Social media blues: An exploratory investigation of the variations in social media use motives and mental health across platforms

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BACKGROUND

7 out of 10 Americans report using social media. Among 18 to 29 year-olds, popular social media sites include Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok.

Previous research suggests that motives for social media use and links to mental health vary between platforms.

Instagram, an image-based platform, has been linked with motives to⁷,²
- Connect with friends
- Find humor
- Have fun

Twitter, a text-based platform, has been linked with motives to⁴
- Pass time
- Keep up with news
- Potential social component

Image-based platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat) but not text-based platforms (e.g., Twitter) have been linked with motives to⁷:
- Increased well-being
- Increased happiness
- Decreased feelings of loneliness

A cyclical relation between mental health and social media use has been proposed, such that poorer mental health may lead to stronger emotional connections to social media, which, in turn, may increase the likelihood of negative mental health outcomes.³

⁷Pittman & Reich, 2016; ²Huang & Su, 2018; ³Bekalu et al. (2019)

METHODS

Objective
- Perform secondary data analysis to investigate whether use of specific social media platforms predicts differences in mental health and social media use motives

Participants
- U.S. cisgender men and women recruited through Prolific.co (N = 502)
- Age: M = 32.7 (SD = 12.8); Gender: 46.2% women

Materials
- Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977; 20 items)
- Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck et al., 1988; 21 items)
- Scale of Motives for Using Social Networking Sites (SMU-SNS; PertegaL et al., 2019)

RESULTS

A series of regressions were performed with a grouping variable for use (1) vs. non-use (0) of a given platform as a predictor of each mental health and social media use motive variable, with age and gender as covariates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Twitter (n = 272)</th>
<th>Facebook (n = 338)</th>
<th>Instagram (n = 347)</th>
<th>Snapchat (n = 203)</th>
<th>TikTok (n = 290)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression (CES-D)</td>
<td>3.18 (0.88)</td>
<td>3.17 (0.84)</td>
<td>3.00 (0.92)</td>
<td>3.07 (0.96)</td>
<td>3.16 (0.93)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety (BAI)</td>
<td>1.65 (0.57)</td>
<td>1.60 (0.54)</td>
<td>1.71 (0.63)</td>
<td>1.82 (0.64)**</td>
<td>1.70 (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive: Dating</td>
<td>1.66 (1.43)***</td>
<td>1.60 (1.40)</td>
<td>1.56 (1.40)**</td>
<td>1.57 (1.40)</td>
<td>1.55 (1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive: New-Friendship</td>
<td>3.14 (1.34)***</td>
<td>3.18 (1.35)***</td>
<td>3.06 (1.39)***</td>
<td>3.08 (1.43)**</td>
<td>3.15 (1.38)***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motive: Social Connection</td>
<td>3.04 (1.45)***</td>
<td>3.04 (1.45)***</td>
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<td>3.04 (1.45)***</td>
<td>3.04 (1.45)***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motive: Social Status</td>
<td>5.45 (1.38)***</td>
<td>5.47 (1.39)***</td>
<td>5.47 (1.39)***</td>
<td>5.47 (1.39)***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motive: Self-Expression</td>
<td>5.86 (1.43)***</td>
<td>5.86 (1.43)***</td>
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<td>5.86 (1.43)***</td>
<td>5.86 (1.43)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive: News / Information</td>
<td>5.27 (1.40)***</td>
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With Bonferroni correction for five effects across each DV, the adjusted significance threshold is p < .01 (to maintain a family-wise error rate of p < .05). Bold font indicates significance at the adjusted threshold. **p < .01, *** p < .001

CONCLUSION

- Exploratory analyses revealed little evidence of a link between the use of specific platforms and poorer mental health.
- Directions for future research include better understanding the bidirectional relation between social media use and mental health and sociodemographic differences in platform use, social media motives, and mental health.