

Endless Scrolling, Endless Struggles: How Social Media Influences the Path to Leaving School.

Drid Lakhmissi^{1,*}

University Larbi Ben M'hidi Oum El Bouaghi (Algeria),
The Multidisciplinary Laboratory in Humanities and
Social Sciences for Development in Jijel,
drid.lakhmissi@univ-oeb.dz

Bouchama Badis²

University Larbi ben M'hidi Oum El Bouaghi (Algeria),
badisbouchama@yahoo.fr

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Abstract:

The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed the way young people engage with their social and academic worlds. While social media offers valuable opportunities for connection and self-expression, growing evidence suggests it may also contribute to the troubling trend of school dropout. This study investigates the complex relationship between social media use and educational disengagement among high school students. The research explores how excessive social media consumption, cyberbullying, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) can lead students down a path toward leaving school prematurely. The findings reveal that heavy social media users are more likely to experience academic difficulties, mental health challenges, and a diminished sense of belonging - all of which are strongly linked to higher dropout rates.

.Keywords:

Social media, Educational disengagement, Cyberbullying, Fear of missing out (FOMO), High school dropout.

Résumé

La prolifération des plateformes de médias sociaux a transformé la façon dont les jeunes interagissent avec leurs mondes sociaux et scolaires. Bien que les médias sociaux offrent des opportunités précieuses de connexion et d'expression de soi, des preuves croissantes suggèrent qu'ils peuvent également contribuer à la tendance préoccupante de l'abandon scolaire. Cette étude examine la relation complexe entre l'utilisation des médias sociaux et le désengagement éducatif chez les élèves du secondaire. La recherche explore comment la consommation excessive de médias sociaux, le cyberharcèlement et la peur de manquer quelque chose (FOMO) peuvent amener les élèves sur la voie de l'abandon scolaire prématuré. Les résultats révèlent que les utilisateurs intensifs de médias sociaux sont plus susceptibles de rencontrer des difficultés scolaires, des problèmes de santé mentale et un sentiment d'appartenance diminué - tous étroitement liés à des taux d'abandon scolaire plus élevés.

Mots-clés:

Médias sociaux, Désengagement éducatif, Cyberharcèlement, Peur de manquer quelque chose (FOMO), Abandon scolaire au secondaire.

*drid.lakhmissi@univ-oeb.dz

1 . Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms over the past two decades has radically transformed the social and academic lives of young people, Emerging research has begun to shed light on the complex and multifaceted relationship between social media use and educational outcomes, particularly the troubling trend of school dropout. Studies indicate that heavy social media users are more likely to struggle academically, experience mental health issues, and feel disconnected from their school communities - all of which are risk factors strongly associated with the decision to leave school prematurely.

As the pervasive presence of social media continues to reshape the adolescent experience, understanding its influence on educational disengagement has become a critical area of inquiry. This comprehensive study aims to investigate the various ways in which social media use can push students down the path toward dropping out of high school. the research explores how excessive social media consumption, cyberbullying, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) can contribute to academic difficulties, mental health challenges, and a diminished sense of belonging - all of which are strongly linked to higher dropout rates. By delving into the social dynamics cultivated by social platforms, this work sheds light on how peer pressure, social comparison, and the constant need for online validation can undermine students' motivation, self-esteem, and investment in their education.

The findings offer critical insights into the student experience in the digital age, providing educators, policymakers, and parents with a more nuanced understanding of the risks posed by unchecked social media use. Ultimately, this research aims to guide the development of interventions and support systems that can help mitigate the threat of the social media-dropout connection, empowering young people to navigate the online world while staying engaged in their academic pursuits. The key problem that this study aims to address is the influence of social media use on the risk of high school students dropping out of school. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate how: Excessive social media consumption Cyberbullying The fear of missing out (FOMO) Can contribute to: Academic difficulties Mental health challenges A diminished sense of belonging Among high school students.

These factors - academic struggles, mental health issues, and lack of school connectedness - are all strongly associated with the decision to leave school prematurely. By exploring the social dynamics cultivated by social media platforms, such as peer pressure, social comparison, and the need for online validation, the study aims to shed light on how these mechanisms can undermine students' motivation, self-esteem, and investment in their education, ultimately increasing their risk of dropping out. Understanding this complex interplay between social media use and the path to school dropout is crucial, as it can provide critical insights to educators, policymakers, and parents.

