How does an increased amount of time on social media influences people’s self-esteem?

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# Introduction

A world where instead of face-to-face, we’re having face-to-phones; instead of finding love, we find satisfaction in “likes”; instead of conversations, we have “follow-for-follows.” It’s a semi-dystopian universe constructed by our need for momentary gratification. Social Media has been present for years beginning with BBS (Bulletin Board System), AOL, MySpace, Friendster, and Facebook. Eventually this has progressed into Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and the Facebook we are now familiar with. No one could have predicted the gravity of this technological force, but there is no doubt that it affects one’s mental health, especially one’s self-esteem. Self-esteem is often described as one’s confidence in one’s own worth or abilities. At first, **mental health and self-esteem** were two mutually exclusive groups, but times have changed and the intersection of these two realms are becoming more evident. Some people use social media as a simple means to do as the term says, and simply socialize with the masses. On the other hand, there are people nowadays who are using social media to put front an image of luxury, happiness, and content. This leads me to pose the question of how an increased amount of time on social media actively influences people’s self-esteem.

As we fall into this realm of technological advancement, we are provided with a wider and easier accessibility to social media sites. These sites have become an integral part of our everyday lives which is why numerous studies specifically, the correlation between social media use and our self-esteem, were conducted. However, rather than getting one absolute conclusion, researchers lead to mixed and conflicting results that resulted to the creation of more empirical studies. One of these studies was conducted by Wending Chen, PhD and Kye-Hyoung Lee, MA (2013) titled, Sharing, Liking, Commenting, and Distress? The pathway Between Facebook Interaction and Psychological Distress. The researchers discussed the relationship between Facebook, a specific social media site, and our psychological distress as well as how the are linked by way of communication overload and self-esteem (Chen and Lee, 2013, p. 728). But before conducting their study, Chen and Lee considered many previous studies such as the late 1990’s time-displacement hypothesis, wherein there is an assumed achieved balance between time spending online and face to face with family and friends; the study about digital communication and nonverbal cues resulting to an increase in stress levels; and more recently, a study that showed self-presentation is catalyst for happiness but is bad for our self-esteem (p. 728-729).

Facebook seemed to be the right fit because aside from it being the year of Facebook frenzy, it is a type of social media site wherein you can construct and share your online persona (self-presentation) while exposed to and at the same time being able to communicate with other user’s self-presentations (Chen and Lee, 2013, p. 729). Thus, they hypothesized that the frequency of Facebook interaction is positively related to psychological distress, the feeling of mental uneasiness.

Chen and Lee (2013) focused on two mechanisms that may link Facebook interaction and distress: communication overload and self-esteem (p.729). They defined communication overload as a phenomena when people feel overloaded by a vast amount of complex communication input from diverse sources, multiple channels, with rapid turn around time, which can lead to stress and depression (Chen and Lee, 2013, p. 729); and self-esteem as “the most fundamental manifestation of core self-evaluations (Chen and Lee, 2013, p. 729),” which has a positive relations with psychological well-being, the opposite of psychological distress. The researchers then hypothesized that Facebook is positively related to communication overload and is negatively related to self esteem.

In conducting the research, Chen and Lee (2013) draws an online survey for 594 college students in two introductory courses at a big public university in southwestern Unites States and offered extra credit points ( p. 729). They measured psychological distress, Facebook interaction, communication overload and self esteem separately and later on analyzed and compared together with the student’s sociodemographic characteristics, including class, race, and sex.

First, Psychological distress was measured by using the five-point Likert-type scale (1= none of the time and 5= all of the time) alongside six items from the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale which were “for the past 30 days often do they felt (a) sad, (b) nervous, (c) restless, (d) hopeless, (e) worthless, and (f) everything was an effort. Second, Facebook interaction was measured by using the 7-point Likert-type scale (1= never and 7 = a few times an hour) alongside 5 items that measures the frequency use of Facebook, which were: (a) upload and share photos; (b) share web links, news stories, blog posts, and notes; (c) ‘‘like’’ or comment on people’s status, wall,links, or photos; (d) ‘‘like’’ or comment on Facebook pages of groups, events, organizations, or companies; and (e) click the‘‘like’’ or ‘‘share’’ button on a non Facebook website to share it on Facebook. Third, communication overload was measured by using a five-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree) using three items such as: (a) I feel that I generally have too many phone calls, meetings,face-to-face conversations, e-mails, text messages, etc.; (b) I receive more information than I can process; and (c) I feel overloaded with information. Lastly, self-esteem was measured by also using the same scale for communication overload using four items: (a) on the whole I am satisfied with myself, (b) at times I think that I am no good at all (reversed), (c) I feel I do not have much to be proud of (reversed), and (d) I wish I could have more respect for myself (reversed).

