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## RELAX AND LOG ON FACEBOOK: EXAMINING STUDENTS' USE OF FACEBOOK TO RELIEVE ACADEMIC STRESS THROUGH PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

Tamika Tompoulidis

University of Kentucky, [tamika.tompoulidis@gmail.com](mailto:tamika.tompoulidis@gmail.com)

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Tamika Tompoulidis, Student

Dr. Allison Scott, Major Professor

Dr. Bobi Ivanov, Director of Graduate Studies

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FACEBOOK TO RELIEVE ACADEMIC STRESS THROUGH  
PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in the College of Communication and Information  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Tamika Maria Tompoulidis

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Allison Scott, Assistant Professor of Communication

Lexington, Kentucky

2015

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### RELAX AND LOG ON FACEBOOK: EXAMINING STUDENTS' USE OF FACEBOOK TO RELIEVE ACADEMIC STRESS THROUGH PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

College students often times experience academic stress, whether it is due to homework, exams, GPA requirement, or even adapting to the college environment. Social support has been known to reduce stress levels and affect psychological well-being. Social support can also be prevalent on social media sites, such as Facebook. Facebook users can communicate with friends near and far and find the needed support during times of stress. While college students are active Facebook users, little research has examined whether Facebook affects academic stress levels. This study examined if college students use Facebook to gain social support for stress above and beyond psychological uses. Survey results found that escape, relaxation, and social support were inversely associated with academic stress. This suggests that Facebook provides an effective means of dealing with academic stress among college students.

**KEYWORDS:** Facebook, Academic Stress, Social Support, Motivation, Uses and Gratifications

Tamika Maria Tompoulidis

Student's Signature

04/13/2015

Date

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Tamika Maria Tompoulidis

Dr. Allison Scott

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Director of Thesis

Dr. Bobi Ivanov

---

Director of Graduate Studies

04/13/2015

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Date

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

College students are known to have very high academic stress levels (Chiauzzi, Brevard, Thurn, Decembrele, & Lord, 2008). Due to studying for exams, completing homework assignments on time, maintaining a good GPA, and time management, students may become overwhelmed and in some cases show depression and anxiety from such stressors (Chiauzzi et al., 2008). The various stressors that students experience can often impact their overall experience in college. In order to cope with high amounts of stress, students will rely on social support to calm themselves and seek assistance (Campisi et al., 2012). Perceived social support has been shown to reduce stress levels (Burlinson, 2003). Social support can be found in not only face-to-face settings, but even online. One way college students have searched for social support is turning towards social networking sites, such as Facebook (Wright, 2012).

Originally, Facebook was created to access information about others, maintain existing relationships, and build new friendships (Turan, Tinmaz, & Goktas, 2013). Since its first launch in 2004, Facebook has offered various psychological benefits as well. “As the number of social networking sites increases, so does the popularity of using the sites for satisfying cognitive and affective needs” (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009, p. 219). College students represent a large population of active users on Facebook, where they can interact with friends from home and new friends they meet in college, and making the site fundamental in their everyday life (Johnston, Chen, & Hauman, 2013). Wright (2012) surveyed young adults, ages 18-29, and found that seventy-two percent of the participants did in fact use the social networking site for social support. Users can find various forms

of social support, such as emotional and informational support, from their social networks (Wright, 2012).

### **Problem and Rationale**

With the increasing use of Facebook, while students are in school, there is lack of research examining whether college students express academic stress online and whether they use the site to escape, or relax, from their academic studying. The advantages of college students using Facebook for academic purposes are that students can receive assistance from friends on homework, gathering notes from classmates, and students who are just entering college can connect with college friends that will assist them in adapting to the college environment (Gafni & Deri, 2012). However, the disadvantages are that Facebook can be distracting from studies and cause procrastinating from completing work assignments (Gafni & Deri, 2012). The connection between relieving academic stress and seeking social support online has not been examined.

It is important to understand that Facebook is used to maintain relationships, but studies have shown that the site can be used as a bid for connection, or a request to communicate (Gottman & DeClair, 2001). Students might find themselves relying on the social media site for more than just maintaining relationships, but as a call for help and support from friends near and far. The uses and gratifications theory states that people can rely on different types of media for the need to escape, or relax, from reality (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). While the feelings of escape and relaxation are identified as psychological purposes, this research will expand the uses and gratifications theory by examining if social support, a communication need, is significant. Wright (2012) stated

that there are limited studies that have examined Facebook use and college student's perceived social support.

This research study will use uses and gratifications theory to help explain the students use of Facebook as a way to escape and relax from studies and academic stress, but also as a way to find the needed for support from friends and family. The purpose is to gain an understanding of whether or not Facebook has an impact on the academic achievement among college students, what types of perceived social support are present on Facebook, and whether a distraction, or break, from studies via social media can decrease academic stress levels. Uses and gratifications theory was selected for the study in order to explain how and why college students use Facebook to fulfill the need for support from friends, and the need to distract themselves from work.