These insights can then inform the development of interventions and support systems to help mitigate the threat of the social media-dropout connection, and empower young people

to navigate the digital world while remaining engaged in their academic pursuits. In summary, the core problem this study seeks to address is the influence of social media on the alarming trend of high school dropout, with the goal of guiding more effective strategies to support student success and wellbeing in the digital age.

2. When Social Media Fuels Cyberbullying and FOMO

The proliferation of social media platforms has undoubtedly transformed how we connect and communicate in the digital age. Yet, alongside the benefits of increased connectivity, a darker undercurrent has emerged - the disturbing rise of cyberbullying and the pervasive fear of missing out (FOMO). (Meddouri, Zghadoudi (2020), p. 15).

Social media, with its constant stream of curated images and status updates, has become a breeding ground for toxic behavior. The anonymity and distance afforded by online interactions embolden some users to engage in cruel, harassing, and even defamatory actions against their peers. From spreading malicious rumors to publicly humiliating individuals, cyberbullies exploit the very platforms designed to bring people together.

Compounding this issue is the insidious grip of FOMO. The pressure to maintain a constant presence on social media, to document every aspect of one's life, and to portray a flawless, envy-inducing existence has left many users in a state of perpetual anxiety. The fear of missing out on the apparent achievements, experiences, and social connections of others can drive excessive social media use, further exposing individuals to the risk of cyberbullying.

This vicious cycle becomes self-reinforcing, as the need to curate a perfect online persona and the desire to keep up with peers often leads users to engage in behaviors that undermine their mental well-being. The constant comparisons, the feelings of inadequacy, and the vulnerability to harassment can all take a significant toll on an individual's self-esteem and overall psychological health.

Addressing this multifaceted challenge requires a holistic approach. Social media platforms must implement robust and transparent policies to quickly identify and address instances of cyberbullying. Simultaneously, there must be a concerted effort to educate users, particularly young people, on the dangers of FOMO and the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship with social media.

Only by acknowledging the intricate interplay between social media, cyberbullying, and FOMO can we hope to create a more positive and empowering digital landscape - one that fosters genuine connection, empathy, and personal growth, rather than perpetuating a culture of fear, hostility, and constant comparison.

2.1. Social networking sites and bullying

In the year 2024, social media platforms have witnessed remarkable developments. With the addition of new features for shopping and live streaming, the focus has been on improving the user experience and promoting video content. The launch of new features for live

broadcasting and voice chatting has led to continuous growth in social media, with an increasing emphasis on video, e-commerce, and personal as well as professional communication.(Boumchita (2021), p .163)

2.1.1. Social Media:

Social media are digital platforms that allow users to create personal accounts, generate content, and interact with others. These platforms offer a variety of features, such as sharing posts, images, and videos, chatting, instant messaging, engaging through likes and comments, joining groups or pages, and participating in platform-wide discussions. Social media platforms are a powerful tool for connecting people, communities, and institutions on a global scale, and they play a crucial role in communication, social interaction, entertainment, marketing, and various other aspects of life and work. "Social media is a system of electronic networks that allow subscribers to create their own account and connect it through an electronic social system with members who share the same interests and hobbies" (Amitouch, Natch, 2022, p. 05).

Social media platforms have played a prominent role on the internet in recent years. These platforms are diverse and have distinct features, but they all aim to connect people and communities across geographical borders, enabling them to communicate, interact, and share digital content. Some of these platforms have gained widespread popularity and have become an integral part of the daily lives of millions around the world.

- **Facebook:** Facebook is a web-based platform operated by the company "Meta" (formerly known as Facebook, Inc.), and it is one of the most well-known social media platforms. It can be defined as a large social network, where users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, or region, in order to connect and interact with others. Users can add friends to their list, send messages to them, and update their personal profiles to introduce themselves to their connections.

Facebook also allows ordinary individuals and organizations to showcase themselves and enhance their presence within the platform's network or through communication with others, thereby establishing connections with others.

- **YouTube:** YouTube is a web platform that allows its users to upload video recordings for free, watch them through live streaming, share them, comment on them, and more. It was founded on February 14, 2005, by three former PayPal employees - Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim - in San Bruno. It initially used Adobe Flash technology to display the video clips, but now it relies on HTML5 technology. The content on the website varies, including movie clips, TV shows, music, as well as user-generated videos.

YouTube also allows users to upload, view, rate, share, add to playlists, report, comment on videos, and subscribe to other users. In November 2023, the video streaming

platform "YouTube" announced that it will soon allow the removal of AI-generated fake content, and that videos containing this type of content will soon be required to disclose it.

