

# **Discovering Social Media**

by

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### **Abstract**

*In March of 2020, the pandemic started, and everyone had to go into isolation. We were in lockdown for a couple of months and even then, we had to be extra careful about who we saw and in what context. I felt isolated and alone until I went on social media. After two years I wanted to know if people used social media more now than ever. I wanted to know if people benefited from social media during the pandemic by using it to interact with more people or if the screen just added to the isolation and social media had negative repercussions. There were not many articles on the impacts of social media in the United States, so research was needed to fill the gap. I used surveys to collect data. First, I went to my school community and then I wanted to know what everyone else thought. I got approximately 300 people to take my survey. I found that social media usage had a more positive effect on people. It allowed people to connect with others to feel less isolated. I also found that people use social media as entertainment more than anything else and that it made people happier. Some limitations were that some people took the survey as a joke. Another one is there were some biases because my friends and their friends did the survey, so it was not a super diverse population of people taking the survey.*

## Discovering Social Media

### Introduction

In March of 2020, I was at Purchase College's campus. I feel like it was yesterday. I was in a Career Success Seminar, and my teacher said my classes would be shut down for approximately two weeks. It was right before my birthday, on March 13, 2020, when we all had to be out of our dorms. I was in denial about the whole situation and before I knew it, everything went to video and classes went to Zoom. The government went into a shutdown, no one went out, no one went to the stores, and everything was done online. The only real reason people went out was for walks. I was scrolling through Facebook one day and found Zoom University Hillel. It was started by a Clark University student. A few days after that another page was started, named MeetJew University. It started with a small group of people posting about themselves or their friends that wanted to meet someone for a romantic relationship. People would like the Facebook post and other people would like or comment on the post. Then there would be a few people selected by the administrators to become the MeetJew boy, girl, or person of the week. Soon, the Facebook page expanded beyond just romantic interests. Nearly every night there would be a Zoom chat with people from all over the world who were just there to socialize. It started as a video speed-dating Zoom, but quickly just became a bunch of people talking and becoming very close friends. I found comfort in the people I met. There were four different groups because it got so popular. The names are MeetJew University, Social, Post-Grad, and 30+.

After a few months, I met my boyfriend on a survey. We matched and I found out that he actually codes the survey. He messaged me on September 12, 2020. We chatted on Facebook Messenger. I learned that his dad is a Biology professor and we talked about how my grandma is

a retired scientist. Then we bonded and had our first in-person date on November 14, 2020, after getting COVID tested before our date. I fell in love with him. The group has over 60,000 members and they do in-person events. I share this not because I want to brag about my personal success during the pandemic, or because I want to get more people to join the MeetJew community, but because the use of social media during the pandemic changed my outlook and kept me socializing with people even if I could not be physically near them.

I relied on social media a lot during the pandemic, and it changed my relationship with others. It has positively affected me. A lot of people have benefited from social media as an outlet during the pandemic even though it can take up a lot of time. It was easier to ask questions to others through social media that you might not want to ask during an in-person class for example. Discord has helped me, and others do better in classes since it can be used as a constructive and monitored space for collaboration. I will also prove the at-home environment actually helps people do more work than ever before.

I will prove that social media had both a negative and positive effect on people's lives during the pandemic. Most of all it had a positive impact on individuals during the pandemic, rather than a negative. Most people struggled a lot through the past two years, and I think social media helped to find people a voice. If not for social media, I think the mental health effects of the pandemic could have been even worse. I will prove that in family life, school, and coverage of the pandemic and the media, the influence of social media is more positive than negative. I will also show that social media has the potential to cause negative effects like self-isolation and being in an echo chamber, but these are outweighed by the benefits of social media.

There are so many different platforms for social media. For the purposes of the study, social media will be classified as an interface in which users can chat over the internet. To name

just a few, there is Zoom, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, Reddit, Snapchat, and Discord. There are definitely more, but a comprehensive list would take multiple pages. One other interesting one of note is the Chinese social media app Weibo which is used by a billion people but does not have a market share in the United States, so in general conversation, it is not mentioned although there are takeaways from Weibo that will be discussed. These platforms are vehicles to make people feel less lonely when people are stuck inside or otherwise isolated. I use Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, and Facebook the most. I feel like most older people use Facebook, and I still use it to connect with others. I also use Discord a lot of the time because it feels more intimate and private in addition to being focused on one specific community at a time.

Throughout my research, my question has changed and developed into studying and understanding how people use social media as a means of connection. I learned how people used social media to form connections with peers, new friends, and others. There are not too many United States articles about the usage of social media. I want to fill in the spots where I think there is a lack of information. In order to get my research completed, I will be conducting surveys. It will be primarily quantitative data, with some qualitative data used to augment the analysis. I will be surveying people around campus and then use an identical survey under a different link for my community so that I can see the differences between how college students and the community at large interact with social media.

I will ask several questions, such as “On a scale from 1 to 5 does social media stress you out or make you feel happier?”, “Did you use social media more than before the pandemic?”, and “Did you find using social media was a good substitute for in-person communication?” I would also ask if something besides social media got them through this pandemic. By asking all of these questions and more, I will gain more information on what people went through in the

pandemic and whether social media affected their experience. The limitation in my study would be if I do not ask all of the appropriate questions and if I do not go deep enough. People also might be lying or not telling the truth, or I might not be asking clear enough questions. I will be discussing more in my results section.

## **Literature Review**

There are many different impacts that social media had on people during the COVID-19/Pandemic world. I will talk about the misuse of media, then go into the positives, talking about education and advancements in technology and communication. There are all sorts of different viewpoints on stress and how social media either causes or relieves it. In my opinion, social media has had a positive effect on my life and others by using our phones or other smart devices during the pandemic to stay engaged with the world and not use our negative thoughts to harm us. In other words, some researchers said social media hurts society more by having people read fake news or by encouraging substance use. Depending on the results, I hope to conclude that the positives of social media outweigh the negatives.

### *Misuse of Social Media*

Social media is used in negative and positive ways throughout the pandemic. The literature shows that there is a positive correlation between social media usage and substance misuse. This particular journal article, "COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Substance Misuse: A Social Media Listening, Mixed Method Analysis" by Davide Arillotta, focuses on Reddit instead of any other social media. During Covid, usage of social media increased from 430 million users to over 1.5 billion. Between December 2019 and May 2020, the number of people who talked about using drugs over social media increased by 9.2%. (Arillotta 1) In the article, it says there

are many different types of drugs talked about online and it lists out all of them. The authors found after the first six months of quarantine, using qualitative and quantitative means, that there was an increased focus on drugs during the time period. (Arillotta 5) The author did not talk about any other social media platforms, which would have helped in this article. There should be more research done to explain the current impact of Reddit. In addition, it should be revealed which drugs were used more. This was a clear negative and overall misuse of social media.