### **Organization**

The research will be divided into five chapters. Chapter one will introduces the study and the added problem and rationale. Chapter two will give a review of existing research. The chapter introduces the academic stress among college students, their use of Facebook, and how perceived social support affects stress levels. Chapter three will explain the methods of the study. Chapter four will report the results and chapter five will give conclusions, limitations and future directions for the study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

College students with high academic stress levels have various negative psychological effects such as depression and anxiety (MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011). “Stressful conditions place individuals at greater risk for psychological disorder, disease, and mortality” (MacGeorge et al., 2011, p. 318). In order to decrease stress and eliminate physical and mental harm, individuals are encouraged to seek social support (MacGeorge et al., 2011). Social networks decrease depression, individuals live longer, and they create beneficial physical and psychological health (Campisi et al., 2012). Since many students move away from home to attend school, their social networks are not conveniently near to provide support. Thus, social networking sites, like Facebook, provide users an easy opportunity to connect with friends and family near and far (Tong & Walther, 2011). With an increasing use of Facebook and the experiences the user has, their attitudes, and perceptions of the site can change (Johnston, Chen, & Hauman, 2013). While Facebook can be perceived as a site to maintain relationships, over the years since it was launched to the public, users may use Facebook for different needs, such as acquiring social support from friends (Wright, 2012). Therefore, the current research will examine whether college students use Facebook to fulfill the need for social support and as a distraction from schoolwork, which will assist in reducing academic stress levels. Chapter two is organized to first review the variables being tested, then review the theoretical framework, and concluding with research questions.

### **Academic Stress**

Academic stress is the feeling of pressure to attain good grades in school (Murphy, Denis, Ward, & Tartar, 2010). According to the American College of Health

Association (ACHA), academic performance can be negatively influenced by stress (Aselton, 2012). Students are entering college overwhelmed and that stress level does not decrease during their years in college. Stress can be linked to attention problems in school and poor academic performance (Chiauzzi et al., 2008). Being pressured to have a good grade point average is one example of academic stress (Aselton, 2012). Aselton further states that due to the pressure of having a good grade point average, students worry how that will affect being hired for future employment based on those academic records. According to the ACHA (2007), 33.7% of the 16,000 college students surveyed were overwhelmed with stress had poor academic performance, such as low grades, and began to miss and drop courses. Grade competition among classmates has also been relevant to increased stress (Kausar, 2010). Not only are grades an issue for students, but also time management. Students must adapt to a new learning environment upon entering college and may have difficulty managing time spent between different homework assignments (Kausar, 2010).

With grade concerns, time management issues, adapting to a new environment, and preparation for future jobs, academic stress can cause many psychological issues such as depression and anxiety (MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005). Because of the various stressors that occur among college students, it is important to understand what coping mechanisms they employ in order to best relieve academic stress. College students with academic stress have found various coping mechanisms. Having a conversation with friends about their stress and seeing a therapist have helped students (Aselton, 2012). Other than speaking to someone about their stress, students have also referred to exercise, listening to music, and journaling as coping mechanisms to deal with

academic stress (Aselton, 2012). However, based on Aselton's study, most of the coping mechanisms came from having a conversation with someone, rather than the student doing an activity, like listening to music, by themselves. Thus, communicating with others seems to have more of a positive effect on stress levels. According to Kalpidou, Costin, and Morris (2011), first year students may use Facebook as a coping approach to the stress they experience when adjusting to college. If conversing with friends decreases stress levels, then Facebook can be related to coping and potentially facilitate the conversations with friends to alleviate stress.

### **Facebook Use**

The purpose of Facebook is to maintain relationships with others online, while creating a personal profile that includes demographics ranging from employment, relationship status, age, and residence. Tong and Walther (2011) stated that maintaining relationships on Facebook can include updating statuses, posting pictures, instant messaging, and learning what other friends and family are doing daily. Hunt, Atkin, and Krishnan (2012) stated that Facebook users take up to a quarter of their time browsing the site, especially teenagers and young adults. According to Johnston and Hauman (2013), there are seven motives that explain the purpose of using Facebook. Specifically, individuals use Facebook to maintain relationships, meet new friends, for enjoyment, gain popularity, express oneself, for learning purposes, and to voice opinions. Maintaining existing relationships as well as developing new relationships online have been the main reasons for using Facebook (Sheldon, 2008). Students who have large social networks on Facebook are likely to feel satisfied with their lives and are less likely to experience feelings of loneliness (Campisi et al., 2012).

Research that has examined Facebook as passing time, or for escape purposes, explained that those motives were used by individuals who preferred less face-to-face contact (Sheldon, 2008). Sheldon further examined how individuals who lack interpersonal skills will gravitate towards Facebook to fill the need for escape from face-to-face interaction. When individuals are lonely, but still want to minimize social risk, they are more likely to use the internet to fill free time. Thus, introverts are more likely to use Facebook for more escape needs, rather than interpersonal communication. While students may feel a sense of acceptance by friends on Facebook and feel less lonely, few studies have examined how Facebook can affect their academic life (Sheldon, 2008). As stated previously, students in college experience academic stress. As they continue to use Facebook while in school, research should further examine how Facebook correlates with their academic stress.

Although some educational institutions have raised their voices against Facebook, claiming that students may be addicted to the site and spend too much time on there, there is little research on who uses the site, what brings people to Facebook, and what the outcome of their social networking is (Sheldon, 2008, p. 40).

