9-4-2019

The Effects of Scrolling: Social Media Takeover

Bianca Mancini

The Effects of Scrolling: Social Media Takeover

Bianca Mancini

Santa Clara University

4 September 2019

Abstract

The present research and argument examines how social media (influencers) negatively affect individuals by causing envy and low self esteem. Results suggest that many factors play a role, including time spent on social media and the individual's level of self-esteem. To support my background research I will pull from my personal experience and a study I conducted. From these results, I have determined that we as a society have to take envy, low self-esteem, age, gender, and location into consideration when we are examining the link between mental health and social media. In the study, I will show that females ranging in age from 13 years to 26 are amongst the highest percent to develop depression through social media.

Keywords: Micro-celebrity, influencer, ordinary people, mental health, social media, facebook surveillance, social comparison theory, envy, self-esteem

Introduction to Social Media and the Negative effects Associated

This past summer I spent a lot of time with my niece, and within that time I witnessed a true tragedy. I was faced with a dilemma I never thought I would encounter. I was watching an instagram video from this girl I follow, and my niece who is six years old walked in and started watching with me. The video was innocent enough: it was a makeup tutorial where the girl was explaining her process of how she puts on her makeup. When the video was finished, I noticed my niece was quiet, which is completely out of character for her. When I asked her what was wrong, it broke my heart to hear her response. She explained how she felt discouraged because she will never be as pretty as the girl she just watched. Again, my niece is six years old. When I was her age, I couldn't care less about how I looked compared to others; all I cared about was toys and having fun. Today, sadly this is not the case for many children; social media has become so readily available that even children are beginning to compare themselves with others.

Social media has become somewhat of a necessity. Everywhere you go you see people snapping selfies to post, watching videos posted by others, or even following someone's live stream (a non-edited live video of someone). Don't get me wrong, social media has its positives, such as motivation, inspiration, and charity, just to name a few. Social media has the potential to gather resources to help find missing people or generate awareness for certain charities. However, with all the positives that come with social media, there are just as many, if not more, negatives associated with it. Envy, depression, suicide, bullying, and body dsymorphia are just a few of social media's negative effects. I will discuss the mental and physical implications that are linked to social media through influencers' posts and inspirational messages, as well as illuminate the societal threats that social media poses. I will examine the implications of

depression, suicide and self harm throughout the study. I aim to prove that social media and its influencers are the cause the general viewer's depression. I will examine how age, gender and location affect social media use through my own study and tie that back to envy and depression. In my study I look at a range of ages, the youngest being 8 and the oldest being 26. As for gender I look at both equally to determine which gender is more susceptible to social media related issues. Throughout my study I take location as a way to determine if certain individuals are more susceptible to social media related issues due to where they are from. It is important to examine the connection between depression and social media due to the increase of suicidial rates in children and young adults.

Throughout this paper I am going to explore the idea that social media influencers affect viewers in a negative way. I will also provide evidence that lower self-esteem individuals have a higher likelihood to develop depression due to social comparison. I will touch on age, location, and gender, while looking to provide evidence to support my thesis. To be clear, the two main points I will discuss in this paper are how social media causes depression through envy and how low self-esteem plays a factor in depression from social media.

Background, key terms and the social comparison theory

While social media influencers can encourage people to better their lives and motivate them to work hard, ordinary people, who sometimes have low self-esteem, are more likely to develop depression. They are more likely to develop depression after following social media influencers and viewing their posts. I believe that social media has become a necessity and that it has the potential to cause depression in a younger audience. Younger audiences are now

comparing their lives to something that is a fantasy. For any person, especially a young person, to compare this unachievable lifestyle can bring about mental issues. Social media can cause body dysmorphia and bullying, and studies have shown that individuals who view social media accounts and compare their lives with that of the influencer are likely to develop envy. While envy may be the most crucial factor leading to depression, there are also other factors that must be present in order to develop depression. Low self-esteem, age, gender, and location are all factors that play a major role in whether or not an individual will develop depression or not.

