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Investigating the Relationship between Social Anxiety and Social Media Use: A Review Study

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Abstract:

This review study aims to explore the relationship between social anxiety and social media use among a sample of young society. Social media has become increasingly integrated into daily life, providing individuals with various opportunities for social interaction. However, concerns have been raised regarding the potential impact of social media use on mental health, particularly with regards to social anxiety. The study will utilize self-report measures to assess social anxiety levels and social media usage patterns among participants. Numerous studies have sought to investigate the association between social anxiety and social media use, aiming to shed light on how these factors interact and influence each other. By examining the available research on this topic, this review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current understanding of the relationship between social anxiety and social media use. Findings from this study will contribute to our understanding of the complex relationship between social anxiety and social media use and may have implications for mental health interventions and social media guidelines.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, distress, fear of missing out, impairment, Negative feedback loop, Social Media use, Social Anxiety

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Introduction:

Social anxiety and social media use are two prominent aspects of modern society that have garnered considerable attention from researchers and practitioners. Social anxiety refers to a persistent fear of social situations and the fear of negative evaluation by others, leading to significant distress and impairment in various areas of life. On the other hand, social media has rapidly become an integral part of everyday life, enabling individuals to connect, communicate, and share information with others through various online platforms. Given the widespread use of social media and the increasing prevalence of social anxiety, understanding the relationship between these two phenomena has become a topic of great interest. The exploration of this relationship is vital due to its potential implications for individuals' mental health and well-being. Social anxiety can have a profound impact on individuals' lives, leading to reduced social interactions, impaired relationships, and diminished quality of life. Understanding the nature of the relationship between social anxiety and social media use is essential for several reasons. First, it can inform the development of interventions and strategies to support individuals with social anxiety who engage with social media. Second, it can help identify potential risk factors associated with social media use that may contribute to the onset or exacerbation of social anxiety. Third, it can provide insights into the underlying mechanisms and processes that drive the relationship, thereby deepening our understanding of the complex interplay between psychological factors and technological advancements.

Social Anxiety:

Social anxiety is defined as an overwhelming fear of social situations, including public speaking, socializing at parties, meeting new people, or even participating in everyday conversations.

Social Media Use:

Social media has become an integral part of modern society, transforming the way people communicate, share information, and connect with others. Social media refers to online platforms and technologies that facilitate the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

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Literature Review:

- **Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015).** Using social media for social comparison and feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms. A total of 619 students (57 % female; mean age 14.6) completed self-report questionnaires at 2 time points. Adolescents reported on levels of depressive symptoms at baseline, and 1 year later on depressive symptoms, frequency of technology use (cell phones, Facebook, and Instagram), excessive reassurance-seeking, and technology-based social comparison and feedback-seeking. Popularity and gender served as moderators of this effect, such that the association was particularly strong among females and adolescents low in popularity. Associations were found above and beyond the effects of overall frequency of technology use, offline excessive reassurance-seeking, and prior depressive symptoms. Findings highlight the utility of examining the psychological implications of adolescents' technology use within the framework of existing interpersonal models of adolescent depression and suggest the importance of more nuanced approaches to the study of adolescents' media use.

- **Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Okdie, B. M., Eckles, K., & Franz, B. (2015)**. Critically, some research has found that online interactions and relationships on social media are different from those created offline (Ivcevic & Ambady, 2012). This may be attributed, in part, to the fact that people are better able to present themselves in a positive light online (Chou and Edge, 2012, Ellison et al., 2006, Gonzales and Hancock, 2011). Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that personal SNS profiles tend to present the self in a favorable light (e.g., Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012, Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011). Importantly, if people selectively self-present positive aspects of their lives on social media, then social comparisons that are made using that biased information should differ from in-person social comparisons and involve mostly upward social comparisons to those who are better off on some dimension (Feinstein et al., 2013, Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011, Lee, 2014, Vogel et al., 2014).

- Social media use has become ubiquitous in many societies, with popular social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook.com having 1.4 billion active users worldwide (Facebook,

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2015). SNSs not only allow users to maintain friendships, form new relationships, and connect with others (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, Manago et al., 2012), but also allow people to construct their own personal profiles and present a rich set of information about themselves (e.g., accomplishments, attitudes, activities, personalities, relationship status, daily habits, routines). Based on the rich information we can learn about others and the expansive network of people from which we can learn it (Acar, 2008), SNSs offer up an ideal platform for social comparison to take place.

