analysis explores the relationship between crocheting, social media reliance, social isolation, and mental health, further hypothesizing that crocheting leads to reduced social media use, social isolation, and improved mental health. This research not only bridges the fields of psychology, sociology, and education but also offers valuable insights into the potential benefits of engaging in crocheting to positively impact individuals' social media habits, social connections, and mental health outcomes. This information is crucial in developing strategies to improve teenagers' general well-being. The findings of this paper indicate that crocheting reduces social media use and social isolation through its ability to provide relaxation, foster a sense of accomplishment, and facilitate connections with others, ultimately contributing to improved mental health.

Literature Review

Engaging in creative work as a hobby has been shown to have a positive impact on mental health by promoting relaxation, fostering self-expression, and boosting overall well-being. Creative activities such as painting, writing, or crafting can serve as a form of stress relief and a way to unwind from daily pressures. The act of creating something new can also help individuals feel a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment, contributing to a more positive mindset. Research conducted by the American Journal of Public Health found that participating in creative activities such as painting, writing, or crafting can lower levels of anxiety and depression, leading to improved overall well-being (Stuckey et al, 2010). Additionally, a study published in the Journal of Positive Psychology demonstrated that engaging in creative hobbies can enhance cognitive function and increase feelings of happiness and satisfaction. (Conner et al, 2016).

However, the rise of social media has created both benefits and problems. These problems can include social media addiction and social isolation. Now researchers are looking into whether creativity can help people cope with these new problems. My study looks at how crocheting can help teenagers with social media addiction and social isolation. While it is true that crocheting as a form of creative activity can provide benefits, it is important to acknowledge the counterargument that crocheting may not necessarily reduce social media use or social isolation for everyone. Its impact on social media use and social isolation may vary depending on individual preferences and circumstances. Some individuals may find solace in social media as a means of connecting with others, especially those who have limited physical interactions due to various reasons such as physical disabilities or geographical contraints. Additionally, the assumption that crocheting can facilitate connections with others has its limitations and should always be contextualized, as not everyone may have access to a community of fellow crocheters or may not feel comfortable engaging in social interactions related to their hobby.

The increasing prevalence of social media use in today's digital age has sparked concerns about its potential negative impacts on social interaction and mental health, which may influence the relationship between crocheting and social media use. According to Medical News Today, "72% of people in the United States now use social media." (Johnson, 2021). The curated and often unrealistic portrayal of others' lives on social media platforms can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, exacerbating mental health challenges. Additionally, the constant exposure to news, opinions, and curated content on social media can contribute to information overload and heightened stress levels, impacting overall well-being. The book *Reviving Ophelia* explains, "the most common presenting problems are self-harm, suicidal thoughts, anxiety attacks, and depression. Often these complaints can be directly linked to social media." (Pipher, 2019: 353). The article "Social Media Damages Teenagers' Mental Health, Report Says," by BBC News discusses the negative impact of social media on mental health and well-being. The article states, "The number of young people with probable mental illness has risen to one in six, up from one in nine in 2017," and "Heavy social media use was linked to negative well-being and self-esteem, regardless of a young person's mental state, with more girls experiencing feelings of depression and hopelessness." (Criddle, 2021). Social media can be a detriment to emotional stability.

With the current development of communication and technology, social media platforms have come to dominate people's sense of time and consumption of media. This shift has had a profound psychological impact on individuals, influencing their behavior and mindset. Social media platforms dictate norms and expectations for how people

should behave and interact online, shaping their social interactions and self-perception. The popularity of social media can be attributed to its ability to create a public sphere where individuals can connect, share information, and engage in discussions on a global scale. However, the fragmented nature of time spent on social media, coupled with the constant stream of content and notifications, can lead to addictive behaviors as users seek validation, connection, and entertainment in a digital environment. This addictive quality is reinforced by the instant gratification and dopamine release that comes from likes, comments, and shares, creating a cycle of seeking validation and engagement on social media platforms (Center for Human Technology, n.d.).