Lower self-esteem individuals have a higher chance of becoming envious of social media influencers according to Jiyoung Chae. Chae's explains in the article "Explaining Females' Envy Toward Social Media Influencers" that social media influencers and the effect that they have on their followers has a direct link to envy. I chose to use this article because the sources Chae incorporates into the article draws from other research to support the theories and findings. Another of this source's strengths is that it is a relatively new data published in 2017, which is good because it is important to stay up to date when it comes to studies about social media. Another article I chose to use as a way to connect my data to my thesis is "Depression as a predictor of Facebook surveillance and envy: Longitudinal evidence from a cross-lagged panel study in Germany" by Sebastian Scherr, Catalina L. Toma, and Barbara Schuster. The article touches on depression and the role it plays in Facebook surveillance, which is viewing profiles, comments, and pictures. The authors argues that the higher an individual's depression is, the higher the chance for that individual to partake in Facebook Surveillance. In which case, would lead to higher levels of envy and depression. I chose this source because it takes into consideration both male and females as well as the age of the participants, the youngest being 14

years old. This is beneficial in my opinion because one previous source that I looked into only survived women, and they ranged from 20-39 years old. It is important to look at younger aged individuals when it comes to social media.

The key terms throughout the paper are micro-celebrity and influencer, which can be used interchangeably, as well as ordinary people, mental health, social media, facebook surveillance, self-esteem, envy and the social comparison theory. Micro-celebrities, also known as influencers, are individuals who are well known on social media outlets. When I use the term ordinary people, I am referring to individuals who follow other individuals with a high following count or who share their lives to the public. Mental health refers to the negative aspects that social media brings to some individuals. Some mental health issues connected to social media usage are envy, depression, suicide, bullying, and body dsymorphia. Social media outlets are all applications that allow their users to post content and express themselves in many ways, like through photos, videos, inspirational messages and quotes. Facebook surveillance is the process in which an individual looks at posts, pictures, or videos of other people on facebook, without contacting or interacting. Basically, this means that Facebook surveillance is when someone views another person's account, with the objective to look anonymously, and this could lead to envy. Self-esteem is how an individual views themselves and envy is how another person's situation affects your own individual desires. The social comparison theory is simply comparing yourself to others. My approach for this paper will be psychological, specifically investigating the application of the social comparison theory to social media influencers. The negative aspects that come along with social media stem off of ordinary individuals comparing themselves to influencers. Influencers are really just ordinary people who hide behind the facade they portray

as their everyday lives. It is easy to post pictures and inspirational messages, but no matter what, we are all human beings and have flaws. If you really think about it, flaws are what make us human; without them life is unrealistic and boring. The biggest problem with social media today is that it is rare to show flaws and show what is truly going on in your life.

Social media has become an everyday necessity for a large portion of young adults and teens. For many it is rare to go a day without looking at their favorite accounts and the content posted. It is possible that for certain individuals viewing this content can motivate them and encourage them to better their lives. However, in this paper I will discuss two main points that show how social media is a trigger for depression.

The first point I will discuss is how social media causes depression through envy. I will dive deeply into the mental health issues that social media accounts can cause certain individuals to struggle with. When looking at social media and how it incites envy, which commonly leads to depression, we first must look at who it is that is being affected. An interesting article titled "Does Social Media Cause Depression" the editorial director with the child mind institute, Caroline Miller stated "a 2017 study of over half a million eighth through 12th graders found that the number exhibiting high levels of depressive symptoms increased by 33 percent between 2010 and 2015. In the same period, the suicide rate for girls in that age group increased by 65 percent." From the time smart phones were introduced to the public in 2007, nearly 92 percent of people ages 13 to 24 owned some type of smartphone. (Miller, 2018). Young females in their 20's are among the highest percentage to use social media (Chae, 2018). Therefore, we can assume that females in their early to mid twenties are among the individuals I should take a look at. When it comes to depression, envy is a stepping stone. In other words, envy is the spark that

