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Background

- The decline in the attention span of college students has become evident in recent years.
- While students were able to sit through a long lecture, they are now starting to lose focus just 10-15 minutes into a 30-minute to an hour-long lecture. ¹
- Extensive use of social media correlates with a 53% increase in the likelihood of college students having shorter attention spans. ²
- A decline in attention span can impact the performance of college students.
- Preliminary research has linked excessive social media usage to attention-related problems; however, there are gaps in how much time, and how many apps are utilized, that impact attention span.
- By thoroughly investigating the effects of extended social media use, this research aims to expand on this knowledge gap.

Objectives

1. To identify the association between social media usage and attention span among college students.
2. To examine if there is a clear association between social media usage and attention span.

Methods

- An online cross-sectional survey was distributed to San Diego college students in February 2024 (n=92). The survey contained questions on the association between social media and attention span. We conducted a Chi-square test to analyze the association between social media usage and attention span.
- The Human Benchmark Reaction Time Test is an online tool used to measure reaction time.
- Participants were given a link to fill out our survey.

Results

Table 1: Individual Characteristics (n=92)

Year	N (%)
Graduate Student	4 (4)
Undergrad: 1st Year	4 (4)
Undergrad: 2nd Year	10 (11)
Undergrad: 3rd Year	23 (25)
Undergrad: 4th Year	48 (52)
Undergrad: 5th Year+	3 (3)
Age Range, Years	N (%)
18-20	22 (24)
21-23	65 (71)
24-26	2 (2)
27 or Older	3 (3)

Figure 1: Reaction Time (ms)

