

Marisa DePasquale

Dr. Suver

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Literature Review

The exponential growth rate of digital technology has provided us with more ways to communicate with each other than ever before. It has also allowed us to create and distribute content through mediums such as social media. Social media such as Facebook and Instagram have become so popular that, hypothetically, using such sites may contribute to fulfilling our need for belonging. However, current statistics suggests that reports of loneliness are highly prevalent in age groups where social media is commonly used. Loneliness contributes to serious health risks and negative comorbidities such as social isolation or even worse - an earlier death. Research on this topic is conflicting. Some studies concluded that social media decreases loneliness while others found that it increases loneliness. Current studies suggests that the type of person and social media platform used will determine whether or not social media is beneficial or detrimental to their well-being. It is important to mention that types of social media is not universally defined so each study uses their own definition.

In the article, *Is the social use of media for seeking connectedness or for avoiding social isolation? Mechanisms underlying media use and subjective well being*, Ahn and Shin categorized media into three sections: communication use, video use, and reading use. Communication use was further split into the following subsections: asynchronous messaging (sending e-mails), synchronous messaging (instant messaging) and video messaging (using

Skype). Video use included watching YouTube videos or Netflix and reading use included reading the news or ebooks.

Ahn and Shin wanted to evaluate the state of well-being among users for each category. There is no clear cut answer to what the main contributors of well-being are but among studies that have tried to determine these contributors, some factors overlap. In this study, relatedness was the focused attribute. Relatedness was also broken up into two categories: social isolation and connectedness. Ahn and Shin evaluated how each media category affected these two components.

Questionnaires were distributed among 300 people of Korean descent. Questions pertaining to social isolation were phrased negatively and questions pertaining to connectedness were phrased positively. The duration in which a person used each category of media was also asked. Additionally, questions about face-to-face communication were included.

The study came to several conclusions. Face-to-face communication was positively associated with connectedness but more negatively associated with social isolation. Communication and video use had a positive correlation with connectedness but no significant correlation to social isolation. Neither connectedness nor social isolation were related to reading use. What does this mean for well-being? For all instances of media, connectedness was the only factor. However, since the connectedness factor was larger for communication use than for video use, communication use had an increase in well-being while video use had no connection to well-being. Perhaps social isolation and connectedness gives loneliness a more complex definition.

This study also experiences limitations. The sample of people selected could be more diverse (have different backgrounds instead of just Korean). Also, well-being is usually defined to encompass many more components so focusing on just one of them (relatedness) may not tell the full story about the effects of social media.

While Ahn and Shin concluded that communication use may increase well-being, an article published 3 years afterwards argues that the type of platform used to communicate makes a difference. Pittman's and Reich's article, *Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture may be worth more than a thousand Twitter words* looks at 5 social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and YikYak and compares how each one of these contributes to loneliness. Intimacy and immediacy are the two factors defined to reduce loneliness.

Surveys were sent to 253 college students either majoring in journalism or business. All who participated received extra credit or or partial course credit. This sample population may influence results to skew a certain way because you would expect a journalism student to read a lot more news than the average person. Extra credit participation may also influence participants not to provide real responses but to just finish the survey as fast as possible to receive their side of the deal.

Pittman and Reich measured loneliness, happiness, and satisfaction with life. They asked participants in depth questions including yes/no and short answer questions about each of the 5 social media platforms. They then combined results from Instagram and Snapchat together and labeled those as image-based social platforms while Twitter and YikYak formed the text-based

platform group. Facebook was considered a mix platform since it contains elements of both image and text-based groups.

Text-based social media was found to have no effect on the three measures. This finding supports Ahn's and Shin's results of reading use but refutes their results about communication use. Image-based social media was found to decrease loneliness but increase happiness and satisfaction of life. Participants that used both Instagram and Snapchat reported an even greater difference in these measurements as opposed to participants who used only one image-based platform. This makes sense because images give a sense of intimacy and a platform such as Snapchat is good for delivering images immediately and intimately.

The most interesting finding is the effects of Facebook. Since Facebook is a hybrid, one would expect some moderate increase of happiness, however, the opposite was found. Facebook users reported to be less happy and more lonely than non-users. Since Facebook would be a form of communication use, this result contradicts Ahn's and Shin's finding.

The next two studies focus on personality and behavior traits of social media users. In order to understand these better, we can look at a classic paper released in 1977 called *The Halo Effect: Evidence for Unconscious Alteration of Judgments* by Nisbet and Wilson. They support the theory that the halo effect exists. The halo effect is when we identify and evaluate one character trait about a person and then attribute their overall character based on our predisposition from that one trait. An attractive person has a good character trait and thus people would view an attractive person in a positive light, given they are unaware of that person's other traits.

Seidman's paper, *Self-Presentation and belonging on Facebook: How personality influences social media use and motivations*, discusses the relationship between the Five Factor Model and Facebook usage. The Five Factor Model is the idea that a personality can be modelled with five character traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

One-hundred eighty-four undergraduate college students completed a survey which asked them their personality traits and about how many hours a week they used Facebook. Participants received extra credit for completing the survey. As with the Pittman and Reich study, this could be considered a limitation. The age range is small and responses could be inaccurate.

Seidman extracted motivation information such as self-presentational behaviors, attention seeking behavior, and the expression of oneself by looking at how each participant used Facebook. She found that the agreeableness and neuroticism categories had high belongingness motivations. Those with high neuroticism represented themselves online with a mixture of actual and ideal characteristics of themselves. They vented their negative emotions but at the same time wanted acceptance from others so they would post information about themselves that would seem appealing to others even if it wasn't true. Conscientious people were concerned about their self representation as well. In this way, both categories used the halo effect to their advantage by carefully selecting what they posted.

Dumas, Maxwell-Smith, Davis, and Giulietti look further into social media behaviors by analyzing how people use the "like" system on Instagram. In their article, *Lying or longing for likes? Narcissism, peer belonging, loneliness and normative versus deceptive like-seeking on*

Instagram in emerging adulthood, they focused on how people used self promotion and presentation instead of communication.

Participants were aged 18-29 and not exclusively college students. This study has a better demographic than the others mentioned because there were 198 participants and many demographic groups were represented. Although, like all of the previous studies, the method of acquiring data was through a survey and there always lies the possibility of inaccurate responses.

The survey consisted of questions that asked participants about Instagram usage, loneliness, belongingness, and narcissism. More than three quarters of the participants uploaded and took a picture. The least popular behavior was bribing people for likes and followers. Supporting the previous study, narcissists exhibited normal and deceptive like behavior similar to the neuroticism trait. Interestingly enough, neither normative or deceptive behavior had any correlation with loneliness.

A replication study was done on the same data using a different method and a different conclusion about loneliness emerged. In direct contrast to Pittman's and Reich's research, it was concluded that loneliness may not dictate how people use social media. Dumas, Maxwell-Smith, Davis, and Giulietti give alternative explanations such as someone who is lonely and experiences depression may have less motivation to post on social media.

Social media and digital communication is widely used and constantly evolving. Many studies have been done to analyze how personality and interaction with social media affect us. Currently, there are many conflicting results as the type of platform is essential in extracting different types of behaviors. Additionally, all studies mentioned were conducted using surveys and thus all data collected and analyzed could only be concluded using correlations not

causations. More research needs to be done to find out if social media really is beneficial to our belongingness and wellbeing. One such study should include a sample size that considers different demographics. Additionally, instead of using surveys to collect information, a longitudinal study about the different social media platforms should be conducted to really understand relationships in a more casual than correlational fashion.

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