lights the fire that is depression. In order to understand depression, we must first look at what causes envy. It is defined in Chae's article that "Envy arises when an individual and the envy target have similarities except for the desired attribute, the desired attribute is personally relevant for the person, the person is not confident about his/her ability to obtain such attribute, the envied people's advantage is seen as unfair" (Chae, 2018). What this means is that in order to develop envy, an individual must see similarities between themselves and the influencer in which they are viewing. Not only do they see similarities, but also feel cheated out of the opportunity to obtain such a lifestyle. According to the article "Depression as a Predictor of Facebook Surveillance and Envy" it is explained that individuals with depressive tendencies are far more likely to engage in Facebook surveillance, which leads to envy (Scherr, Toma, Schuster, 2018). However, it is also stated that this envy did not lead to depression up to a year later. When looking at social media, it is easy to see the appeal of viewing someone else's life and seeing their experiences. Nonetheless, it is clear to see that there is a direct link between envy and social media and that in the past 5 years it has not only increased the depression rate, but also the suicide rate, especially in females. However, not all envy leads to depression; there are other factors that need to be present in order for depression to develop.

Counter Argument

It is important to understand the positives associated with social media before we go into detail on the negatives. Social media has become a main platform to connect and stay connected with friends, colleagues, and family, as well as make new connections through mutual acquaintances or even common interests. It is a way to explore experiences you otherwise may

have never thought possible. For example, I live in California, but my family and friends are in New York, where I am originally from. Social media is a great way to stay connected with my life back in New York. It also allows for my friends and family to see my life here and view the new experiences I am encountering. Social Media has also become a way to pass time. Look at the student waiting for class to begin or people waiting in the doctor's office. For the most part they are almost always on their phones, and it is my guess that a large majority of them are on social media, trying to keep entertained.

There is a great example of the positives of social media in the article "A Week Without Using Social Media: Results from an Ecological Momentary Intervention Study Using Smartphones" where the authors explain how not using social media actually causes withdrawal symptoms which affect one's mood, leading to reduced positive affect and heightened negative affect (Stieger, Lewetz). This theory suggests that social media may actually be the cure to depression. As for influencers on social media, the article "Factors Associated With Increased Dissemination of Positive Mental Health Messaging On Social Media" states that more messages with positives tones posted by an influencer decrease the chances of a normal person following the influencer developing negative feelings (Sumner, Bowen, Bartholow, 2019). However, in this article I will disprove this idea and provide evidence to support my theory that social media causes depression.

Low self-esteem and the relationship to depression through social media

Social media has become a place where people can share ideas and stay connected. It allows people to explore the world without leaving their homes. There are opportunities to

follow certain individuals who flaunt aspects of their luxurious life style. For some people this is fine and easy to view without becoming depressed. However, it is fair to point out that a large majority of these "viewers" feel envy when looking at such accounts. The reason not all people develop depression is due to their own self worth and opinion of themselves. This leads me to my second main point, which is how low self-esteem plays a role in the development of depression through social media. In order to understand how low self-esteem factors in, we must first understand what self-esteem is. According to "Adolescence and Self-Esteem" by Carl E Pickhardt Ph.D, "self-esteem is an abstract psychological concept made up to describe part of a person's human nature." In other words, self-esteem is confidence in one's ability or worth. In the article "Life satisfaction and suicide: a 20-year follow-up study" the authors state that "Low self-esteem and low life satisfaction are strongly associated with depression" (Koivumaa-Honkanen, Kaprio, Honkanen, Viinamäki, & Koskenvuo, 2004; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). It is also important to note that individuals who have low self-esteem are far more likely to follow influencers on social media (Chae, 2018). It is fair to say that not every person has low self-esteem. However, a recent survey states that 7 out of 10 girls believe they are not good enough, and low self-esteem is a thinking disorder that affects over 85% of the population, according to "11 facts about teens and self-esteem". With the amount of access that today's world allows, it is easy to see how someone with low self-esteem can feel discouraged and envious. According to "Exploring the Relationship Between Frequency of Instagram Use, Exposure to Idealized Images, and Psychological Well-being in Women," the authors state that "the frequency of social media use directly correlates with depressive symptoms, self-esteem, general and physical appearance anxiety, and body dissatisfaction" (Sherlock, Wagstaff, 2018). It is

important to note that envy without low self-esteem does not directly lead to depression; however, envy with low self-esteem does. Clearly, envy, low self esteem and patterns of social media surveillance form a triad of conditions that lead to depression.

