

SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH: INVESTIGATING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF ONLINE INTERACTION AND INFORMATION CONSUMPTION

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Abstract: Online social networking has significantly altered human interaction and communication over the past decade. However, it is not yet known if some of these alterations may induce psychiatric problems by altering otherwise normal human behavior. Depressive symptoms have been related to prolonged use of social networking sites like Facebook. In addition, some researchers have shown a correlation between certain types of social media use and low self-esteem in young people. Despite these negative findings, some researches have shown that social networking can actually boost one's confidence. Whether or not SNS use is associated with psychological suffering is still hotly contested, and researchers in this area face a number of challenges. This article provides a concise review of recent studies that point to a correlation between SNS and mental health issues such as depression, altered self-image, and obsessive Internet use.

Keywords: Social networking sites, mental health, online communication, Cognitive distortions

1.0 Introduction :

Social networking sites (SNSs) have changed the way people communicate in many fundamental ways over the past decade, thanks to their meteoric rise in popularity. It is predicted that Facebook's user base, already the largest among social networking sites, will grow substantially in the next years, especially in less developed regions of the world. Facebook's widespread use has ushered in a slew of benefits, including greater opportunities for networking, information dissemination, and distance education.

Recent research, however, has established connections between a variety of psychiatric disorders. Many questions about the impact of social networks on mental health remain unanswered because of their relative newness. However, because of the high volume of users, any future findings that relate these networks to psychological distress would be quite concerning.

This short article summarizes recent studies that have found a link between social networking and mood disorders, altered self-esteem, and other possible mental difficulties. Referenced papers were chosen from Thomson Reuters' Web of Science citation index with the use of the KoBSON search tool (Konzorcijum biblioteka Srbije za objedinjenu nabavku; Serbian Library Consortium for Coordinated Acquisition). There was a total of fifty keywords included in the search, all of which had to do with social networking and mental health in some way. These included terms like "Facebook," "Twitter," "Depression," "Addiction," "self-Esteem," and so on. The most highly cited works were prioritised, as were works published during the past decade in journals with high 2-year and 5-year impact factors (the top 50% rank in the journal category). Elsevier's Scopus database was used to count how many times a certain article had been referenced¹.

2.0 Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how effectively mental health professionals appreciate the potential negative consequences of their clients' increased usage of social media.

Project's Importance in Mental Health Work

Because there have been so few studies on how mental health professionals are reacting to the rise in social media use and its effects on mental health, the proposed study is crucial.

3.0 Literature Review

According to research conducted by Ashford (2017), social media use is associated with an increased risk of feeling lonely, depressed, insecure, jealous, and having low self-esteem. Some users may experience cognitive distortions

and emotional distress as a result of constantly comparing their own lives to those of other users. According to (Ashford 2017),

When trying to help people who have been diagnosed with mental illness, mental health professionals often face challenges related to access and involvement. According to studies, people with mental health issues are less likely to seek therapy because of personal and societal stigma and discrimination (Henderson et al., 2013). Although some users may experience a detrimental influence on their mental health via social media, mental health professionals are increasingly turning to online forums to help those who lack traditional means of gaining access to assistance. Practitioners can use social media to reach underserved groups and spread important messages about mental health and offer assistance to people who are struggling with serious mental health issues (Naslund & Riefer, 2018).

4.0 Facebook And Symptoms Of Depression

Despite a number of studies drawing connections between CMC and depression, this is still a contentious issue in modern psychiatric research. A depressed person may begin or expand their use of social networking sites like Facebook for a variety of reasons.

The 1998 study by Kraut et al. was one of the first to demonstrate that Internet use, in general, has significant consequences on social interactions and political participation. The authors of this study found that people who spend more time online tend to have fewer friends and a smaller social circle, factors that may lead to feelings of loneliness and depression. Numerous other studies have now been published, all of which express worry that children's screen time is negatively affecting their social abilities.