The prevalence of social media today has significantly altered the way individuals interact, often reducing real-life social interactions in favor of virtual connections. This shift towards online communication can potentially lead to a lack of social skills, as face-to-face interactions become less frequent. As individuals spend more time engaging with others through screens rather than in person, the risk of compounding loneliness and feelings of isolation may increase, impacting mental well-being and overall social development. The lack of real-world interaction on social media platforms often leads to comparisons with others' seemingly perfect lives, which can contribute to negative self-perception. Influencers frequently portray themselves as leading flawless lives, and teenagers may internalize these portrayals, leading to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with their own lives. This phenomenon highlights the importance of critical thinking and self-awareness when consuming social media content, as well as the need for individuals to recognize that what is presented online may not always reflect reality. Social isolation can also lead to seeking validation through likes and comments, creating a cycle of anxiety when it is not received. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* says, "Heavy users of social media manifest all the hallmarks of addicts. They had cravings for the phones when they weren't available. They lied about how much time they spent online and when they tried to limit it, they couldn't." (Pipher, 2019: 19). Additionally, the addictive nature of social media can result in excessive screen time, leading to a sedentary lifestyle and a lack of physical activity. For example, one study found that individuals who spend a significant amount of time on social media may experience negative effects on their physical health. Some of these effects include sleep deprivation, lack of exercise, and increased lethargy, all of which can lead to reduced productivity, weakened immune system, weight gain, and an overall decline in physical and mental well-being. Taking away their phone can serve as a wake-up call to the detrimental impact of social media addiction on overall well-being and encourage individuals to prioritize healthier habits.

Crocheting in a club can be seen as a ritualistic process that demands individuals to invest time and effort into their craft. Unlike the fast-paced nature of social media where information is consumed quickly and easily, crocheting requires participants to slow down, focus, and participate in a purposeful way. By physically going through the motions of crocheting, individuals can immerse themselves in the creative process, allowing for a deeper connection with their work and fellow club members. This intentional and time-consuming activity not only fosters a sense of community and camaraderie but also provides a therapeutic outlet for relaxation and mindfulness in today's fast-paced digital world.

Many researchers have studied the link between creativity and mental health. They have found that "The average person has about 60,000 thoughts in a day. A creative act such as crafting can help focus the mind, and has even been compared to meditation due to its calming effects on the brain and body." (Stahl, 2020). According to Diversus Health "Being creative can increase positive emotions, reduce stress, and improve overall mental well-being. Engaging in creative activities can also enhance problem-solving skills and boost self-esteem." (n.d.). Additionally, creativity has been linked to improved cognitive function. Furthermore, the study by Noori et al. (2024) which examines the relationship between creativity and mental health in university students, found that engaging in creative activities, such as art and crafts, can positively impact mental health by reducing stress and promoting overall well-being.

Crocheting is a uniquely accessible form of creative expression that may have advantages over other forms. Unlike activities that require specific artistic skills or predispositions, crocheting can be easily learned and enjoyed by individuals of various backgrounds and abilities. Study Breaks Magazine found that "crocheting is a more flexible and creative hobby, no matter your level of experience. You only need a crochet hook, some yarn, and some basic

instructions to start". (Barnard, 2020). Unlike activities like dancing which may require specific physical abilities, crocheting can be easily learned and enjoyed by individuals of diverse backgrounds and skill levels, making it a more accessible and inclusive hobby for promoting mental well-being. Additionally, other forms of artistic expression can be costly, considering the money that goes into classes and materials. Crocheting is more affordable in that it only requires a hook and yarn. Crocheting is also more portable than activities which require different types of equipment or specific settings. For example, dance requires specific floors, costumes, dance shoes, etc. to be able to dance comfortably, whereas crocheting can be done wherever you are whether that be at your house, in your car, or even on a plane. Crocheting stands out as a distinctly available and affordable form of creative expression that can be enjoyed by individuals of diverse backgrounds and abilities, offering a portable and cost-effective alternative to other artistic activities that may require specific skills, resources, or settings. Crocheting also offers an opportunity for relaxation. "The repetitive stitches within crochet and the repetitive nature of making an item" (Eccleston, 2023) is believed to have a calming effect on the mind, allowing individuals to enter a state of flow and deep concentration. This focused state can enhance productivity and cognitive performance in other areas of life as well.

By conducting interviews with crochet club participants and analyzing numerous studies, it can be argued that crocheting is a creative outlet which does indeed provide relaxation, foster a sense of accomplishment, and facilitate connections with others. This research is valuable as it provides further evidence that can inform creative interventions and strategies aimed at reducing the negative effects of social media use and promoting mental wellness among teenagers. The research conducted can also provide parents with insight into how social media is affecting their children and give them a possible activity to decrease children's social media reliance and social isolation. This qualitative analysis can help parents find hobbies for their children, such as crocheting. This research can be expanded by gathering additional quantitative data about crocheting as this paper was limited to primarily qualitative data. In conclusion, social media has many negative effects on mental health which creative activities, such as crocheting, have been found to mitigate.