Another example of negative usage of social media is in an article by Deng and Yang. They discuss the effects of public concern on social media and COVID on two different social media platforms, Weibo and Twitter, in “Cross-Platform Comparative Study of Public Concern on Social Media during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Empirical Study Based on Twitter and Weibo.” Using three different statistical methodologies including network analysis and temporal analysis, the researchers found distinct patterns where people on Twitter use more domestic terms, worrying about their own country and locality when discussing the COVID pandemic. Weibo users discussed more international terms and were more worried about the world at large. Twitter users also had more worrying emotions based on their sentiment analysis in the study. Of note is that this study was sponsored by the State Scholarship Fund of China Scholarship Council. (Deng and Yang 3) Weibo is partly owned by the Chinese government and thus there is a benefit to be had by showing Weibo users as more empathetic. Although it was theoretically peer-reviewed and claimed no conflicts of interest, I am not entirely convinced. The most important takeaway from this study is not the comparison between Weibo and Twitter, but instead the overall sentiment and negativity seen on Twitter in isolation. Covid impacted Twitter by making it more negative.

*Education and technology with regards to social media*



Social media impacted learning and the education industry. In “Social Media for Knowledge Acquisition and Dissemination: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Collaborative Learning Driven Social Media Adoption” by Muhammad Naeem Khan et al., they talk about how COVID changed the education landscape. When everything closed, schools went to learning at home. The study tries to show how social media increased during Covid-19, and how it was not a negative thing that social media usage increased. Social media was a positive way to socialize with your classmates and ask questions about other topics, not just school. (Khan 1)

A positive thing about this article is it has many pictures to help on their topic rather than just being text. Online classes meant that it became mainstream for everyone to sit and talk online, sometimes enhancing the teaching of others. The research study surveyed gender, qualifications, and social media usage vs. learning over a 27-day period. (Khan 7) According to the study, teachers can cover more content over an online forum. A negative about this study was that it did not separate each social media platform, like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Knowing which platforms were most used for this positive outcome of social media would have been helpful. In the future, the author should do more studies on what the students like learning over social media. They should also do a wider span of days looked at, not just a month, to see if the effects of learning remotely waned over time. In conclusion, social media was positive because teachers could teach what they wanted to, not just what they had to. (Khan 10) The student could learn much more than the one subject that the school assigned. Social media generally had a positive effect on education and allowed for much more flexibility in teaching style.

In the study “Emergency remote teaching with technology during the COVID-19 pandemic: using the whole teacher lens to examine educator’s experiences and insights,” the authors focused on the teachers’ need to suddenly use technology to teach students at a distance.

The teachers relied on social media to direct their new situation. The authors posted the survey all over social media including Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and Edmodo. There were 227 participants in grades K-12. The finding was that the teachers were not prepared for this, but made it work. In the future, the teachers want to study the findings and grow from the skills they now know. (Trust 2) Now more than ever people use the internet and social media to improve their education. They also found it easier to teach their passion. It was a positive event in education because it was able to teach the teachers how to be more flexible.

Another example of a positive in education is that in the pandemic, new technology was developed to aid in teaching. People had this technology before but never used it in the way they were forced to during the pandemic. In the past few years, there have been so many new technologies that have come out. The new technology can be used for Covid-19 to guide people out of the lockdown. In the article called “Digital technology and COVID-19,” by Daniel Shu Wei Ting, he states that there is a lot of monitoring, surveillance, and detection in the prevention of COVID-19. He uses the example of a ‘Worldometer’ to track the number of COVID cases in each area and to get real-time updates about it. (Shu 459) The author then talks about how digital technology can improve public-health education and communication. Those monitoring these technologies can track your temperature by just seeing your face. (Shu 460) Lastly, we all learn different things through technology and social media about Covid-19.

A separate example of new technology that benefits people during the pandemic is the use of healthcare technology. One potential place where it can go too far is surveillance. Social media was beneficial to studying the trends of the public reaction to policies over the time of the pandemic. Technology can collect public health benefits; it could also erode people’s freedoms and/or leave people behind based on things like race. Social media is behind a lot of fake news

spreading, and spreading quickly, but new technology can cause more help than harm. Social media was very relevant when Covid-19 broke out. The study, “Digital Health Strategies to Fight COVID-19 Worldwide: Challenges, Recommendations, and a Call for Papers,” says that there is a usefulness of digital health in the long-term view of health care. ( Fagherazzi 1) There should be more done on the effects of incorrect health information being spread on social media.

### *Environment changes*

There are lots of changes as a result of Covid-19. One of the most impactful is that people worked remotely, and college students went from being in-person to online. In this journal article, the authors prove that people worked more than ever in their home environment. In the article “How COVID-19 Impacts Social Media Businesses in the Period of the Pandemic” the authors talk about how people adapt to the circumstances of being in a lockdown. It not only affects people but the journal and the research world were affected as well. Academia finds itself at an occasion with never-ending possibilities and likely improvements. (Gupta 1 ) There are more people submitting articles. More work is being done in the home environment than ever before. The ending paragraph thanks everyone that is still writing articles even in the face of such uncertainty.

In “Possible Effects of Internet Use on Cognitive Development in Adolescence,” Kathryn L. Mills studies the ability to use the internet and the public’s concern about its impact on the growth of cognitive abilities. This study discusses online behaviors, the environment, and the development of adolescents. The study said there is no relationship between emerging adults’ cognitive development and social media exposure. (Mills 1) There need to be more surveys and more people need to see this so that people become less worried about the frequent usage of

social media by minors. One limitation is the study measured in relation to online activities. (Mills 9) They only included internet surveys and it should include interviews as well since people can lie on internet surveys and choose to not take them if they do not like the line of questioning halfway through the survey.

### *Mental Health and Social Media*

During the covid-19 pandemic, the government had a lockdown and people went on social media more than ever. The article “Impact of Online Information on Self-Isolation Intention During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Cross-Sectional Study” by Ali Farooq talks about the impact of self-isolation and its effects on motivation. They use surveys as a method. About 225 people took this survey. People were asked how social media affected their living situations, and they were then tested through multigroup analysis. (Farooq 1) The conclusion was that there was no effect of living situations on people’s motivation. There needs to be more research to be done on this subject because it throws common thought on its head because we have been taught that interpersonal connections are part of what drives us. (Farooq 2) More people in the survey and the studying of cofactors might change some of the conclusions made in this study.

“Communication and Public Perception of COVID-19 Risk in the Era of Social Media,” discusses the public perception of the risk of COVID in their area during the pandemic. During the discussion, they describe the competing natures of outrage and hazard. When a person thinks there are a lot of hazards, people will not take risks associated with being unsafe during COVID. In opposition to this, the more outrage a person has, the more willing to ignore the safety guidelines shared with the public. (Malecki 1) Media, and social media especially, has the ability to shape people's opinions on perceived risks with the pandemic. Social media shaped confusion by sharing conflicting information and causing outrage in public.