The vast majority of today's popular social media platforms did not even exist when this study was conducted. For instance, Facebook didn't initially catch on with teenagers until a few years after its 2004 inception. Most literature instead centered on the study of the impact of online and offline activities (such as violent video games) on mental health.

It's no secret that adolescent and young adult screen time has skyrocketed along with the popularity of social media. This results in less opportunities for people to engage with one another in the contexts of the house and the neighborhood. A significant number of acquaintances can be made through social media, but these relationships are superficial and can't take the place of real-life conversationsⁱⁱ.

This possible link between social network use and loneliness and depression has not yet been thoroughly explored because social networks are a relatively new phenomenon. Recent years have seen a proliferation of studies devoted to this topic, but the scientific community has been hampered in its ability to thoroughly analyses and discuss the findings.

A favorable association between depression symptoms and time spent on SNS was identified in our recent study of a high school sample. Depressive symptoms were evaluated using the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). On the other hand, we found no connection between BDI and TV viewing habits. It has been shown by other writers utilizing the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 depression screen on a sample of older teenagers comprising university students that there is no correlation between SNS and depressed symptoms. There is a possibility that high school students and older teenagers have distinct reactions to SNS content and challenges for reasons beyond methodological variation.

In 2013, Kross et al. published a study exploring how often using Facebook affected young individuals' levels of happiness. Participants were surveyed through text message five times daily for two weeks to assess their emotions, loneliness, social interactions, and Facebook use. The Beck Depression Inventory, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Social Provision Scale, and the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale were used in conjunction with this method. The findings suggested that users' sense of happiness and contentment in life may be diminished. Depression symptoms are known to be exacerbated by periods of decline.

SNS use is associated with depressive symptoms, and this may be due in part to the fact that people's perceptions of the physical and psychological features of other users are distorted (and often completely false) through computer-mediated contact. This can lead to erroneous judgements about people's real-world appearances, education levels, IQ, moral character, and many other traits in the virtual world. Chou and Edge recently published a research investigating how Facebook may affect students' capacity for empathy and insight into the experiences of others. According to a survey of 425 freshman at a university in Utah, Facebook users are more likely to believe that their Facebook friends are happier than they are and more likely to agree that "life is not fair." It's not always depressing to think that other people have it better than you do. However, this may exacerbate mental health problems in people who have a history of depression or other psychiatric comorbiditiesⁱⁱⁱ.

Facebook is believed to be one of the causes supporting the development of depressed symptoms, hence it is expected that certain characteristics of online behavior may be predictive factors in depression detection and

assessment. It's now common knowledge that social media platforms like Facebook can facilitate the detection of depression in their members at an early stage. In a recent study, Park et al. hypothesized that Facebook users with a greater need for depression resources would be more likely to make use of those tools. Emotion Diary, a custom app created by the authors, has been shown to accurately assess depressive symptoms in humans. That is to say, it may be possible to assess the likelihood that a social network user may develop depression, and this assessment may have a high predictive value. In addition to these findings, this analysis provided evidence that a depressed Facebook user shares other features, including a smaller friend network and an increased tendency to geotag their posts. Because of their measurable nature, these characteristics may also be useful as predictors in any future attempts to screen for depression.

However, it is important to note that there is currently no conclusive proof that social networking sites like Facebook induce depression or any symptom of depression. The authors of the aforementioned study on the Internet and depression, Kraut et al., have recently released findings suggesting that social networking site (SNS) use for interacting with friends and family is correlated with less depression. Social networks and the Internet in general appear to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of social relationships, especially among families and close groups of friends, which may in turn have a good effect on mental health. However, heavy use of SNS outside of these groups may erode already fragile ties to loved ones and fuel feelings of isolation and despair^{iv}.

5.0 Statistics

Many reports have linked the usage of social media with dire outcomes, leading to widespread criticism.

Results from large-scale surveys and population research indicate that time spent in the online social media environment can have a disastrous impact on users' psychological well-being. Teen suicide attempts increased by 25% between 2009 and 2017, according to a national survey conducted in the United States.