There have been inconsistent findings on how Facebook impacts academic achievement. For example, Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) examined whether Facebook use affects academic performance, such as college students grade point averages. Students who were active Facebook users were more likely to lack sleep, which caused them to miss classes the next day. Kirschner and Karpinski found that there was a negative relationship between Facebook use and academic performance, reporting lower GPA, and less time spent studying. However, Kirschner and Karpinski did not specify



what motivated, or drove, students to use Facebook during studying. They did not examine students' academic stress levels, and the study was based on correlations of Facebook use and GPA's, not causation.

Alternatively, Zhang, Tang, and Leung (2011) conducted a study examining what drives individuals to using Facebook. Emotional openness, or expressing feelings, is one reason why people use Facebook. People who consistently used Facebook felt motivated to express liking, but also post information to grab attention of those who would respond (Zhang et al., 2011). Thus, Facebook is not only used to keep in contact with friends and maintain relationships, but it can also serve as a medium to initiate a call for an emotional connection. Facebook allows users to give a status update by asking "What's on your mind?" This is a chance for users to disclose personal thoughts, feelings, or actions. With this ease of disclosing thoughts, further research should examine how college students use these features on Facebook to draw attention to the need for social support. Research on online social support has only focused on social support groups designated towards health needs (Wright, 2012). Users typically share the same health needs, they speak to strangers, and are included in a support community. However, social support can be seen on Facebook, and unlike online communities, users can communicate with friends rather than strangers.

### **Perceived Social Support**

Satisfaction from a social support group can be described as gaining positive psychological outcomes, such as fulfilling a need or expectation (Wright et al., 2012). "The more satisfied a person is with his or her support network, the greater the likelihood of positive adaptation to a stressful situation" (Wright, 2000 p. 142). Social support can

be a psychological perspective by examining the perceived social support that is available. According to MacGeorge et al., (2011) perceived availability of social support is “the perception that support is available is viewed as buffering the individual against stress and its health-damaging effects, as well as enhancing the individuals’ coping” (p. 320). Support can reduce stress, improving coping mechanisms, and can nurture psychological change (MacGeorge et al., 2011).

Social support systems have been known to also increase self-esteem and better construct one’s identity, which are associated with positive psychological well-being (Kim, Kim, & Nam, 2010). Academic stress is one cause of poor psychological well-being which may prompt college students to seek social support. College students may seek social support in face-to-face settings, but may also make use of Facebook to access their social networks. Based on the research by MacGeorge, Samter, and Gillihan (2005), supportive communication from social networks will decrease academic stress levels. However, it is unclear if Facebook, as a source of supportive communication during academic stress, has the same potential to lead to social support satisfaction when compared to face-to-face social support.

Facebook users may use the status update as a way to draw attention to themselves, which can also be known as a bid for connection. Gottman and DeClaire (2001) stated that a bid for connection is a “fundamental unit of emotional communication” (p. 4). The bids serve as requests for emotional support, conversation starters, drawing in attention, or just for humor (Gottman & Ryan, 2005). Initiating conversation through Facebook relates to a desire to connect with someone (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001). Status updates may offer more insight as to the motivations for college

students to use Facebook. Communicating with friends through Facebook allows the users to seek support needed. While this form of updating statuses has been primarily focused on relational maintenance, examining how users utilize Facebook to update their statuses as a call for social support would further expand the research. After individuals post on Facebook as a way to draw attention, they evaluate the messages received and perceive what types of social support they gain when using Facebook.

When individuals have the opportunity to communicate with Facebook friends, which can be classified as weak-tie networks, they feel more comfortable disclosing information that does not harm their identity. Facebook can serve as a source to save face when compared to face-to-face interaction (Wright et al., 2013). “Weaker ties (i.e., more distant friends, acquaintances) may be seen as more desirable network members because of the lowered interpersonal risk of disclosing sensitive information to weaker ties and the advantage of obtaining more diverse information” (Wright et al., 2013, p. 44).

Wright, Banas, Bessarabova, and Bernard (2010) conducted a study examining the relationship between communication competence and social support and how each affects stress and job burnout. Wright et al. (2010) continue to state that social support is what mediates communication competence and perceived stress. When communication competence increases, social support increases and thus decreases the amount of stress, job burnout, and depression. Nurses in particular stated that they coped with the various stressors of their jobs through social support and that satisfaction decreases their likelihood to quit (Wright et al., 2010). While the study examined employee’s job burnout, students can classify as going to school full time as their ‘full time job’ and therefore can experience job burnout as well.

Studies done by Burleson (2003) and Kryak, Murdock, and Marszalek (2012) can provide further research on the effects of perceived social support and stress levels. Burleson (2003) stated that people feel loved and appreciate the assistance received during times of stress, from close friends who show social support. When there is little social support received, especially emotional support, then individuals feel more stressed (Kryak et al., 2012). Thus, this study will further examine whether the perceived social support received from Facebook friends will affect academic stress levels. In order to understand whether student's needs for social support, or psychological purposes are met, the uses and gratifications theory will explain the motives to using mass media.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) answers the “how and why” of using mass media to fulfill specific needs (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004, p.266). “U&G is a psychological communication perspective that examines how individuals use mass media” (Papacharissi, 2008, p. 137). Motives can be, but are not limited to, social interaction, entertainment, arousal, escape, pass time, and relaxation (Papacharissi, 2008). Media interactions are sought during a time when an individual is seeking ways to gratify expectations and needs. Individuals are goal-oriented; they have a motivation to utilize specific media to fulfill needs (Urista, et al., 2009). There are three assumptions to U&G (Ayyad, 2011). The assumptions are that people are always using the media, people will gravitate to specific media in order to fulfill needs, and that people's behaviors are based on goals. To articulate why someone is using a specific media is based on the individual's need. Some people may use Facebook, for example, to communicate with friends while

others just use it to escape daily activity for a while. Some needs could be identified as ritualistic or instrumental (Wurff, 2011).