An example of a positive way of social media is the spread of news. There was more panic than ever before, which is a good thing when discussing the pandemic, probably a good thing since it is such a deadly virus. "The Impact of Social Media on Panic During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iraqi Kurdistan: Online Questionnaire Study" focused on Iraqi Kurdistan a few months after the pandemic started, looking at the news and on social media. They surveyed people that were 18 and over. (Ahmad 1) There were 516 people who took the social media survey on how social media affects self-reporting mental health and the spread of panic during Covid-19. (Ahmad 3) They found a positive connection between self-reporting media use and the panic of Covid-19. (Ahmad 9) Social media has played an important role in spreading anxiety about the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Another note about stress and anxiety with regards to social media is a higher usage of social media is an effective way to communicate during times of stress. Huang, Luo, and Kulemeka, in the article "Strategic Social Media Use in Public Relations: Professionals' Perceived Social Media Impact, Leadership Behaviors, and Work-Life Conflict," discuss the use of social media in disseminating information and positively communicating with colleagues during crises or the workday. This is true even if there are potential problems with social media use and could create more extended workdays for the leaders. The effectiveness of the use of social media in sharing information with others outweighs a lot of the potential risks of aggravating colleagues by using social media (Jiang 18). People are no longer able to separate work and life because social media is present throughout their day. In addition to all of this, high use of social media was associated with high stress in individuals.

*Usage with family*

There were more people using social media in the pandemic than ever before. In the Asian Journal of Psychiatry, the editor wrote a letter for the journal. First, it stated that people have been consuming more and more social media. He then writes that there are six parts that make the internet addictive: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. This study was a cross-over study and designed that 106 people took Google Forms surveys. One result was found that by increasing social media during COVID, people had more mental health issues than ever. (Verma 1) The editor's solution is trying to make people use it less at night. Another result is there are only 28 people who use it for more than 6 hours, and I think it is interesting because I use it more. In further research, there need to be more people in the study.

There are a lot of articles about stress but not enough about communication. This article shows the relationship within families. There are a lot of families that do not use media to communicate but then again there are a lot of families that use media. The article "Families and Social Media Use: The Role of Parents' Perceptions about Social Media Impact on Family Systems in the Relationship between Family Collective Efficacy and Open Communication," by Fortuna Procentese shows how communication through social media illustrates lives and relationships. The study shows 227 Italian parents who have one or more teenagers using Facebook or WhatsApp to communicate with them. (Procentese 1) They feel like they manage the knowledge of social media in their teenager's life. They have a positive impact on the knowledge of how to use social media in a good way. However, there is a limitation to the study, including that it is only the child's perspective, and it could be biased based on that. One

limitation is that they only use some media. (Procentese 3) Some families only use Snapchat to communicate for example. There should be more articles like this one.

## **Methods**

I will be doing quantitative surveys to identify patterns and make generalizations in order to better understand what students went through during the pandemic. I will be surveying people in college who are willing to take the survey. Due to the time investment of interviews in addition to its being easier to reach more people and more diverse groups of people, I feel that surveys alone will allow me to get the best information for this study. Gauging from my personal feelings and others that I have heard in passing, I think people will want to share their experiences because they are otherwise not feeling heard. I will post it on the open forum for Purchase College and I will encourage my peers and friends to take the survey. The first questions I ask will be demographic questions, focused on understanding who it is that is taking my survey. After that, I would ask if they liked being on Zoom better than in person for their classes. In order to understand their social media habits, I will ask if they had access to social media and if so, how many hours per day would they use it. I will also ask which app they go on most, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or Discord. Then, I will quantify if they made new online friends during the pandemic. There are plenty more questions to ask about social media usage during the pandemic and its development as a substitute for in-person communication. Every voice needs to be heard and this way I can write an analysis of what people learned from this time in their life.

I also will do the exact same survey with my community. I think it is important to make sure everyone is included. We all survived the pandemic together. I want their voice to be out as well. Getting answers from the community will also allow me to compare how college students

and people outside college responded to the pandemic and perhaps used social media differently in order to stay connected to avoid feeling the effects of isolation as dramatically.

There needs to be more information about the pandemic and how people used social media during the pandemic. There are not enough journal articles about the pandemic, in part because of how recent it was. It also seems that there are many articles focusing on social media use in teens and young adults and some articles on remote learning, but because there has not been much combining these two topics and yet both topics being at the center of a lot of people's lives, it is a worthwhile effort. After gathering information, it will be important to analyze this data to better understand any patterns the surveys submitted by people indicate. The goal will be to get as many people as possible to take the survey since an additional person taking the survey can only give us more information and not less. Before the analysis, I will have to validate that people did not put in any joke answers and took it seriously.

### **Describing all media**

A social media platform is generally a website that allows people to share ideas, thoughts, and moments through the internet and to specific communities. There are all types of different social media out in the world. These include Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Zoom, Twitter, Tiktok, and YouTube among others that are less popular, or at least less popular in the United States. Some are used by the schools to improve student-teacher interaction or to improve the sense of community in classes. The most common platforms for this are ones like Slack, Discord, and Zoom. People also use social media more now than ever as a way to sell things, either as a resale or as a small business. I will talk about the negatives and positives of each of



the social media platforms and show how it's more of a positive than negative to be on social media.

Facebook is the oldest still relevant social media website. It also owns Instagram. Facebook is used to connect people with other people whom they may have lost touch with. Generally, there is not a ton of interaction between users anymore and it is more of a news site and has a few key influencers in each network without a ton of discussion. Facebook has become an extremely popular social media site. The purpose of the article "Why do people use Facebook?" by Ashwini Nadkarni and Stefan G. Hofmann is to review the factors contributing to Facebook's extreme popularity. According to Nadkarni and Hofmann, there are two main motives behind the use of Facebook, the first is a need to belong, and the second is a need for self-promotion. There are plenty of factors that lead to needing to belong including demographics and culture. Aspects of personality like neuroticism, narcissism, shyness, self-esteem, and self-worth contribute to the need for self-promotion. What has happened, according to the authors, is that people rely on Facebook for more than just their day-to-day social media, but really as a means to feel needed and wanted in a community.

Snapchat is a social media platform that has people taking pictures or videos of themselves or of things they find interesting to send to others. Snapchat is used by 530 million people all over the world. In this past year, usage surpassed the totals seen in either of the previous two years. In the article "Tech Choices Dictate Teen Friendships During Pandemic; The use of Snapchat, Instagram or TikTok can fray or strengthen ties, depending on whether pals communicate the same way" by Julie Jargon, they interviewed five teenagers all over America. They say that Snapchat is a method of connection between friends. It is a way to keep track of a few friends, but it is not good for when the network you want to keep up with is more than about

20. Users tend to have a small circle of users they interact with more frequently, becoming “best friends” and having streaks (a Snapchat has to go back and forth between the two users once every 24 hours to extend the streak) with them.

Instagram is an app that allows people to share video clips and pictures, which other people then like and comment on those posts. Posts can gain popularity when more people like the post or comment on it, allowing even more users to see the post. Instagram has about one billion users. All throughout the Covid pandemic the usage statistics have wavered, increasing, and decreasing at times, likely as a function of the amount of in-person communication was considered safer (the usage probably went up as waves spiked and people were forced inside.) On the website Statista, there is a chart that says that most of the users have been between the ages of 18 and 34. About 62.2 percent of users are in this age group. Instagram has the chance to make people jealous of others because the more popular people get more recognition. There is also a clear “Instagram lifestyle” where users only post their best moments, so other people seeing these think the poster is living a perfect life when the reality is that no one is perfect. In addition to collaborating with brands, Instagram serves as a primary platform to satisfy the need for entertainment with “reels,” a feature where people post videos, they find amusing or funny and share them with the world. There are additional motivations for using Instagram, multilevel marketing schemes, also called pyramid schemes have become more popular on the site and users need to be careful that they are not caught in one.