The rise in popularity of social networking sites coincides with this period, which may not be causal in every case. Research from 2021 verifies this result. Social media use was associated with an elevated clinical risk of suicide in later life for girls who began using it at age 13 and continued to use it for at least two hours per day.

Furthermore, a population-based study showed a general decline in mental health in the United States, and adolescent girls are 37% more likely to undergo a major depressive episode.

More than three hours of daily social media use among adolescents has been linked to an increased risk of negative mental health outcomes, including melancholy, anxiety, aggression, and antisocial behavior, according to a 2019 study from a reputable source^v.

6.0 Negative Effects On Health

Inadequacy complexes can be triggered by social networking. Seeing the seemingly perfect lives and flawless appearances of others on social media can make a person feel inadequate about their own life and looks.

One study from 2018 indicated that heavy social media use really makes people lonelier. It also found that people's mental health and happiness improved when they cut back on their social media use.

In addition, social media can open the door to cyberbullying and lead to an unhealthy focus on oneself and isolation from loved ones.

7.0 Positive Effects

Despite certain problems, social media is still a powerful tool for bringing people together from all over the world.

Many people can benefit from forming smaller social networks using social media. Kids who have trouble making friends or expressing themselves in person can overcome these issues by using social media. For underrepresented communities like the LGBTQIA+, this can be especially helpful because it opens doors to communication and support networks.

The voiceless are given a forum to be heard thanks to the rise of social media. Communities like the #MeToo movement provide a safe space for victims of violence and abuse to share their stories, get support, and speak up. Education, information, and a place for expression are all possible via social media.

8.0 Social Networking And Self-Esteem

The phrase "self-esteem" is defined in many books as "the evaluative component of the self—the degree to which one prizes, values, approves, or likes oneself." It plays a crucial role in ensuring one's emotional well-being and general happiness. Depression, eating disorders, and addiction are only some of the mental illnesses linked to low self-esteem as a pathogenic factor. Recent research into the effect of social networking sites like Facebook on individuals' sense of self-worth has yielded contradictory findings^{vi}.

The negative relationship between Facebook use and self-esteem may be explained by the fact that all social networking sites where self-presentation is the main user activity produce or at least encourage narcissistic behavior. Mehdizadeh published a report describing the results of a study in which one hundred Facebook users from York University self-reported their levels of self-esteem and narcissism. Those with lower self-esteem were shown to be more active on the internet, as measured by the amount of self-promotional content included on their SNS profiles. The researchers found a negative correlation between using specific Facebook features (such "The Main Photo") and self-esteem as judged by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

However, other academics have provided evidence that using Facebook can increase self-assurance. Gonzales and Hancock conducted a study in which groups of students were shown either a mirror, their own Facebook profiles, or a neutral website. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to assess each person's degree of confidence. The research results supported the so-called Hyper personal Model, which posits that a person's reputation may be improved by strategic self-presentation.

Data from the aforementioned research and the existing literature support a number of models and hypotheses on how CMC might affect people's sense of self-worth. According to the theory of objective self-awareness, one's sense of oneself would shrink if one is exposed to stimuli that turn one become the object of one's consciousness, rather than the subject. These include situations in which the subject is required to concentrate on himself or herself, such as while staring at a mirror, listening to one's own voice, or composing a resume. It's likely that the average Facebook user will see his or her profile page many times every day, taking in photos, updating biographical information, checking on romantic interests, and more. All of these things can cause a temporary or permanent drop in confidence, especially when compared to similar information seen in other users' profiles.

Gonzales and Hancock's research suggests that a Facebook user's sense of self-worth can be affected by their adherence to the "hyper personal model" of behavior when using CMC. In this approach, the benefits of computer-mediated communication are highlighted in comparison to more traditional forms of face-to-face interaction. It has been hypothesized that people tend to present the parts of themselves on social media that they hope other users would like best. This is because they have more time to do so while communicating online. This is in contrast to more traditional forms of interpersonal communication, in which the subject often lacks the time and space to focus solely on presenting his best attributes to the other person. According to this theory, a person's self-esteem would rise if they carefully curated their online presence and formed more connections with like-minded individuals through SNSs.