- **Kircaburun, K., & Griffiths, M. D. (2018).** During the past decade, social media use and its many sub-forms including social networking use have evolved rapidly (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Recent statistics suggest that more than two-thirds of Internet users are also active social networking site (SNS) users (Kemp, 2017). This popularity is expected to result in problematic use and abuse of specific platforms for a minority of its users (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Internet-related addictions (such as social networking addiction) were not included in the latest (fifth) edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), although one application (gaming) was included in the Section 3 appendix as an emerging condition (i.e., Internet gaming disorder) that needed further research before full inclusion in a future edition.

- Given the obsessive and mood changing nature of these antisocial online behaviors **(Patton, Nobles, & Fox, 2010)**, such behaviors may associate with higher PSMU because mood modification and preoccupation are two addiction-like symptoms that may lead to problematic use (Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg, & Pallesen, 2012). Such mood modifying effects can either be excitatory (e.g., providing a 'high' or a 'buzz') or inhibitory (e.g., providing a sense of escape or numbing) but are experienced as being positively reinforcing for individuals (Griffiths, 2005). Given that Dark Triad traits associate with values such as power, hedonism, and manipulation (Jones & Figueredo, 2013; Kajonius, Persson, & Jonason, 2015), individuals high on aforementioned traits may engage in cyberbullying, cybertrolling, and/or cyberstalking to feel powerful, entertained, or relieved as a coping strategy against everyday real-life problems.

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- **Wang, Z., Tchernev, J. M., & Solloway, T. (2012)**. SM are websites and software that serve a primary function of allowing users to "connect, communicate, and interact with each other" (Correa, Hinsley, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010, p. 248), often by posting, sharing, or co-producing information (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Our conceptualization of SM therefore includes several overlapping domains: social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn), tools for communication with others (e.g., email, instant messaging), and sites for the sharing of information, which generally can be commented on or altered by others (e.g., blogs, YouTube). To identify the characteristics of SM use, this study compares SM, wherein social interaction is a fundamental component, to all other media (OM), such as television and radio, which are not typically perceived as inherently and primarily social.This longitudinal study investigates the dynamic nature of social media use among college students and explores the needs and gratifications associated with social media. While not specific to social anxiety, it provides insights into the motivations and patterns of social media use that may be relevant to individuals with social anxiety.

- **Odgers, C. L., & Jensen, M. R. (2020).** Adolescents are spending an increasing amount of their time online and connected to each other via digital technologies. Mobile device ownership and social media usage have reached unprecedented levels, and concerns have been raised that this constant connectivity is harming adolescents' mental health. This review synthesized data from three sources: (a) narrative reviews and meta-analyses conducted between 2014 and 2019, (b) large-scale preregistered cohort studies and (c) intensive longitudinal and ecological momentary assessment studies, to summarize what is known about linkages between digital technology usage and adolescent mental health, with a specific focus on depression and anxiety. The review highlights that most research to date has been correlational, focused on adults versus adolescents, and has generated a mix of often conflicting small positive, negative and null associations. This review article examines the impact of digital technology, including social media, on adolescent mental health. It discusses various aspects of mental health, including social anxiety, and provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of research and potential future directions in this field.

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- a study by **Clayton et al. (2015)** found that individuals with higher levels of social anxiety tended to spend more time on Facebook. Similarly, McCall et al. (2019) found that social anxiety was positively associated with general social media use, including platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. These findings suggest that individuals with social anxiety may turn to social media as a means of social interaction and connection. It is important to note that the relationship between social anxiety and social media use is complex, and not all studies have found consistent results. Some research has suggested that social media use may exacerbate social anxiety symptoms. For instance, researchers have proposed the "displacement hypothesis," which suggests that excessive time spent on social media may lead to reduced face-to-face social interactions and increased feelings of isolation, thereby contributing to social anxiety (Kross et al., 2013). Similarly, a study by Vannucci et al. (2019) found that higher levels of social media use were associated with increased social anxiety symptoms in adolescents.

Methodology:

The inclusion criteria for studies were based on relevance to the topic, publication in peer-reviewed journals, and availability of data up until the knowledge cut off of September 2021. The selected studies were analysed to identify key findings, trends, and gaps in the existing literature.

1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

- Studies included in this review were selected based on their relevance to the topic of investigating the relationship between social anxiety and social media use.
- Only studies published in peer-reviewed journals were considered to ensure the quality and validity of the findings.
- The timeframe for inclusion was up until the knowledge cut off of September 2021.
- Studies focusing on different populations, such as adolescents, adults, or specific clinical populations, were included to capture a broad range of perspectives.

2. Search Strategy:

A systematic search was conducted to identify relevant studies available online. Multiple academic databases, such as PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, were utilized to

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ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature. The search terms included variations of "social anxiety," "social phobia," "social media," "online social networking," and "internet use." Boolean operators (e.g., AND, OR) were used to combine search terms and refine the search results. The reference lists of selected studies were also reviewed to identify additional relevant articles that may not have been captured in the initial search.