Twitter is a service where people send short messages and media that are called tweets for friends and family to see. Twitter reached its peak popularity when the world shut down in March of 2020. Most people felt sadness, anger, and negative thoughts when using Twitter, a conclusion based on data collected for the article “Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on ride-

hailing services based on large-scale Twitter data analysis.” There was a massive emotional shift during the early days of the pandemic, in part because former-President Trump posted a lot on Twitter, a significant amount of which was either negative or untrue. At first, there was anger, then sadness, and in general, just a lot of strong emotions. In the article, the authors say there are three types of tweets: Neutral, positive, and negative. Following this, there are different emotions that come from the kind of tweet it was. There can be apathy, contentedness, happiness, sadness, disgust, and anger. There were also more categories the deeper the authors dove like satisfaction and complaints while making a recommendation. The general takeaway is that there is much more complaining on Twitter than positivity. The limitation of the article was the dates that they used for their analysis. If they expanded the timespan the data came from, they could hear more people’s thoughts. Twitter shares media quicker than other social media platforms because other people can quickly retweet these short messages. During (and since) the presidency of Donald Trump, Twitter was plagued by a lot of fake news. In the study, “Study: On Twitter, false news travels faster than true stories,” by Peter Dizikes, he said fake news spreads faster than real news usually due to the sensationalist appearance of the fake news. It is bad because people start to believe fake news and will reject anything that contradicts their views.

Discord is a free text and voice chat that people use more now than before the pandemic. Pre-pandemic, Discord was reserved mostly for people who liked playing video games, but now it is more mainstream for any group of people. Discord is used by schools too. In my computer science class, we only used Discord as a means of communication. The teacher would only respond by direct messages and not emails. In the article “User-centered evaluation of Discord in midwifery education during the COVID-19 pandemic: Analysis of the adaptation of the tool to student needs,” they used discord and said it was an easy-to-use app/website. About 80% of

those who took the survey said that Discord can be used in conjunction with learning, and 75% said it was functional good. Academic departments can continue to use Discord without reservation to create games and maintain links between students and teaching staff in the department. In addition, Discord has the characteristics of a social network, allowing students to connect. Discord is a positive way to connect with others. The major other plus to this social media platform is the perceived privacy of each group and the ability to have different channels, so if people are talking politics, they are in a separate chat from those trying to share pictures of their pets.

Zoom usage exploded during the pandemic. Zoom is a cloud-based video conference platform used to video chat with others. It can be used for school, work, or talking with friends. YouTube is a free video-sharing app and website that gets people to learn, be entertained, or watch new things. During the pandemic, people used YouTube to learn a new language or how to cook, or to learn a different new skill. I learned a coding language from YouTube. The teacher used YouTube as a way to share lessons rather than using live Zooms. Zoom is used more by teachers because it has breakout rooms for students to learn from each other. YouTube is just a video and people learn from the video. I used YouTube for cooking to learn how to cook a chicken rather than calling my mom on Zoom and learning from her. I liked using social media as a way to help me learn.

Another platform that was surveyed in my research is Tiktok. On this app, creators post short videos that showcase and cater to a variety of interests. Some of these include pranks, stunts, tricks jokes, dance trends, and other entertaining videos. That being said as with many media platforms, the identity of the accounts that watch the videos posted is questionable. Additionally, although there are small Tiktok communities based on special interests such as

WitchTok and FrogTok the app does not foster as much community building as other apps listed in my research. Therefore, it could be inferred that my participants mainly used the app for entertainment rather than community-building purposes.

There was some data that suggested that social media usage hurt the community by not being able to filter out when people post fake news, because people will believe it is real. Researchers discovered social media distracts people, taking hours of productivity away from individuals. They also found it had to do with bullying and peer pressure and unrealistic views on others. There are a lot of bad parts of social media that do not portray humans in the best light.

### **Findings & Analysis:**

As discussed, I did two different surveys, one only for SUNY Purchase college students and the other for my community. I used all kinds of different social media networks and had some people forward it to people that they knew. I ended up with 241 different people who did my community survey. Only 62 people did my SUNY Purchase survey. Overall, the result was similar to my hypotheses. My hypotheses are that social media affects people in a positive way. I asked this in my survey. Figure one is the SUNY purchase survey and figure 2 is the community.

Social media

### **Figure 1**

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being strongly disagreed and 5 strongly agree, how do you feel about the following statement: Social media had a positive effect on me in the

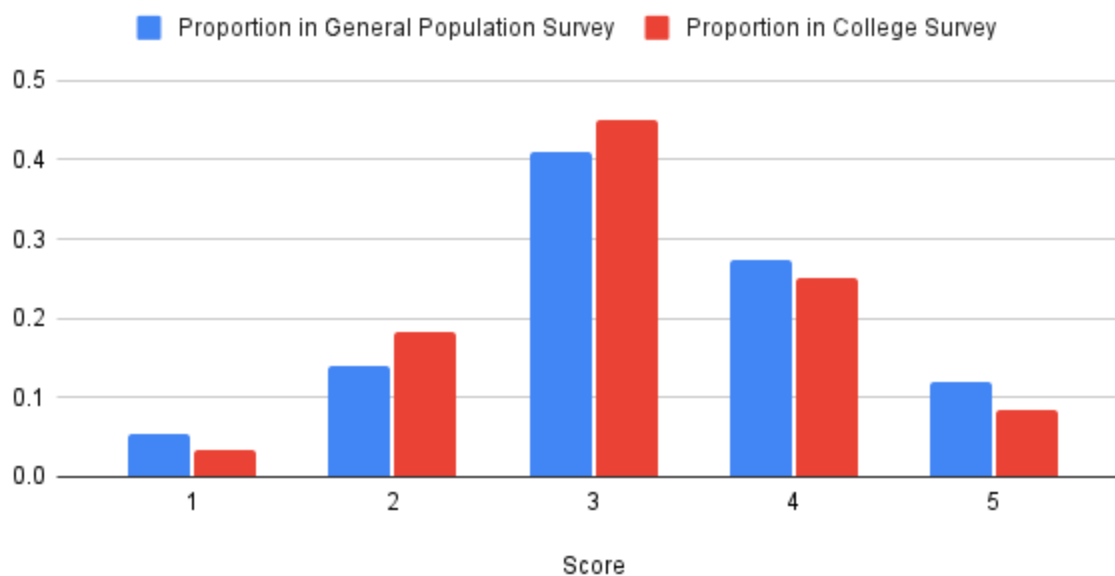
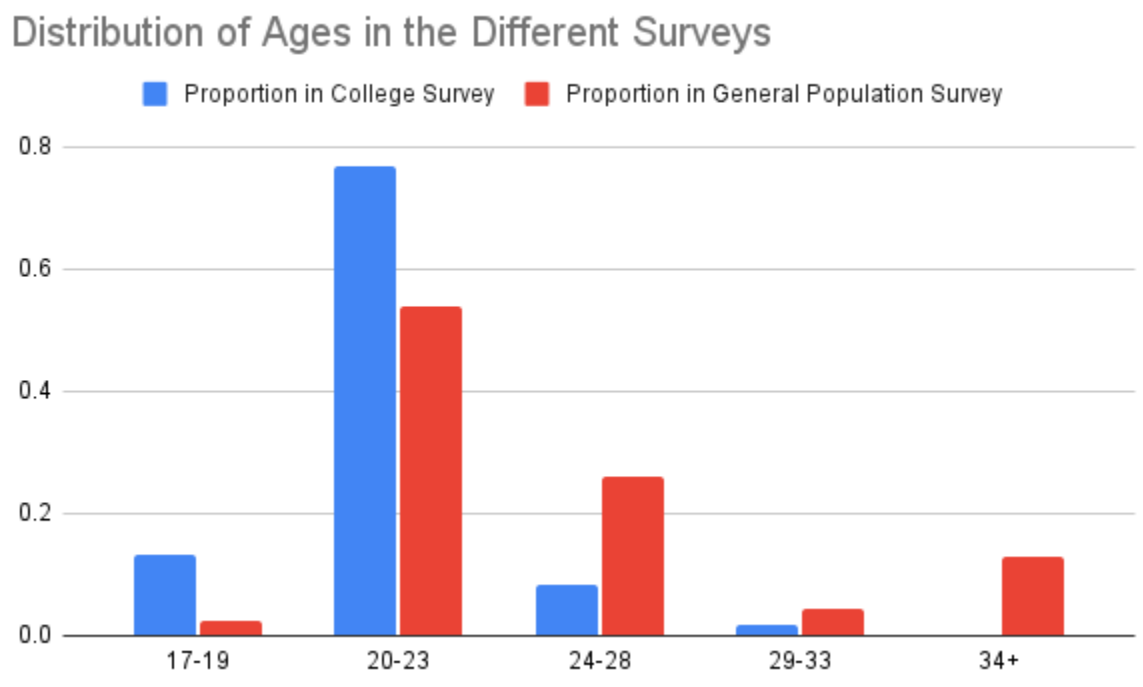


