

FACEBOOK EXPOSURE AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AMONG SELECTED COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to study the relationship of exposure to Facebook and depressive symptoms among selected college students. With three hundred forty three (343) college students, the Beck Depression Inventory - a 21-item self-report instrument, measured depressive symptoms; and the Facebook Intensity Scale measured Facebook exposure. Results show that there is no significant relationship between depressive symptoms and Facebook Usage; Facebook Connection Strategies; Length of Time Spent on Facebook; and Number of Friends on Facebook.

Keywords: Facebook, Social Networking Sites, Depressive Symptoms, Depression

INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites are widely used in our country today. Millions of people all over the world are actively part of it, and the population of users continue to increase (Murray and Walter, 2007). Educators are interested in the effects of social media on many college students with a specific focus on the popular media website called Facebook (Abramson, 2011; Kamenetz, 2011). Facebook is the most visited social website in the world. There are other social networking sites that have same features as Facebook, but Facebook is more user-friendly than the others, thus making it popular.

Facebook is a computer-mediated social networking system that has become one of the most popular means of communication. It was founded by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes, while attending Harvard. After its successful use within the Harvard community, it quickly spread to other institutions. Facebook has been widely used all over the world. Murray and Waller (2007) said it has been identified as one of the social networking websites that serve as virtual communities, which allow people to connect and interact with each other on a particular subject or to just hang out together online. Even though there are popular and professional interests on how Facebook affects students, not much research has been conducted on the topic (Abramson, 2011; Kamenetz, 2011; Pychl, 2008).

According to National Institution for Mental Health (NIMH), every person sometimes experience being down or sad. But these feelings are usually short-lived and can pass within a couple of days. This is different from depression. When a person experiences depression, it can interfere with everyday activity and life itself. Depression is a common but serious illness.

The NIMH has listed the common signs and symptoms of depression. These signs and symptoms may not be experienced all at the same time and the frequency and duration may depend on the individual's illness. These are: persistent, sad, or anxious feelings; feelings of hopelessness or pessimism; feelings of guilt, helplessness, and worthlessness; irritability or restlessness; loss of interest in hobbies or activities once pleasurable, including sex; fatigue and decrease of energy; difficulty in concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions; insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping; overeating, loss of appetite; thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts; aches or pains, headaches, cramps, digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment.

Because of the rise in popularity of Facebook and the shortage of researches conducted about the topic, the researchers decided to pursue this study. This research basically aimed to determine the level of exposure to Facebook and manifestations of depressive symptoms of college students and how these two factors are related with each other.

Literature Review

The study of Lopez and Murray (2006) entitled "Global and regional burden of disease and risk factors" claims that depression is prevalent among young adults. It also states that depressive symptoms have different factors attributed within and outside the individual's control.

Due to common discourse in the population, most individuals consider the term depression to relate to internal psychological factors (Corrigan, 2005). In the study of National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in 1997 entitled "Depression in young people: clinical practice guidelines", young people will have suffered from at least one clinically significant depressive episode by the time they are 18 years old.

Depression is the result of having poor academic performance, social dysfunction, substance abuse, suicide attempts and actual suicide. Research uncovering and understanding factors involved in the evolution of depression are urgently needed in order to develop programmes aimed at combating it. A large number of risk factors have been implicated in the development of depression. According to the study of Rudolph, Hammen, Burge, Lindberg, Herzberg, Daley in 2000 entitled "Towards an interpersonal life-stress model of depression: the developmental context of stress generation", negative life events/stress, parental depression, low self-esteem, negative body image, relationship with parents and peers, conduct problems, and maltreatment are among the factors most consistently associated with depression across studies. Usually, however, few risk factors are investigated at any one point in time (cross-sectionally).

In the study of Farahani et al. (2011) entitled "Examining the relationship between sensitivity to rejection and using Facebook in university students", the researchers examined the relationship between rejection and sensitivity and the rate of using Facebook. Their study shows that rejection sensitivity is significantly correlated with the rate of using Facebook.

Another similar study is “Feeling Bad on Facebook: Depression disclosures by college students on a social networking site” of Moreno et al. (2011). The study wanted to find out if college students use Facebook profiles to disclose symptoms of depression. Findings reveal associations between Facebook use characteristics and display of depression symptoms. Students who displayed more recent Facebook activity were more likely to display a reference to depression.

Theoretical Overview

According to Reed (1994), in Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression, negative thoughts, generated by dysfunctional beliefs are typically the cause of depressive symptoms. There is a direct relationship that occurs between the amount of severity of someone's negative thoughts and the severity of their depressive symptoms. In other words, the more negative thoughts an individual experiences, the more he/she will become depressed.

Research Simulacrum

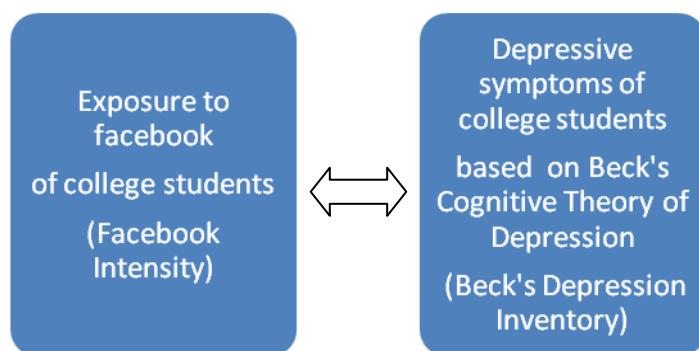


Figure 1. Research Simulacrum

The diagram exhibits the aim of the study, which is to know if there is a relationship between exposure to Facebook and depressive symptoms of college students. To be able to measure these two variables, the researchers used Facebook Intensity Scale for exposure to Facebook and Beck's Depression Inventory (anchored on Beck's Depression Inventory) for depressive symptoms.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to determine if there is significant relationship between exposure to Facebook and depressive symptoms. Specifically it aimed:

1. To determine the level of exposure to Facebook of college students.
2. To ascertain if college students exhibit depressive symptoms.