After analyzing and comparing results, Chen and Lee (2013) lead to three conclusions: first, relationship between Facebook interaction and psychological well-being was consistent with previous research in that they tend to be negative (p.731). Second, communication overload does not link the relationship between Facebook interaction and distress, however, it does link them in a two-step pathway through self-esteem (Chen and Lee, 2013, p.731). Lastly, the findings supports the recent research that Facebook use and self-esteem is likely to have a negative relationship.

Similarly, to look at the correlation between social networking sites (SNS) and an individual's perception of oneself that emanates from the groups that the individual is a part of. Valerie Barker (2009) conducted a study wherein in she focused on the older adolescents motives for using social networking sites (SNS), which are similar to social media sites wherein users can create a profile(self-presentation) and connect that profile to others to form an explicit personal network, as well as a specific focal point on social identity issues and gender ( p.209). Instead of simply studying one’s perception of oneself, Barker’s study titled, “Older Adolescents’ Motivation for Social Network Site Use: The influence of Gender, Group identity, and Collective Self-Esteem” revolved on the social aspect which is called collective self-esteem. It is defined as one’s perception of oneself in consideration of one’s social group or identity. Two studies previous to hers, have examined adolescents use of social media. They indicated that they use social media to find out how others react to them, overcome shyness, and facilitate relationship formation (Valkenberg et al., 2009, p.209). It was also found out that those who felt less secure in the face-to-face contexts reported a preference for internet interactions (Papacharissi and Rubin, 2009, p.209). Additionally, Barker (2009) also used a previous study on undergraduate Facebook users and examined the formation of social capital (p. 209). In this empirical study, it was found out that contrary to Chen and Lee’s empirical study, Facebook is positively related to psychological well-being, findings also suggested that this type of social media site is of a particular benefit to those with low self-esteem (Barker, 2009, p. 210). With this, Barker hypothesized that among people reporting high group identification and positive collective self-esteem, the most important motivation for SNS use would be to maintain contact with their closest peer group and would most likely seek “opportunities to identify with ingroup members who look and act similarly to each other as well as to compare themselves to out-group members (Barker, 2009, p. 209).”; and the most important motivation for SNS use for people with low group identification and negative collective self-esteem would be to seek a form of virtual companionship or social compensation (Barker, 2009, p. 210). Barker (2009) also came to a hypothesis that females would be more motivated to use SNS to communicate with close peers and males would be more motivated to use it for learning purposes (p. 210). In doing so, Barker measured a total of 734 freshman students’ motives for use, group identification, collective self esteem, and frequency of use; all using the items that were closed ended on a 7-point range (1, very strongly disagree; 7, very strongly agree). Of the participants, 68% were 18 years old (SD 0.47), 59% female, 57% Anglo, 13% Latino, 7% Pacific Islander, 9% Asian, 3% African American. The remainder mixed race, European, and Middle Eastern students.

In measuring the motives for use, the items were a combination of interpersonal, media, and computer mediated communication motives; in both group identification and collective self-esteem, the inclusion-of-self-ingroup measure and the 12 amended items for the collective self-esteem scale (e.g “In general I’m glad to be a member of my group.”) were used; and in the frequency of use, participants were asked to estimate the number of visits they make to their sites(frequency) as well as the estimates of the length of time spent on their SNS(duration) on an average weekday and as on an average weekend.

The results of this study showed that most of the participants who reported high collective self-esteem also reported SNS use to communicate with peer group members and negative collective self-esteem reported more instrumental interest in SNS use for social compensation and learning (Barker, 2009, p. 212) which all support Baker’s hypothesis. The findings also showed females are more likely to go to SNS sites to connect with their friends rather than males. Additionally, similar to the findings found in Papacharissi, Rubin, And Ellison et al.’s, results showed that participants with negative collective self-esteem (e.g participants who are shy and unhappy with their friend group) were more likely to use SNS for companionship and the desire to identify with others.

Lastly, to see how self-esteem and other environmental factors are correlated with internet addiction, a study titled, “The Influence of Personality, Parental Behaviors, and Self-Esteem on Internet Addiction: A study of Chinese College Students” by Yao **and his colleagues**. was conducted. They wanted to perform this study because according to them, most existing studies regarding internet addiction revolves mostly around internal and individual factors(Yao et al., 2014, p.104). An example of this would be Petrie, Gunn, and Robert’s findings that introversion, often correlated to shyness, was positively correlated with internet addiction; and felt like they were able to create more diverse relationships online than offline (Yao et al., 2014, p.104). Multiple previous studies were also found on self-esteem as a factor. It was found by Armstrong et al.that people with lower self-esteem is a good predictor of problematic use due to the fact that they may find refuge on the internet because it allows them more control to manage self-presentation and satisfies their need to belong ( p.104). Therefore, the researchers hypothesize that introversion will be positively related to internet addiction and high self-esteem will be negatively associated with it (Yao et al., 2014, p.105).