However, the total effect of SNS on one's sense of self-worth is likely to be far more nuanced. Daily self-criticism, rivalry, and comparisons to others' accomplishments can all have a positive or negative effect on self-esteem, as can inaccurate assessments of the physical, emotional, and social traits of others, feelings of envy, and narcissistic actions. Despite numerous attempts over the past decade, researchers have been unable to determine the nature of the correlation between these two variables^{vii}.

9.0 Online Social Network Addiction

The psychiatric literature has addressed and sometimes discussed the prevalence of Internet addiction and social media addiction, two relatively recent diseases. Many heavy social media users are so consumed by their virtual lives that they overlook their real-world relationships with loved ones and acquaintances. Our own research and observations have led us to believe that for some chronic Internet users, the sudden cessation of online social networking (i.e., loss of Internet connection) can cause withdrawal symptoms analogous to those of substance or nicotine dependency.

Numerous articles have addressed the topic of online social networking as a possible addiction illness. As with other potentially SNS-related diseases, many concerns remain unsolved in the field of psychiatry concerning the phenomenon of SNS addiction.

In 2012, Andreassen et al. developed the Facebook Addiction Scale, a score system based on a total of 18 items that analyses salience, mood modulation, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse as features of addiction. A total of 423 students were subjected to the measure and a battery of additional questionnaires developed by the authors (including the Addictive Tendencies measure and the Online Sociability Scale). The test was found to be valid for use with students and had a satisfactory reliability. The same year this study was published, Griffiths expressed worry that the phrase "Facebook addiction" would be rendered meaningless given the myriad applications Facebook offers outside of social networking. We believe it is important to expand the current body of research in this field, so we welcome any effort to develop a scoring system that can quantify at least some aspect of social networking addiction.

In order to assess Facebook addiction among students, Wolniczak et al. recently modified The Internet Addiction Questionnaire. The authors also used the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index to evaluate Facebook users' slumber. The findings suggested a link between Facebook addiction and sleep disturbances. This is the first study that we are aware of those uses modified versions of existing surveys to assess Facebook addiction.

The primary issue is determining if SNS addiction is a mental disorder and, if so, what category it falls under. The Tenth Revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10) defines several specific criteria for dependence syndrome, such as a strong desire or sense of compulsion, difficulties in controlling consumption behavior, a physiological withdrawal state after reduction or cessation, evidence of tolerance, and so on. A diagnosis should be made if three or more of the above criteria have been met (at a given time period) in the past 12 months.

There is no doubt that a small fraction of Facebook addicts exhibit symptoms of pathological computer use that meet many of these diagnostic criteria. However, this strategy needs to be approached with extreme caution, as it may become more difficult to differentiate SNS addiction from Internet addiction, a much broader condition (also known as Internet addiction disorder, problematic Internet usage, or compulsive Internet use). The current disease categorization guides, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), do not include Internet or SNS addiction as a recognized mental health condition. In addition, comorbidity, the co-occurrence of two or more mental health disorders, is a common occurrence in cases involving SNS and Internet use. As a result, it's not quite apparent whether the potential for SNS addiction is a distinct mental illness or only a symptom of underlying issues like, say, personality disorders.

The ultimate fate of SNS addiction as a distinct mental disease is uncertain. Many studies will likely focus on this topic in the years to come, and it will likely spark heated debate among psychiatrists, psychologists, and other experts in the field. Since online social networking affects such a big percentage of the global population, the final results and conclusions will have significant implications for the future organization of the mental health system^{viii}.