Ritualistic needs can be classified as passing time and escaping, while instrumental focuses on retrieving specific information (Papacharissi, 2008).

Gratifications from internet use have been identified as “web searching, the acquisition of information, the ability to engage in interpersonal communication, and socialization.” (Urista, et al., 2009, p. 219). However, Urista, et al. (2009) have not classified these gratifications as either ritualistic or instrumental. This lacks support on whether the individuals are utilizing the internet for either escape, or information seeking needs.

Because individuals can have an abundance of needs to be fulfilled, they may become dependent on media use. This dependency then stems into the media dependency theory which states that people will rely heavily on a particular medium to fulfill the various needs (Papacharissi, 2008). Once the dependency has been identified, individuals will continue to rely on the medium in order to gain the desired behavioral results. Palmgreen and Rayburn (1982) stated that gratifications are sought and obtained. One goal of U&G, according to Lim and Ting (2012), is applying the information gained from the mass media to their everyday life. Individuals will take the information they obtained from the media and refer back to that same source for future needs. For example, if someone refers to Facebook to gain social support, and believes it is effective in fulfilling his or her needs, then he or she will go back to Facebook to gain social support in the future. The selection of the medium is therefore purposeful. Rubin, Perse, and Barbato (1988) created a scale that included psychological needs that may be obtained from

different mass media uses. Because the subscales are relevant to using Facebook, the Rubin et al (1988) scale was used to identify the interpersonal psychological needs.

Too much focus of U&G has been on the individual, rather than examining how a specific gratification is delivered by the medium (Sheldon, 2008). Individuals will first have expectations, then they will seek to gratify those expectations, or needs, followed by behavioral intention, and concluding with continuous involvement with that particular medium (Papacharissi, 2008). However, what is sought is not always obtained. If an individual is relying on a specific television program, for example, to fulfill the need for entertainment, then not every individual will find that same program to fulfill their need for entertainment. Research by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) have found that the internet has been highly used for more functional needs, stating that people will prefer online versus face-to-face conversation as well as seeking information.

With the lack of nonverbal cues online, users of social media may feel more comfortable disclosing personal information because they can save face (Tong & Walther, 2011). Zhang et al. (2011) examined what motivations people had to disclose information on Facebook. Having the easiness to express one's feelings, or emotional openness, was one motivation to express themselves on Facebook. Motivations towards using the internet have also been identified as fun, relaxation, and encouragement (Urista et al., 2009). As people continue to rely on Facebook to disclose information, they are continued to be motivated express affection and begin conversations with others (Zhang et al., 2011). "The gratifications that we derive from media need not necessarily be driven by innate needs, but could be triggered by features we experience *while* using particular media" (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 510).

As Facebook has various features to communicate with others, users may discover different needs that can be met while in the midst of interacting with others. Therefore, this could explain the easiness of disclosing information. Zhang et al. (2011) stated that, as people use Facebook to interact with others, they are accomplishing needs that were not previously being sought. Sundar and Limperos (2013) continue to state that online users might not have a specific goal they desire to obtain at the beginning of using media, but will cultivate needs during their interactions. Although students likely use Facebook for various psychological reasons, students could use Facebook to fulfill the need to gain social support above and beyond the psychological uses of Facebook.

### **Research Questions**

In order to understand how college students' academic stress levels are affected by using Facebook and fulfilling the need for social support, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: How do students use Facebook when stressed with academics?

RQ2: Do the reported uses of Facebook predict academic stress?

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

Chapter three will outline the recruitment, participants, procedures, instruments, and data analysis. The chapter will specifically examine how students use Facebook and what their beliefs are on perceived social support received, due to academic stress. This quantitative study will ask a series of survey questions and ask for demographic information from the participants as well.

### **Recruitment**

The participants of the study were recruited via SONA. The SONA option allows students to participate in research studies as a part of class credit. Participants were able to take the online survey from the convenience of their own computers. Only participants who had a current Facebook account were eligible to participate and those who did not have an account were excluded. The participants were at least 18 years of age and were currently enrolled in a university.

### **Participants**

Participants ( $N = 198$ ) included males ( $n = 61$ ) and females ( $n = 137$ ) who ranged in age from 18 to 30 ( $M = 21.94$ ,  $SD = 2.49$ ). Originally, there were ( $N = 200$ ) participants, but two were removed because they had only completed half of the survey. There were ( $n = 1$ ) American Indian or Alaskan Native, ( $n = 8$ ) Asian, ( $n = 12$ ) Black or African American, ( $n = 2$ ) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, ( $n = 4$ ) Hispanic or Latino, ( $n = 166$ ) White, and ( $n = 5$ ) were other. They were classified as freshman ( $n = 26$ ), sophomore ( $n = 47$ ), junior ( $n = 64$ ), and senior ( $n = 61$ ) students.