Methods

In conducting research on the impact of crocheting on mental health within my school's crochet club, it is important to consider the unique nature of this club within the context of a competitive academic environment. Unlike other clubs such as Model UN, Chess Team, and Debate Team, which are highly competitive and aligned with the school's curriculum, the crochet club offers a distinct opportunity for relaxation and stress relief. The article "Crochet: Engaging Secondary School Girls in Art for STEAM's Sake" highlights how "crocheting enhances students' sense of belonging, creativity, well-being, as well as STEM learning." (Zang, et al, 2022). This emphasis on relaxation and creativity can attract students who may not be as interested in or suited for the competitive nature of other clubs. This smaller, non-academic club provides a space for individuals to unwind and engage in a creative activity that is not tied to academic performance.

My study has adopted the qualitative research methodology using semi-structured interviews and a small survey to gather data about the possible positive impacts of crocheting on mental and emotional health. Qualitative research was chosen due to its ability to explore the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of human behavior. By using qualitative methods such as interviews and observations, I aim to capture the personal stories and emotions of club members to gain insight into how crocheting impacts their mental well-being. The strengths of a qualitative approach lie in its ability to uncover rich, detailed information that may not be captured through quantitative measures alone. This methodology allows for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied, offering valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals. However, qualitative research may be subject to biases and interpretation, and findings may not be easily generalizable to a larger population. Despite these limitations, the qualitative approach offers a valuable perspective on the relationship between crocheting and mental health within the unique context of my school's crochet club.

Over time, numerous changes have been observed in my club members, demonstrating how crocheting has helped them relax, unwind, and express their creativity. These observations sparked my interest in conducting research on how crocheting affects mental health within the club setting.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used as the main method of data collection. The semi-structured approach was chosen to strike a balance between flexibility and guidance in the interview process. By having a set of core questions while allowing for open-ended responses, these questions aimed to capture a range of perspectives and experiences from club members. The guiding principle behind the structure of my questions was to explore key themes such as social isolation, screen time habits, and concentration levels, which are all factors that could potentially be influenced by crocheting.

Through these semi-structured interviews, I sought to uncover the ways in which crocheting impacts the mental well-being of club members and students in a class where I coached students to crochet and how it may contribute to their overall sense of relaxation and stress relief. The club has 10 members, 7 of whom were interviewed for this study, and the class, which I teach every summer, has 8 students and all were interviewed. The insights gathered from these interviews will provide valuable qualitative data to further understand the potential benefits of crocheting on mental health within the unique context of my school's crochet club and class I instructed.

Results

According to the questionnaire responses, crocheting has been found to have a variety of positive impacts on mental health. Crocheting appears to improve focus and concentration at least in part by reducing time spent on social media. As participant B states, "I am more productive and have something to do when crocheting instead of scrolling on my phone. Being off social media, I have been experiencing less negative effects and influences." Participant R explains that she spends less time on social media when working on a crochet project. By redirecting their attention towards activities like crocheting, individuals can engage in a more purposeful and fulfilling use of their time. Interviews with individuals in both the crochet club and the class taught by the researcher found that 100% of the participants reported an increased ability to focus both during and after crocheting.

Table 1. Students notice a decrease in their screen time since joining crochet club. Screen Time Daily Average Before and After Crocheting

	B	J	C.J.	C.M.	Z	O	M
Before	10 hours (before 2023)	8 hours (before 2023)	7 hours (before 2023)	16 hours (before 2023)	5 hours (before 2021)	7 hours (before 2021)	13 hours (before 2021)
After	7 hours	6 hours	5 hours	12 hours	3 hours	4 hours	9 hours

Before starting to crochet, the average time members spent on their phones was about 9.5 hours, which has decreased, over the past few years or so, to about 6.6 hours. Crocheting has helped the average member's screen time to decrease by almost 3 hours, demonstrating a shift in how individuals allocate their fragmented time away from social media towards a more productive and engaging activity.