Social media has such a strong hold on today's youth; if it's not Instagram, it's Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, or Youtube, just to name a few. People are living their lives vicariously through the lives of celebrities and influencers. People also share, retweet, like, and comment on other peoples post, as a way to share common interests. When I walk around the mall, I notice almost every person I look at is on their phone doing something. Now I know what you are thinking, this doesn't necessarily mean they are using social media at that moment. You would be correct in thinking this; however, let's investigate this further. According to Maggie Fox and Erika Edwards, with West Virginia Education Association, Tweens and teens both feel the constant demand to use social media as a way to stay up to date with everything trending at the moment. In other words, social media is constantly being used to keep people in the loop. Therefore, I can assume that when I take my walks around the mall and see all these people on their phones, a large majority are likely using social media. This of course is speculation; I am sure you want some sort of proof. That is why I took it upon myself to gather a bit of information.

Apple has developed a new way for people to see just how much they use certain apps on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. The new method was developed as a way to track battery usage on a device. However, for our purposes I used it as a way to determine time allocated to social media. For this to work, I narrowed down the social media platforms I looked at, to Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook and Youtube. Also I categorized the ages of all the

people I spoke with into three categories, tweens ages 8-12, teens ages 13-19 and young adults ages 20-26.

My method was simple enough: walk up to someone using their phone and ask them if they wouldn't mind partaking in my study. For those who agreed, I would ask four questions: how old they were, if they were just on social media when I approached them, how often they felt they used social media on a daily basis, and finally if we could take a look at their battery usage. Of the 100 people I surveyed 58 were female and 42 were male. As for the age groups, 41 were young adults, 26 were tweens, and 33 were teens. What I found was not surprising: almost 90 percent of all participants underestimated how much time they spent on social media on a daily basis. On average between all three age groups the time allocated to social media on a daily basis was a staggering 4.5 hours a day. With young adults averaging 6 hours a day, tweens 3 hours, and teens 5 hours. Where it gets interesting is the role gender plays on the study. For example, males on average spent half as much time on social media than females. In fact, 78 of the 100 people I surveyed were on social media when I approached them. Of those 78, 45 were female and 33 were male. Another interesting point is that the social media platform that was used the most was Instagram, followed closely by Twitter, Snapchat, Youtube, and Facebook was the least. As Fox and Edwards established, these individuals are using social media as a way to stay connected to trends. However, social media has also become a method for people to pass the time. Using social media as a distraction from other everyday scenarios such as work, school, or even traffic. Interestingly enough, according to a recent article "Social Media and Depression Symptoms: A Network Perspective" George Aalbers, Richard J. McNally, Alexandre Heeren, Sanne de Wit and Eiko I. Fried, tell us that passive social media use can actually increase

attention related issues, as well as increase one's loneliness and envy. Let's think about that for one second. If increasing social media use can decrease one's attention span, that could have serious real world implications. Such implications include, but are not limited to, traffic collisions, on site work issues, and decreased academic performance. All of these have the potential to change someone's life for the worse, which in turn could also lead to depression. Let's take traffic collisions as an example. According to Aalbers, McNally, Heeran, Wit, and Fried, social media use decreases attention span. Therefore, we can assume that if someone who has been using social media is driving a car, they could become distracted and cause an accident. This shows that social media can have a direct and indirect effect on people's lives.

Gender's role in the development of depression through social media

As it turns out, gender plays a major role in the development of depression through social media influencers. Women for the most part develop depression far more frequently than men (Nesi, Prinstein). However, that is not to say that men are not affected by depression through social media. For example, according to a recent study "Social Media Behavior, Toxic Masculinity, and Depression" conducted by Mike C. Parent, Teresa D. Gobble, and Aaron Rochlen with the University of Texas at Austin, negative online interactions involving men increases the likelihood of depression due to toxic masculinity. In other words, men are frequently forced to appear as masculine as possible, using homophobic language and sexist ideas as a way to gain their male suppurority (Parent, Gobble, and Rochlen). This is common due to how men are depicted in mainstream media. If we look at movies or music videos, men are usually depicted as fit, wealthy, and straight. This plays a major role of how young men view

their futures, and when someone does not measure up to these factors, they frequently begin

developing depression. According to "What About Men? Social Comparison and the Effects of