3. Data Collection Process:

The initial search yielded a large number of articles. Duplicate articles were removed to avoid redundancy. The remaining articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts to assess their relevance to the research topic. Full-text articles of potentially relevant studies were then obtained and thoroughly reviewed for final inclusion in the review. Data from the included studies were extracted, focusing on study characteristics (e.g., authors, year of publication), participant characteristics (e.g., sample size, demographics), research design, measures used, and key findings related to the relationship between social anxiety and social media use.

5. Data Synthesis and Analysis:

The findings from the included studies were synthesized and analysed to identify patterns, trends, and inconsistencies in the relationship between social anxiety and social media use. Common themes and key findings were extracted and organized to provide a coherent overview of the research landscape. The synthesis and analysis process aimed to identify the direction and strength of the relationship, potential mechanisms underlying the association, and factors that may moderate or mediate the relationship. The methodology outlined above ensures a systematic and comprehensive approach to reviewing the existing studies on the relationship between social anxiety and social media use. By employing rigorous inclusion criteria, conducting a thorough search, and assessing the quality of the included studies, this review aims to provide a reliable and informative synthesis of the available research on this topic.

Impacts of Social Media Use:

Social media use has both positive and negative effects on individuals and society. Benefits include increased social connectivity, access to information, and opportunities for self-expression and creativity. Negative impacts can include excessive use leading to addictive

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behaviours, privacy concerns, cyberbullying, social comparison, and potential negative effects on mental health and well-being. Understanding social media use is crucial for recognizing its influence on individuals' lives and societal dynamics. Researchers have explored various aspects related to social media use, including its effects on mental health, self-esteem, relationships, and social interactions. It is important to strike a balance between leveraging the benefits of social media while mitigating the potential negative consequences, promoting digital well-being, and fostering responsible online behaviour.

Furthermore, investigating the relationship between social anxiety and social media use can provide insights into how individuals with social anxiety navigate and experience these online platforms. By understanding the dynamics between social anxiety and social media use, researchers can develop interventions, guidelines, and strategies to promote positive online experiences and support individuals who may be vulnerable to the negative effects of social media use. Overall, social media use continues to shape the way people communicate, share information, and engage with the world. Recognizing its impact and understanding its implications are essential for individuals, policymakers, and mental health professionals alike.

The Relationship between Social Anxiety and Social Media Use

The relationship between social anxiety and social media use has been a topic of interest in recent years. While research in this area is still evolving, several findings and patterns have emerged. It is important to note that individual experiences and outcomes may vary, and not all individuals with social anxiety will have the same relationship with social media.

1. Social media as a Double-Edged Sword:

Some studies suggest that individuals with social anxiety may use social media as a way to alleviate social anxiety by providing a perceived sense of control, reduced face-to-face interaction, and increased anonymity. However, excessive or maladaptive social media use can exacerbate social anxiety symptoms by fostering social comparison, cyberbullying, and fear of missing out (FOMO).

2. Social Comparison and Self-Evaluation:

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Social media platforms often present carefully curated and idealized versions of people's lives, leading to upward social comparisons. Individuals with social anxiety may engage in more frequent and negative social comparisons, intensifying feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

3. Fear of Negative Evaluation:

Socially anxious individuals may be particularly sensitive to negative feedback or judgment on social media. Perceived scrutiny and fear of negative evaluation from others can contribute to increased social anxiety symptoms and avoidance of online interactions.

4. Cyberbullying and Online Harassment:

Social media platforms can be breeding grounds for cyberbullying and online harassment, which can profoundly impact individuals with social anxiety. Experiences of cyberbullying can reinforce negative beliefs, increase self-consciousness, and contribute to heightened social anxiety.

5. Social Support and Connection:

Social media can provide a platform for individuals with social anxiety to connect with like-minded individuals, seek support, and engage in online communities. Positive social interactions and support on social media can mitigate social anxiety symptoms and foster a sense of belonging and support.

6. Mixed Findings on Social Media Use:

Research findings on the relationship between social media use and social anxiety are mixed, with some studies showing a positive association, others showing a negative association, and some finding no significant relationship. Individual differences, patterns of social media use, and contextual factors may contribute to these discrepancies. It is important to consider the complex interplay between social anxiety and social media use, acknowledging that the relationship is multifaceted and influenced by various factors. Future research should continue to explore this relationship, considering potential mechanisms, moderators, and individual differences to gain a more comprehensive understanding. By understanding this relationship, mental health professionals can provide targeted interventions, strategies, and

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support to individuals with social anxiety who engage with social media, promoting healthier online experiences and overall well-being.

