

A Study of the Effects of Social Media Use and Addiction on Relationship Satisfaction

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Abstract

Based on traditional theories of relationship satisfaction and Internet dependency, this study examined the relationship between social media use and addiction to interpersonal relationship satisfaction with an individual's closest relationship. Two hundred nineteen (N = 219) individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 who are users of social media participated in an online questionnaire about their satisfaction with their closest interpersonal relationship. Our results were based on one-tailed correlations between time spent on social media, social media withdrawal, and their connection to relationship satisfaction. The results did not support our hypothesis and there was a negative correlation between social media use and relationship satisfaction. Further implications and future investigations of the effects of social media use are discussed.

Keywords: relationship satisfaction; social media use; Internet dependency; interpersonal

Effects of Social Media Use on Relationship Satisfaction

Social media, a web-based and mobile technology, has turned communication into a social dialogue, and dominates the younger generation and their culture. As of 2010, Generation Y has outnumbered Baby Boomers, and 96% of Gen Y has joined a social network (Qualman, 2009). Social media is now the number one use for the Internet, and this percentage is growing larger every day (Qualman, 2009). As a result, the population is becoming more dependent on social media, which has led to a number of beneficial and detrimental outcomes. The world is more connected now than ever before because of this technology, but what are the implications for interpersonal communication? The role that these virtual forums and technologies play in interpersonal interaction is vital to understand. There have been numerous studies conducted on social media, the reasons why so many individuals engage in it, its effect on users, and its impact on society at large.

Over time, our society is likely to become more technologically advanced, allowing individuals to do almost anything they please, but in a virtual space. With this continual advancement in technology and social media, some believe we will become more engaged with individuals globally, and some fear that technology will begin to isolate people. We are conducting this study to determine if the prevalence of social media addiction has a negative impact on society. The purpose of our study is to determine whether social media addiction and interpersonal relationship satisfaction are related, and if so, to what degree.

Review of Literature

Social Media Use

Social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange

of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). In this definition, Web 2.0 is introduced as an interactive, collaborative, and participatory web experience for users (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). The Web 2.0 landscape provides user generated content, which can be described as content developed and published by users of these social media sites. Examples of common social media sites that have millions of users include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and LinkedIn. There are hundreds of other sites that all serve a unique purpose for an end-user, and new sites are continually developed to increase two-way participant communication and interaction. An end-user in this instance is the individual using these social media sites benefitting from the increased personalized communication.

In previous studies, social media has been measured by its frequency of use. Frequency can describe how long the user has been engaged in a social media platform (i.e., how long they have had a Facebook account) or how frequently they log in and use social media in a given day or week. Another standard of measurement of social media use is the amount of updates on one’s social networking site and the amount of interaction between an individual and his/her social media contacts. Frequency is an important variable to understand in terms of social media use because it can play a role in an individual’s interpersonal relationships. It also may play a role in determining what can be defined as social media addiction in a young adult’s life.

A recent study utilized the Uses and Gratifications Theory to analyze students’ social media use (Sheldon, 2008). Sheldon aimed to discover the reasons why students used Facebook, and what gratifications they received as a result. Sheldon indicated that checking Facebook has become a routine behavior for students on the Internet because they are already online (2008). According to Charney and Greenberg (2001), there are eight gratification factors for Internet use: to keep informed, diversion and entertainment, peer identity, good feelings, communication,

sights and sounds, career, and coolness. Sheldon's study indicated that relationship maintenance, passing time, entertainment, and coolness motives were significant predictors for how often students logged into their Facebook account and what they expected to get out of their time spent online (2008). The relationship maintenance and passing time motives also positively predicted the number of hours spent on Facebook (Sheldon, 2008).

Social media use is the variable examined in this study to determine the role it plays in relationship satisfaction.

Media and Relationships

The success of newer media forms, such as text messaging and social media web sites, has altered the traditional relationship model. Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson, and Grant (2011) explored how often new technology is used within romantic relationships to communicate, and the correlation between new technology communication and relationship satisfaction. Their study not only dealt with interpersonal romantic relationships, but relationships between family members and friends, as well (Coyne et al., 2011).

Social media are relatively newer forms of media, allowing users to be more interactive with the content, as well as use technologies (both mobile and web-based) to create an interactive platform where individuals and communities share, co-create, and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). During the past decade, it has become far more interactive. Some important aspects of social media are presence, sharing, conversations, groups, reputation, relationships, and most importantly, identity (Kietzmenn et al., 2011). The amount of self-disclosure that is revealed through social media creates one's identity on the Internet (Kietzmenn et. al, 2011).