10.0 Managing The Effects

Methods that promote healthy social media use include: disabling a smartphone's data connection during specific times of the day, such as while driving, at the office, or in a meeting; disconnecting from the internet when I'm with my loved ones; keeping my phone out of my bedroom so I don't wake up with it; turning off alerts makes it less likely that you'll be interrupted by intrusive beeps or vibrations; limiting one's smartphone use for social media in favor of a computer;

11.0 Preventing Negative Effects

Users can reduce feelings of loneliness and other negative results by limiting their daily social media use to 30 minutes.

A person's mental health, happiness, and attention could all benefit from cutting back on their time spent on social media.

12.0 Future Prospects

In the future, researchers hoping to study how social media affects people's mental health are expected to face a number of obstacles. To begin, many of the authors who have looked into this subject so far have employed a cross-sectional study technique followed by correlation analysis in their methodology. Simply because a correlation exists, it does not necessarily imply causality. For example, it's possible that having a poor self-esteem is linked to using Facebook more regularly, but it's also possible that those who already have a low self-esteem are more likely to use Facebook. That is, it's difficult, if not impossible, to tell which of two variables is responsible for the other. Future research that aims to determine the effects of SNS use on mental health would benefit greatly from longitudinal approaches. In the end, we'd be able to draw firm conclusions about this association thanks to the evidence acquired through experimental investigations.

It should be noted that most studies examining the correlation between social networking and psychological well-being have focused on a relatively healthy population (i.e., young adults). When scientists state things like "time spent on social networking is related to depression," they are frequently referring to physiological mood oscillations (measured by numerous psychological scales) rather than depression as a clinical entity. As a matter of fact, as far as we are aware, no such research on those with mental illness has ever been done. We can only discuss the possible association between social networking and mental health issues in terms of the physiological (psychophysiological) variations that occur naturally in psychic functioning.

Remembering that not every social media platform is the same is essential. Facebook, the most widely used social networking site, allows users to make and update profiles that can include media such as images, videos, comments,

status updates, and notes. Popular social networking service Twitter operates on a distinct premise: users write and read short text messages (called "tweets") in which they discuss and share their thoughts and feelings with one another. The majority of the SNS studies listed below focus on Facebook specifically; even when the title of the study includes the phrase "social networking," Facebook is usually the primary topic of examination. We were unable to locate any primary research investigating Twitter's effect on mental health despite extensive searching of the relevant scientific databases. It's to be anticipated that Twitter will soon be the focus of numerous academic investigations.

Conventional correlation may be strengthened or weakened by a number of confounding factors, but these aspects are rarely tested. Some personality disorders are common but often misdiagnosed, and it's probable that those who suffer from them spend disproportionately more time than the average person on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Participation from such people is likely to skew the outcomes of surveys measuring self-esteem, sadness, and addiction. That is to say, in order to maintain a high level of quality in any future research on this subject, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria will need to have been set. Another option would be to utilize a large study sample because these criteria are notoriously tricky to specify and even more so to put into practice. Multivariate regression analysis and other statistical tests would have to be added to this.

Conventional psychiatric questionnaires, like the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Beck Depression Inventory, have been used in the vast majority of the studies conducted to far on the topic of social networking and mental health. It is usual practice today to use many scales to evaluate the same psychiatric symptom or indication. The researcher may use any number of scales, including the Beck Depression Inventory, the CES-D, the HAM-D, the HAM-Z, the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale, the Montgomery-sberg Depression Rating Scale (MADRS), and so on, to quantify depressive symptoms. Although these scales have been used extensively in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, it can be challenging to ascertain which scale has the most sensitivity for a particular population or study group when organizing a study. This may be the case when applied to the entire public or to people of varying ages (e.g., high schoolers, college students, etc.). Rapid developments in computing mean that new, cutting-edge scales may soon be required to assess the likelihood of mental health problems, or at the very least, existing scales should be compared so that guidelines for their future use can be established.

Overall, it's clear that the last decade has seen a dramatic shift in how people engage and communicate because to the rise of online social networking. However, whether or not some of these alterations impair normal human behavior and lead to psychiatric diseases remains unknown. More study is needed to determine if and how SNS use is related to specific mental health problems in the future.

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