Crocheting can serve as a valuable medium for adolescents to detach themselves from their phones, even if only momentarily. As one crochet club member, participant O, states "Not having my phone would force me to pay more attention to my surroundings." This sentiment is echoed in their personal experience during a class trip to a camp in Wisconsin during 6th grade, where phones were prohibited. The member recalls this as a memorable experience where they were able to bond with classmates and fully engage in activities without the distractions of notifications

or online videos. For Participant O, crocheting is reminiscent of this experience as it creates a temporal space where one is not dependent on their phone. Crocheting provides a tangible and engaging outlet for individuals to disconnect from the digital world and immerse themselves in the present moment, fostering meaningful connections and experiences.

The findings from the questionnaire responses highlight the positive impact of crocheting on focus and concentration. Crocheting not only serves as a therapeutic outlet for individuals to unwind and destress but also offers a meditative experience that aids in clearing the mind of distractions and achieving mental clarity. Participant J says, "When I'm crocheting a new project, it takes dedication and time to complete it. It requires undivided attention because I don't want to mess up a stitch. This has translated into my schoolwork. When I am dedicated to completing it and want it done to the best of my ability, I put my full focus into it." This craft provides a unique sense of accomplishment and fulfillment, while also fostering social interaction and decreasing social isolation. In contrast, the function of social media to connect people all over the world has also caused overreliance on it which has led to increased disconnection in real life.

Rituals, especially in today's generation, are slowly becoming less common. The ritualistic aspect of crocheting in a club provides a sense of structure and routine that can be comforting and grounding for participants. By setting aside a specific time each week (every Thursday at lunch) to come together and engage in their shared passion for crocheting, club members establish a sense of continuity and tradition. This regular gathering not only allows individuals to hone their skills and work on their projects in a dedicated space but also fosters a sense of camaraderie and belonging among the group. Participant R says, "Before crochet club, I didn't have a day-to-day ritual that I followed, but having crochet club at the same time every week gives me a sense of structure and routine that I had been missing in my life. It provides me with a dedicated time to unwind, connect with my friends, and focus on my newfound creative hobby that brings me joy and relaxation." The act of coming together to crochet on a consistent basis creates a shared experience that strengthens the bonds between members and reinforces the sense of community within the club. The ritualistic nature of crocheting in a club setting can offer a comforting sense of structure and routine, providing a valuable opportunity for adolescents to detach from their phones and engage in a meaningful activity.

Crocheting also appears to serve as a meditative experience which provides an outlet to help individuals unwind and destress. As participant Z says, "My days are always busy, stressful, and overwhelming, so when I go home it's hard for me to ease my brain and focus on my work. With crocheting, I've been able to take breaks on the high intensity work and ground myself. Afterwards, the work is more manageable and I'm able to get more done." This direct quote shows how crocheting can help people relax and reduce stress. Crocheting is a calming activity that allows individuals to unwind and take a mental break from their busy lives. By crocheting, individuals can center themselves, refocus, and feel more grounded and productive. This highlights how crocheting can be beneficial for managing stress, improving mental clarity, and enhancing overall well-being by giving individuals a chance to recharge and approach tasks with a sense of calm and focus. Whether it's the tactile sensation of working with yarn or the satisfaction of creating something beautiful, crocheting holds promise as a valuable tool for reducing stress.

Crocheting may further benefit mental health by providing a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. Learning new stitches and discovering new patterns is exciting, and seeing progress in the craft is satisfying. As participant C shares, "The product that comes out when I crochet is the most enjoyable part of the work." Another member, participant M, also says, "When I first started crocheting, learning new stitches was exciting, and finding new patterns was thrilling. It was satisfying to know that I was getting better at the craft, especially when I was able to finish something" These direct quotes encapsulate the sense of growth and achievement that crocheting can provide. Compared to the passive consumption of social media, the active, hands-on nature of crocheting brings a tangible sense of progress and accomplishment. The challenge of learning new techniques and starting new types of projects provides an experience of continual learning. Achieving mastery in these new skill sets can instill a sense of pride.

Participants also reported that the time they spend on social media seemingly connected with people virtually is the time they could be spending with people in real life. Participant R says, "Social media shows me new things and

it shows me the world, but it also takes up a lot of my time and takes time away from seeing my friends in person." The mention of crocheting as a different hobby shows how important it is to have activities away from screens that let people connect face-to-face and talk. Doing things like crocheting gives individuals a chance to take a break from technology, concentrate on being creative, and engage with others in a more personal and hands-on manner. This emphasizes the need to mix online and offline interactions to keep strong social ties and build real friendships. Crochet clubs provide a valuable opportunity for individuals to maintain connections and relationships in a meaningful and tangible way.