Media Images on Body and Self-Esteem" the authors prove that men's self worth and image are

affected by what they see on social media. In other words, the content men are exposed to on

social media (other men's physique or life style) has the potential to bring about negative

thinking which could lead to depression. On the other hand, women are far more likely to

develop depression from social media influencers, mainly due to the fact that my research

indicates women use social media far more frequently than men. According to "Using Social

Media for Social Comparison and Feedback-Seeking: Gender and Popularity Moderate

Associations with Depressive Symptoms" Jacqueline Nesi & Mitchell J. Prinstein, women are far

more likely to compare themselves with others, when it comes to physical attractiveness based

on online photos. It is also said in the same article that the number of females with depression

has increased dramatically in the past 5 years. Depression stems from comparison: when we

compare our lives with anyone, especially influencers, we are looking for the negative

differences, which will inevitably bring about depression if such differences are found.

The role location plays on the development of depression through social media

It is imperative to look at location when examining the effects of social media on one's

mental health. As it turns out, location plays a larger role in the development of depression than I

initially hypothesized. When examining the results I had gathered from my mall study, I quickly

realized that perhaps the individual's location may play a factor on the results. To test this

theory, I chose to make a few inquiries, to conduct my survey with a few people from out of

state. Considering I am originally from New York, and my initial survey took place in California, I chose to send my survey to a few acquaintances from New York. The survey questions were exactly the same. However the sample size was much smaller. I surveyed only 25 people, ages ranging from 13-27, and 11 were male and 14 were female. The results surprised me to say the least. Unlike California, the average amount of time spent on social media a day was 5.5 hours. Compared to the 4.5 hours the California survey resulted in, this may not seem like a big change. However, 1 full hour is indeed a significant amount of time, and this has the potential to show that location plays a factor in social media usage. Now the only thing I had to figure out wasif higher usage could lead to higher risk of depression.

Location clearly plays a role in the amount of time individuals use social media. However, the question still remained: did this necessarily mean that location is relevant to the claim that social media usage and depression are positively correlated? It is hard to argue the fact that the more you use something the higher the potential for that something to affect you. Let's use another example: if we are looking at the potential risk factor associated with smoking and cancer, it is clear that the more someone chooses to smoke, the higher their risk of cancer becomes. I firmly believe that the same logic can be used when looking at social media usage and depression. The more someone uses social media, the more he or she is exposed to the influencers, which increases their potential to develop depression, according to Chae. If we take this logic into consideration then it is fair to assume that people in California are less likely to develop depression than those in New York. According to Mental Health America, when it comes to the ranking of every state in regards to depression, New York ranks number 12, whereas Caifornia comes in at 25. This proves the theory that the more time allocated to social

media, does in fact increase the risk of depression. As another way to provide as much evidence as possible, I look to an article that talks about social media and depression. According to "Social Media Behavior, Toxic Masculinity, and Depression" the more time spent on the internet does not increase chances of depression, however more time on social media does. This again proves my initial thought, that location does in fact play a role in the development of depression through social media.

Potential solution

What do we do about social media? Is there anything we can do? It has been argued that social media is our future, and that removing it completely can in fact cause withdrawal symptoms and even depression symptoms (Stieger, Lewetz, 2018). However, social media influencers cause depression by constantly flaunting their "fake lives" in posts. Therefore, I propose a safe and healthy monitor on social media as my potential solution. By this I mean that there needs to be a certain algorithm that searches for key terms or potential hotspot postings in order to find individuals who are expressing depressive symptoms. This way, social media can remain active and people can get the help they need. According to "Assortativity of Suicide-Related Posting on Social Media" individuals who use similar language on social media are more likely to view the same material. Also, individuals with suicidal tendencies seem to follow a similar pattern on social media (Cero, Witte, 2019). By creating an algorithm that searches for keywords, we can locate and provide help for the ones in need.