## Procedures

Recruiting for the study began in February. Midterms for students began that month and therefore academic stress levels were likely to be heightened during that time, given that midterms commonly entail assignments and exams. Participants signed up online through their SONA accounts. Once the participants were confirmed to participate in SONA, they completed the survey online. An overview of the study was first presented, following a consent question indicating participant's responses would be kept anonymous.

The survey began by asking participants two screening questions: if they had a Facebook account and if they were enrolled in a college or university. If a participant answered no to either question, the survey automatically removed the participant from continuing the survey. The participants were asked to include approximately how many minutes per day is spent on Facebook. The scales of perceived social support, and academic stress were then asked. The demographics, including age, sex, and year in school were asked at the end of the survey. The advantage for placing the demographics at the end of the survey is that it prevents primacy effects (Teclaw, Price, & Osatuke, 2012). If participants were reminded of their race, or sex, they may alter their responses. Participants on Facebook were able to complete the survey with no time limit. If the participants had questions or concerns regarding the study, an email address was listed after the completion of the survey, although no students sent an email.

## **Instruments**

### **Academic Stress**

Academic stress was measured using Kohn and Frazer (1986) Academic Stress Scale that measures perceived stress from environmental, social, and psychological stressors. The 34-item scale uses a 5-item Likert ranging from 1 (no stress) to 5 (extremely stressed). Stressors included academic stress and family issues that increase academic stress. A few sample items include, “Studying for exams”, “Lack of time for study”, and “Timing, spacing of assignments.” The reliability for the current study was  $\alpha = .937$  ( $M = 90.82$ ,  $SD = 21.75$ ).

### **Facebook Use**

Facebook use was measured using Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe’s (2007) Facebook Intensity Scale. The 6-item scale measures attitudes and behavior towards using Facebook. The responses to the scale indicated whether students had a positive attitude towards Facebook and whether they used Facebook on a daily basis. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample statements included were, “Facebook is part of my everyday activity,” and “I feel out of touch when I haven’t logged onto Facebook.” The reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .81$  ( $M = 18.24$ ,  $SD = 4.48$ ).

### **Facebook Motivations**

Using Facebook to gratify specific needs was measured using Rubin, Perse, and Barbato’s (1988) Interpersonal Communication Motives Scale. This scale provides the necessary motivations for why students might use Facebook for psychological purposes. Subscales included inclusion, escape, relaxation, pleasure, affection, and control. The

goal was to understand how students used Facebook for inclusion to their social networks, escape from academic stress, and relaxation from academic stress. The 5-point Likert scale has a total of 28 statements. Statements were modified to include the term “academic” related stress. The following modifications were, including the term “academic” to a statement in order to say “Because I just need to talk about my academic problems sometimes”, and stating “I use Facebook...” instead of the original “I talk to people.” The reliability for the various dimensions were: pleasure was  $\alpha = .89$ , ( $M = 23.98$ ,  $SD = 5.36$ ), affection  $\alpha = .88$  ( $M = 14.86$ ,  $SD = 4.30$ ), inclusion  $\alpha = .89$  ( $M = 8.96$ ,  $SD = 3.45$ ), escape  $\alpha = .85$  ( $M = 14.28$ ,  $SD = 3.49$ ), relaxation  $\alpha = .92$  ( $M = 12.05$ ,  $SD = 3.45$ ), and control  $\alpha = .86$  ( $M = 6.21$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ).

### **Perceived Social Support**

Perceived social support was tested using The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983). The 16 items were from three different subscales: self-esteem (“There is someone who takes pride in my accomplishments”), appraisal (“There are several people on Facebook that I trust to help solve my problems”) and belonging (“I often talk with family or friends on Facebook”). Tangible support was not included in the survey because the research is asking how social support is perceived on Facebook and not in person occurrences. Modifications to items were made in order to specify perceived social support on Facebook, and not on general social media sites or in face-to-face interactions. Items were modified to state “on Facebook” and relate issues, or seeking support, to “academic stress.” However, due to the low reliability on items including “academic stress,” in the current research, those items were then removed to improve reliability. Items were on a 4-point Likert-scale, however, to keep all of the

scales consistent, items were modified to a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability for the overall scale of the present study was  $\alpha = .75$  ( $M = 29.95$ ,  $SD = 5.41$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using SPSS. Research question one, which asked how students use Facebook when stressed with academics, was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Content was based on whether Facebook is used as a pleasure, affection, control, relaxation, escape, and inclusion. Research question two asked whether Facebook use and social support predicted academic stress and thus used a hierarchical regression. Correlations among the Facebook motives were also conducted.

## Chapter Four: Results

This chapter will outline the results of the present study. Tables will be used to better outline the descriptive statistics on the variables and show the hierarchical regression analysis.

The average minutes per day spent on Facebook were ( $M = 50, SD = 53.1$ ). RQ1 asked how students use Facebook when stressed with academics. Descriptive statistics for each Facebook motive are displayed in Table 4.1. As the table demonstrates, Escape and Relaxation were the two most common purposes of using Facebook during times of academic stress. To gain a preliminary understanding of the associations between the variables, correlations were examined. The correlations between each of these variables is presented in Table 4.2.