Implications and Practical Applications:

1. Mental Health Awareness and Education:

Recognize the potential impact of social media use on mental health, including social anxiety. Promote awareness about the relationship between social anxiety and social media use among individuals, especially those at risk or already experiencing social anxiety symptoms. Provide education on healthy social media habits, responsible online behavior, and strategies to manage social anxiety in the digital realm.

2. Targeted Interventions and Support:

Develop interventions specifically tailored to individuals with social anxiety who engage with social media. Incorporate cognitive-behavioural strategies, such as cognitive restructuring and exposure therapy, to address negative thinking patterns and reduce avoidance behaviours related to social media use. Offer online support groups or forums that provide a safe space for individuals with social anxiety to discuss their experiences and receive guidance on managing social media use.

3. Digital Well-being Practices:

Encourage individuals to practice mindful and intentional social media use. Promote setting boundaries, such as allocating specific time for social media engagement, limiting exposure to triggering content, and prioritizing offline activities and face-to-face interactions. Advocate for the implementation of digital well-being features on social media platforms, such as usage monitoring, content filtering, and notifications for excessive use.

4. Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention:

Raise awareness about cyberbullying and its potential impact on individuals with social anxiety. Implement anti-cyberbullying policies and strategies within social media platforms, educational institutions, and other relevant settings. Provide resources and support for individuals experiencing cyberbullying, including reporting mechanisms and counseling services.

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5. Collaboration between Mental Health Professionals and Technology Industry:

Foster collaboration between mental health professionals and social media platform developers to create more user-friendly and supportive online environments. Advocate for the integration of mental health resources, helplines, and support networks within social media platforms. Promote responsible design practices that prioritize user well-being and minimize potential negative impacts on mental health.

Further Research:

Encourage ongoing research to deepen our understanding of the relationship between social anxiety and social media use. Investigate the long-term effects of social media use on social anxiety symptoms and mental health outcomes. Examine the efficacy of interventions and prevention strategies targeting social anxiety in the context of social media use. By implementing these implications and practical applications, individuals, mental health professionals, policymakers, and social media platform developers can work collaboratively to promote healthier and more positive social media experiences for individuals with social anxiety. Creating an environment that supports digital well-being and fosters inclusive online communities can mitigate the potential negative effects of social media use and enhance the overall mental health and quality of life for individuals with social anxiety.

Limitations:

1. Generalizability of Findings:

The majority of studies available online may focus on specific populations or cultural contexts, limiting the generalizability of findings to broader populations. Variations in study designs, measurement tools, and methodologies across different studies can make it challenging to draw definitive conclusions and comparisons.

2. Self-report Measures and Biases:

Many studies rely on self-report measures, which are subjective and may be influenced by recall bias or social desirability bias. Socially anxious individuals may have a tendency to over-report or under-report certain behaviours or experiences, affecting the accuracy of data.

3. Directionality and Causality:

The cross-sectional nature of many studies limits our ability to establish causality and determine the direction of the relationship between social anxiety and social media use. It is challenging to determine whether social anxiety leads to increased social media use, or if excessive social media use exacerbates social anxiety symptoms.

4. Limited Longitudinal Studies:

Longitudinal studies that track individuals over an extended period are limited, making it difficult to examine the long-term effects of social media use on social anxiety and mental health outcomes.

Conclusion:

The relationship between social anxiety and social media use is a complex and evolving topic of study. Through reviewing available studies online, we have gained insights into the mechanisms, moderators, implications, and challenges associated with this relationship. Social anxiety, characterized by an intense fear of social situations, can be influenced by various factors related to social media use. Mechanisms such as social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), cyberbullying, and negative feedback loops can contribute to heightened social anxiety symptoms in the context of social media. Moderators such as online social support, online anonymity, motivation for social media use, and frequency/duration of use can influence the relationship, either exacerbating or mitigating the effects of social anxiety. Understanding these mechanisms and moderators has practical implications for mental health awareness, targeted interventions, digital well-being practices, cyberbullying prevention, and collaboration between mental health professionals and the technology industry. By promoting responsible social media use, raising awareness, and providing appropriate support, we can enhance the well-being of individuals with social anxiety in the digital realm. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations and challenges in the existing research. These include issues related to generalizability, self-report measures, directionality, measurement of social media use, ethical considerations, and the rapidly evolving nature of technology. Overcoming these limitations requires ongoing research, methodological advancements, and interdisciplinary collaboration to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social anxiety and social media use.

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