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 to:[1,2]
- ❖ Connect with friends
- ❖ Find humor
- ❖ Have fun

Twitter, a text-based platform, has been linked with motives to:[2]
- ❖ 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:[1]
- ❖ 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]

[1] Pittman & Reich, 2016; [2] Huang & Su, 2018; [3] Bekalu 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)

	I use social network sites…
Motive: Dating ($\alpha = .93$)	to hookup
	to look for a date
	to seek a romantic partner
Motive: New Friendships ($\alpha = .94$)	to make new friends
	to extend my circle of friends
	to meet new people
Motive: Social Connectedness ($\alpha = .88$)	to not feel disengaged from the world
	to feel connected with people
	to feel socially integrated
Motive: Social Information ($\alpha = .73$)	to keep up-to-date with what my contacts are doing in their day-to-day life
	to know the details of my friends' lives
	to snoop on people that I am interested in
Motive: Entertainment ($\alpha = .85$)	to kill my free time
	to kill time when I am bored
	to entertain myself
Motive: Social Status ($\alpha = .84$)	to stand out from others
	for other people to comment on my posts
	to check that others like my posts
Motive: Self-Expression ($\alpha = .91$)	to express my feelings and thoughts
	to give my opinion on a topic
	to discuss some subject (with other people)
Motive: News & Information ($\alpha = .87$)	to keep up with what happens in the world
	to be informed about the news
	to find information about the topics that I like and am interested in

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.

Dependent Variable	Twitter ($n = 272$)	Facebook ($n = 338$)	Instagram ($n = 347$)	SnapChat ($n = 203$)	TikTok ($n = 211$)
Depression (CES-D)	2.18 (0.78)	2.17 (0.80)	2.20 (0.78)	2.27 (0.76)	2.26 (0.77)
Anxiety (BAI)	1.65 (0.57)	1.65 (0.57)	1.71 (0.60)	1.82 (0.64)**	1.79 (0.64)
Motive: Dating	1.66 (1.25)***	1.49 (1.10)	1.56 (1.16)**	1.52 (1.01)	1.55 (1.08)
Motive: New Friendship	3.41 (1.83)***	3.18 (1.77)**	3.20 (1.79)*	3.25 (1.82)	3.31 (1.81)*
Motive: Social Connectedness	4.74 (1.55)***	4.73 (1.56)***	4.73 (1.51)***	4.90 (1.46)*	4.90 (1.55)*
Motive: Social Information	4.32 (1.49)*	4.46 (1.45)***	4.50 (1.45)***	4.76 (1.38)***	4.68 (1.42)***
Motive: Entertainment	5.64 (1.21)	5.59 (1.31)*	5.73 (1.19)**	5.90 (1.14)*	6.05 (0.99)***
Motive: Social Status	2.69 (1.49)***	2.67 (1.49)***	2.65 (1.45)***	2.62 (1.46)	2.79 (1.53)***
Motive: Self-Expression	3.80 (1.74)***	3.56 (1.76)***	3.54 (1.73)*	3.36 (1.81)	3.57 (1.81)
Motive: News / Information	5.37 (1.30)***	5.17 (1.48)	5.31 (1.32)**	5.26 (1.41)	5.35 (1.36)

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. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Twitter — Motives: dating, building new friendships, feeling socially connected, social status, to express oneself, and to obtain news/information

Facebook — Motives: building new friendships, feeling socially connected, gaining information about others, and social status

SnapChat — Motives: gain information about others. Reported higher levels of anxiety compared to non-users

Instagram — Motives: dating, feeling socially connected, gaining information about others, entertainment, social status, and news/information

TikTok — Motives: gaining information about others, entertainment, and social status

Note: Compared to non-users, those who reported using **Twitter**, **Instagram**, **Facebook** or **TikTok** did **NOT** report greater levels of anxiety or depression.

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.