RQ2 asked whether the reported uses of Facebook predict academic stress. To determine if social support was predictive above and beyond the predictive effect of the psychological uses of Facebook, a hierarchical linear regression was conducted. The results of which are displayed in Table 4.3. Two covariates, year in school and Facebook intensity, were controlled in block 1. Facebook motives of pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, relaxation, and control were entered in block 2, and Social Support was entered in block 3. The overall model was significant. A linear regression revealed a significant model,  $F(9, 189) = 2.36, p < .01, R^2 = .11$  and accounted for 61% of the variance. The model containing the psychological uses of Facebook was significant,  $F\text{-change}(8, 189) = 1.77, p < .01$ . Finally, adding the social support term resulted in a significant improvement over the previous step,  $F\text{-change}(9, 189) = 3.56, p < .01, R^2 = .01$ . In the final model, of all the reported Facebook uses, escape ( $\beta = .181, p < .038$ ), and social

support ( $\beta = .167, p < .049$ ) were statistically significant. Relaxation ( $\beta = -.188, p < .060$ ) approached significance. Table 4.3 presents the results of the Facebook motives and social support. Pleasure, affection, inclusion, and control were not significant.

*Table 4.1. Descriptive use of Facebook.*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	$\alpha$
Pleasure	2.99	.67	.89
Affection	2.94	.85	.88
Inclusion	2.23	.85	.89
Escape	3.56	.87	.85
Relaxation	3.02	.86	.92
Control	2.05	.74	.86
Social Support	2.92	.34	.75

*Table 4.2. Correlations among variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Year									
2 FBIntensity	.03								
3 Pleasure	-.03	.51**							
4 Affection	.03	.37**	.35**						
5 Inclusion	.02	.34**	.25**	.44**					
6 Escape	.04	.42**	.38**	.15*	.30**				
7 Relaxation	-.06	.45**	.59**	.31**	.33**	.52**			
8 Control	-.06	.11	.20*	.26**	.35**	-.02	.17*		
9 Social support	-.06	.43**	.28**	.49**	.46**	.24**	.39**	.18*	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 4.3. Hierarchical Regression on Facebook Motives and Social Support

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Control:									
Year in school	.20	.04	.16	.09	.04	.15	.20	.04	.16
FB Intensity	.07	.06	.09	-.02	.07	-.02	-.05	.08	-.06
Pleasure				.04	.09	.05	.06	.09	.06
Affection				.07	.06	.20	.03	.07	.05
Inclusion				.08	.06	.11	.06	.06	.08
Escape				-.14	.06	-.19	-.14	.06	-.20**
Relaxation				-.18	.07	-.16	-.14	.07	-.19*
Control				.01	.07	.01	.01	.07	.01
Social Support							-.20	.11	-.17***

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to understand how college students use Facebook to reduce academic stress and the extent to which students receive social support from their Facebook friends. College students are often overwhelmed with the amount of school work needed to complete and feel pressured to always do well. Academic stressors can range from adapting to a new college environment, completing assignments on time, or balancing work and social life. With all the added stress, students can become depressed and need guidance and support to feel better. At some point while they are doing school work, many students are interacting with friends and family on Facebook. While Facebook can be used to maintain relationships, the focus of the present study was to examine how students use the site to fulfill communication needs beyond any psychological needs they may meet through Facebook. Based on the current results, students use Facebook to escape from everyday activities and to relax. However, while psychological needs are significant, communication needs proved to be significant above and beyond the psychological needs met by Facebook. This demonstrates the communicative value of Facebook above and beyond the psychological value of the social media site. Relaxation and escape were inversely related to stress, meaning that as these needs increase, then stress levels will continue to decrease.

Social support was found to significantly inversely predict students' stress beyond the predictive power of psychological uses of Facebook. This demonstrates that while Facebook can be used to fulfill psychological needs, communication is also an important need for stress reduction. Stress can negatively affect students' academic performance. Students communicating online about their stress to others can help reduce their stress



levels. The lower the stress, the better students perform academically. Thus, although Facebook is commonly seen as a distraction to students, (and the current results confirm that escape is a significant predictor of Facebook use), the current results imply that Facebook can be used for positive communication purposes, which in turn can enhance academic performance. This can confirm previous research that when stress levels are reduced, students will have a better concentration on improving their academic work.

Social support was associated with lower stress. In assessing social support, the social support scale was modified to make it specific to academic stress. However, this undermined reliability and thus the modified statements were removed. The finding of reduced reliability suggests that social support may be best measured in terms of general stress, rather than specific or contextualized stress. Facebook may extend access to students needing social support during times when they are not close to home or are away from distant family and friends they trust. Being away can create different types of non-academic stressors, but can still impact academic performance and need for support. With the majority of the sample study being upper level undergraduates, they may be experiencing stress in job searching in the midst of academic work and depend on their Facebook friends to provide social support.