Numerous studies have been performed on the formation of relationships using media, as well as media's influence on these relationships. Although technology can be helpful in beginning relationships, it also can be used as an aid in ending relationships. Because of the natural and virtual distance social media creates, it becomes seemingly easier to accomplish unpleasant interpersonal tasks (Brown, 2011). This technique of using technology for impersonal interactions using the "techno brush-off," shows one of the negative effects that social media can have on a relationship (Brown, 2011). An individual's presence is not necessary in the breakup process anymore because social media can act as mediator. This exemplifies the role changes that technology continues to adopt.

The objective of the study conducted by Coyne et al. (2011) was to discover how technology and social media were used in romantic relationships. The multitude of options for virtual communication includes cell phones, text messaging, e-mail, social networking sites, blogs, and even webcams. To further social media research, Coyne et al. wanted to discover the role each of these mediums plays in the initiation, maintenance, and ultimately, termination, of relationships (2011). Instead of focusing on the specific feelings that social media influences, the researchers chose to focus on the general picture in order to see if extensive use of these media affected satisfaction in relationships (Coyne et al., 2011).

The results of this study showed that most couples use some kind of media to communicate with each other, and certain media forms had specific uses (Coyne et al., 2011). Text messaging was found to be one of the most popular forms of media because of its accessibility, and the main reason for using social media with a significant other was to express affection (Coyne et al., 2011). Therefore, text messaging was the quickest way to send immediate affection to a romantic partner. These findings relate to sharing and relationships,

two of the main aspects of social media previously mentioned. Sharing with a partner, such as via text messaging, can sustain and maintain a relationship, or can cause a relationship's downfall. As the world of media continues to grow and become more powerful, it is important to understand how media may influence the creation and overall quality of a relationship (Coyne et al., 2011). Although it might be too soon to determine the long-term impact of these communication technologies on relationships, it is still important to find out how they have affected relationships thus far.

Another study looked at how social media affects relationships, and examined the difference between relationships online and offline (Pollet, Roberts, & Dunbar, 2011). This study highlights the two opinions of online relationships: cyberpessimists and cyeroptimists (Pollet et al., 2011). “Cyberpessimists’ assert that Internet use has a negative effect on social life ... ‘cyeroptimists’ point to findings showing that the Internet has a positive effect on social life” (Pollet et al., 2011, p. 253). Cyeroptimists also support the idea that the Internet is merely a supplement to traditional communication, not a replacement (Pollet et al., 2011). With the idea of cyberpessimists and cyeroptimists in hand, the authors focused part of their research on the concept of social media use affecting emotional closeness within each offline network layer (Pollet et al., 2011, p. 254). The network layers were support groups, sympathy groups, and outside layers (Pollet et al., 2011). With their findings, Pollett et al. found that there was no difference in the network size or closeness in relationships between people that utilized social media, and those that did not (2011). According to these findings, the beliefs of both the cyeroptimists and the cyberpessimists are inconclusive, since Internet use did not affect interpersonal relationships and closeness in their findings (Pollet et al., 2011).

In order to understand the role social media plays in relationships, especially close ones, we wish to understand the extent to which individuals are dependent on or addicted to their social media use.

Internet Dependency

There has been a dramatic increase in the use of technology in the average American home, making researchers believe that we are in a new technological revolution (Kelly, 2011). This revolution has brought about many useful tools and devices that allow people to access nearly anything they desire within a few simple clicks. The ease and accessibility of these new technologies makes it extremely possible to become dependent, or even addicted to them. Internet dependency is the degree to which an individual uses the Internet and the degree to which a user can develop a dependent relationship consistent with “compulsive overuse of the Internet that causes irritable or moody behavior when deprived of it” (Mitchell, 2000, p. 632). As the Internet is becoming more interwoven into daily life, the use of the Internet and/or social media becomes a higher priority. Young (1999) explained that the “addictive use of the Internet is a new phenomenon which many practitioners are unaware of and subsequently unprepared to treat” (p. 19). With the growing nature of the Internet and media, the idea of dependent relationships is still being explored.

