


A Social Media Give and Take: What Young Adults Would Give Up to Stay Connected

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ABSTRACT

This study explored social media (SM) usage amongst young adults. Participants ($N = 750$) completed an online survey about their usage of/relationship with SM and the sacrifices they would make to remain on SM. Almost half of participants reported checking SM 9+ times/day and more than three-quarters spent 1+ hour/day on SM. SM addiction scores averaged 17.5/30 ($SD = 5.08$). Regression analyses revealed that number of SM checks/day ($p < 0.05$), time/day spent on SM ($p < 0.01$), and SM addiction ($p < 0.001$) all predicted increases in the number of trade-offs participants were willing to make, $F(6,733) = 21.941$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.390$. These results act to both confirm existing literature, while also highlighting the specific compromises young adults would make to maintain their SM access. Future health efforts should aim to promote awareness of these psychological and social issues.

KEYWORDS

Addictive Behaviours, Appearance, Career, Food, Health, Hobbies, Life, Possessions, Relationships, Sacrifices, Social Media, Survey, Trade-Offs, Young Adults

INTRODUCTION

Social media (SM) are interactive technologies that allow users to create and share content via social networking sites (SNSs) or virtual communities (Obar & Wildman, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2021). All SM applications are Web 2.0 Internet-based, contain user-generated content (e.g., photos, text, videos), and require a user to design and maintain an online profile (Obar & Wildman, 2015). Various forms of SM are available, including SNSs (e.g., Facebook, Instagram), instant messaging services (e.g., WhatsApp), blogging sites (e.g., Tumblr), multiplayer online games (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life; Ryan et al., 2017). SM has revolutionized the way people search for information and consume entertainment media (Firth et al., 2019) and has become increasingly popular amongst Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2021). For instance, in 2018, SM was regularly used

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by about 9 in 10 Canadians aged 15 to 34 (Statistics Canada, 2021) and it is thought that Canadian SM users currently stand at a record of 25.35 million users (Tankovska, 2021).

As with other popular technologies, the evolution of SM presents both opportunities and risks for users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2021). One of SM's greatest attributes is its ability to increase connectivity (Akram & Kumar, 2018). Specifically, SM allows individuals to create and maintain personal (e.g., friends and family) and professional (e.g., career networking) relationships, irrespective of physical distance (Keles et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2017). In addition, SM allows users to create virtual spaces (e.g., forums, groups) where individuals can express their views and creativity, which can aid in relieving stress, anxiety, and sadness (Keles et al., 2020). SM can also reduce many barriers to social participation (e.g., social anxiety), which can provide increased emotional support, while simultaneously diminishing social isolation and loneliness (Keles et al., 2020).

Although SM has many benefits, excessive or inappropriate usage has the potential for negative psychosocial and physical outcomes (Karim et al., 2020; Twenge et al., 2018). For example, in 2018, Statistics Canada (2021) reported that around 1 in 8 Canadian SM users reported feeling anxious, depressed, or envious of the lives of others. These negative emotions often emerge due to the overwhelming strive for positive self-presentation on SM, whereby users only upload flattering images or information about personal accomplishments or material successes (Festinger, 1954; Verduyn et al., 2015). This frequent exposure to others can lead to idealized perceptions of other users' lives, which in turn increases the potential for negative comparison (i.e., social deprivation and low self-esteem; Festinger, 1954; Primack et al., 2017). SM can also impact an individual's physical health with Statistics Canada (2021) suggesting that among all SM users aged 15 to 64, around one-fifth reported decreased levels of physical activity (22%), lost sleep (19%), or trouble concentrating on other activities (18%) because of SM usage. Moreover, extended SM usage can increase sedentary behaviour, a known risk factor for obesity and cardiovascular disease (Reid Chassiakos et al., 2016). Even more troubling, individuals who spend a significant amount of time on SM may be more susceptible to developing obsessive compulsions to use SM applications, also known as a SM addiction (Andreassen, 2015; Marino et al., 2017). SM addiction or addictive behaviours often places individuals at a higher risk of these adverse effects (Andreassen, 2015; Karim et al., 2020; Marino et al., 2017).

SM addiction occurs when an individual neglects daily life activities due to their excessive usage of SM applications (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; van den Eijnden et al., 2016). Those who are addicted to SM tend to use it as an escape from life stressors and negative emotions, causing increased anxiety when usage is not possible and making it very difficult to give up or reduce overall usage (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; van den Eijnden et al., 2016). Individuals suffering from addiction also exhibit problematic behaviours that can lead to impairment (i.e., neglecting other areas of their lives), lack of control (i.e., cannot reduce the behaviour, craving), and/or risky actions (i.e., persistent intake despite awareness of negative effects). For example, individuals who are addicted to SM are often overly concerned about their SM profiles and have uncontrollable urges to check their newsfeeds (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014). These problematic behaviours can manifest into cognitive, physical, and/or emotional reactions, resulting in interpersonal and psychological issues (Blachnio et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2016; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2014). The societal impact of SM is a growing topic amongst researchers with many concluding that SM addictions, along with the associated adverse effects, are significantly increasing (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014; Blachnio et al., 2017; Kotyuk et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2016). There is, however, limited research on the associations between SM addiction and usage patterns/problematic behaviours. For instance, it is not well known whether higher SM usage patterns and addiction scores can increase the number of sacrifices a participant is willing to make in their personal lives to stay connected on SM. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to examine SM usage and addiction amongst young adults, while simultaneously uncovering what these individuals would be willing to neglect/give up to remain connected to SM. More specifically, the following research questions were developed:

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