The results of the study can be applied to institutions who aim to assist students in reducing stress levels while in school. Rather than informing students that Facebook can be a distraction to their academic studying, instructors would do well to encourage students to continue using Facebook in order to reduce stress levels. Counselors who are seeking alternative and innovative techniques to help students reduce stress can also follow the trend. Informing instructors and counselors of a new way to reduce stress

equips them to better assist students who typically use Facebook as a primary resource to communicate their issues. Because Facebook is already a popular site that students use, students will not need to develop a new habit to reducing stress. Facebook is not only a resource to reduce stress levels, but it is a fun site to use as well. As more students are using Facebook and finding satisfaction in fulfilling their specific needs, Facebook can be an important means in gaining social support and reducing stress at the same time. Therefore, the current study supported and extended U&G theory. The results supported the theory by highlighting the psychological needs being met, and it extended the theory by including communication needs being fulfilled as well.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are a number of limitations to the present study. First, the participants were from one university. Having students only from one institution take the survey could limit how diverse the sample could be. Most of the participants were juniors and seniors, and participants only included undergraduate and not graduate students. The degrees of stress may change between being an undergraduate and a graduate student. There were over 50 statements that participants needed to complete, so there could have been fatigue in taking the survey. In addition, the research surveyed students one time during the semester. If the study were longitudinal, results could have compared the students' stress levels and need for social support in between midterms and finals.

For future research, there could be a comparison between stress levels among undergraduate versus graduate students. While the participants did use Facebook to gain social support, other social media sites, like Twitter, could also be tested. Students' grades and GPA's were not asked. Future research can test whether relying on social

support online can have actual success in their academic work. The data from the current study could further examine sex differences in Facebook use and academic stress.

Finally, the study could be longitudinal; examining students stress levels and reliance on social media at the beginning of the semester, versus towards the end of the semester.

### **Conclusion**

Students stress can have a significant impact on their academic performance. It is important to target strategies that students can easily use to help reduce their academic stress levels. Young adults are active users of Facebook. The site allows users to communicate with friends and family near and far. While the uses of Facebook are to maintain relationships, users are also fulfilling the need to gain social support from their friends as well. When students are stressing over exams and assignments, they are still using Facebook to communicate and seek help. Communicating with someone is one way to help relieve stress. By venting personal issues and asking for help and support, students can gain relaxation and be able to regain focus on their studies.

Facebook is one tool that can help facilitate those conversations. Wright et al. (2012) found that social support is present on Facebook and this current study expanded the research on using Facebook to gain social support. College students may find it easier to seek social support on Facebook because they can communicate with their friends no matter their physical location. The current study links the academic stress that students are experiencing and their Facebook uses to determine whether the site is being used for social support purposes. The hope is that more institutions who attempt to assist students in alleviating their stress will use Facebook as an example of gaining the social support needed for students.

## Appendix A

**Do you have a Facebook account?**

- Yes
- No

**Please enter your age:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**On average, approximately how many minutes per day do you spend on Facebook?**

- \_\_\_\_\_

**Click on the circle that best represents how stressed you are for each event.**

1	2	3	4	5
No Stress	Somewhat Stressed	Moderate Stressed	Very Stressed	Extremely Stressed

Stressors:

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Examinations and their results       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Studying for exams                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Too much to do                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Amount to learn                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Need to do well (self-imposed)       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Essays, projects                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Financial problems                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Lack of time for study               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Timing, spacing of assignments       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Need to do well (imposed by others) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Unclear assignments                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Worry over future                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Forgotten assignments               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Unclear course objectives           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Knowing what is important to study  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Lack of time for family and friends | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Lack of time for own interests      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Making choices about career         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Learning new skills                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Interpersonal difficulties          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Uninteresting curriculum            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Family crisis                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Boring classes                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

24. Conflict with people you live with	1 2 3 4 5
25. Personal health problems	1 2 3 4 5
26. Problems with houses	1 2 3 4 5
27. Conflict with spouse, partner	1 2 3 4 5
28. Loneliness	1 2 3 4 5
29. Peer pressures	1 2 3 4 5
30. Conflict with college system	1 2 3 4 5
31. Conflict with peer(s)	1 2 3 4 5
32. Home sickness	1 2 3 4 5
33. Conflict with lecturers	1 2 3 4 5
34. Sexual problems	1 2 3 4 5

**Select a statement that best represents your feelings about using Facebook**

1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1. Facebook is part of my everyday activity	1 2 3 4 5				
2. I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook	1 2 3 4 5				
3. Facebook has become part of my daily routine	1 2 3 4 5				
4. I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook	1 2 3 4 5				
5. I feel I am part of the Facebook community	1 2 3 4 5				
6. I would be sorry if Facebook shut down	1 2 3 4 5				

**Click on the circle that best represents how you use Facebook to distract from academic work.**

1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
I use Facebook...					
1. Because it's fun	1 2 3 4 5				
2. Because it's exciting	1 2 3 4 5				
3. To have a good time	1 2 3 4 5				
4. Because it's thrilling	1 2 3 4 5				
5. Because it's stimulating	1 2 3 4 5				
6. Because it's entertaining	1 2 3 4 5				
7. Because I enjoy it	1 2 3 4 5				
8. Because it peps me up	1 2 3 4 5				
9. To help others	1 2 3 4 5				
10. To let others know I care about their feelings	1 2 3 4 5				
11. To thank them	1 2 3 4 5				

