How Do You Social Media?

The Implications of Social Media Usage and Its Effects on Self Perception

Tyler J. Henderson

Angelo State University

Abstract

Increasingly, social media has become an integral part of everyday life. Research suggests that the usage of social media has mixed implications, both positive and negative, on an individual. Despite mixed research results, there is evidence that social media usage has a strong relationship particularly with negative outcomes (depression, anxiety, poor sleep habits, eating concerns and self-esteem). Our research focused on answering the question: does the usage of social media negatively correlate with the self-perception (confidence, self-esteem and self-worth) of individuals? Data were analyzed using bivariate correlational analysis; social media usage was analyzed individually with state-based self-esteem and trait-based self-esteem. Unfortunately, our findings reinforce the established mixed research results of social media and its implications on the individual. Social media usage was not significantly correlated with state-based self-esteem or trait-based self-esteem. Our findings further suggest that research regarding social media and self-perception should be taken into consideration by future researchers.

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From our incredible technological advances that span from the end of 20th century and propagate well into the 21st century, sprouted a remarkably new aspect of the mundane—social media (SM). With this innovative technology's integration, it sparked researchers to ask the questions: How are people using SM? What are the psychological and sociological implications of this new way to mingle, interact, and communicate? Are the implications strictly positive or negative? Many researchers have started here at these fundamental questions. But it seems there may be a potential gap in the literature with regards to SM and its implications on self-perception of the individual. Is there a negative association between the SM usage and self-perception (confidence, esteem, worth)? What follows is a discussion of the established research where social media seems to be associated with several negative outcomes.

Primack and Escobar-Viera (2016) state that the data from large-scale cross-sectional epidemiological studies conducted among young adults displays an association between increased SM usage and negative outcomes (depression, anxiety, poor sleep and eating concerns) (p. 222). A study conducted in the United States that focused on individuals aged from 19 to 32, found that there was a consistent linear relationship SM usage and degree of depression as measured with the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS) brief depression scale. This finding is especially important because it establishes a linear relationship between SM usage and degree of depression. Further, the more one uses SM the more likely the individual is to develop more intense feelings of depression. In many cases of depression, the individual usually reports coupled symptoms of anxiety. Primack and Escobar-

Viera (2016) also discuss the results of a study conducted on Scottish adolescents, and the findings show a clear association between SM use and anxiety (p. 223).

Another study conducted by Woods and Scott (2016), focused on how SM usage was related to poor sleeping habits, self-esteem, sleep quality, and depression on 467 Scottish adolescent youths (p. 41). Participants were asked to complete questionnaires regarding the variables of interest: 97% of the participants used SM; 35% of participants were classified as poor sleepers according to their reports using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI); 47% of participants were classified as anxious and 21% as depressed (p.45). There is substantial evidence linking poor sleep with social media usage; further, Woods and Scott (2016) concluded that greater SM usage, night-time specific SM usage and emotional investment in SM use were each associated with poorer sleep quality and higher levels of anxiety and depression (p. 46). Of the previous results mentioned in Woods's and Scott's paper, it is important to include that Western adolescents have been known to be volatile. In fact, adolescence has become this period where individuals are vulnerable to the onset of depression and anxiety (McLaughlin & King, 2015). If this vulnerability is coupled with excessive SM use and poor sleep routines, an adolescent becomes especially susceptible to developing a mental illness.

Another negative outcome that seems to have some relation with frequent SM usage are problematic eating behaviors (Primack & Escobar-Viera, 2016, p. 223). In a qualitative study where interviewing was conducting on several women in regards to their connection with the "pro-anorexia" movement, Lavis (2016) concluded that these pro-anorexia SM movements allow for eating disorders like anorexia to be valued, and even more troubling, celebrated (59). Lavis (2016) also discusses the pressures the women feel to be thin by viewing, tagging, and posting pictures with "#proana," "#thinspo," "#selfhatred" and "#depression." This is very nuanced

point. Social media does not inevitably cause the viewer of this type of material to become anorexic, but the mere fact that this propaganda is circulating the likes of Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest is concerning especially from the perspective of people who struggle with their self-perception. Individuals involved in a community where anorexia is celebrated is selective and niche-based; however, I do find relevance in this point due to overwhelming evidence that adolescents and younger adults excessively compare themselves to celebrity style figures online, many of which are not explicitly perpetuating unhealthy eating habits, but many do implicitly convey this need to be thin, which, of course, translates into the impressionable public sphere (Te'eni-Harari & Eyal, 2016, p. 947).

