



Associations Between College Students' Social Media Use and Psychological Adjustment During COVID-19

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Introduction

- ❖ Research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic may be negatively impacting individuals' psychological well-being (Copeland et al., 2021). For example, studies show that college students are experiencing elevated levels of depression and anxiety (Copeland et al., 2021).
- ❖ One reason for mental health problems may be quarantine and isolation and the resulting lack of social interaction.
- ❖ To try to stay connected during quarantine and isolation, and alleviate depression and anxiety symptoms, people may turn to social media. Indeed, research suggests social media use has become more prevalent during the pandemic (Primack et al., 2019).
- ❖ We investigated whether depression and anxiety symptoms are associated with college students' social media use during the pandemic.

Method

Participants

- ❖ $N = 522$ (297 Females, 217 Males, $M_{age} = 19.52$, $SD = 1.26$)
- ❖ 49.5% White, 22.1% Asian, 7.7% Black or African American, 7.4% Hispanic or Latin American, 11.2% Multiracial, and 2.1% were some other race/ethnicity

Procedure

- ❖ Data were collected in Fall 2020 at two small liberal arts institutions in the Southeastern United States
- ❖ Participants completed an approximately 20-minute web-based survey

Measures

Depressive Symptoms

- Center for Epidemiological Studies – Depression (CES-D; Radloff, 1977)
- 20 self-report items; 0 = Rarely or none of the time, 3 = Most or all of the time
- Sample items: “I felt everything I did was an effort”, “I talked less than usual”
- Total depression score computed for every participant

Anxiety Symptoms

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder- 7 (GAD-7; Spitzer et al., 2006)
- 20 self-report items; 0= Not at all, 3= Nearly every day
- Sample items: “I felt nervous, anxious, or on edge”, “I was not able to stop or control worrying”
- Total anxiety score computed for every participant

Social Media Use Symptoms

- Adapted Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013)
- 11 self-report items; 1= Strongly disagree, 6= Strongly agree
- Sample items: “I get upset when I can't log on to social media”, “I feel disconnected from friends when I have not logged on to social media”
- Average social media score computed for every participant

Results

- ❖ Correlational analyses show positive associations between both depression and social media use and anxiety and social media use (Table 1).
- ❖ The regression model with depression and anxiety as predictors was significant and accounted for 3.2% of the variance in social media use (Table 2).
- ❖ Higher levels of depression predicted higher levels of social media use, but anxiety did not contribute to social media use. This suggests that depression is a contributor to social media use above and beyond anxiety.

Tables

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Social media use	Depression
1. Social Media Use	2.80	1.09	-	-
2. Depression	23.02	11.69	.186	-
3. Anxiety	8.76	5.81	.163	.732

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 2. Summary of regression analysis for depression and anxiety predicting social media use

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Adj. R²</i>
			9.717***	.032
Depression	.013*	.006		
Anxiety	.011	.012		

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Conclusion

- ❖ Our findings show that depression and anxiety symptoms were associated with social media use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although both depression and anxiety were significantly correlated with social media use, a regression analysis revealed that elevated depressive symptoms contributed to higher levels of social media use *above and beyond* anxiety symptoms.
- ❖ Consistent with past research, our study shows that college students' psychological well-being may affect the way they interact with and use social media.
- ❖ Future research should seek to further understand why certain mental health problems contribute to social media use.
- ❖ Declines in mental health throughout the pandemic can potentially be catastrophic and have serious implications. While we cannot make major generalizations due to limitations in current studies, this research is important in understanding how COVID-19 has affected and will continue to affect college students and their mental well-being.