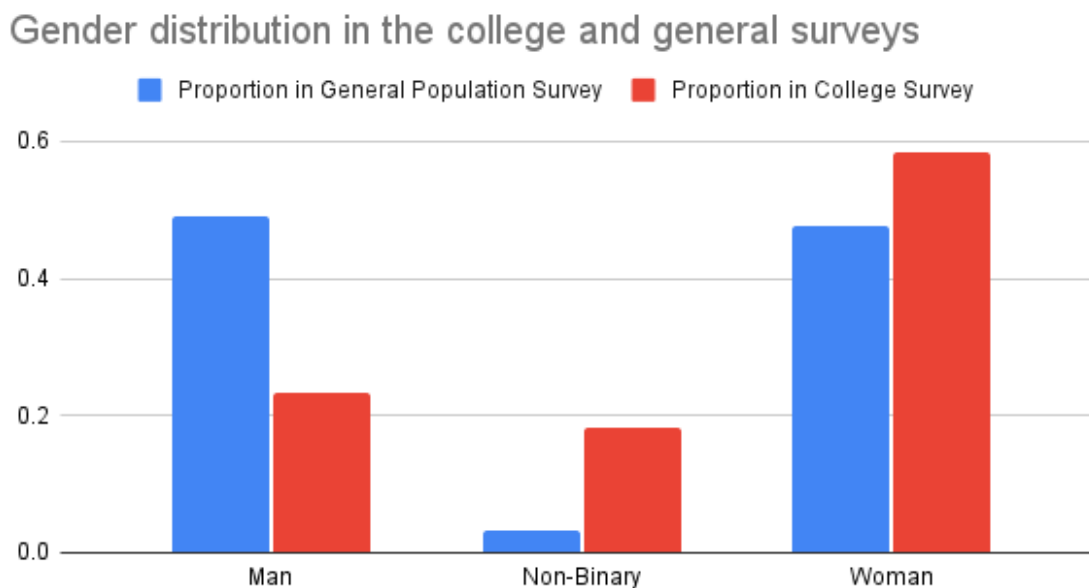
Figure 1 shows that most people think it does not really affect them but mostly it has a positive role. The college survey had 2 people who strongly disagreed with this statement. 11 people disagreed, 28 people who were neutral, 15 people agreed with that statement, and 6 people strongly agreed. This averages out to approximately 3.2, meaning there is a slight bias towards believing social media had a positive effect on people during the pandemic for college students. It also showed for the general population that 13 people strongly disagreed, 34 disagreed, 99 people neither disagreed nor agreed, 66 people agreed, 29 people strongly agreed with “social media had a positive effect on me in the Pandemic.” This averages out to approximately 3.3. The community at large and Purchase College students have similar opinions that on average people thought that social media had a positive effect on their pandemic experience.

I then looked at the age of the people who took my survey. In the community, there was a wide range of ages, but the college students one just a few. In Figure 2 it shows the ages of the SUNY Purchase students in blue and the community respondents in red.

Figure 2



The average age for my community respondents was 26.8 which is a bit lower than I had hoped for but makes sense based on who I know and who I know, knows. The average age for the college students survey was 22.3 years old. I believe that even if the community had a lower average age than I hoped for, the stage of life this age gap represents, from college student to adult can account for some differences between groups.