We have laid out the foundation of some relationships between SM usage and some negative outcomes, all of which seem to be associated with self-perception. But, why? What are some explanations that could explain these associations? Fundamentally, these problems arise from the innate human necessity to compare the self with peers, celebrities, politicians, etc. SM allows for the dramatic showcasing of only the unrealistic versions of others. Sequentially, the viewing that follows this showcasing may potentially result in individuals projecting negative feelings toward themselves. Herein, with this knowledge that theoretically originates from both objective self-awareness (OSA) theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), a rationale for these phenomena begins to become comprehensible.

Hanna et al., (2017) conducted a study that tested and explored the role of social comparison and self-objectification as possible mediators that may could link Facebook usage with self-esteem, mental health, and body shame (p. 172). The study collected data from 1,104 men and women undergraduates via surveys assessing their Facebook usage, social comparison, self-objectification, and well-being. Hanna et al. refer to Festinger's social comparison theory:

when confronted with information about others, people often engage with this information by comparing and reflecting on their relating experiences. With all of the sharing, tagging, and posting of detailed personal information on Facebook, it is an ideal platform for social comparison processes. Hanna et al. proposed that women and men who report higher levels of social comparison and self-objectification will, in turn, have lower self-esteem, reduced mental health, and greater body shame. Their results supported their hypotheses.

OSA theory can be applied here as well. Participants may think of themselves as a subject and object. The self becomes a subject to routine or the mundane—daily unconscious experiences. The self becomes an object when there is a heightened sense of conscious awareness. So, a prime example of this objectified thinking of the self would be when an individual is editing the perfect selfie for a post. (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011, pp. 79-82). So theoretically, from OSA theory, when preparing a post or picture, individuals begin to compare themselves, as an object, to all of their peers' "perfect" posts or pictures. From here, one can imagine the feelings of lower self-esteem, reduced mental health, and greater body shaming that can potentially couple with excess SM usage (Hanna et al., 2017, p. 172).

Previous work has utilized both objective self-awareness theory and social comparison theory in the sociological and psychological in a capacity separate from one other. Our research on self-perception hinges on both of their contributions. In our study, we hope to prime participants into observing themselves both as a subject and as an object. We postulate that there is a negative association between self-perception and SM usage: as SM usage increases, self-esteem decreases.

Method

Participants

Questionnaires were completed by 28 undergraduates (23 women and 5 men) ranging in age from 18-21 ($M = 18.96$, $SD = .84$) from Angelo State University. Participants (54% Hispanic/Latino, 25% White/Caucasian, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% Black/African American, and 3% other) were recruited via SONA's research sign-up system. Participants were encouraged by their psychology professors to go to the site and sign up for studies of their interest. Most of the professors granted their students, for their participation and as a means to incentivize, extra credit points.

Design and Procedure

This study's design is a within-SS correlational design. All participants were given the same three items of measurement and a demographics survey. All participants were expected to complete and answer the same items.

Measures: Our study consists of three items of measurement: a research created social media questionnaire (this item will be used primarily to gauge the participant's activity on social media--how frequent or infrequent, while also, attempting to identify motive of use), state-based self-esteem scale (Heatherton-Polivy, 1991), a trait-based self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965), and in addition to our three items of measurement, a demographics survey was at the end of the study. Scale reliability of all the items of measurement were calculated. The Cronbach's alphas for all scales suggest that all scales used were consistently reliable.

There are 20 items in the research created social media questionnaire ($\alpha = .88$). Of these 20 items, 2 were reverse coded. The scale for the custom-made questionnaire was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A sample item that was used to measure SM usage includes, *"I use social media daily"* A sample item that was reverse coded

includes, *"If I was unable to check social media, I would feel like I am missing something."* Following these items, using a Likert scale, participants were asked to rate how much they agree or disagree with the statements.

