

Chapter 66

Facebook, Social Comparison, and Subjective Well-Being: An Examination of the Interaction Between Active and Passive Facebook Use on Subjective Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Facebook use has implications for subjective well-being. Previous research has revealed that passive Facebook use is typically related to deficits in subjective well-being, which is thought to be linked through upward social comparison. In contrast, active Facebook use is typically related to enhancements in subjective well-being. The main objective of the present study was to synthesize findings related to Facebook use and subjective well-being and to expand by proposing and testing whether the benefits associated with active Facebook use compensate for the negative effects associated with passive use. The second objective was to discuss policy and research directions. A total of 310 undergraduate students completed an online survey with questions regarding Facebook use, social comparison, and subjective well-being. Bootstrapping analyses revealed that active Facebook use did not buffer the negative effects for subjective well-being that occur during passive Facebook use. Recommendations for future research and education programs are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

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). Subjective well-being is influenced by many factors (Diener, et al., 1999), but the factor most relevant to the current study is social comparison. Given that social media is pervasive among young adults today and offers, opportunities to connect with friends and

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expose them to the successes of others, in other words offering ample opportunities to compare oneself to online friends, it too has the potential to contribute positively or negatively to subjective well-being. There are three aims of the present chapter: First, to provide an overview of how passively and actively using Facebook impacts users' subjective well-being; second, to further investigate these relationships by proposing and testing a model, as well as explore individuals' perceptions of the positive and negative consequences of Facebook use; and third, to provide recommendations for future research and potential policy applications.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT LITERATURE

Social media has become pervasive in society today, with the potential to influence psychosocial functioning. Among the most popular of these sites includes the social networking site, Facebook. While on Facebook, users are able to create online profiles that contain personal information (photos, personal disclosures, memories and so on) about the self, which are then broadcasted to a network of individuals that the user deems a Facebook "friend." The content posted by a Facebook user is done so at the discretion of the profile owner and may be updated at any time. The information broadcasted on Facebook is then open to receiving both quantitative (i.e., likes, reactions), and/or qualitative (i.e., comments, messaging) feedback from the user's Facebook friends. Since Facebook was introduced to the public in 2005, the basic function of creating a personal profile, which is then viewed, and responded to, by friends has remained consistent, although Facebook has continued to create features (e.g., reactions, Facebook messenger) that make connecting with friends' content even easier (Gramlich, 2018).

Facebook has rapidly gained popularity since its induction to the general public. Internationally, over 2.27 billion people visit Facebook every month, with over 1.49 billion visits taking place every day (Stats, 2018). In fact, in October 2018 the Pew Research Centre reported that Facebook remains the most popular social networking site among adults in the United States by a large margin (Gramlich, 2018). Further, Facebook was rated second in the United States (to video sharing site YouTube) for most visited social media website in 2018 (Gramlich, 2018). One of the potential reasons for its immense popularity is that there are a multitude of features on Facebook, as well as a variety of different ways to use the social networking site—all of which offer the user the ability to instantaneously connect with their friendship network. For instance, people can passively observe their Facebook friends by scrolling through the newsfeed, or browsing friends' photos/timelines; this type of Facebook behaviour is typically regarded as *passive Facebook use* (e.g. Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015). In addition, people can engage more actively while on Facebook, such that users are able to disclose information about themselves in the form of photo and status updates (writing what is on a person's mind), as well as sharing links, memories, or memes that one affiliates with. These types of Facebook behaviours are typically referred to as *active Facebook use* (e.g., Ryan & Xenos, 2011). Due to the huge popularity and variety of social functions while on Facebook, researchers have begun to examine how this particular site may actually impact users' subjective well-being.

Early investigations of the relation between Facebook use and subjective well-being presented inconsistent results. Some research indicated that time spent on Facebook may be detrimental to users' subjective well-being (Valenzuela, Halpern, & Katz, 2014; Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014; Lou, Yan, Nickerson, & McMorris, 2012). Others found that time spent on Facebook may, in fact, enhance subjective well-being (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). Still, others suggested no

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