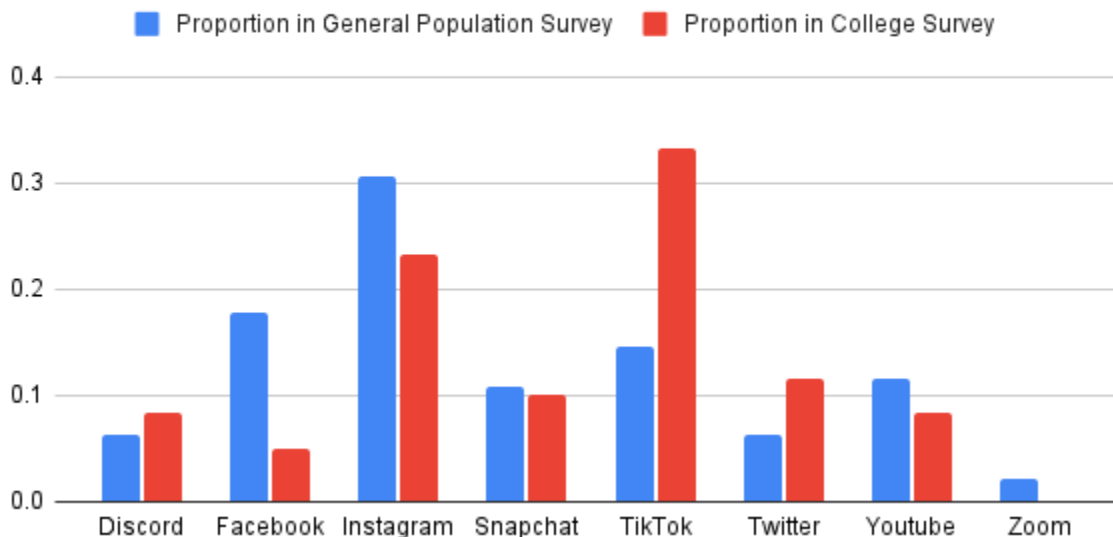
**Figure 3**

For Purchase College, mostly women did this survey. The Campus is so friendly to the LGBTQ+ community that there were 10 nonbinary people who did my survey. There is a connection between women using Instagram more than men. I was pleasantly surprised that men and women both took the survey at relatively even ratios for the community survey. There were five nonbinary people who did the community survey. There was one person that did this survey as a joke (based on their other answers being highly improbable and inconsistent with the rest of the data) and said foxkin. At best, this is an outlier as a foxkin is someone who identifies as transgender where the second gender is an animal. At worst (and perhaps more likely) is that they did not take the survey seriously.

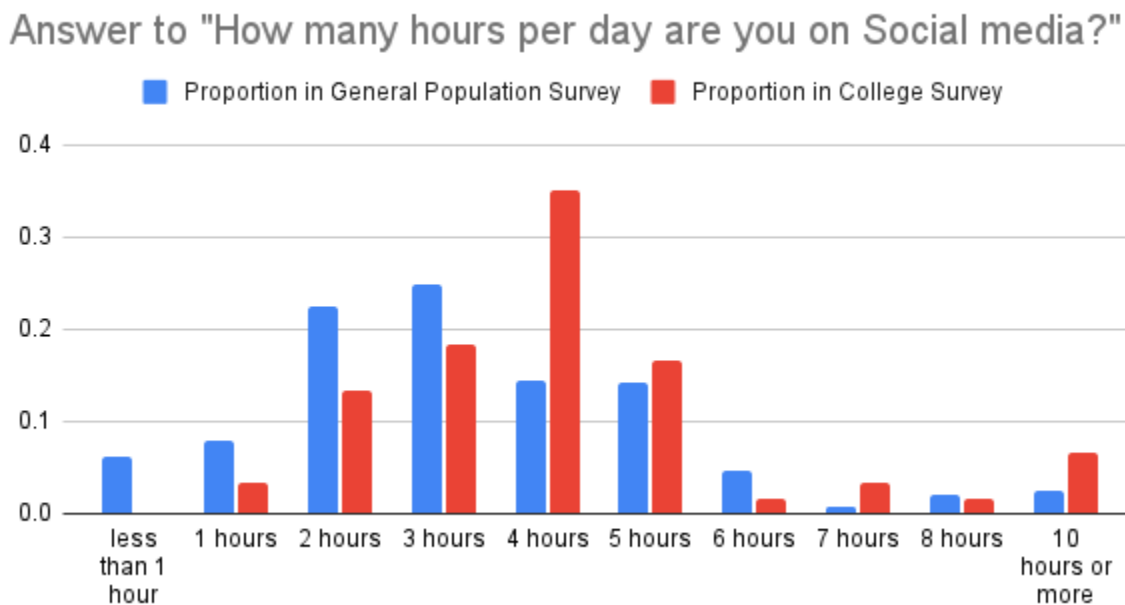


**Figure 4**

### Answer to "Which social media platform do you use most?"



When asking which social media platform people used most for the college population, Tiktok came in at 33.9%. That was the plurality of the people that took the survey. There is a pattern where young people use Tiktok more than the community/adults. In the future, I want to research more about this. Younger people migrate to Tiktok because it is more Gen Z focused. It is geared to college students and younger by making little videos and posting so the whole world can see them. According to the survey, more women use Tiktok than men. In the community, most people use Instagram the most, then Facebook, then Tiktok. It is totally different than the figure above. Facebook is mainly for people that are older than college students and want to connect with others. Instagram is where people post pictures that other people like for popularity. The older generation usually uses it more to try to connect with the younger generation, which is why I was not surprised when I saw this.

**Figure 5**

The vast majority of college students use social media for between three and five hours. The survey gave the option for anywhere between zero hours and 10+ hours as a potential response. Four people in the college survey admitted that they used more than 10 hours of social media. They also said that most of the time they use social media for entertainment. The community tends to use social media slightly less than college students. The majority of respondents used social media from 2-4 hours instead of 3 to 5 hours like college students. In the open-ended section, a lot of people mentioned how they think they use too much social media even though it was still lower than the college response on average. I wonder if they are underestimating their usage or if they are just busier doing different things. They feel like social media takes them away from other tasks.

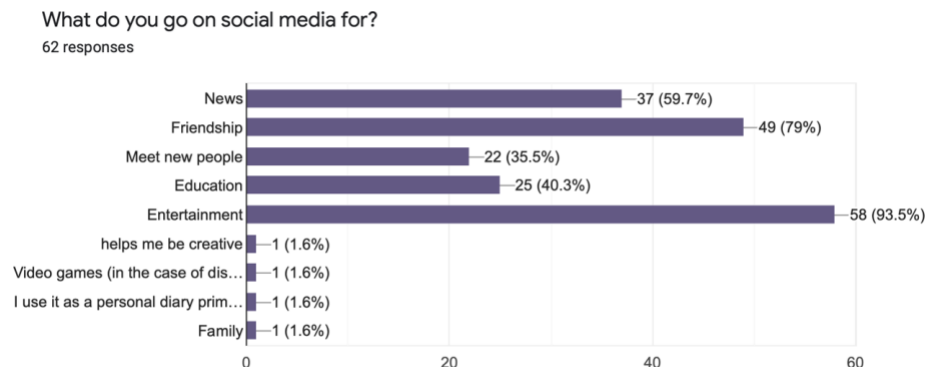
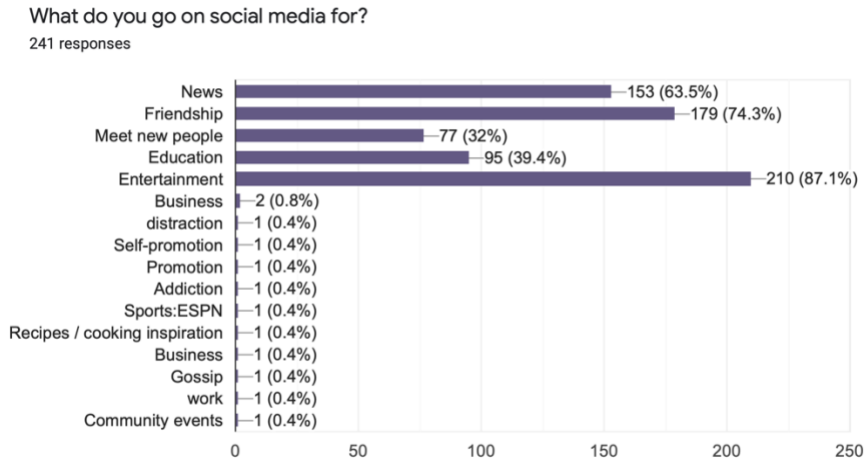
**Figure 6**

Figure 6 indicates that a lot of college students use social media for entertainment which is what I expected. A fair amount of people used social media as a source of news which was expected but also confirms that fake news on social media has the potential to be a huge issue if people are taking their cues from social media/Unsurprisingly, a lot of people use social media for social interaction whether it is meeting new people or keeping in touch with friends and acquaintances. 40% of users said they use social media for education which makes me think that maybe they just do not consider Zoom and other platforms as social media platforms because almost all college students are using these platforms for education. Unfortunately, this question did not really prompt an answer regarding their feelings on the value of the connections they were making online or if they were still feeling quite isolated while using social media.