Next, participants were assessed by a 20-item state-based self-esteem scale ($\alpha = .88$) (Heatherton-Polivy, 1991). This scale consists of 3 components of self-esteem: performance self-esteem (seven items), social self-esteem (seven items), and appearance self-esteem (six items). A sample of a performance self-esteem item includes, *"I feel like I am not doing well."* A sample of a social self-esteem item includes, *"I am worried about what other people think of me."* A sample of an appearance self-esteem item includes, *"I feel unattractive."* Of the 20 items, 13 items were reverse coded. A sample of a reverse coded item includes, *"I am dissatisfied with my weight."* This item is also considered to be a measurable item of social self-esteem. Responses to each item were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all to 5 = extremely). The higher calculated mean score of the individual; the higher the self-esteem of the individual.

Following the state-based self-esteem assessment, participants completed a trait-based self-esteem assessment ($\alpha = .88$). (Rosenberg, 1965). This 10-item scale focuses on the general feelings the individual feels about him/herself. It measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. For our study, for uniformity and congruence, the measure was scaled from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. An item used to measure trait-based self-esteem includes, *"On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."* Of the 10 items, 5 items are reverse coded. A reverse-coded item used to measure trait-based self-esteem includes, *"At times I think I am no good at all."* The higher the scores the higher the self-esteem. Following the three items of measurement, a brief 3-item demographics survey will require completion. The three items include, age, sex, and race/ethnicity.

Procedure: Upon arrival of the participants, they were greeted, made comfortable, and were directed to their seats. Once all the scheduled participants arrived, they were asked to silence their cell phones to minimize interruptions. Next, the informed consent documents were passed out to the participants. They were given some time to read and sign the document. Participants were asked, upon their completion of reading and signing the informed consent document, to turn the document over so the researcher knew they completed the task. Once all the informed consent forms were flipped over, the researcher walked around the study room and collected the documents from the participants. Next, the researcher handed out the study packets individually to the participants. They were informed to not begin until instructed to. Next, the participants were informed about a basic guideline they needed to follow while completing the study. They were instructed to not skip across questionnaires. It was stressed that the study be completed in the sequential order as it was stapled. However, they were informed that if they wished to skip items within the same questionnaire they could do so. Upon completion of the researcher made SM usage questionnaire, participants were required to answer questions about the state of the self-perception, and following this task, participants then were required to answer questions about their self-esteem holistically. If participants, skipped across questionnaires, it could potentially skew the data, and prime them to answer in a particular way. Once this guideline was explained, participants were encouraged to ask any questions if they had any. We then instructed the participants to not include any personal identifying information on the study. Also, we raised their attention to the manila folder that was located at the front of the study room. It was explained to the participants that upon the completion of the study, they needed to turn their packet into the folder. This was done to ensure that the participants' right to confidentiality was preserved. Next, the participants were told about the debriefing process of

our study. Participants were told about the information that would be located on the debriefing forms: supervisor contact information, rationale of the study, references of other relevant literature on SM usage and self-perception. Lastly, before the study began, participants were thanked and appreciated for their insights, and were then instructed to begin the study.

Results

We hypothesized that there is a negative association between SM usage and self-perception (state-based self-esteem and trait-based self-esteem): as social media usage increases, self-esteem decreases. We used bivariate correlational analyses to determine the relationships between SM usage ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .68$) and state-based self-esteem ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .58$) and trait-based self-esteem ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .48$). When analyzing the means, it is important to keep in mind the Likert scales used for each measure: for SM usage, a 5-point Likert scale was used, for state-based self-esteem, a 5-point Likert scale was used, and for trait-based self-esteem, a 4-point Likert scale was used. The higher means indicate higher reports of SM usage, state-based self-esteem, and trait-based self-esteem. The mean of SM usage indicates a neutral finding, and the means of state-based self-esteem and trait-based self-esteem indicates high reports of both variables. The analysis elucidated that participants' SM usage and state-based self-esteem were not significantly correlated, Pearson's $r(28) = .07$, $p = .361$. Also, participants' SM usage and trait-based self-esteem were not significantly correlated Pearson's $r(28) = .05$, $p = .397$. From the data analysis, our hypothesis was not supported; there was not a significant negative correlation between SM usage and self-esteem

Discussion

This study was designed to determine if there was a negative association between SM usage and self-perception: as social media usage increases, self-esteem will decrease. SM usage was measured with a researchers' created questionnaire. Self-perception was operationalized into

two measurable self-esteem scales: a state-based self-esteem scale and a trait-based self-esteem scale. From our analysis of the data, there was not a significant relationship between SM usage and self-esteem on either scale.