According to the researchers, although personality and individual motivational factors have always been the popular studies on internet addiction, there might be other factors such as the environment that could influence it as well. An example of this would be cultural bias, it was found in one study on a Chinese sample that the relationship of the individual and his or her parents were measured and concluded that it might have bearing on an individual's internet usage therefore, Yao, et al. came up with the hypothesis that parental overprotectiveness and rejection will be positively related to internet addiction and emotional warmth from them will be negatively related to internet addiction (Yao et al., 2014, p.105).

In conducting the research, a total of 2,397 participants were randomly selected from major Chinese cities, universities, and academic departments. They then measured the four key measures: First, Internet addiction by using Young’s Internet addiction questionnaire which had 20 questions that assess participants’ internet usage, their feedback were rated using the 5-point scale (1 = never and 5 = always); second, parenting behaviors were measured by using a short version of the Egna Minnenav Barndoms Uppfostran (EMBU). It consisted of 19 questions, based on previous studies, that measured rejection, overprotection, and emotional warmth. Their responses were rated using the 5-point scale (1= never and 5 = always). Third, personality was measured by using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire which consisted of 85 questions with dichotomized yes or no responses. The questionnaire focused on 4 dimensions: extraversion, introversion, psychoticism, and predisposition to lie. Lastly, they measured self-esteem through the Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale, which consisted of 10 questions that describes one’s attitude to oneself. The responses were then rated by using the 5-point scale (1= totally agree and 5 = totally disagree).

After comparing and analyzing the results they came up with several conclusions. Yao et al., (2014) found out that psychoticism and neuroticism are both positively related to internet addiction(p. 106). This means the participants impulse control and emotional instability are more susceptible to problematic internet use. The the researchers also concluded that both the mother and father’s rejection and overprotection would increase the risk of internet addiction. In contrast, their emotional support from both parents would increase self-esteem (Yao et al., 2014, p.107 ). This also means that emotional warmth from parents reduces the child’s risk of being addicted to the internet since low self-esteem is also said to be positively related to internet addiction. Additionally, Yao et al., (2014) came to find that the frequency or internet users does not really correlate with the addiction to the internet but rather the duration or how long they stay online (p. 108).

**Limitations**

The aforementioned studies provided a great deal of information about the correlation between social media sites and a person’s perception of oneself through various processes. However, the chances of these studies to be a hundred percent accurate is highly unlikely.

In the first study wherein researchers, Chen and his colleagues (2013), were trying to ~~prove~~ determine whether there is a correlation between Facebook usage and a person’s Psychological distress. They only gathered college students (N = 594) from two introductory classes in a public university in southwestern United States. By looking at the external validity, this method limits the generalizability of the research since college students are not the only population that frequently uses Facebook. In order to do so, they should have included people with a different age range. Furthermore, by looking at how the variables were evaluated, when the researchers measured the variable communication overload they used very generalized questions (e.g. I feel that I generally have too many phone calls, meetings,face-to-face conversations, e-mails, text messages, etc.) wherein there can be a number of reasons why the particular participant had a difficult time understanding an issue and making decisions when they too much information. Chen and his colleagues should have focused more on specific questions about communication overload caused by Facebook use. [There’s a relevant critique at the base of this, but this is exactly how to **not** fix it; we call this “begging the question”—essentially requires participants to figure out what they think the answer to your research question is before they answer the question you asked. Could be more subtle ways of doing this, such as, “When I spend time on Facebook, I feel like I can’t keep up with what’s happening with all my friends,” but still not an optimal fix.]

Similarly in the second study, when Valerie Barker, Ph.D. measured older adolescents’ motivations for social networking, she gathered a total of N = 734 freshman students attending a mandatory communication class in spring 2008 (Barker, 2009, p. 210). By looking at the external validity again, gathering participants in just one class and university limited this study to be generalizable. [Explain—especially considering these were communications students, how might this sample be systematically different from the larger population?] The researchers had also gathered participants that were mostly 18 years old, which indicates other adolescents that are ages 16-17, and 19 were not reflected in this study. Thus, decreased the validity of the study. [Any other issues in the study?]