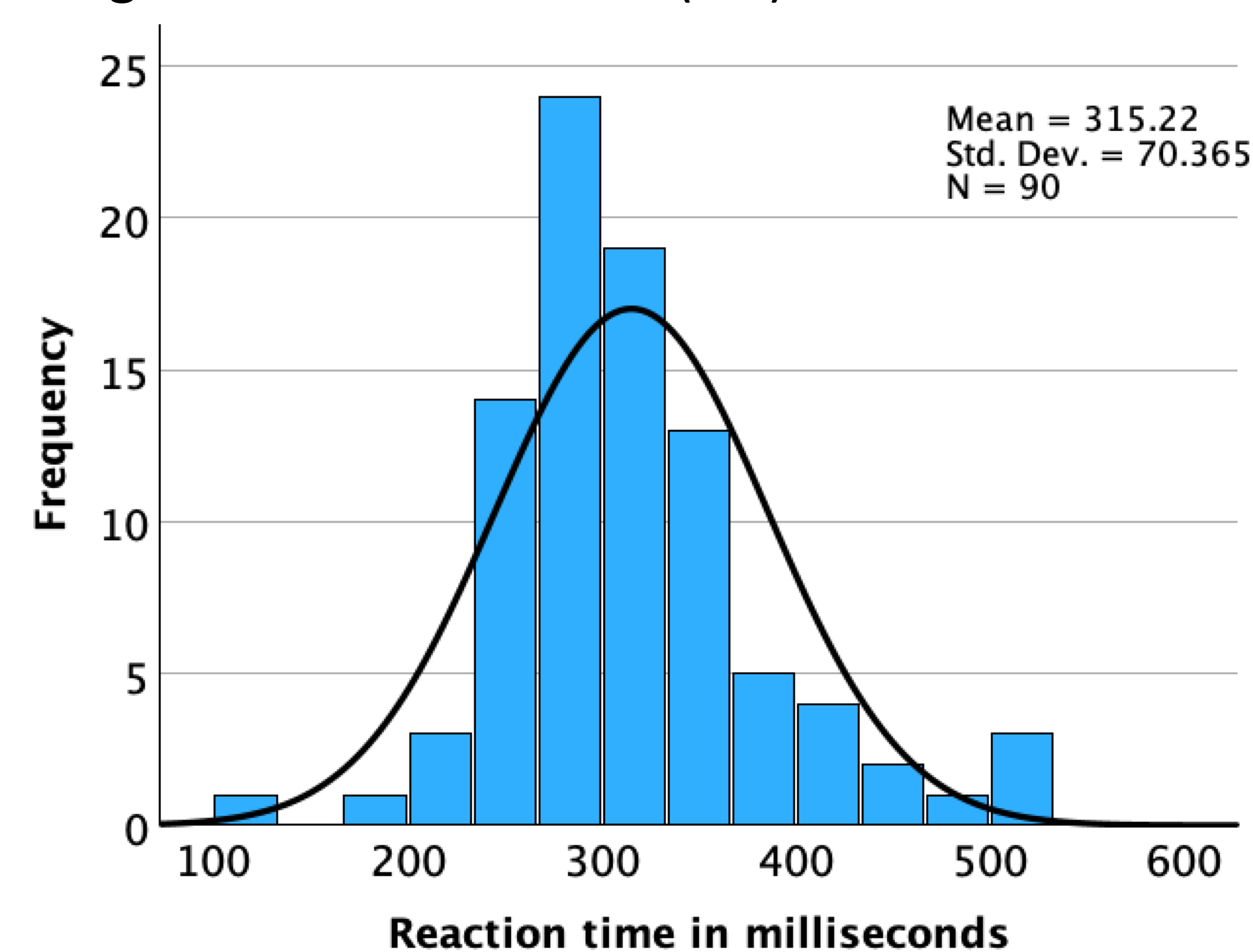


Figure 2: Mean Comparison of Time on Social Media and Reaction Time

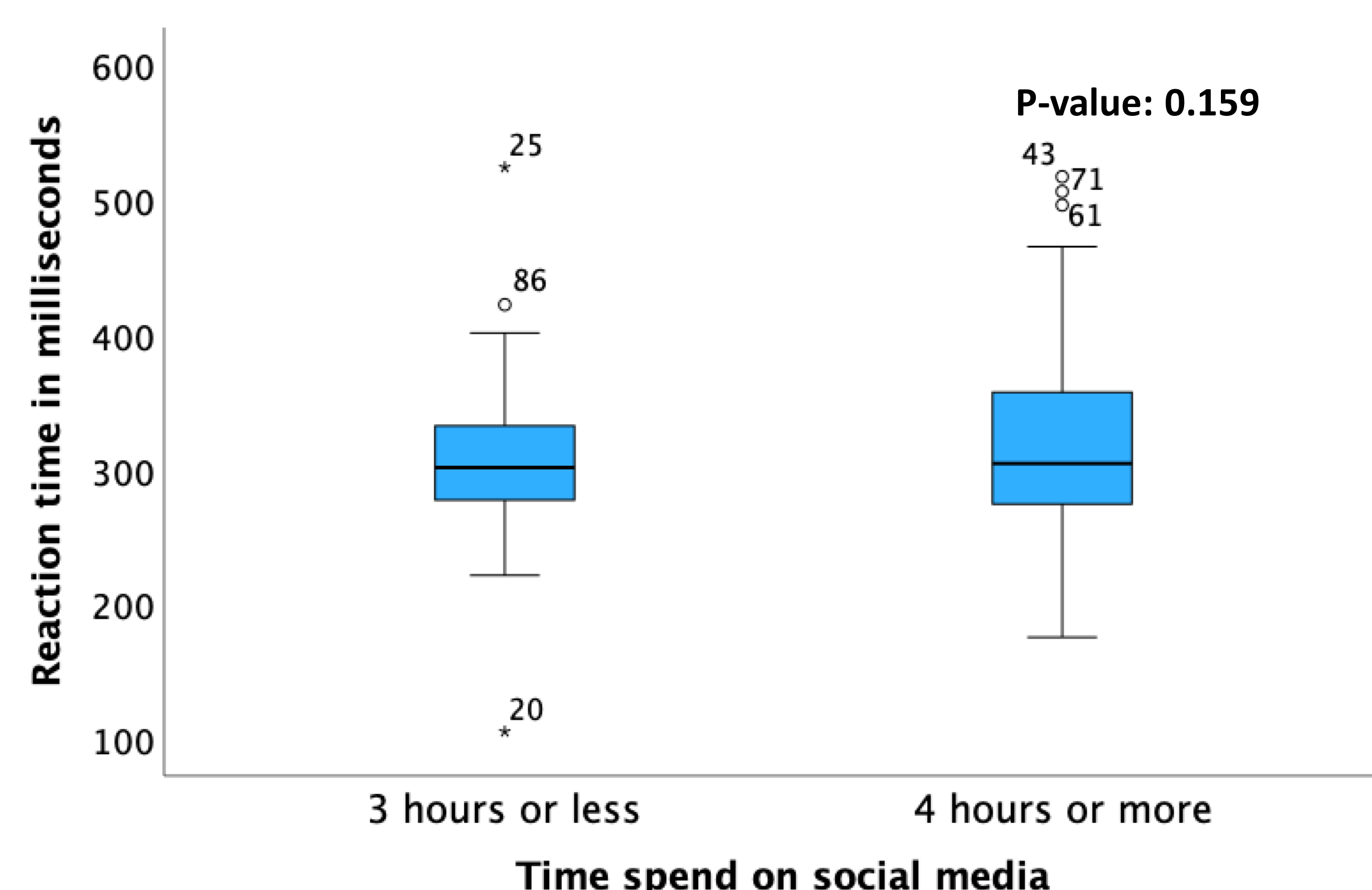
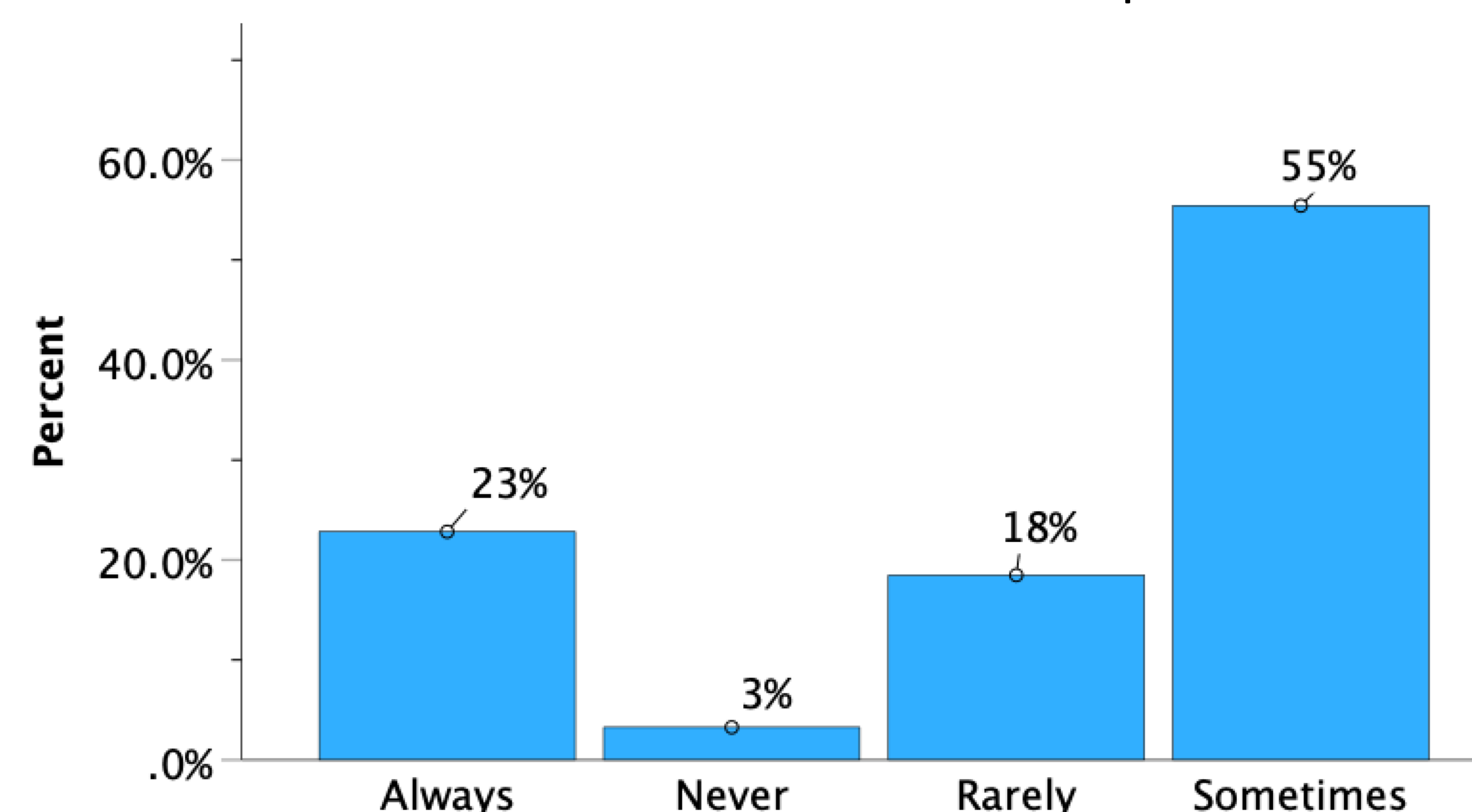


Figure 3: Count of How Often Do Individuals Jump From Task to Task



Conclusions

- There was no association between individuals not using social media heavily (1-3 hours), those who did (4+ hours), and increase in reaction time.
- However, individuals believed that due to their heavy use of social media, they were more distracted and jumped from task to task.

Policy Implications

- These findings support that there may be a necessity for campus health policies to help address the effects of excessive social media use and its effect on attention span.
- The campus policy approaches should prioritize supporting healthy digital habits, encouraging balanced screen usage, and increasing knowledge of possible cognitive impacts.

Acknowledgements

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References

1. Wilson, K., & Korn, J. H. (2007, December 5). *Attention during lectures: Beyond ten minutes - university of Arizona*. University of Arizona. <https://oia.arizona.edu/sites/oia.arizona.edu/files/2016-08/Beyond%20Ten%20Minutes.pdf>
2. *Mental health Mondays: Study finds link between heavy social media & ADHD*. Legacy Community Health. (2019, August 7). <https://www.legacycommunityhealth.org/newsblogmental-health-mondays-study-finds-link-between-heavy-social-media-adhd/#:~:text=Scientists%20found%20that%20those%20with,hyperactive%20mood%2C%20and%20impulsive%20actions.>