Our theoretical rationales include framework from Festinger's social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and Duval's and Wicklund's OSA theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). With respect to our study, social comparison theory claims that excessive browsing, tagging, posting and sharing of personal information makes the individual subject to excessive comparison, judgement and reflection, which could result in lower self-esteem of the individual. Regarding our study, OSA theory claims that using social media innately leads individuals to objectify themselves via browsing, tagging, posting and sharing, which activates discrepancies between the ideal self and actual self, resulting in lower self-esteem. Theoretically, our study was grounded properly. As cited above, numerous research studies have referred to both Festinger's social comparison theory and Duval's and Wicklund's OSA theory as being foundational rationales for research. The issues with our project were not likely theoretical.

I believe that our hypothesis was not supported due to limited sample size, participant demand characteristics, and a lack of measuring the participants' true SM motives and habits. Previous works on SM and self-perception, are mixed. Hanna et al., (2017), found that women and men who report higher levels of social comparison, through Facebook usage, had lower self-esteem (p. 173). Gonzales and Hancock (2011) found that selective self-presentation on Facebook can have positive influence on self-esteem (p. 81). These findings established a significant relationship between SM usage and self-perception, but it is evident that SM usage and self-perception is a convoluted multifaceted issue not always pointing in one particular direction.

Our study demonstrates that there may need to be more research conducted in this particular field of study. This study had several limitations that should be addressed for future research. First, our study was very limited in terms of sample size. Our sample included only 28 college students ranging in age from 17-22. Our results are not generalizable to older adults or to young adults who use social media. Our sample was predominantly Hispanic, so we cannot determine whether these results differ across race/ethnicity. This is important to address because increasing and acquiring a more accurate sample size of the population makes the hypothesis more sensitive to statistical reliability and significance. Second, all of our measures were subject to self-report, meaning participants likely biased their responses to the questionnaires, and may not have accurately recorded their SM usage or their true feelings of their self-esteem. It is likely that once participants began responding to the items they became aware of what the researchers were studying. In some cases, it is likely that participants may have even become aware of the hypothesis while responding to the study. This, no doubt, would affect the responses of the participants. Third, I do think there was an issue in the way SM usage was operationalized and measured as a variable. Using 4 options of SM platforms, gives the participants opportunities to evaluate their habits across all platforms per question. This inherently leads to erroneous recall because participants experience SM differently across platforms. They could use platform specific experiences to justify a response to any particular item without truly evaluating the nature of their SM usage. What we considered to be a novel approach to evaluating SM usage, I believe ended up jeopardizing the study. Next time, I would like to narrow the platforms to one particular platform. I think this would be extremely helpful in the research conducted in the future. It keeps the study uniform, and it allows the participants to more accurately evaluate and recall their experiences while answering SM usage items.

Further, I would like to ask more questions evaluating frequency of SM usage. This was lacking in the researcher created SM questionnaire. There should have been more items regarding the participants' hourly, daily, and weekly use of SM. There should have been items asking how long they have used a particular platform to further gauge how long they maintained and manicured their profile. Also, regarding the one particular platform, it should be asked if they have multiple profiles. This could give us insight on the image(s) the participant is trying to portray. If these suggestions are considered, it will make for a better study.

Understanding the motive and frequency of SM use is multifaceted. People use social media for various reasons: keeping in touch with friends and family, networking, dating or demonstrating social status. Many of these motives may be due to individual personality types. Future research, regarding the relationship between SM usage and self-perception, should consider individual personality differences seen across various motives of SM use. Further, maybe motive is what increases frequency? It is likely that more extroverted people use SM for dating or demonstrating social status, so does this directly affect frequency of use? It is likely that more conscientious people use SM for its networking capabilities, so does this directly affect frequency of use? In future research, this would be an interesting third variable to consider.

Overall, this research highlights the necessity to study the effects of SM on the individual. From our study, it is clear that this issue of SM and its effects on self-perception is complex. There are multiple issues that need to be considered when measuring SM usage and self-perception, especially if one wants to conduct a reliable and thorough study. Increasingly, SM is being integrating into the routine of everyday lives. It is very important for us to ask questions and attempt to understand the psychological underpinnings that result from this new technology. From our study and the cited studies above, it is clear that the relationship between

SM use and self-perception is not always pointing in a particular direction. This is exciting because it means more research needs to be conducted in the future to better understand SM and its effects on the individual.

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