

Chapter 61

Facebook Depression or Facebook Contentment: The Relation Between Facebook Use and Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Within the literature, Facebook has received much attention in order to understand the potential positive and negative effects associated with using the social networking site. The current chapter provides a discussion of the empirical support for the differential outcomes associated with actively posting and chatting on Facebook vs. passively browsing Facebook, as well as the underlying mechanisms for the effects. Specifically, the current chapter will discuss two perspectives related to the differential effects of active and passive Facebook use: Facebook contentment (a wellbeing enhancing effect) and Facebook depression (a wellbeing diminishing effect). The authors also discuss the extension of the results to other social media platforms and provide suggestions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites are rapidly changing the way that people interact with one another, and have the potential to influence psychosocial functioning and emotional distress. Of the variety of social networking sites that exist, Facebook has rapidly gained popularity since its induction to the general public in 2005. Facebook users create online profiles containing personal information about the self that are

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broadcasted to other online users, which can be updated with additional information at the discretion of the profile owner. The information shared is also open to the reception of quantitative or qualitative feedback from Facebook friends.

Subjective well-being is a phenomenon that is comprised of people's personal evaluations of their lives, including emotional responses to life events, as well as a personal assessment of one's overall satisfaction with life (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Research on the social aspects of well-being has revealed that interpersonal relationships and social engagement are associated with positive affect and enhancements in subjective well-being (see Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999 for review). With the opportunity to stay connected with others online, Facebook may benefit subjective well-being, resulting in a potential for "Facebook Contentment". However, not all aspects of being social enhance subjective well-being; for example, if a person compares him/herself to others who are doing better off than he/she is, then subjective well-being is reduced (Michalos, 1985). Similar emotional distress may arise when negative feedback is received for information about oneself that is shared on Facebook. In either case, Facebook users are at risk of "Facebook Depression".

Overall, this chapter will synthesize the current literature regarding Facebook and its relation to psychosocial functioning, which may aid in the advancement of research, increase in public awareness, policy development, and clinical applications. The chapter is divided into the following sections. First, the chapter will summarize statistics about the frequency of Facebook's use and its most popular users. Second, the authors will synthesize the literature examining the relationship for active and passive Facebook use separately with subjective well-being and present theoretical background to explain these associations to support the potential for Facebook Contentment and Facebook Depression, respectively. Third, a summary of the literature regarding the effects of posting selfies will be provided, and the authors will present an evidence-based argument that active Facebook use is not always positive when considering selfie-posting behavior. Fourth, the authors will evaluate the uniqueness of the findings related to Facebook in comparison to offline interactions and other social networking sites, which highlights the real but rather small magnitude of effect Facebook has on social interactions and mental health. Finally, the gaps in the literature will be discussed and future research suggested.

AN OVERVIEW OF FACEBOOK USE AND USERS

Internationally, over 1.7 billion people visit Facebook every month, with over 1.2 billion visits every day, and 85% of the logins occurring outside of North America (Stats, 2016). In relation to North American use, in November of 2016, the Pew Research Centre reported that Facebook remains the most popular social networking platform in the United States by an overwhelming margin (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). Furthermore, in a 2015 study conducted by Forum Research on social media usage, Facebook remained the top social network in Canada, with 59% of respondents indicating they use Facebook and visit about nine times each week (McKinnon, 2015). On average, Facebook users are comprised of young adults between the ages of 18 and 39, with female users being slightly more common than male users (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016).

While on Facebook, users are able to create a personal profile, known as the Facebook 'Timeline' that contains an amalgamation of image and text-based information about the user, which can then be shared with the user's Facebook 'friends'. In the context of Facebook, 'friends' consist of a combination of close friends and acquaintances met offline, and family members, for which the average ranges from

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