

# Chapter 10

## Stress, Coping, and Social Media Use

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### ABSTRACT

*Social media has become a part of people's lives and many psychological processes are suggested to be related with social media use. This chapter examines social media use from a stress and coping perspective. Social media can be a stressor for users with the content of posts they see, with a fear of negative evaluation, as an unhealthy attachment to social media accounts, and as a result of cyberbullying. Social media use can also be a problem-focused coping as a source of information, an emotion-focused coping as a distraction, and a source of social support. Lastly, it can be a predictor or a part of well-being as well as a moderator or mediator between coping and well-being. After elaborating on social media use as a part of the coping process, implications for research and practice are discussed. The key points from a coping viewpoint are specified for users, parents, teachers, and professionals. While problematic use of social media can be part of dysfunctional coping and a worse well-being, healthy use can help individuals deal with stresses and lead to a better well-being.*

### INTRODUCTION

With the increase in the use of technological devices and the internet, social media use has emerged as a new way of communication in people's lives. Social media was defined as internet-based applications by which users generate and share content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With the advancements in technology and an easy access,

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more and more people have moved their daily activities to online environments, including social lives. Different types of social media include social network sites, user generated content, trading and marketing sites, and game sites (Dijck, 2013). The focus of the present chapter is especially on social exchange and sharing activities via social media. To examine the use of social media, many psychological theories have been used in relation with certain psychosocial variables (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015). The aim of the present chapter is to examine social media use from a stress and coping perspective. As an electronic form of communication, social media provides a social setting, with its challenges and opportunities. Therefore, it can be evaluated as both a source of stress, i.e. a threat to the person, and a coping mechanism, i.e. efforts against the threat, as elaborated in “Theoretical Background”. Social media use can buffer the negative effects of stress when used as a healthy coping mechanism, for example as a source of social support. On the other hand, similar to other sources of stress and maladaptive coping mechanisms, it can be related to negative long-term consequences such as anxiety disorders, depression, or addiction. In other words, problematic use of social support can itself be an indicator of reduced well-being. Thus, social media use has been the focus of research investigating its relation with stress and coping variables.

Lazarus and Folkman’s classical Transactional Model of Stress (1984) is utilized in this chapter as the theoretical framework for the role of social media. The theoretical model is introduced to provide the background for an analysis of social media use in relation with stress and coping. Then, social media use is explained as a part of each stage of the Transactional Model of Stress, that is, stress appraisal, coping, and well-being. Misuse of internet and social media; such as for harassing others, (i.e. cyberbullying), and use in excessive durations - as an addiction or in inappropriate contexts (e.g. use during working hours for non-work related purposes, i.e. cyberloafing) (Lim, 2002) are also acknowledged. Furthermore, implications of the relations between stress and social media use are included. Lastly, functions of healthy use of social media and possible solutions to the problematic use of social media from a coping perspective are provided, which may guide not only users of social media, especially young adults and their parents, but also related professionals, such as teachers and mental health professionals.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

By considering its relationship with health and illnesses, stress has been extensively investigated by researchers. Stress has been defined mainly from three perspectives, namely, stimulus, response, and stimulus-response interaction. Some researchers like Holmes and Rahe (1967) and Harris (2007), have defined stress as a stimulus.

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