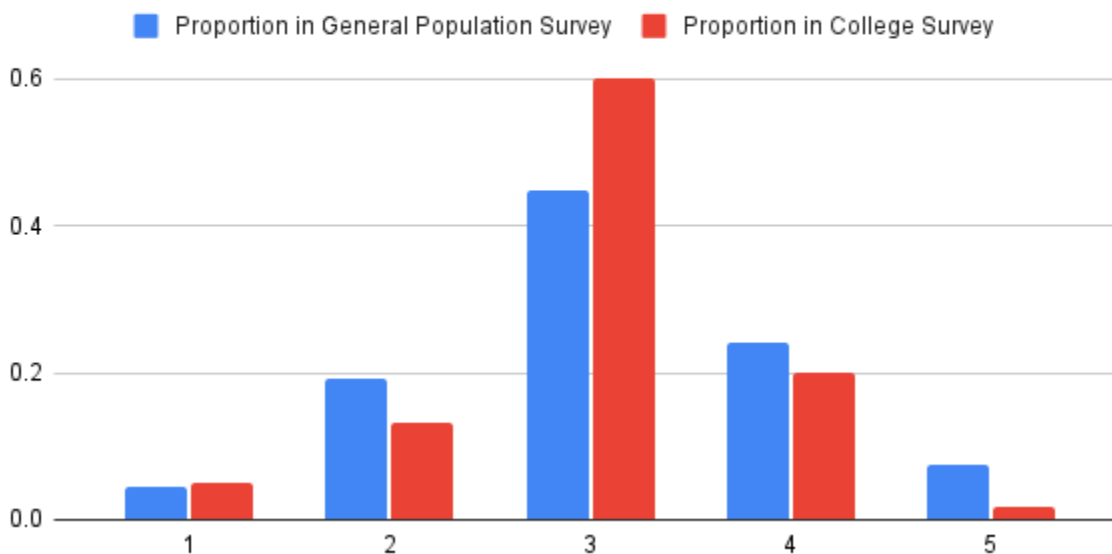
**Figure 7**



The community said that they use social media as a source of entertainment above all else as seen in Figure 12. This is followed by keeping up with friends and news, similar to college students. Of interest is that 39% of the community respondents use social media for education which makes me think that either some college students from outside of SUNY Purchase took the community survey or that people just continue to learn once outside of the classic school environment.

**Figure 8**

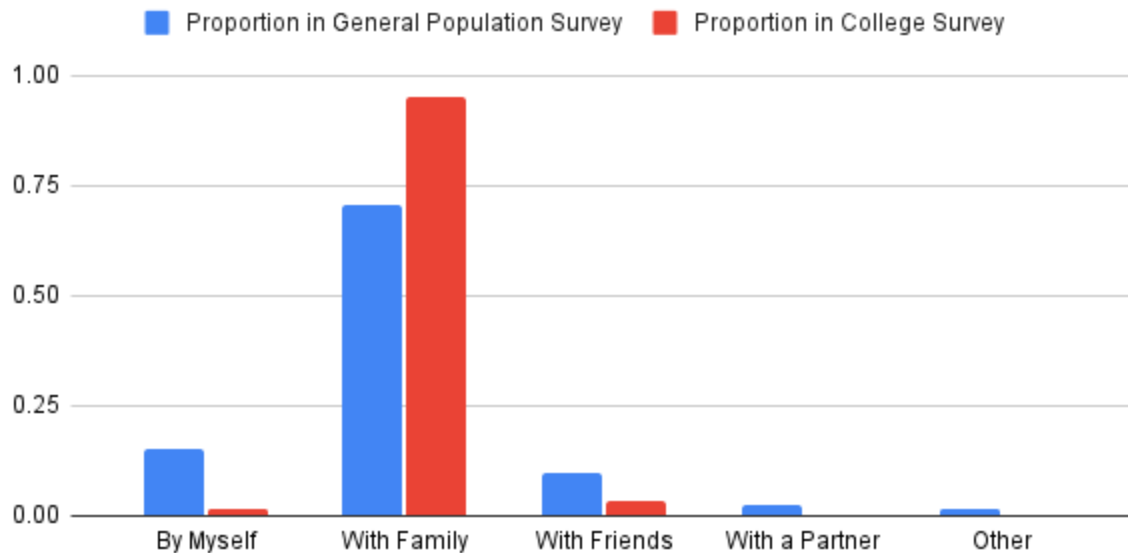
Answer to "On a scale from 1 to 5 does social media stress you out or make you feel happier?"



Both the SUNY Purchase students and community respondents had a similar distribution where most people did not have a large effect on their happiness. On average, the community rated that they had social media making them slightly happier with a 3.1 on a scale of one to five (Figure 14). The SUNY Purchase students were very similar with a score of 3.05 (Figure 13). By percentage, a few more people thought that social media made them happier in the community versus those in college. This is at the crux of my argument that at the very least social media does not stress people out more than it makes them happy. If that truly is the case, then the added benefit of connectivity should make social media worthwhile.

**Figure 9**

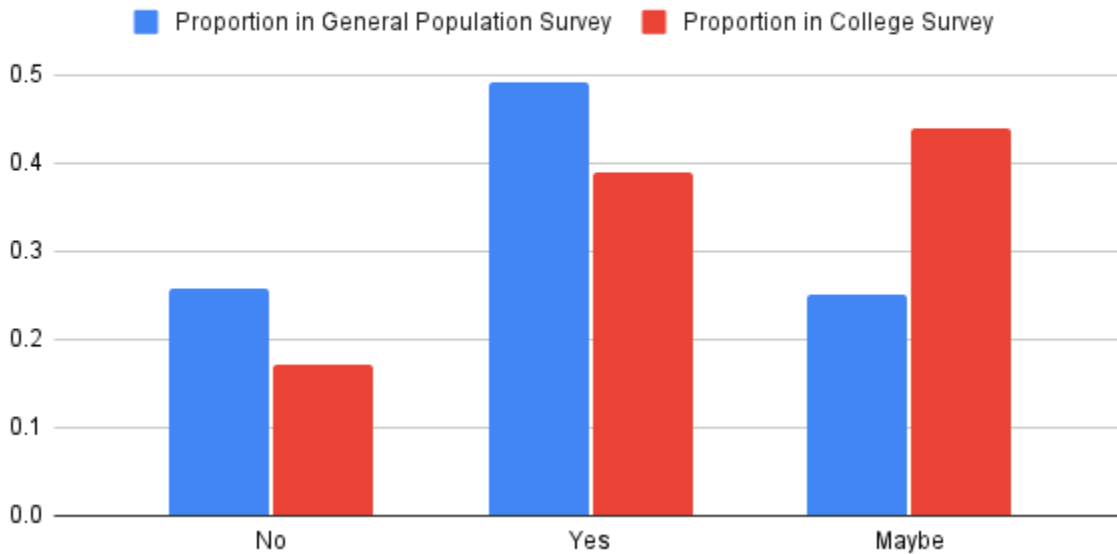
## Answer to "Where did you live for the majority of the pandemic?"