3. To find out if there is a significant relationship between exposure to Facebook and depressive symptoms.

Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between exposure to Facebook and depressive symptoms.

METHODS

Research Design

The researchers implored the Descriptive-Correlational design for this study. Descriptive so as to describe the Facebook exposure and depressive symptoms of college students and Correlational to test the relationship between the two variables.

Subjects

Three hundred forty three (343) college students, coming from various courses, (aged 18 – 20 years old) of a private HEI in Manila were the respondents of the study.

Instruments

To measure the depressive symptoms, the researchers used the Beck Depression Inventory. The Beck Depression Inventory is a 21-item self-report instrument intended to assess the existence and severity of symptoms of depression.

To measure exposure to Facebook, the Facebook Intensity Scale was administered. It is used to measure Facebook usage beyond simple measures of frequency and duration, incorporating emotional connectedness to the site and its integration into individuals' daily activities.

Data Analysis

Percentage Distribution was used to describe the depressive symptoms of college students. Pearson Chi-square was used to test the relationship between number of Facebook friends and depressive symptoms. Pearson R was used to test if there is significant relationship between Facebook usage, Facebook connection strategies and length of time spent on Facebook to depressive symptoms.

RESULTS

Table 1

Distribution of Subjects by Level of Depression

Level of Depression	n	Percent (%)
Normal	218	63.6
Mild Mood Disturbance	68	19.8
Borderline Clinical Depression	23	6.7
Moderate Depression	23	6.7
Severe Depression	8	2.3
Extreme Depression	3	.9
Total	343	100.0

More than half of the respondents fall in the Normal level of depression. This shows that majority of the subjects do not exhibit depressive symptoms. However, it is quite alarming that a handful of college students fall beyond the Borderline Clinical Depression. These students are already demonstrating depressive symptoms.

Table 2

Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for Scores in the Facebook Intensity Scale

Measure	Mean	SD
Facebook Usage	3.49	.74233
Facebook Connection Strategies	3.56	.56598
Length of Time Spent on Facebook	190.22	219.22

For Facebook usage, the computed mean of 3.49 shows that the respondents are neutral regarding the importance and use of Facebook to them. In Facebook connection strategies, the computed mean of 3.56 presents that the respondents are also neutral in their use of Facebook to meet new people. For length of time spent on Facebook (in minutes), the computed mean of 219.22 illustrates that the respondents use Facebook at an average of 3 hours per day.

Table 3**Summary of Correlations between Facebook Exposure and Depressive Symptoms**

Variables	P-value	Decision	Conclusion
Facebook Usage & Depressive Symptoms	0.513	Accept Ho	No Significant Relationship
Facebook Connection Strategies & Depressive Symptoms	0.187	Accept Ho	No Significant Relationship
Number of Facebook Friends & Depressive Symptoms	0.974	Accept Ho	No Significant Relationship
Length of Time Spent on Facebook & Depressive Symptoms	0.350	Accept Ho	No Significant Relationship

Correlation results between Facebook usage and depressive symptoms show a computed P-value of 0.513, which is greater than alpha (0.05), thus we accept Ho that there is no significant relationship between Facebook usage and depressive symptoms.

The result of the correlation analysis between Facebook connection strategies and depressive symptoms yielded a computed P-value 0.187, also greater than alpha (0.05), thus we accept Ho that there is no significant relationship between Facebook connection strategies and depressive symptoms.

For the variables number of Facebook friends and depressive symptoms, the researchers used Pearson Chi-square to test their relationship. The computed P-value is 0.974, which is greater than alpha (0.05), thus we accept Ho that there is no significant relationship between number of Facebook friends and depressive symptoms.

The correlation results of length of time spent on Facebook and depressive symptoms generated a computed P-value 0.350, also greater than alpha (0.05), thus we accept Ho that there is no significant relationship between length of time spent on Facebook and depressive symptoms.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study is mirrored and reflected by several previous studies.

The study of Jelenchick et. al. (2012) entitled ““Facebook Depression?” Social Networking Site Use and Depression in Older Adolescents” made use of a real-time assessment of Internet use and a validated clinical screening instrument for depression. They found no

association between social networking sites use and probability of depression in a sample of older adolescents. The researchers found that the participants were on Facebook for over half on the total time online. This was correlated with the results of the depression screening.

The study of Simoncic (2012) entitled the “Facebook Depression Revisited: The Absence of an Association between Facebook Use and Depressive Symptoms”, showed that there is no linear association between Facebook activity and depression, nor between Facebook attachment and depression. Moreover, results of the Simoncic study also show low level of depression among its participants.

In the local study of Datu, et. al. (2012) entitled “Does Facebook make us sad? Hunting relationship between Facebook use and depression among Filipino adolescents”, they correlate the frequency of Facebook use and the level of depression, with 200 Filipino adolescents who participated in the study. The results show that there is no relationship between the levels of depression on Facebook use.

In the article of Jaffee (2011) entitled ""Facebook depression": 'Do you have it?", they coined the term “Facebook Depression”. This describes the phenomenon in which depressive symptoms results from high frequency of activity on SNS, such as Facebook.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no association or relationship between Facebook exposure and depressive symptoms. Specifically, depressive symptoms have no significant association or relationship with Facebook usage, Facebook connection strategies, number of Facebook friends and length of time spent on Facebook.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future researchers can consider determining associations or relationships between depressive symptoms and other social networking sites like Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram. They could also consider determining if there are significant relationships between use of social networking sites and other psychological variables such as anxiety.

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