In a recent study, Mitchell and Beard (2010) aimed to demonstrate that Internet dependence is measurable. They sought to show the level of dependence among college students, specifically by demonstrating that college-aged individuals and young adults tend to heavily use the Internet, but few are actually addicted. As a foundation for the study, Mitchell and Beard used CAGE scales originally developed to explore alcohol addiction (see Ewing, 1984). CAGE is an acronym for cut, annoyed, guilty, and eye--keywords of four main questions

used within the study (Ewing, 1984). Mitchell and Beard adapted the scales to look at how much time participants spent on the Internet and where they used the Internet to determine the levels of potential Internet addiction (2010).

The results of this study explored and validated four factors including heavy usage, time spent, withdrawal, and problem usage of the Internet (Mitchell & Beard, 2010). By exploring the four factors (usage, time, withdrawal, and problem usage), the results succeeded in validating previous works, but more importantly, provided a single scale that could be adapted for future media-related addiction studies. Their study creates a single scale that is consistent with previous studies of Internet addiction, but also expands on the gaps in previous literature (Mitchell & Beard, 2010). Their findings supported the hypothesis that college students use the Internet often; however, the students are not in a state of addiction that would lead to problem usage or withdrawal (Mitchell & Beard, 2010).

In a study intended to learn more about Internet dependency, Sun, Rubin, and Haridakis (2008) sought to investigate relationships among dependency, motivation of use, and the involvement in using the Internet. To explain the connection between the three factors, the study was based around the Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). MSD puts Internet dependency in a power-dependence relationship, where Internet and media hold the power to keep users reliant (Sun et al., 2008). While users become dependent and the Internet is used to fulfill needs, the Internet has no dependency upon particular users (Sun et al., 2008). They linked the three factors together by illustrating that people are motivated to use the Internet to fulfill needs of involvement with others, but the level of dependency ranges due to difference in user motivation and involvement (Sun et al., 2008). Results showed that the two most common uses of the Internet were emailing and browsing, and

the individuals' motives were to seek information or to correspond with others (Sun et al., 2008). The researchers found that involvement drives motivation to use the media and Internet, which to varying degrees can lead to a dependent relationship (Sun et al., 2008).

In the future, differentiating the types of Internet use, as well as the content accessed via the Internet, may be factors studied in terms of Internet dependency. It is a relatively new field with rapidly changing forums, and therefore the research will adapt to discover how Internet dependency shifts over time. In this study, the dependency will be examined to gauge its relevance to interpersonal relationship satisfaction.

Interpersonal Relationship Satisfaction

Interactions in interpersonal relationships can be conducted verbally, nonverbally and now, thanks to the advent of social media and computer-mediated communication (CMC), virtually. However, not all communication between two individuals is constructive and/or leads to satisfaction for both or either parties. Interpersonal relationship satisfaction determines the usefulness of the communication, its content, and future interactions (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Feeling satisfied in a close relationship invites further communication and a sense of comfort with the interaction. In addition, feeling satisfied in a communicative setting leads to immediacy, closeness, and an increased level of self-disclosure with a relational partner.

Relational satisfaction can be defined as “the degree to which an individual is content and satisfied with his or her relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 155). If the degree of relational satisfaction is high, the more likely the relationship will be successful and lengthy, as a face-to-face or online dyad (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Predictors of relationship satisfaction include perceived similarity, commitment, intimacy, trust, communication satisfaction, and attributional confidence (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006).

Relationship satisfaction has been measured by the degree of these predictors. The higher the degrees of the predictors that are present, the higher the satisfaction for an individual or dyadic pair (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). It is crucial to understand the implications of these predictors in order to understand their role in social media communication.

With how easily and often the Internet is accessed, there is no doubt that it has changed the way we communicate and impacted the quality of romantic relationships. Relationship satisfaction constitutes a positive level of contentment, wants and needs being met by a partner, and being in a mutually beneficial position in the relationship (Emmers-Sommer, 2004). In her study, Emmers-Sommer explored the effects of quality communication on relationship satisfaction. Participants were asked to record their communication with an individual with whom they had a significant relationship, whether romantic or platonic, for a period of one week (Emmers-Sommer, 2004). The study intended to demonstrate that both the amount and the quality of time spent communicating improved intimacy and satisfaction within the relationship (Emmers-Sommer, 2004). The study sought to determine which communication qualities and quantities indicated intimacy and relationship satisfaction. The study found that frequent face-to-face interactions improved relationship satisfaction, and it was the preferred method of communicating because of the potential for important nonverbal communication that is hard to distinguish in other forms of communication (Emmers-Sommer, 2004). The findings of this study provide a better understanding of the communication elements necessary for interpersonal relationships with high levels of intimacy and satisfaction.

Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) explored the predictors that indicated how satisfied people were in their online romantic relationships. The study was conducted via online questionnaire and found communication satisfaction, intimacy, and trust to be indicators of

relationship satisfaction in online-only relationships (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). They also looked at how the amount of time spent online affects the length of the relationship (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). The results reported that there was a direct relationship between partner communication and relationship satisfaction, and revealed that aspects of face-to-face communication are still necessary in online relationships to maintain satisfaction (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006).

Relationship satisfaction and social media. Communication satisfaction is extremely important to online relationships because individuals in these relationships do not have the ability to see each other physically. The online communication serves as a base for the relationship to grow, maintain, and satisfy each partner. Terminology and communication length are examples of face-to-face communication factors that are present in online interactions. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging are part of the relationship life cycle for many partnerships, especially men and women ages 18-24, as these are the individuals who engage in social media most frequently. Satisfaction determines the successful outcomes and termination of a relationship. This study aims to discover whether social media is detrimental or beneficial to the satisfaction of our target participants. Understanding the correlation between social media use and relationship satisfaction is important as our world becomes more and more enveloped in social media platforms. Our study will explore these relationships and provide an analysis of social media use and its correlation with relationship satisfaction. Just as we will increase our understanding of satisfaction in a relationship, we also hope to discover how the increased use of social media affects these relationships.

After reviewing the existing literature, we conclude that face-to-face communication is important in relationships and that the use of social media and the Internet is on the rise.

Analyzing self-reported relationship satisfaction, our research will indicate whether relationship satisfaction is correlated to social media use. With increasing access to social media sources, we seek to determine whether or not media use affects relationship satisfaction. Therefore we propose one hypothesis:

H: The more individuals aged 18-24 engage in frequent and continued use of social media, especially Facebook, Twitter, and instant messaging (AIM, SMS, and BBM), the lower their relationship satisfaction will be.

Method

Participants

After posting the survey on SurveyMonkey.com for two weeks and advertising its link through social media networks and email, we received a total of 219 participants who completed the online survey. The large majority of participants were females, who made up 71.7% of the sample, while men made up 17.4%. Out of the 219 participants, 134 of them identify as white (61.2%), 26 as Asian (11.9%), 18 as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino/a (8.2%), seven as from multiple races (3.2%), five as an ethnicity not listed (2.3%), three as Black or African-American (1.4%), three as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (1.4%), and one as American Indian or Alaskan Native (.5%). The participants had a variety of education levels: 71.2% had some college but no degree or were currently in college, 12.3% had a bachelor's degree, 2.7% had an associate degree, 2.3% had a high school degree or equivalent, and .9% had a graduate degree.

Our study targeted young adults aged 18 to 24 who used social media frequently in their daily lives. We found that, of the 219 participants who completed the survey, 203 (92.7%) used social media multiple times per day, while nine (4.1%) participants used social media once a day and seven (3.2%) participants used it only a few times a week. The vast majority of participants

(98.2%) had a Facebook account (two participants did not have an account) and 54.8% had a Twitter account (98 participants did not have a Twitter account). The mean age of these social media users was 20.47 years old ($M = 20.47$, $SD = 1.48$, range = 18-24). Toward the end of the survey, participants were asked to think of the latest interaction he/she had with his/her closest relational partner. This partner could be a romantic partner, friend, or a family member. A large number of participants decided to analyze a romantic partner (41.1%) or a friend (32%), while 12.3% analyzed their relationship with a parent, 3.7% with a sibling, and .9% with a cousin.

The participants in the study not only used social media, but also displayed characteristics of being somewhat dependent on social media. An interesting finding in the study was the participants' responses to their preferred method of communication. The large majority of participants (51.6%) preferred to communicate via text messages, and the next largest group (31.5%) preferred to communicate in person with others, followed by Facebook (6.8%), phone (4.6%), email (4.1%) and another method not listed (1.4%). A number of participants (38.8%) stated that they check Facebook ten or more times a day, 20.5% stated that they check it one to three times a day, 21.5% check it four to six times a day, 16.4% check it seven to nine times a day, .9% do not check Facebook, and .9% do not have a Facebook account.