Unsurprisingly, it looks like a lot of people lived with their families during the pandemic. This makes sense since a lot of people went back to their homes to live in small groups that they trusted, which is in a lot of cases, a family. There were some people who lived in isolation or with friends instead. There was a lot less variation in the answers from the college students who could not pay enough to go out on their own rather than community members. Most people still lived with their family, but there were still a lot of people who lived alone or with friends. There were also a lot of people who split time between multiple locations.

**Figure 10**

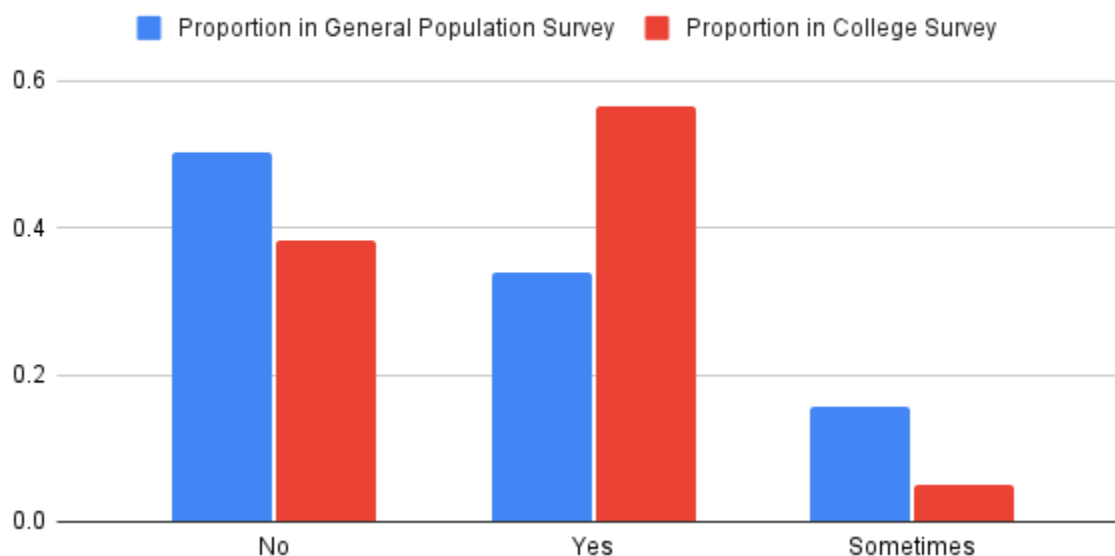
Answer to "Do you think you use social media more than before the Pandemic/lockdown?"



Slightly more students believe that they use social media more than they used to. Generally speaking, the students and community had similar splits in whether or not people use social media more or less than they did before the pandemic. I expected this since a lot of people had more time on their hands than ever before and could use it to play on their phones or be invested in social media. It was interesting seeing that some people took a break from social media when looking at the open-ended answers.

**Figure 11**

Answer to "Did you find using social media was a good substitute for in-person communication?"



In Figure 11 it appears that most people believe that social media was a good substitute for in-person communication. I was pleasantly surprised to see this as it backed my hypothesis that social media created a somewhat positive effect on people's lives by being able to replace in-person conversations. People from the community had a different take saying that social media did not replace in-person communication. It was very interesting to see the change since this is the first question that the two surveys differed in drastically. This was surprising for me because their earlier response indicated that social media was used for entertainment and social interaction. This likely means that entertainment and social interactions are not tied together directly.

### **Conclusion**

Through this project, I have learned so much. I was able to somewhat confirm my hypothesis and conclude that more people believe social media helped them than hurt them



during the pandemic. It showed that a lot of society has changed through the lock down more than I personally thought. Additionally, I was able to learn about how people use social media primarily for entertainment, but there are so many other reasons that people use social media, including the key aspect of replacing social interaction during physical isolation. I thought 62 SUNY Purchase students was not enough of a sample size, so I made another survey to get data from my community. Social media was something of a positive to some people. People used social media more than I initially thought. I learned that college students and the community around me have similar opinions about social media, really only differing majorly on whether social media was good to use for replacing social interaction or not (with college students thinking it is good for replacing social interactions.) This conclusion that social media is relatively net even with whether it makes someone more stressed or happy, and on top of that it being an OK replacement for in-person interaction leads me to believe that social media is an overall positive. I have used social media to live my life to the fullest. I met my boyfriend and some friends on Facebook, kept up with people on Discord and Facebook, and am entertained by other apps. Most people said social media was not a good substitute for in person communication which I think is right. There is a difference between talking in-person than over the phone. People do not get the emotional or physical connection on the phone but because so many people got sick, we had to do something else in the meantime. Some people deactivated their social media of the pandemic because it was not good for their mental health even though that was not the case for me.

This data shows us that there are a lot of people who took my survey, and some did it as a joke which was a limitation. One person said they were 69, a Foxkin, and loved 4Chan, which is just a highly improbable set of answers and likely was a joke. The other limitation is that I wish

I had more college students to see what was going on in their heads. Furthermore, I should have a bigger sample size of college students and not only my friends. In order to get my data, I used all of my social media platforms to send out the survey. Due to how I sent people the survey, there was likely a bias. Since it was just my friends and their friends, I only saw a few types of people. I got slightly more women to do the survey so there was a minor gender bias. More men use social media for entertainment than anything else or a positive way to communicate with others. I should have asked if the pandemic helped people find and use drugs more or learned more about mental health. If the media was used to make people use drugs it would obviously be a negative part of the internet. Some other people misused social media for bad things like drinking a lot more, as shown in my literature review. I also should have asked about their race to see if there is an interaction between how people felt about social media and race. I should have asked more in-depth questions. Another limitation was time. I wish I had more time to ask different people. If I had more time, I would go more in depth about how mainstream social media was, how people abused it and posted fake news instead of positive things. On Twitter a bad thing that happened was a majority of people would post about fake things happening in the world. I would have loved to go into how the former president used the media as a political platform more so than anything else. It showed how people would believe in almost anything so that everything would be fine. In the community survey I went up to 70 years old, I could have expanded it to the older generation to get more of a range. There needs to be more social media research and some interviews to get people's voices heard. In my literature review there was a lack of data in the United States of America on social media usage. There are journal articles from China, Iraq, European Union, and worldwide but not much in the USA which is surprising

based on how pervasive it is in society. All in all, I feel comfortable concluding that social media does in general have a positive impact on a post-pandemic society.

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