Final thoughts on social media and mental health

  In conclusion, social media and mental health are important in the field of research because our society's future is at stake. Technology has made tremendous strides in the past few years: with all the new phones and tablets that have come out, it makes it nearly impossible to go anywhere without seeing someone sneaking a selfie, snapping a picture of their food, or any other aspect of their life to post online. It has become an epidemic and an addiction. Social media and technology use has grown exponentially in the past few years. Consequently, it is imperative to discuss the effects they have on mental health. Unless we find a way to establish a way to manage the chaos that is social media, we will undoubtedly be prisoners to it. Ordinary people, including children, follow "influencers" online, and see the lavish lifestyles they post. Not everyone is built to handle the reality that these lives posted on social media are a fantasy, and that it is not always possible to achieve what is being presented. An ordinary person who is following the life of someone who is constantly happy, carefree, fit, and not to mention almost always traveling, can easily become envious, which according to Chae, leads to depression. Certain factors play a major role in the development of depression from social media. Factors such as envy, low self-esteem, age, gender, and location are all factors that we need to take into consideration when we are examining the link between depression and social media. Social media is not going anywhere, if the last few years have taught us anything, it's that social media is only getting stronger and more relevant as the years progress. The reality is, social media is a part of our lives whether we like it or not, young children are subject to the same types of mental illness as adults. Therefore, it is our responsibility to determine whether or not social media is the

cause or the solution. I want to leave you today with this: strive for less scrolling and more

living. Live your life and experience things for yourself, rather than through a screen.

Works Cited

Aalbers, G., McNally, R. J., Heeren, A., de Wit, S., & Fried, E. I. (2019). Social media and

   depression symptoms: A network perspective. *Journal of Experimental Psychology:*

   General, *148*(8), 1454–1462. https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1037/xge0000528.supp

   (Supplemental)

Adolescence and Self-Esteem. (n.d.). Retrieved from

   https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201009/ad

   olescence-and-self-esteem

Cero, I., & Witte, T. K. (2019). Assortativity of suicide-related posting on social media.

   American Psychologist. https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1037/amp0000477

Chae, J. (2018). Explaining Females' Envy Toward Social Media Influencers. *Media*

   Psychology, 21(2), 246–262.

   https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1080/15213269.2017.1328312

Hobza, C. L., Walker, K. E., Yakushko, O., & Peugh, J. L. (2007). What about men? Social

   comparison and the effects of media images on body and self-esteem. *Psychology of Men*

   & Masculinity, *8*(3), 161–172.

   https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1037/1524-9220.8.3.161

Miller, C., & Child Mind Institute. (n.d.). Does Social Media Cause Depression? Retrieved from

   https://childmind.org/article/is-social-media-use-causing-depression/

Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015). Using social media for social comparison and

   feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive

symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *43*(8), 1427–1438.

https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1007/s10802-015-0020-0

Parent, M. C., Gobble, T. D., & Rochlen, A. (2019). Social media behavior, toxic masculinity,

and depression. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *20*(3), 277–287.

https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1037/men0000156

Scherr, S., Toma, C. L., & Schuster, B. (2018). Depression as a predictor of Facebook

surveillance and envy: Longitudinal evidence from a cross-lagged panel study in

Germany. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*.

https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1027/1864-1105/a000247

Sherlock, M., & Wagstaff, D. L. (2018). Exploring the relationship between frequency of

Instagram use, exposure to idealized images, and psychological well-being in women.

Psychology of Popular Media Culture.

https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1037/ppm0000182

Stieger, S., & Lewetz, D. (2018). A week without using social media: Results from an ecological

momentary intervention study using smartphones. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and

Social Networking*, *21*(10), 618–624.

https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1089/cyber.2018.0070

Sumner, S. A., Bowen, D. A., & Bartholow, B. (2019). Factors associated with increased

dissemination of positive mental health messaging on social media. Crisis: The Journal of

Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention.

https://doi-org.libproxy.scu.edu/10.1027/0227-5910/a000598 (Supplemental)

11 Facts About Teens and Self Esteem. (n.d.). Retrieved from

https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-teens-and-self-esteem

(2016, October 17). Ranking the States. Retrieved from

https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/ranking-states