The majority of those who answered the question with regards to how often they check Twitter stated that they did not have a Twitter account (43.4%). Of those who did have an account, 19.2% check it one to three times a day, 8.2% check it four to six times a day, 3.2% check it seven to nine times a day, 7.8% check it ten or more times a day, and 16.4% do not check their Twitter account. Participants were also asked how often they engaged in social media while in class, which included Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging. The majority (37.4%) stated that every time he/she was in class and had a phone or computer available, they used

social media, 20.1% responded that they do not use any form of social media while in class, 16.4% use social media in class one to two times a week, 15.5% use it three to four times a week, and 9.6% use social media in the classroom five to seven times a week.

Another question asked how long participants have gone without checking either Twitter or Facebook. Individuals who had a Facebook account were evenly split between not checking Facebook for one to three days or one to two weeks, both at 29.7%. The rest of the participants who answered the question responded that they have gone four to six days without checking Facebook (19.6%), a month or longer (16%) or they did not have an account (.5%). Only 3.7% have not gone one day without checking Facebook. The majority of individuals did not have a Twitter account (42.9%), but those that did have gone a month or longer without checking the account (22.4%), followed by 14.6% who have gone one to two weeks, 10% who have gone one to three days, 5.9% who have gone four to six days, and .9% who haven't gone a day without checking their Twitter account.

Finally, when asked if participants have ever terminated their Facebook or Twitter accounts, 72.1% of Facebook users have never terminated their accounts (23.7% have terminated their accounts and 3.2% didn't have an account), while 51.6% of Twitter users have never terminated, 40.2% were not applicable because they did not have an account, and 6.4% have terminated their account.

Procedures

In order to participate, individuals were required to be between the ages of 18-24 and a user of social media. Specifically, the survey asked immediately if the participants were users of Facebook and Twitter since these are two main social media platforms and the focus of the study. These participants were recruited through a variety of forums including Facebook,

Twitter, ChapterBoard, Craigslist, and via email. ChapterBoard is a social network for Greek life chapters to interact, and the survey was posted in a discussion forum.

The sampling methods implemented throughout our research were both convenient and snowball sampling. By posting our survey on social media outlets, such as Facebook, Twitter, and ChapterBoard, we reached out to a population to which we were connected. Participants were also encouraged to share the survey link via social media or email to create a snowball effect and increase the size of the participant pool. An email sign-up was also passed around to communication studies students at Chapman University who were willing to participate in the study. Once someone added their email to a list, he/she would receive an introductory email and a follow-up email containing the survey link to participate. We encouraged individuals participating via email to forward the information to possible interested parties elsewhere. This also added variety to the participant demographics.

The participants in this study had to first click on the link posted on one of numerous social media sources or sent to them via email. Then, before participation in the survey, participants were required to read the consent form and click “Agree.” After consent was obtained from the participants, they continued on to the survey. The participants answered a series of questions, ranging in topics from social media use to interpersonal relationships to demographic information, before submitting the answers online. There were 59 questions total in the survey. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey was live and stayed open for 18 days. No compensation was provided.

Measures

Time spent on social media. The scale used to measure time spent using social media was Mitchell and Beard’s Internet Dependency Scale (2010). There were a total of five

questions used to measure time spent on social media. Three items measured how much time was spent on social media in a certain time period or for specific reasons (i.e. “I spend more time using social media than just about anything else”). These questions were measured through a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha for time spent on social media was .84. The scores of the items measuring time spent using social media indicated that individuals spend a moderate amount of time using social media in their everyday lives ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .80$).

Social media withdrawal. The Internet Dependency Scale, created by Mitchell and Beard (2010), was used to measure social media withdrawal. Using a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), three items measured social media withdrawal. An example of one of the items is “I cannot imagine going without social media” (Mitchell & Beard, 2010). The Cronbach’s alpha score was .63. The survey results indicated that participants would feel some withdrawal from social media after a certain period of time ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .80$).

Relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was measured through Burns’ (1993) Relationship Satisfaction Scale. Included in the survey were items to measure relationship satisfaction (i.e. “How satisfied are you with your role in the relationship with your partner?”) using a Likert-type scale (0 = Very Dissatisfied, 6 = Very Satisfied). These questions received a Cronbach’s alpha of .95. On a 1-7 range, the mean and standard deviation showed that most participants were satisfied with the relationships they referenced to answer the items ($M = 5.77$, $SD = 1.14$).