Participants have reported experiencing negative effects from social media. Participant Z says, "Before I joined the crochet club, I would spend most of my time on social media. Mainly I would try to learn all the dances on TikTok. They were really fun at first but then I found myself overanalyzing the creators and saw how fit and skinny they all were. Disregarding the fact that they were actual dancers and would work out a lot, I really wanted my body to look like theirs." Participant Z's comment shows how social media can make people feel bad about themselves and their bodies. By spending too much time on apps like TikTok, Participant Z started comparing themselves to the people making videos, especially focusing on how they looked. This made Participant Z feel like they weren't good enough and want to look like the people on social media, even though it's not realistic. Social media often makes people feel bad about how they look and themselves, as they feel like they must be like the people they see online.

Engaging in crochet also offers opportunities for increased social interaction and therefore meaningful connection. As Participant B expresses, "I have met new people through crochet and made new friends. The change makes me feel good. I get to meet new people as well as spend less time with some of the bad social media influences." This quote highlights the positive social aspects of engaging in crochet, emphasizing how the craft fosters meaningful connection among individuals. Participant C states, "I look forward to the crochet club to see my friends because it makes me happy." This suggests that engaging in creative activities like crochet can enhance one's social life and contribute to overall well-being by promoting genuine relationships and reducing exposure to detrimental online environments.

Joining crochet groups or attending workshops allows participants to connect with like-minded individuals, share their passion for the craft, and form meaningful relationships. Participant G from the crochet class shares that, after learning to crochet, she developed friendships with other participants as they helped each other to continue to learn the craft. The love for crocheting brings people together and helps them bond, making it easier to connect and build friendships. This feeling of belonging and common interest is especially helpful for those dealing with social anxiety, as it provides a comfortable environment to socialize without fear of judgment. Engaging in creative activities like crocheting not only allows individuals to explore their artistic side but also helps them develop important social skills and relationships that enhance their overall happiness.

By engaging in a shared hobby or interest, members of a crochet club can bond over their love for the craft, share tips and techniques, and support each other in their creative endeavors. One member, participant J, says "Being part of this club has allowed me to connect with people from all different grades, who I would have never gotten the chance to talk to. Having friends is the major key in having improved my mental health throughout high school. They've stuck by my side through all the good and bad times and knowing that I'm really close to most of my friends makes me realize that I can go to them for anything." This face-to-face interaction fosters genuine connections and helps to build a sense of community among participants. Another member, Participant O, states, "I look forward to the crochet club to see my friends." Unlike social media, which can sometimes lead to superficial or fleeting connections, crochet clubs offer a more personal and fulfilling way to connect with others.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant potential of crocheting as a beneficial activity for teenagers struggling with the negative impacts of excessive social media use. By offering a creative outlet that promotes relaxation, focus, and social interaction, crocheting can serve as an effective coping mechanism for mitigating feelings of anxiety,

depression, and social isolation that are often exacerbated by prolonged engagement with social media platforms. The qualitative data gathered from interviews with members of the crochet club indicate that engaging in this craft not only reduces screen time but also fosters a sense of accomplishment and enhances overall mental well-being.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching, suggesting that incorporating creative activities like crocheting into daily routines can be a valuable strategy for improving adolescents' mental health. Schools, parents, and mental health professionals should consider encouraging such hobbies as part of a broader effort to promote healthy, balanced lifestyles among young people. Future research could expand on these results by exploring additional creative activities and their specific impacts on different aspects of mental health. Ultimately, this study contributes to a growing body of evidence supporting the integration of creative and recreational activities into interventions aimed at combating the adverse effects of digital overconsumption, highlighting the importance of fostering environments where teenagers can thrive both online and offline.

Limitations

The study has limitations that may affect how widely the findings can be applied. Firstly, the study's sample size is small, focusing only on teenagers and not adults. This could limit how relevant the results are to a broader population. Another limitation is that the study only included girls, not boys, which could limit how well the findings can be applied to a mixed-gender population. Future research should aim to address these limitations to improve the study's reliability and relevance.

Acknowledgments

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