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| |  | | --- | | A recent survey of 250 adults between the ages of 30 and 45 showed an association between the number of hours adults spend online each day and self-reporting of symptoms commonly associated with depression. The survey found that adults who spend 30 hours or more online each week were twice as likely as others to report that they “frequently” had trouble concentrating. Of adults who reported spending more than 30 hours per week online, 20 percent also reported that they had felt “sad, down, or blue” at least three times within the past month.  These results suggest that spending too much time online is linked to depression and people who want to improve their well-being should strictly limit the time they spend online.  Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the recommendation and the argument on which it is based are reasonable. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the recommendation. | |

The argument reaches the conclusion that depression is linked to the time spent online by an individual, and that strictly limiting this time would improve their health and well-being. This conclusion has been made on the basis of a recent survey, that it claims supports the argument due to the statistical data provided. However, in reaching their conclusion, the author of the argument fails to answer three important questions, the answers to which can make or break the argument.

First, Is the survey's sample space of 250 people representative of the general public? Even if we assume that the author's intention is to make the argument only for adults between the ages of 30 and 45, they fail to address the aforementioned question. It may be possible that the people who reported spending more time online did so to socialize and talk with other people, to alleviate existing mental health issues. It may also be the case that those who reported spending less time online took the decision to do so because they did not like the toxic environment that some social media platforms may possess, and then solve their mental health issues afterwards. Considering these two cases: If the survey overrepresented the people of any one of these groups, then it fails to form a fair sample space. It is possible that 50% of the population has good mental health and higher screen-time, but formed only 10% of the sample space. Hence, the author must prove that the answer to this question is a definitive 'yes,' if they want to cement their conclusion.

Second, were the utilized surveying practices logically sound? A related question is: Have the people who felt 'sad, down or blue' been diagnosed with depression? The argument's author fails to provide a definitive answer to these questions, and this decreases the validity of the conclusion. It may be the case that feeling 'sad, down or blue' three times within the past month is not a sure way to diagnose depression, or to imply that it caues that sadness. If the survey had instead asked if the respondents felt that their sadness was a cause of their time spent online, then it would have made for a better argument. In fact, if a psychologist were to prove that this frequency of sadness is not a valid diagnosis/symptom of depression, then the answer to the above question has a higher possibility of being no, and the argument's claims would be unwarranted.

Finally, even if we assume that the answers to the above questions were in favour of the argument, did the survey observe any plausible trend in their findings from the survey? (Also, was the trouble in concentrating provably caused by screen-time? This is a more minor aspect of the survey, but a clear link has not been proven.) The survey provides information that only depicts the proportion of people who reported spending more than 30 hours per week online, and claims that 20% of such people felt sad atleast three times in the past month. Perhaps, there may be a trend among the other people that has not been presented in the survey results. The percentage of people who report feeling sad may be 50% or 60% for, say, adults who spend less than 10 hours online. If this were the case, and the trend observed showed, say, a decreasing level of sadness as screen-time increases, then the argument would break down.

In conclusion, the argument, in its current form, fails considerably in reaching its conclusion, by failing to answer the three questions discussed above. Failing to provide a definitive answer to these questions (as the argument stands now) has led to the argument having little to no persuasiveness. The author of the argument must conduct or consult a more comprehensive survey that thoroughly substantiated by evidence, must be logically sound.

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