Results

The hypothesis was tested using one-tailed correlations between time spent on social media, social media withdrawal, and their relationship with relationship satisfaction. The

hypothesis, predicting an inverse correlation between time spent on social media and relationship satisfaction, was not supported, $r = -.02$. The correlation between social media withdrawal was predicted to be positive but turned in negative results as well, $r = -.07$. These negative correlations do not support our original hypothesis that the frequency of use and addictive qualities of social media, such as withdrawal, directly affect relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

This study examined the potential negative effects of frequent social media on the perceived satisfaction of an interpersonal relationship. The phrase social media refers to computer-mediated communication, such as Facebook and Twitter, but can also include text messaging and video chatting. Our results were based on one-tailed correlations between time spent on social media, social media withdrawal, and their connection to relationship satisfaction. Our hypothesis was not supported and there was a negative correlation between social media use and relationship satisfaction. However, our study uncovered some interesting findings about social media use in the 21st century and provided some insight on the ways in which individuals might communicate in the future. We will discuss the implications of our findings, as well as identify the limitations and improvements that could be made for future research.

Social Media Use

Our results indicated that the majority of participants use social media frequently. In fact, our sample showed that our participants use social media multiple times per day. Our results reveal the prominence of social media use among college-aged individuals and validate the importance of studying social media use. As previously mentioned, frequency can have several measures, many of which we employed in our study. For example, Sheldon (2008) measured frequency by asking how many hours users spent on Facebook in a given day, how often they log

in to their accounts, how long they have held an account, and how many Facebook friends they have. In one measure of frequency, a large portion of the sample responded that they have been using social media for four to six years. Because our respondents were between the ages of 18-24, we can conclude that they have been users of social media since their adolescence. The continual use of social media over many years indicates that it has become an integral part of daily life for college-aged individuals.

Furthermore, a significant number of participants indicated they access social media while in class, either from a mobile phone or computer. This finding indicates that college-aged individuals frequently engage in social media while accomplishing other tasks, specifically, while attending academic courses. This can be associated with poor academic performance as indicated by Levine, Waite, and Bowman (2007), who found that students who instant messaged more than others show signs of being easily distracted during academic tasks. In addition, Bowman, Levine, Waite, and Gendron (2010) found that students who instant messaged while reading passages read slower and scored lower on comprehension tests than students who instant messaged before reading or those who did not instant message at all. These studies further indicate that social media use by teens and young adults is frequent and can affect their actions and/or behavior.

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction, measured by Burns' Relationship Satisfaction Scale (1993), was used to measure one partner's satisfaction within an interpersonal relationship. The majority of those surveyed were satisfied with their interpersonal relationship. Similarities, commitment, trust, intimacy, communication satisfaction, and attributing confidence are indicators of relationship satisfaction in interpersonal relationships (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). In

addition, the quality and quantity of communication in a relationship also contributed to interpersonal relationship satisfaction. Our hypothesis was intended to find a connection between social media and relationship satisfaction. Our findings were consistent with previous research. The majority of those surveyed were satisfied with their relationships, which could be related to the quantity of communication the participants have with their significant other. In addition, since our research showed that text messaging was the main preferred form of communication, the ease of text messaging increases the quantity of communication, and thus communication satisfaction for those surveyed.

Future research could be employed to better understand methods used by individuals to maintain and improve relationship satisfaction. Communication satisfaction is a major indicator of relationship satisfaction among interpersonal relationships. Our research showed that quality and quantity of communication contributes to communication satisfaction. While social media allows individuals to increase the quantity of communication, it is unclear if social media increases the quality of communication.

Implications of the Findings

Social media has become an important and substantial communication tool for young adults, as well as the general population. The majority of respondents in the study stated that they use social media multiple times per day. We also found that participants used social media for a variety of communication and relationship purposes. One of the appealing aspects of social media is that content is user-generated and always changing. The accessibility of social media allows for users to stay connected with people and to contact them more frequently.

Our results also indicated that social media use does not have a significant association with relationship satisfaction. These results go beyond the context of communication research to

paint a larger picture of societal and communication tendencies. Through this study, we discovered that regardless of the communication medium, relationship satisfaction is increased with frequent communication among close relational partners. Facebook and Twitter are two examples of social media sites commonly used by individuals aged 18-24. Studying relationship satisfaction allowed us to gain a better understanding of the intentions and motivations for using social media. Communication is an integral part of how we survive, grow, and learn. In the Web 2.0 world, we are becoming increasingly dependent on social media to communicate with others. When asked their preferred method of communication our sample stated that text messaging was the medium of choice. This is an example of how society is utilizing new tools of technology to improve and increase communication in interpersonal relationships.

