Marisa DePasquale

Dr. Suver

CSE 300.04

16 November 2017

Research Proposal

With Facebook ranking within the top 3 websites, our usage of social media has skyrocketed since its existence. Examining its effect on mental health is essential in evaluating loneliness and well being. Recent studies regarding the usage of social media have shown contradicting results. No definitive answer has been concluded in determining the extent in which social media affects well-being. In the study that I propose, I hope to achieve a clearer understanding about the relationship between social media and its usage to determine how social media affects overall loneliness and well-being.

Two studies that currently investigate this topic examine loneliness and belongingness based on categorization of social media outlets.

In Ahn's and Shin's paper, they claim that social media for communication use (such as video and text messaging) increases connectedness which was positively correlated to well-being. Other outlets that utilized videos such as YouTube or Netflix also increased connectedness but had no effect on well-being.

Meanwhile, Pittman's and Reich's research examined more specific applications such as Yik Yak, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and Twitter. Again, categories were used except for their purpose it was split into text or image based media. Loneliness was defined using intimacy and immediacy. This definition differed from Ahn's and Shin's paper where they defined

loneliness as the opposite of connectedness. With this new definition, Pittman and Reich concluded that only image based media had an impact on loneliness and it was correlated negatively.

The following two studies focus on wellbeing and social media but shift emphasis on how the personality of a person factors into that. In order to understand those papers to their full extent, I will bring up a classic study by Nisbet and Wilson. Nisbet and Wilson sought to provide more support for the halo effect phenomenon. The halo effect is when a person perceives a prominent attribute about another person as negative or positive and then applies that same association to their overall character. This concept is important for analyzing a user's decision to post something that would affect their online social presence.

Seidman's paper examines how the Five Factor Model to characterize personality types affects how people use Facebook. Among all sectors, she determined that those who ranked highest in neuroticism presented themselves with a combination of actual and ideal characteristics. The need for belongingness was higher in these individuals and they seeked out Facebook to fulfill these needs - thus increasing well-being.

Lastly, Dumas (et al.) investigated Instagram users and their various behaviors. They were categorized as either normal or deceptive. Users who scored high in narcissism exhibited both behaviors. However, they found that regardless of behavior type, loneliness was not correlated to any behavior.

These results lead to a confusing conclusion. There are several issues with the methods used in the studies discussed. Firstly, all papers gathered information through one time surveys that in some cases only focused on college students within certain majors. Additionally, Ahn's

and Shin's study sampled a population from the same ethnic background. Not only do the sample populations need more fine tuning, but because all studies depended on self-report, inaccurate responses were always a concern.

The most fundamental issue lies within the definition of loneliness and the measures used to evaluate it (based on personality or not). If every paper defines the same word with different variations then it can be used to determine results in a biased way. Let us define loneliness as a spectrum. This spectrum will include a range between severe loneliness and its opposite, maximum belongingness. Where you land on the scale is a direct relationship to well-being.

In the study I propose, I seek to determine whether social media usage increases or decreases loneliness overall based on our defined spectrum. I think Ahn's and Pittman's research was headed in the correct direction by categorizing social media outlets. Unlike Pittman's research, I will exclude outdated outlets such as Yik Yak. I plan to analyze the usage of the current top 5 social media outlets including: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Reddit. I think the inclusion of Reddit with the exclusion of Snapchat will encourage a wider age range to sample from.

Furthermore, I plan on recording data for each website independently. In both Ahn's and Pittman's studies, each grouped a number of media sites together and evaluated loneliness based on those categories. I think separate divisions will give us more insight on how each site contributes to loneliness. This will also allow us to gather inferences about the union of website usage.

The next thing to determine is how I want to perform my research. In every study mentioned, all authors took a survey sampling of a sample size that only represented each person

at that moment. I would like to create a longitudinal study that really examines the effect of social media usage by continuing to use surveys but over an extended period of time among several people. My sample population will be required to live in the U.S.A. since it is one of the countries listed that is involved in the overall increased loneliness statistic. I will send out letters to 500 people within the ages of 18 to 35 about my study and from those responses, only 30 participants will be randomly selected to join my study. Those who join the study will agree to a 2 year analysis on their social media usage based on the 5 websites previously defined. Surveys will be sent to them monthly asking the same questions about all 5 website usage. Questions relating to loneliness will be asked using the UCLA Loneliness Scale along with our own questions relevant to our loneliness spectrum.

My hypothesis is that frequent usage of Facebook and Twitter will increase loneliness and thus decrease well-being while the other websites will have no correlation. In order to measure my results and compare against my hypothesis, I will calculate 30 chi squared regression tests, one for each person and all of their survey results. I will then analyze all of the results and cross reference them to make a more definitive conclusion about the correlation of website usage and loneliness.

I think my research will contribute to our understanding of social media usage and whether is has any effect on loneliness and well-being because of method I chose to implement. Using a longitudinal study increases the commitment of each participant and thus will elicit more accurate responses among them. Additionally, the websites selected have been around for at least 7 years and are still popular today. This being said, the likelihood of them maintaining popularity within the next 2 years is very high. The allotted time of the study also allows us to look deeper

into behaviors of social media users that have been previously undiscovered. Lastly, it will allow

us to look at any confounding variables such as how work or school life effects loneliness.

Bibliography

Ahn, Dohyun, and Dong-Hee Shin. "Is the social use of media for seeking connectedness or for

    avoiding social isolation? Mechanisms underlying media use and subjective

    well-Being." *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 29, no. 6, 2013, pp. 2453–2462.,

    doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.022.

Dumas, Tara M., et al. "Lying or longing for likes? Narcissism, peer belonging, loneliness and

    normative versus deceptive like-Seeking on Instagram in emerging adulthood."

    Computers in Human Behavior, vol. 71, 2017, pp. 1–10., doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.037.

Nisbett, Richard E., and Timothy D. Wilson. "The Halo effect: Evidence for Unconscious

    Alteration of Judgments." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 4,

    1977, pp. 250–256., doi:10.1037//0022-3514.35.4.250.

Pittman, Matthew, and Brandon Reich. "Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture

    may be worth more than a thousand Twitter words." *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol.

    62, 2016, pp. 155–167., doi:10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.084.

Seidman, Gwendolyn. "Self-Presentation and belonging on Facebook: How personality

    influences social media use and motivations." *Personality and Individual Differences*,

    vol. 54, no. 3, 2013, pp. 402–407., doi:10.1016/j.paid.2012.10.009.