

The Healthy Minds Network

For Research on Adolescent and Young Adult Mental Health

Research Brief #7

May 2014

Social Media

How does social media use affect mental health and what are the implications for future research?

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Effects of social media on mental health and related research implications

Social media has forever changed how we interact with the world. In many ways, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the like have become an integral part of our individual identities. This is particularly true in adolescent and young adult populations. Considering that 98% of U.S. college students report having a social media profile (Lenhart et al., 2010), it is imperative for researchers, clinicians, practitioners, and others, to further understand relationships between social media use and student mental health. To that end, the purpose of this research brief is to: 1) synthesize research regarding the effects of social media use on wellbeing and 2) discuss intervention research that leverages social media.



Is Social Media Good or Bad for Mental Health?

Social scientists are just beginning to understand the interplay between social media use and individual mental health. Research has demonstrated both negative and positive effects of social media use on wellbeing.

Evidence of positive effects

The very foundation on which social media was developed – to enhance communication and strengthen human connection – has undoubtedly had tremendous value in terms of enriching human relationships. In addition, there is growing evidence that social media may have a significant influence on psychological wellbeing (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Toma and Hancock (2012) posit that Facebook users report increases in subjective ratings of self-worth. They attribute this to an ability to exhibit oneself as “attractive, successful, and embedded in a network of meaningful relationships.” Moreover, Malikhao and Servaes (2011) found a positive association between number of Facebook friends and user-reported levels of personal connectedness. This phenomenon is attributed to stronger perceptions of social support, which often leads to reductions in stress as well as increases in perceived wellbeing (Nabi, Preston & So, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2011).

Effects of social media on mental health and related research implications (continued)

Evidence of negative effects

In contrast to the aforementioned findings, several recent studies have found social media use to be associated with decreased subjective wellbeing and self-esteem, and increased psychological distress (Kross, et al., 2013; Chen & Lee, 2013). Researchers have further explored reasons for these detrimental effects, some of which include: information overload (Chen & Lee, 2013), Internet addiction (Christakis et al., 2011), and a negative contagion/peer effect, such as modeling high-risk behavior (Moreno, 2010).

Next Steps for Social Media Research

Social media offers many benefits and opportunities for advancing mental health research. Firstly, social media has been shown to be a cost effective platform for the recruitment and delivery of mental health initiatives (Park & Calamaro, 2013). For example, online depression screenings offered through Facebook have been conducted with a rapid start-up and very low cost (Youn et al., 2012). Students prefer communicating via social media versus traditional email (Moreno, 2010). Secondly, social media can enhance access to social support services by creating an online, therapeutic community for individuals experiencing mental health problems. Young people are able to express themselves through social media by writing regularly in blogs and sharing their thoughts and feelings with friends online (Kazdin & Rabitt, 2013). According to a study by Baker and Moore (2008), people who spend time blogging have a large network of friends and report high rates of social support for psychological issues. Finally, social media has been successfully used to gain access to “hard-to-reach” populations, such as minority or underserved groups (Park & Calamaro, 2013).

Perhaps the most researched of the social media interventions are online support groups, but these have often generated unfavorable outcomes (Griffiths, Calear, & Banfield, 2009). The seemingly more promising interventions have been integrated with existing social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), which significantly reduces the user-burden of having to adopt and become accustomed to a new platform (e.g., online support groups). For example, Munson et al. (2010) adapted an evidence-based intervention, 3GT (Three Good Things), for Facebook. 3GT allows users to share positive experiences with their social network. Interventions such as 3GT that leverage pre-existing social networks have the potential to reach a limitless audience through peer-to-peer sharing across social networks.

All available evidence suggests that social media will have a growing and pervasive effect on human interaction across cultures. The effects on our collective mental health are mixed thus far; however, the potential for broad scale influence on positive social norms and improved coping efficacy is undeniable. Researchers and practitioners are encouraged by the potential to reach even the most underserved subpopulations in a cost-effective manner. Social media interventions hold great promise in reinforcing both pro-social messages and serving as important adjuncts to other levels of care delivery.