YouTube is one of the most widely used platforms in classrooms, as it easily allows the free upload and download of various films in general, and the gradual upload and display of short films from public films that everyone can watch to films restricted to a specific and special audience (Sari, 2008, p. 302).

- **Twitter:** Twitter was an American social media company headquartered in San Francisco, California. The company previously owned the social networking service "Tweetr" and the short video app Vine, as well as the live streaming service Periscope.

Twitter is a social network service where users can post and interact with short messages known as "tweets". These can include text, photos, and videos, which are publicly or privately shared and responded to (Sari, 2008, p. 302).

- **Instagram:** Instagram is a free website and mobile app for sharing photos and videos. It was launched in October 2010 and later acquired by Facebook. Instagram allows users to take photos, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social networking services, including the Instagram network itself.

In general, the early social media landscape was quite complex, with various platforms, features, and user communities that made significant impacts, beyond just student participation. Things like the rise of citizen journalism, the role of these sites in social movements, the evolving business models and monetization strategies, and the broader cultural shifts driven by widespread social networking - these were all important facets that shaped that era. From this, we cannot exhaustively list all the platforms and sites that high school students may have used.

2.1.2. Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is another very important and influential aspect of the early social media landscape that is worth discussing further. Here's a more detailed response:

Cyberbullying emerged as a major issue during the rise of social networking platforms, as the anonymity and widespread reach of these technologies enabled new forms of harassment and abuse. Beyond just student participation, the social media ecosystem facilitated the spread of harmful content, hate speech, and targeted attacks against individuals.

The impacts of cyberbullying were wide-ranging - it affected mental health, self-esteem, and emotional wellbeing, especially among young users. It also raised complex questions around online safety, content moderation, and the responsibilities of platform providers. Policymakers and educators had to grapple with how to address cyberbullying and mitigate its damaging effects on vulnerable communities.

The rise of citizen journalism and user-generated content on social media also intersected with cyberbullying, as individuals could easily amplify harmful narratives or target specific people. This blurred the lines between free speech and online harassment in ways that society was still trying to navigate.(Hassi Charara (2019), p .69 ,70)

Addressing cyberbullying remained an ongoing challenge throughout the evolution of social media. Platforms developed new policies and tools, but the problem persisted due to the complexities involved. It was a critical issue that shaped user experiences and public discourse around these technologies.

2.1.2.1. Forms of Cyberbullying

Common forms of cyberbullying that emerged with the rise of social media included harassment, cyber stalking, denigration, impersonation, and outing/trickery. Harassers would send threatening, insulting, or aggressive messages repeatedly to their victims. Cyberstalking involved obsessively tracking and monitoring someone's online activity. Denigration referred to posting cruel rumors, gossip, or false information to damage someone's reputation. Impersonation entailed pretending to be the victim and posting inappropriate content in their name. Outing/trickery involved sharing someone's private or embarrassing information online. .(Hassi Charara (2019), p .71).

2.1.2.2. Methods of Cyberbullying

The unique capabilities of social media platforms enabled cyberbullies to employ various methods to carry out their attacks. Anonymity allowed them to use fake profiles or hidden identities to avoid accountability. The viral nature of social media enabled them to rapidly spread harmful content across multiple platforms. The permanence of online information made it difficult to remove the lasting digital record. The ubiquity of social media and mobile devices meant victims had no escape, as the harassment could continue endlessly.

Cyberbullies would often combine these tactics, such as creating an anonymous profile to impersonate a victim and post embarrassing content, which would then rapidly spread across the victim's social networks.(Falah, Ben Said (2022), p .15).

2.2. The Rise of FOMO: How Social Media Fueled a New Psychological Phenomenon?

The rapid rise of social media platforms has given rise to a new psychological phenomenon known as FOMO, or the "fear of missing out." FOMO refers to the anxiety people feel when they believe others may be having more rewarding experiences that they are absent from. This topic has become an important area of study as social media has profoundly impacted human behavior and well-being.

2.1. The Emergence of FOMO

The phenomenon of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) emerged as a key psychological impact of the rise of social media platforms. FOMO refers to the anxious feelings people would experience, stemming from the belief that others might be having more rewarding experiences from which they are absent. (Badr Amer Jad, (2022) ,pp.200.201)

Social media played a central role in fueling this dynamic. The constant streams of updates, photos, and status posts from friends and peers on these networks created a perception that everyone else was engaging in more interesting, exciting, or fulfilling activities. This triggered a fear of missing out on those experiences and connections.

FOMO led users to compulsively check their social media feeds, validate their self-worth through likes and shares, and even engage in risky or unwise behaviors just to avoid feeling left out. It exacerbated issues around social comparison, envy, and a lack of presence engagement in one's actual life.