Lastly, looking at the study by Yao and his colleagues on internet addiction, they had gathered a bigger population size wherein the participants were chosen from 5 cities in China through a multistage sampling which can mean that the study is more widespread and generalized. However, since the average age showed most of the students are 19 years old (M = 19.35, SD = 0.46) and had a low standard deviation (results are clustered to the mean), the sample size did not represent the whole entirety of Chinese college students since ages other than 20 are not reflected in the population. [Okay, but what about other validities?]

**Synthesis**

Despite the fact that all 3 empirical studies do not exhibit a widespread and generalizable sample size, we can still utilize their results if we assume they are referring to the smaller specific type of population where they gathered their participants (e.g The facebook use of college students, from a public university in southwestern United States, is correlated with their psychological distress).

In analyzing the results of these studies, all three indicated that there is a correlation between self-esteem and social media use, it all just came down as to whether it is a positive or a negative correlation. In Chen and his colleagues’ study on Facebook interaction and psychological distress, they found out that these two are positively correlated which means if one goes up the other goes up as well. They also had found that through self-esteem, facebook interaction and psychological distress is associated with one another. This can be viewed as: Facebook interaction self-esteem psychological distress. [I.e., self esteem is a **mediating** variable.] By looking at this two-step pathway, they also came to the conclusion that Facebook interaction has a negative correlation with self-esteem. This indicate that if one has high facebook interaction then they tend to have a low self-esteem.

To support Chen and his colleagues’ findings, Yao and his colleagues conducted a study on the influences of environmental factors such as self-esteem and parental behaviors to internet addiction. They had found that low self-esteem is positively correlated [Or that self esteem is negatively correlated…] with internet addiction. Although internet addiction is more on the extreme side, the results are still comparable to the findings of Chen and his colleagues because both studies had deduced that if one has high facebook interaction and high internet addiction then they are more inclined to have low self-esteem. [Last piece of the puzzle: how comparable are Facebook interaction and internet addiction, as measured in these studies?]

In contrast, Valerie Barker Ph.D., found that collective self-esteem is positively correlated with SNS use when she conducted a study wherein motives for using social networking sites using the influence of collective self-esteem were measured. This means when a participant perceive highly of himself and is very comfortable in a particular group of people (friend group) then they are more prone to social media use. Barker also found that participants who had low collective self-esteem or think they do not fit in their friend group tend to turn to the internet to socialize and make new friends; and participants who had high collective self-esteem turn to the internet as a form of entertainment and pass time only. [Explain this seeming contradiction—what’s the relationship between self esteem and **collective** self esteem? How does this finding relate to those previously discussed?]

Furthermore, these findings led me to prove my theory, that the advancement of technology and the severe influence of social media, the line between reality and perceived reality becomes much harder to separate. It is easy for anyone to just publish the perfect bits of their life and to avoid what is not. Therefore, led people to have unrealistic expectations especially about themselves and forces a change in their self-esteem. [Clarify—how do the research findings support these ideas?]

**Hypothesis**

After examining all the results found in the 3 previous empirical studies, I have gathered 3 deductions to answer how an increased amount of time on social media actively influences people’s self-esteem. First, looking at the amounts spent on a specific social media website the researchers saw that the higher the amount of time spent on it, the lower their self-esteem was. Second, by measuring again how much time a participant spent using the internet, but this time, using internet addiction as a variable. They found out that the higher the duration, not the frequency, in using the internet the lower their self-esteem is. Finally, rather than looking at a person’s self-esteem, researchers looked at the collective self-esteem, wherein how they perceive themselves in a particular group, and found that when participants feel comfortable with their said group (high collective self-esteem) they spent more time on social media use and vice- versa.

By looking at the collective aspect of self-esteem the opposite seems to occur, this is because when people have low collective self- esteem they do not feel like they belong to their peer group and most of the time feel left out (Barker, 2009, p. 213). This led them to only use social media as a catalyst to seek social compensation (new friend groups) and social identification as well (Barker, 2009, p. 213). In addition by looking at the age range of all 3 studies, most of the ages that were identified were 18-19 year olds, which can possibly indicate that participants in this age range are still trying transition from high school to college. Therefore, since I have studies to back up the correlation between the usage of social media and self esteem, I hypothesize that college students that are fresh from high school tend to have a low self-esteem and therefore uses social media to seek social compensation and social identification.

Limitations: 8/10

Relevant limitations are discussed, but could have gone further; need to consider multiple validities and explain their implications for the studies.

Synthesis: 9/10

Relevant comparisons are made, but need to be a little more fleshed out.

Hypothesis: 12/12

Clear and novel hypothesis; solid argument made to support it.

Quality: 5/5

Very clear and thoughtful.

PP2 Total: 34/37

References

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