The Impact of Maladaptive Social Media Use on Mental Well-Being

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Introduction

- Social networking sites (SNSs) allow people to express themselves by posting pictures and status updates and to communicate with others (Tosun, 2012).
- Many people do not realize that they may use SNSs compulsively and are "overly concerned" and have an "uncontrollable urge" to get on SNSs (Andreassen et al., 2015).
- People often use SNSs to engage in social comparison by comparing themselves to their peers (Vogel et al., 2014).
- Use of SNSs are linked with higher levels of anxiety and depression (Woods & Scott, 2016).

Purpose

- To examine the ways in which people use SNSs in maladaptive ways.

Hypotheses

1. People who use SNSs maladaptively will report higher stress, anxiety, and depression than those who do not.
2. Those who use SNSs to make social comparisons will also report higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than those who do not.
3. The relationship between maladaptive use of SNSs and reported stress, anxiety, and depression will be mediated by whether one engages in social comparison on SNSs.

Method

Participants

- 189 undergraduate students (48 males, 148 females) recruited through Sona Systems.
  - Age range: 18 – 57 years, $M = 21.22$ ($SD = 5.13$).
  - Completed surveys online from the convenience of their own electronic devices.

Materials

- General Social Media Scale (Mabe, Fourney, & Keel, 2014)
- Social Media Disorder Scale (SMDS) 9-item version (Van den Eijnden, Lemmens, and Valkenburg, 2015)
- Depression, Anxiety, & Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)
- Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Scale, adapted (SCS) (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999)
- Demographic Information
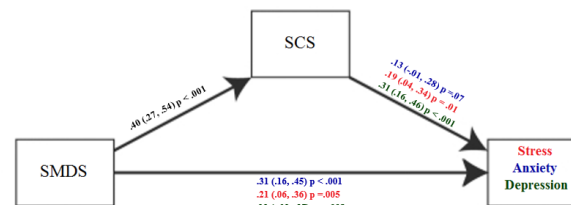
Results

Descriptive Statistics
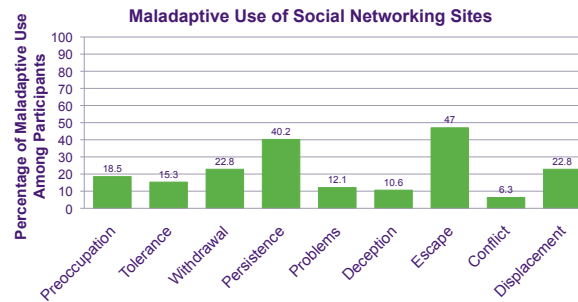
Figure 1. Percentage of participants reporting maladaptive use of social networking sites for each category within the SMDS. Example item: "During the past year, have you regularly used social media to escape from negative feelings?"

Regression Analyses

- **Stress:** $F(3, 185) = 8.11$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .12$
  - Main effect SCS: $\beta = .20$, $t = 2.09$, $p = .04$
  - Main Effect SMDS: $\beta = .29$, $t = 0.79$, $p = .43$
  - SCS x SMDS Interaction: $\beta = -.08$, $t = -0.20$, $p = .84$

- **Anxiety:** $F(3, 185) = 12.60$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .17$
  - Main effect SCS: $\beta = .27$, $t = 2.89$, $p = .004$
  - Main Effect SMDS: $\beta = 1.10$, $t = 3.17$, $p = .002$
  - SCS x SMDS Interaction: $\beta = -.88$, $t = -2.34$, $p = .02$

- **Depression:** $F(3, 185) = 10.25$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .14$
  - Main effect SCS: $\beta = .33$, $t = 3.44$, $p = .001$
  - Main Effect SMDS: $\beta = .24$, $t = 0.67$, $p = .50$
  - SCS x SMDS Interaction: $\beta = -.13$, $t = -0.33$, $p = .74$

Mediation Analyses

Figure 2. Social comparison (SCS) as a mediator between maladaptive use of social networking sites (SMDS) and self-reported stress, anxiety, & depression.

Results (continued)

- **H1**: Partially supported; regression analyses showed that maladaptively using social media accounted for 17% of the variance in anxiety scores.

- **H2**: Fully supported; regression analyses showed that making social comparisons on social media accounted for 11% the variance for stress scores, 17% of the variance for anxiety scores, and 14% of the variance for depression scores.

- **H3**: Partially supported; maladaptive use of SNSs is mediated by SCS for depression and stress, but not for anxiety.

Discussion

Implications

- Excessively using social media is related to anxiety; this may be due to maladaptive use of social media, which could cause an increase in negative feelings. Using social media may also provide an "escape" that college-aged individuals are looking for.
- Maladaptive social media use seems to be mediated by social comparison for stress & depression.

Limitations

- Largely female sample.
- Self-selection of participation.
- Non-experimental, correlation approach.
- Social media landscape is constantly changing.

Future Research

- If replicated, including the 27-item SMDS could produce more accurate scoring, thus yielding different results. The 9-item version was used in this study to decrease survey fatigue.
- Future research may want to create a measure to determine whether the social comparisons being made are upward or downward social comparisons.
- Exploring how SNSs affect other related constructs (e.g., poor sleep, state self-esteem, narcissism).

Contact Information

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