2.2. The Amplification of FOMO

Certain platform design features further contributed to the amplification of FOMO. Mechanisms like infinite scrolling, push notifications, and algorithmically-curated content constantly exposed users to a selective, highlight-reel version of their social connections' lives.

The impacts of FOMO were wide-ranging - it contributed to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy, especially among younger users. FOMO also influenced purchasing decisions, travel plans, and other lifestyle choices as people tried to keep up with their peers.

Addressing FOMO became an important consideration for both platform providers and mental health experts as they grappled with the unintended psychological consequences of social media's rise. Developing healthier relationships with these technologies remained an ongoing challenge for users.

3. School Dropout: A Multidimensional Challenge

School dropout is a multifaceted phenomenon that affects students and the entire educational system. This problem has social, economic, and educational roots, and must be addressed comprehensively through integrated strategies.

The issue of school dropout typically begins with students being pushed away from education or discontinuing their studies before completing the prescribed academic stage. This problem arises from a set of interrelated factors, such as the dire economic conditions of families, family and social problems, the educational and psychological difficulties faced by students, as well as deficiencies in the educational infrastructure and weak institutional support.

Addressing this complex phenomenon requires the concerted efforts of all stakeholders - the government, schools, families, and the local community - to develop comprehensive solutions that target the various influential factors. Consequently, tackling the school dropout problem will contribute to enhancing students' educational success and developing the educational system as a whole.

3.1. Definition of School Dropout:

School dropout is defined as leaving education before completing its stages, or as leaving the school bench for one reason or another before the end of the final year of the educational journey in which the student was enrolled, or during one of its years. Dropout has social, cultural, economic, educational, and personal causes (Shahata, 2003, p.180).

According to Thabit Nasser, school dropout refers to the student's failure to continue in school. After enrolling and being considered a registered student, the student misses attendance and drops out of school, joining the illiterate population (Nasser, 1992, p.127).

Educational dropout means the student's discontinuation of their studies in the different academic years, preventing them from achieving the academic attainment that would qualify them for completion (Ibrahim Hassan, 1988, p.167).

3.1. Causes and Factors of School Dropout:

The issue of school dropout rates is a complex and multifaceted problem that affects education systems around the world. There are a variety of factors that can contribute to a student's decision to leave school before completing their education. Some common reasons include academic struggles, financial hardship, personal or family problems, lack of engagement or motivation, and conflicts with the school environment or policies. Dropping out of school can have long-term consequences for an individual's future prospects, as it is often associated with lower earning potential, higher rates of unemployment, and increased risks of poverty and other social challenges. Understanding the root causes of school dropout and implementing effective interventions are crucial for improving educational outcomes and promoting greater equity and opportunity for all students.

3.1.1. Reasons related to the school:

These include:

- The prevalence of school violence among students and the frequency of fights.
- The lack of use of modern educational tools as an attractive factor for students.
- The study and examination system may be a reason for the dropout and absence of students and their aversion to school.
- Lack of concern for students with repeated absences and knowing the reason for their absence.
- Failure to develop curricula to become engaging and attractive to students.
- The teacher plays a major role in the student's rejection or acceptance of the school (Daheem,

2018, p.66)

3.1.2. Reasons related to the student:

These include:

- The student's inability to comprehend the academic material and the decline in their level.
- The student's hatred of some teachers and the school.
- The student's influence by bad company and unsuccessful study companions, and their emulation of them, which may lead to dropout, especially in the absence of parental follow-up and their lack of awareness of the seriousness of abandoning studies (Ben Azah, 2019, p.23).
- The student's own lack of desire to continue their studies or being afflicted with some disabilities and diseases that prevent them from completing their studies.

3.1.3. Reasons related to the family:

These include:

- Family disintegration and the low social and economic level of the family.
- Increasing the number of family members and their lack of conviction in the usefulness and importance of education.
- The pursuit of some families to improve their material conditions through the work of their children, as well as the lack of conviction of some families in educating girls.

3.2.. Forms and types of school dropout:

School dropout has various forms and types, including:

3.2.1. Temporary dropout:

Temporary dropout is a phenomenon worthy of attention in the field of education, which refers to the interruption of students' regular studies for specific periods and then their return to it at a later time. Many factors contribute to this phenomenon, including family and economic problems that may force some to stop studying to assist in family affairs or to look for an additional source of income. Also, the educational difficulties faced by some may lead to frustration and a desire for temporary interruption. In addition, social and cultural factors such as customs and traditions may play a role in some people's decision to take breaks from their studies at intervals.