The results and implications from this study can be used to improve relationships and communication through social media. Our findings indicate that even though individuals are using social media more frequently in their everyday lives, they are still finding a way to maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships through these mediums. In the context of our study, individuals did not find social media usage to negatively affect their interpersonal relationships. However, they reported social media to be useful in improving communication in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study in regards to the measurement of our variables and the participant sample. Our study included 219 participants who were gathered through social media posts and emails, and consisted of a convenient and snowball sample. Utilizing a random participant sample could have provided more sound results. By extending our survey to our Facebook, Twitter, and ChapterBoard communities, we limited ourselves immediately in terms

of reach. If there were a way to present this survey through social media channels to produce a more random sample, the strength of our findings would be greatly improved. The ultimate goal of this research is to produce results that could be generalizable. However, when we limit our participant sample, we also limit the applicability of the research to individuals outside of our immediate sample.

With that, another limitation to this study is that the percentages of our participants based on race do not reflect the actual percentages of each racial population in this country. As our study was not random, our sample does not accurately reflect the current racial percentages. For example, within our study, only 8.2% were Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino/a and only 1.4% were Black or African-American. These small percentages illustrate that our sample does not reflect the true racial percentages present in the United States population.

A third limitation to this study was the types of relationships about which the participants chose to report. We asked individuals to focus on a relationship with a romantic partner, sibling, parent, friend, or cousin. By only looking at one type of relationship, such as a friendship, we might have been able to determine if social media use had a direct influence on that specific type of relationship. In addition, participants might be more likely to engage in social media use with a particular relational partner, such as a friend. Adding questions measuring the amount of communication between the participant and the individual in the relationship, we could have further discovered if social media was a communication tool that individuals use with a particular individual and determine the extent of their social media usage.

A fourth limitation is the consistency of survey questions. There was a question inquiring about the last interaction the participant had in their chosen interpersonal relationship. Instead of purely focusing on social media interactions, we included the option of reporting on

face-to-face communication. To provide more consistent results, our survey could have solely explored interpersonal communication through social media.

Finally, our last limitation is in regards to the questions that measured “Social Media Withdrawal” in the survey. The Cronbach’s alpha score for this measure was .63, which is moderately low. This low score leads us to believe that our scale was not reliable, and therefore could have prevented us from presenting significant findings.

Conclusion

Our study utilized a specific population in order to look at the use of social media and its effects on interpersonal relationship satisfaction. As social media continues to be a tool often used to communicate with others, it would be appropriate to conduct further research to determine the long-term effects of social media use on individuals and their interpersonal relationships. From our study, we can see that social media users do not feel unsatisfied with their interpersonal relationships, but instead feel that the accessibility of social media can be used to improve relationship satisfaction with more frequent interaction. The information gathered through this study can lead to a better understanding of how members of society prefer to communicate and the intentions of their social media use.

Future research should be done to discover the reasons why young people prefer this method of communication to others. Do they prefer the immediacy of communication, or perhaps the fact that one can communicate via text messaging while also doing other tasks? Discovering the reasons behind preference for certain methods of communication could help social media developers incorporate these benefits into their own social networking platforms. Furthermore, when asked their main reason for using Facebook, 76.7% of the participants replied

that it was to interact with others. This implies that future developments of social networking sites should incorporate interactive features so that people can communicate with others easily.

As technology continues to evolve and social media becomes more prominent, further studies will need to be executed to determine the impact of continued social media use on the user, as well as society as a whole. A future study on social media use could analyze the interpersonal relationships that are formed through social media as well as those that utilize social media highly as a form of communication. As society becomes more dependent on technology, the social media outlets available could largely mold the ways in which individuals meet and interact.

Another area of future study to consider is examining long distance relationships (platonic or romantic). By examining these relationships, researchers can determine if individuals in these relationships use social media to communicate, and in turn, look at the effects that social media has in this specific type of relationship. Studying relationships that mostly rely on technology to communicate might produce results indicating some difference in the levels of relationship satisfaction as the two people engage in social media.

Finally, more research should examine the feelings (psychologically, physically, and emotionally) of participants when they engage in social media. This type of research might lead society to a better understanding of the reasons why individuals engage in social media use to such a great extent. As society continues to evolve and depend more on technology and social media, more research will be needed to understand the effects that social media use will have.

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