



Loneliness: Explaining the Link Between Social Media Rumination and Distress

Keeley Hynes¹, Marissa Berens¹, Jeremy B. Kanter¹, Leandra Parris², Luke T. Russell¹, Daniel G. Lannin¹, Ani Yazedjian¹
¹Illinois State University ²College of William & Mary



Introduction

- Increasing social media engagement has been linked with increased psychological distress (Twenge, 2019)
- The nature of youths' experiences on social media may more directly predict mental health than the quantity of their usage (Chen & Lee, 2013)
- Increased social media usage may increase ruminative social comparison (Vogel et al., 2017)
- Social media rumination—the tendency to repetitively think about one's social media posts may contribute to feelings of loneliness and by extension greater psychological distress (Vanhalst, Luyckx, Raes, & Goossens, 2012)

Research Questions

- Is there an association between social media rumination and psychological distress?
- Is loneliness a mechanism that partially explains the association between social media rumination and psychological distress?

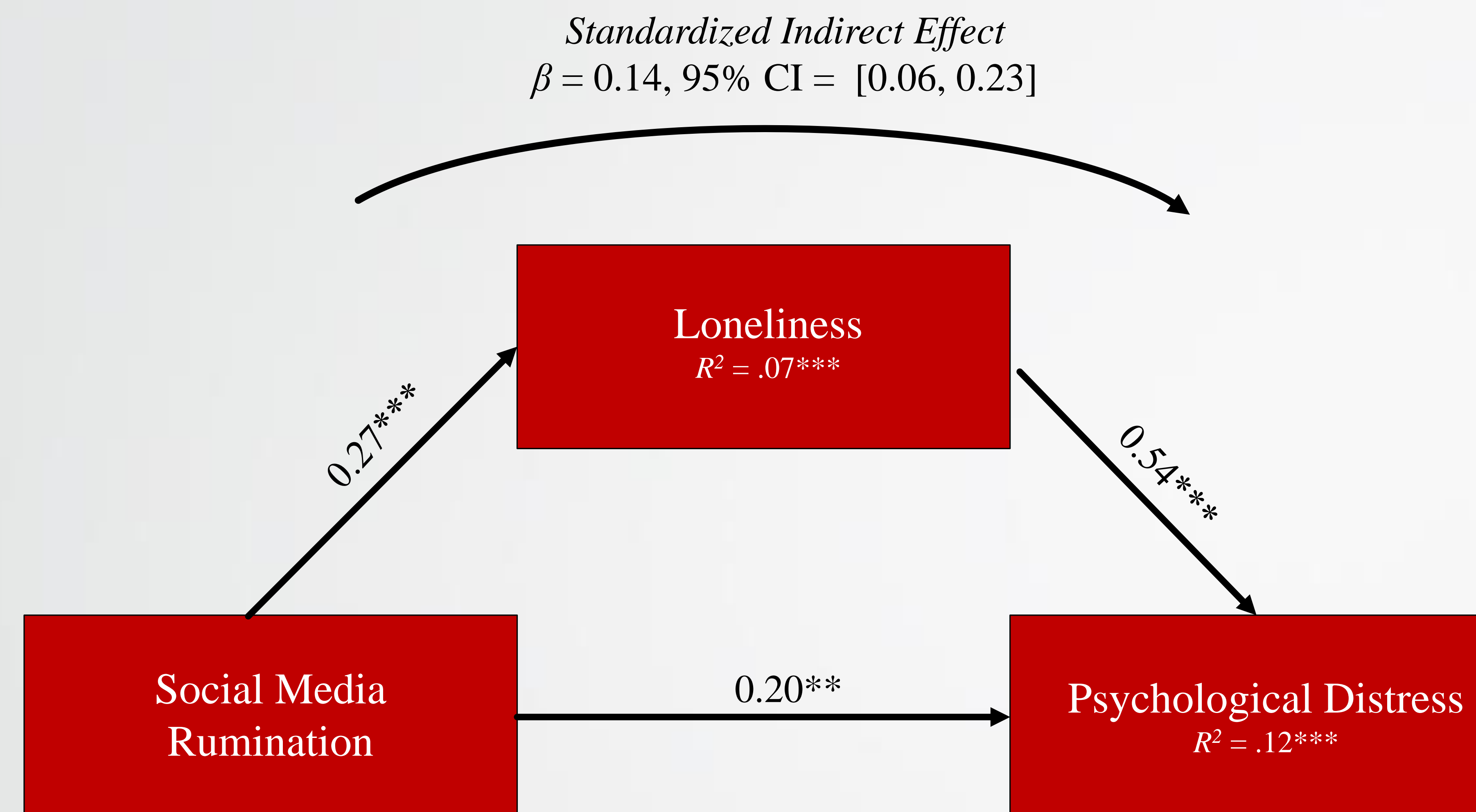


Figure 1. Loneliness mediation model with 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrapped samples. Standardized parameter estimates presented. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Results

- Hayes (2018) PROCESS analyses tested direct and indirect effects in our hypothesized model
- Social media rumination directly predicted greater psychological distress ($\beta = .20, p = .001$)
- Indirect effect via loneliness was also statistically significant ($\beta = .14, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.06, .23]$)
- The model explained 12% of the variance in psychological distress

Methods

Participants

- 184 youth aged 14-21 ($M = 15.71, SD = .95$)
- 60.3% of youth identified as African American
- Enrolled in the Champaign Area Relationship Education for Youth (CARE4U) program

Measures

- Loneliness (van Roekel et al., 2018)
- Social media rumination ($\alpha = .89$; developed by authors)
 - "I worry about what my social media posts say about who I am" (1 = *Almost never* to 4 = *Almost always*)
- Psychological distress ($\alpha = .83$; Kessler et al., 2002)
 - "During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel nervous?" (1 = *None of the time* to 5 = *All of the time*).

Discussion

- Adolescents who ruminate about their social media posts also tend to be more psychologically distressed.
- Ruminating on social media may increase distress because it also heightens feelings of loneliness.
- Social media rumination and loneliness may possibly exacerbate each other over time—ultimately worsening psychological functioning.
- Interventions to bolster adolescents' positive perceptions of their identities may help them mitigate need for external approval.