In general, temporary dropout occurs daily and repeatedly, then gradually turns into continuous dropout, which may result in the student's expulsion from school, and then turns into final and permanent dropout (Ali Al-Shakhaibi, 2002, p.302).

3.2.2. Permanent School Dropout

Permanent school dropout is a serious phenomenon that portends grave social, educational, and economic repercussions. This problem lies in the complete withdrawal of students from education, without ever returning to it, depriving them of opportunities for development, growth, and obtaining official certificates.

The reasons behind permanent dropout are multiple and intertwined. There may be difficult economic circumstances that force students to have to work instead of study. It may also be associated with family or social problems, such as early marriage or the educational and psychological difficulties faced by students. It may also be attributed to deficiencies in infrastructure and educational resources or the weakness of institutional support provided to dropout students.

In general, permanent school dropout means the student's permanent abandonment of school and final interruption of their education.

4. Conclusion

The pervasive influence of social media has emerged as a significant contributor to the complex issue of permanent school dropout. The lure of endless scrolling and the social comparison fueled by these platforms can have a profoundly detrimental impact on students' academic engagement, mental well-being, and overall educational trajectory.

The constant exposure to idealized lifestyles and the fear of missing out (FOMO) cultivated by social media can lead to heightened feelings of inadequacy, distraction, and disillusionment among young learners. This, in turn, undermines their motivation, focus, and academic performance, ultimately increasing the risk of them disengaging from school altogether and embarking on a path toward permanent dropout.

Moreover, the social isolation and cyberbullying experienced by some students on these platforms can exacerbate existing mental health challenges, further eroding their resilience and ability to persist in the face of academic difficulties. The lack of real-world social connection and support, combined with the pressures of maintaining an online persona, can create a perfect storm of factors that push vulnerable students toward the decision to abandon their education.

Addressing this multifaceted challenge requires a holistic approach that includes digital literacy education, mental health support, and the fostering of healthy social media usage habits among students. By empowering young people to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and cultivating a school environment that prioritizes well-being alongside academic achievement, we can help mitigate the influence of social media on the troubling trend of permanent school dropout.

Ultimately, the path to leaving school is a complex and often deeply personal journey, but understanding the role of social media in this process is a critical step toward developing more effective interventions and ensuring that all students have the support they need to thrive and succeed in their educational pursuits.

Based on the foregoing, the study recommends the following:

- **Implement Digital Literacy Education:**

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- Incorporate comprehensive digital literacy programs in school curriculums to teach students how to critically evaluate online content, manage their social media usage, and maintain a healthy balance between digital and offline activities.
 - Empower students with the skills to navigate the online world responsibly and mitigate the negative impacts of social comparison, FOMO, and other harmful social media effects.
 - **Provide Robust Mental Health Support:**
 - Ensure that schools have accessible and well-resourced mental health services, including counseling, therapy, and support groups, to address the psychological and emotional needs of students.
 - Train teachers and staff to recognize the warning signs of mental health struggles and provide timely interventions to support at-risk students.
 - Collaborate with community mental health organizations to expand the reach and availability of mental health resources for students.
 - **Foster a Positive School Climate:**
 - Promote a inclusive, supportive, and nurturing school environment that values the holistic well-being of students, not just their academic performance.
 - Encourage the development of strong peer-to-peer support networks and mentorship programs to cultivate a sense of belonging and community among students.
 - Implement anti-bullying policies and interventions, both online and offline, to address the detrimental impacts of social isolation and cyberbullying.
 - **Engage Parents and Families:**
 - Educate parents and families on the potential risks and challenges associated with excessive social media use and its influence on academic engagement and mental health.
 - Provide resources and guidance to help parents and families support their children's digital well-being and foster healthy technology habits at home.
 - Encourage open communication and collaboration between schools, parents, and families to address the complex issue of permanent school dropout.
 - **Conduct Ongoing Research and Evaluation:**
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- Invest in longitudinal studies and data-driven research to deepen our understanding of the evolving relationship between social media, mental health, and educational outcomes.
- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of implemented interventions and adapt strategies based on empirical evidence and emerging best practices.
- Disseminate research findings and collaborate with policymakers to inform the development of evidence-based policies and programs that address the multifaceted challenge of permanent school dropout.

By implementing a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that addresses the digital, mental health, and social aspects of this issue, schools and communities can work together to empower students, mitigate the detrimental influence of social media, and support their successful navigation of the educational journey.

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