

Social Media Use, Connectedness, & Depression in Graduate Students

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INTRODUCTION

- This study seeks to examine the relationship between social media use, sense of connectedness, and depression among graduate students.
- Humans have a need for connection, specifically social connection. The use of social media has demonstrated advantages and disadvantages in the current literature (Katz, Rice, Aspden, 2001; Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney, & Waters, 2014; Ryan, Allen, Gray, & McInerney, 2017).
- Although social media can provide a sense of connectedness, the mechanisms that satisfy the need for connection can increase the risk of negative psychological implications (Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney, & Waters, 2014).
- Graduate students are at risk of burnout, disconnect from their social support, and depression (Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney, & Waters, 2014; Ryan, Allen, Gray, & McInerney, 2017; Flatt, 2013).

OBJECTIVE

- The current study will assess if graduate students use of social media has an impact on their sense of connection or depression

METHODS

- Design
 - This correlational study will examine the amount of time individuals spend on social media, their perceived sense of connection, and depression.
- Participants
 - This study will include two groups, one of participants who use social media and a control group of graduate students who do not use social media.
- Inclusion criteria
 - Graduate students at PCOM in psychology, biomedical sciences, physician assistant, or medicine programs.
- Exclusion criteria
 - Exclusion criteria includes formal DSM-5 diagnosis, history of inpatient hospitalizations, or poor academic standing.
- Measures
 - The GPIUS2 (Caplan, 2010) is a 15-item self-report measure of problematic internet use. This revised version includes subscales for mood regulation, preference for online social interaction (POSI), cognitive preoccupation, compulsive internet use, and negative outcomes (Caplan, 2010).
 - The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised is a 20-item self-report measure of social connectedness (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001).
 - The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) is a 9-item self-report measure aimed to assess depression (Kroenke, Spitzer, & Williams, 2001).

METHODS

- Procedure
 - Participants will be recruited through convenience sampling, more specifically, social media and PCOM email. A survey will be disseminated through Survey Monkey to gather demographic information, the estimated and reported time they spend on social media, and questions from the three previously mentioned measures.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1:

Participants with high social connectedness as reflected by higher scores on The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R) will have lower levels of depression as reflected by lower scores on the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9).

Hypothesis 2:

Participants who display high levels of problematic internet use will display higher depression and lower social connectedness compared to participants who display lower problematic internet use regardless of the amount of time spent on social media.

Hypothesis 3:

The subscales of The Generalized Problematic Internet Use-2 Scale (GPIUS-2): mood regulation, preference for online social interaction (POSI), cognitive preoccupation, compulsive internet use, and negative outcomes will be predictive of scores on The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R).

DISCUSSION

- Summary of findings
 - This research can help raise mental health awareness in graduate students, specifically surrounding the use of social media
 - These findings can help identify the role of problematic use on a sense of connection and depression in graduate students
 - This study will help to identify which aspects of social media cause negative psychological outcomes for students
- Significance
 - Highlight the relationship between social media use and mental health across disciplines
 - The use of social media has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and this study can help further our understanding of the mental health implications of online connection for graduate students.
- Limitations
 - The COVID-19 shutdown contributed to an increase in social media in lieu of face-to-face interaction.
 - Each program has a unique set of demands for students, and each academic year poses different requirements, which can be confounding variables.
- Future Directions
 - Creating groups based on number of followers
 - Studying other mental health symptoms outside of depression
 - Include participants from undergraduate, high school, middle school, and elementary school.

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