HMN Announcements

Register for the upcoming HMN webinar: Social Media Interventions for Young Adults and Adolescents

Wednesday, May 21, 2014 from 11:30am-12:30pm (ET)

Register by contacting healthyminds@umich.edu

Register for The Suicide Prevention Research Center's upcoming webinar: Promoting Help-Seeking Among College Students: Strategies for Suicide Prevention

Thursday, May 22, 2014 from 3:00-4:30pm (ET)

[Click Here to Register Online!](#)



More from The Healthy Minds Network

The Healthy Minds Study (HMS) and The Healthy Bodies Study (HBS) are actively recruiting colleges and universities to participate during the 2014-2015 academic year. The surveys are hosted entirely online and managed by the researchers (no headache for busy campus practitioners!).

About The Healthy Minds Study (HMS)

HMS is a population-level survey designed specifically for colleges and universities (two- and four-year U.S. and international institutions). HMS examines mental health and related issues (depression, anxiety, substance use) and service utilization. HMS is one of the only annual campus surveys focusing exclusively on these issues, allowing for substantial detail. Since its national launch in 2007, HMS has been fielded at over 100 college and university campuses across the U.S., with over 100,000 survey respondents.

About The Healthy Bodies Study (HBS)

A comprehensive study designed specifically for college student populations, HBS aims to understand students' relationships with eating, dieting, exercising, and body image, and how these relationships, in turn, fit into a larger picture of student health and well-being.

Benefits of Participation

The HMS and HBS research team is committed to strengthening the research-practice link. In addition to receiving a customized data report, participating campuses also have access to an interactive data interface that allows for exploration of the data without any statistical skills.

Uses of HMN Survey Data

HMS and HBS data can be used in numerous ways:

- To strengthen grant applications
- To advocate for mental health services and programs on campus
- To evaluate existing programs (e.g., reductions in stigma following a major campaign)
- To assess need for programs and services
- To raise awareness of mental health and campus resources
- To make comparisons with peer institutions

Participation Fees

Participation fees vary based on institutional characteristics (range: \$500-\$3,000)

All fees support the development of HMN research, helping us to expand and create enhancements.

For more information, please visit:
www.healthymindsnetwork.org or
contact us at healthyminds@umich.edu.

Free Webinar: Social Media Interventions for Adolescent and Young Adult Mental Health

Wednesday, May 21, 11:30-12:30pm (ET)

The upcoming webinar will feature four panelists:

Megan Moreno, PhD (University of Washington/Division of Adolescent Medicine at the Seattle Children's Hospital) and **Megan Pumper** (Seattle Children's Research Institute). Dr. Moreno's research is housed at the Center for Child Health Behavior and Development and she is the PI of the Social Media and Adolescent Health Research Team (SMAHRT). Megan Pumper is a clinical research associate at the Seattle Children's Research Institute and works closely with Dr. Moreno on research involving social media, substance abuse, and adolescent and young adult mental health.

Blake Wagner III (Healthy Minds Network) and **Andy Inscore** (Healthy Minds Network). Blake Wagner III is the Creative Director for the Healthy Minds Network at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. The *inkblots* film series grew out of his passion to merge often esoteric yet helpful evidence-based coping skills with a hip and digestible 2-4 minute film format. Andy Inscore is the web developer for the Healthy Minds Network's *inkblots* project and *tinyshifts* social media website. He studied computer science at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and previously worked as a web developer for Fitbit in San Francisco.



The webinar is intended to provide a synthesis of cutting-edge research in the field and is appropriate for clinical and non-clinical audiences. As always, the webinar is free and requires no special software. **RSVP** by emailing us at healthyminds@umich.edu or using the contact form on our website, healthymindsnetwork.org. In your RSVP, please include your name and email address, and questions/comments for our panelists to address.

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