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 12. To show others encouragement                                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. Because I'm concerned about them                                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. Because I need someone to talk to or be with                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. Because I just need to talk about my academic problems sometimes | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. Because it makes me feel less lonely                             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. Because it's reassuring to know someone is there                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. To put off something I should be doing                           | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 19. To get away from what I am doing                                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 20. Because I have nothing better to do                              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 21. To get away from pressures and responsibilities                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 22. Because it relaxes me  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 23. Because it allows me to unwind                                   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 24. Because it's a pleasant rest                                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 25. Because it make me feel less tense                               | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 26. Because I want someone to do something for me                    | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 27. To tell others what to do  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 28. To get something I don't have                                    | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Select a statement that best represents how you use Facebook to gain social support for academic stress.**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. There are several people on Facebook that I trust to help solve my problems                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. There is someone on Facebook who takes pride in my academic accomplishments                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. There is no one that I feel comfortable to talking to on Facebook about my academic stress                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I often talk with my family or friends on Facebook  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Most people I know on Facebook think highly of me   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. There really is no one on Facebook who can give me an objective view of how I'm handling my academic stress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. There are several different people I enjoy spending time with on Facebook                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8. I feel that there is no one on Facebook I can share my academic stresses with  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. There is someone on Facebook I can turn to for advice about handling my academic stress  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. There is really no one I can trust to give me good academic advice on Facebook  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

11. Most of my friends are more interesting than I am.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

12. When I feel lonely, there are several people I can talk to on Facebook.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

13. When I need suggestions on how to deal with a personal problem, I know someone I can turn to on Facebook  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

14. In general, people do not have much confidence in me.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

15. There is someone on Facebook I can turn to for advice about making career plans or changing my major  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

16. Most of my friends are more successful at making changes in their lives than I am.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

**What is your sex?**

- Male
- Female

**What is your race?**

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American

- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic or Latino
- White
- Other\_\_\_\_\_

**What is your year in school?**

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student

**What is your major?**

- \_\_\_\_\_



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**VITA**  
Tamika M. Tompoulidis

**Education**

B.A. University of Kentucky May 2014  
Major: Communication  
G.P.A.: 3.8/4.0

**Academic Appointments**

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Kentucky, Fall 2014-present  
MC3 Lab Tutor College of Communication, University of Kentucky, Spring 2013  
Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, University of Kentucky, Fall 2012- Spring 2013

**Awards and Honors**

Outstanding Junior, College of Communication, University of Kentucky, 2012-2013

**Manuscripts**

**Tompoulidis, T.** (2015) Relax and log on Facebook: Examining students' use of Facebook to relive academic stress through perceived social support (In Progress)  
Thesis

Reynolds, M.A., Brashear, T.R., Wilson T.N., Robinson, C.E., Untch, L.D., & **Tompoulidis, T.M.** (2014) "Am I really a graduate student?: Exploring the discursive struggles associated with dual degree programs.

Reynolds, M.A, Robinson C.E., Untch L.D., Wilson T.N., Brashear T.R., & **Tompoulidis T.M.** (2014) Undergrad by day, grad student by night: Examining the multiple roles that dual degree students navigate.

Reynolds, M.A., **Tompoulidis, T.M.** Robinson, C.E., Wilson T.N., Untch, L.D., & Brashear, T.R., (2014) Two degrees five years: Discovering what memorable messages impacted dual degree students enrollment decisions.

**Convention Participation**

Reynolds, M.A., Brashear, T.R., Wilson T.N., Robinson, C.E., Untch, L.D., & **Tompoulidis, T.M.** (2014)"Am I really a graduate student?: Exploring the discursive struggles associated with dual degree programs. Panel accepted for presentation at the National Communication Association conference, Chicago IL.

Reynolds, M.A., Warren J., **Tompoulidis, T.M.**, & Brashear, T.R. (2014) "I am a graduate student, but I am not: Exploring the dialectical tensions associated with being enrolled in a five year dual degree program. Panel presented at the Central States Communication Association conference, Minneapolis, MN.

Reynolds, M.A., Davenport, C., & **Tompoulidis, T.M** (2013). Learning through leading:

Pedagogical innovations gained through mentoring undergraduate apprentices.  
Panel accepted for presentation at the Kentucky Innovations Conference,  
Lexington, KY.

Reynolds, M.A., **Tompoulidis T.M.**, & Davenport, C.,(2013). Making Connections in Teaching and Learning: Value Added Experiences In Mentoring Undergraduate Teaching Apprentices (UTAs) in the Communication Classroom. Panel accepted for presentation at the National Communication Association conference, Washington, DC.

**Tompoulidis T.M.**, (2013)"Choosing to Standout: Exploring student-instructor communication during office hours." Competitively selected by; Theodore Clevenger Honors Conference, Southern States Communication Association; Louisville KY

### **Invited Presentations**

2012            Breaking up is hard to do: Managing the Post relational termination blues,  
Co-presented with Tamika Tompoulidis and Chanson Davenport to UK  
101, Univeristy of Kentucky, Lexington, KY (October).

### **Research Fellowships**

Chellgren Research Fellow (University of Kentucky: Fall 2011-Spring 2012)

### **University Service**

Member of Graduate Student Association, 2013-present  
President, Communication Student Association, 2011-2013

### **Membership in Professional Organizations**

National Communication Association  
Southern States Communication Association  
Central States Communication Association