

Does Social Media Use Contribute to Depression?

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Social media is a relatively new concept in a modern world. It combines technology and social tendencies to enhance interaction through Internet-based gadgets and applications (Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012). Through social media platforms, users can create and exchange their own content irrespective of time and distance. Social media consist of several popular platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, blogging sites, MySpace, and Twitter, among others. These modes of socialization have transformed interaction through their instant chatting, messaging, and video capabilities. Today, billions of people use social media sites to interact across the world and share various pieces of content, including photos, news reports, Web links, and posts. A recent poll established that 22 percent of teenagers log on to their various social media sites more than ten times in any given day, while over half of adolescents visited the same sites more than once in a single day (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). As more people have begun to own smartphones, the use of social media has continued to rise, shaping the emotional, mental, and social development of the modern generation. Social media sites offer viable tools for modern communication among individuals and even large organizations; they enable the sharing of ideas, opinions, and vital information. The purpose of this paper is to explore the current literature and determine whether existing research supports the theory that social media use contributes to depression among users.

Depression is a critical public health issue, but the exact causes of this mental disorder remain unknown. However, researchers have strived to examine whether there is a link between the use of social media and depression by conducting several studies

among users. One such study involved over 700 students in the United States to determine the association between Facebook use, feelings of envy, and depression. This research showed that Facebook can trigger feelings of envy among users (Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015), which may consequently cause depression. In this case, feelings of envy related to the use of Facebook were responsible for symptoms of depression, an outcome that was noted in users who regularly compared themselves with the others on Facebook. Notably, Tandoc et al. (2015) established that the use of Facebook alone did not contribute to depression, but rather the most critical factor for symptoms of depression was what the researchers called “Facebook envy”. Those who experienced increased feelings of envy when viewing the activities and photos of friends were the ones most likely to develop increased signs associated with depression (Tandoc et al., 2015). Feelings of low mood were inevitable if people continued to monitor Facebook posts of their friends. However, the researchers noted that the relationships between these variables remained complex due to the presence of other underlying factors, including mental health status, lifestyle, and individual traits (Tandoc et al., 2015). The study, therefore, concluded that there was no direct relationship between Facebook use and depression.

While Tandoc et al. (2015) did not establish a direct link between Facebook and depression, other researchers have introduced the term ‘Facebook depression’. It was meant to refer to depression that occurs when “preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression” (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p. 800). Issues, such as increased contact with and acceptance by peers, are fundamental motivations for social

media use. Consequently, researchers have noted that the extent of social media use could be a factor that may trigger depression in some users. O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) also observed that preteens and teenagers who experienced 'Facebook depression' were at relatively higher risks for social isolation. In some instances, they could turn to other websites that offer unsolicited and potentially dangerous sex advice, depictions of substance abuse, and other forms of self-destructive behaviors.

On the same note, some researchers have singled out suicide as a possible consequence of social media use. The relationship between suicide and depression has been well documented in the past studies (Beskow, 1990). Given such associations, researchers are now interested in how social media sites have been used to aid suicide attempts among users. They have, however, pointed out that the extent of social media's influence on suicidal tendencies, if the link exists at all, is not simple to establish due to the many other underlying variables (Luxton et al., 2012). Another possible link between social media use and depression comes from cyberbullying and harassment, both of which contribute to depression. Cyberbullying involves targeted, intentional, and repeated threats, harassment, humiliation, or embarrassment of the victim. It remains a serious challenge on social media sites. Studies have indicated that the rates of cyberbullying have continued to rise (Luxton et al., 2012). At the same time, the social media contagion effect has been reported as a factor that can influence user behavior and eventually lead to suicide. This effect reflects the influence of other users' suicidal behaviors on young people who are exposed to suicide-related material, which can be easily found on many online forums.

Another potentially depression-triggering phenomenon related to social media

use is sexting. Sexting, which involves the exchange of sexually explicit content among users through social media platforms, has led to widespread and unauthorized distribution of the related content (Hasinoff, 2012). Sexting is not limited to teens alone but also involves adults who may post nude or seminude photos of themselves. These behaviors have devastating effects when exposed to an unintended audience.

Depending on the situation, they can lead to charges of child pornography or juvenile law misdemeanors. They can also lead to other unforeseen consequences from school or community authorities, such as suspension from school. Many teens who have been suspended or expelled from school or have had private photos exposed on social media sites eventually develop symptoms associated with depression and other mental health conditions.

Overall, the available evidence shows that social media use can influence depression as well as suicidal ideation tendencies among users. A growing number of social media sites with pro-suicide content pose new risks to vulnerable individuals. Studies have clearly noted that increased exposure to harmful content can lead to depression and other mental health problems, as well as social isolation, harassment, and stalking (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). However, in their systematic review of the literature, Best et al. (2014) noted that contradictory evidence was available regarding mental health and social media use. They concluded that no robust research has directly linked depression and social media use among young people. At the same time, the authors pointed out that social media platforms and other online technologies have been significantly adopted to enhance social well-being and social care (Best et al., 2014). Hence, it is necessary to conduct further studies to determine the relationship

between depression and social media, arguing that social media sites could be effectively used to enhance the well-being of users.

It is difficult to determine the precise causes of mental disorders including depression. This implies that social media use perhaps may not be responsible for depression, but rather it may exacerbate symptoms of depression based on unique individual characteristics of the user, such as personality traits, mental health, and overall physical health. To sum up, this research has established that other confounding variables exist for depression and, therefore, social media use solely does not contribute to depression.

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Appendix A

Use these guidelines if the customer asks for appendices. The first paragraph of the appendix should be flush with the left margin. Additional paragraphs should be indented.

Begin each appendix on a new page with the word “Appendix” at the top center. Use an identifying capital letter (e.g., Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.) if you have more than one appendix. If you are referring to more than one appendix in your text, use the plural appendices (APA only).

Label tables and figures in the appendix as you would in the text of your manuscript, using the letter A before the number to clarify that the table or figure belongs to the appendix.

Appendix B

Demographic Information for Cummings et al. (2002)'s Review

If an appendix consists entirely of a table or figure, the title of the table or figure should serve as the title of the appendix.