

“It’s Not A Phase, Mom!”: The Relationship Between Social Media Use On Depression And The Mediating Factor Of Spirituality On Emerging Adults

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Introduction

- Depressive symptoms have been on the rise within the Emerging Adulthood population (Leadbeater, Thompson, & Gruppiso, 2012).
- Social Media use has quadrupled from 8% in 2005 to 35% in 2009 (Lenhart, 2009).
- Spirituality mediates depression (Koenig, 2012)
- The first hypothesis tested predicted a correlation between depressive symptoms and comfortability online.
- The second hypothesis predicted that spirituality will mediate the relationship between depressive symptoms and comfortability on social media
- If online comfortability affects depression, and if spirituality mediates depression, exploration in one’s spirituality could be helpful in dealing with depression.

Methods

This study was conducted at an average sized community college in Orange County, California

- 3 researchers surveyed 161 participants.
 - 57 participants were recruited in a Child Developmental course and an Abnormal Psychology course
 - 51 participants were recruited around a rehabilitation center
 - 53 participants were recruited at the community college

Participants

- $N = 161$
- 46.6% of sample was male, 50.9% was female, and 2.5% identified as “other”
- $M_{age} = 22.3$, $SD = 4.10$
- 6.2% of the sample did not considered themselves adults, 34.8% somewhat considered themselves adult, and 58.4% considered themselves adult.
- Participants consisted of 37.9% White, 31.1% Hispanic, 3.1% African American, 14.9% Asian, and 9.7% “other/mixed” individuals.

Measures

- Social Media Online Comfortability
 - 13 items
 - 5 point Likert Scale (1-5 Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree).
 - “I feel safest when I am on the Internet.”
 - Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$
- Spirituality Scale (Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (ISS))
 - 6 items
 - 11 point scale (0-10)
 - “My spiritual beliefs affect” (0 = No aspect of my life. 10 = Absolutely every aspect of my life.)
 - Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$
- Depression Scale (Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9))
 - 8 items total (1 item removed)
 - 4 point scale (0-3)
 - “Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down”
 - Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$

Abstract

In the emerging adulthood population, studies have shown a drastic increase in the use of social media. Coincidentally, reported depressive symptoms has also been on the rise. Interesting enough, previous studies has shown that spirituality has a “buffering” effect on depression. The purpose of this study is to find a positive correlation between how comfortable an individual feels on social media and their depressive symptoms, and if there is a relationship between those two, will spirituality null the previous relationship? Within this study, one hundred and sixty-one participants, ages 18-29, were given surveys based on demographics, online comfortability, spirituality, and their perceived level of depression. After running a correlational analysis, results suggested a positive correlation between an individual’s online comfortability and their depression, and a negative correlation between their spirituality and their perceived depression. However, after running a linear regression analysis on all three variables, it showed that spirituality was not a mediating factor between the two variables. Consistent with previous findings, the data from this current study suggests social media does have a relationship with depression, and there is a significant mediating factor of spirituality on depression; However, an individual’s spirituality has no mediating effect on their depressive symptoms when paired with their online comfortability. With this current study, it is suggested that there can be other variables that can mediate an individual’s depressive symptoms other than their spirituality when it comes to how comfortable a person feels online.

Results

- There was a significant positive correlation between an individual’s conformability online and their perceived depression. Small effect size ($r^2 = 0.06$)
- There was a significant negative correlation between an individual’s perceived depression and their spirituality. Small effect size ($r^2 = 0.06$)
- There was no significance between an individual’s conformability online and their spirituality.

| Measures | CO13AVG | DP08AVG | SO06AVG |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| CO13AVG | 1.00 | | |
| DP08AVG | .252** | 1.00 | |
| SO06AVG | -.124 | -.246** | 1.00 |

Note. There was a significant small positive relationship between CO13AVG vs. DP08AVG, and a significant small negative relationship between DP08AVG vs. SO06AVG.

** $p < 0.01$

- Linear regression analysis shows no mediating effect on spirituality on depression when it pertains to an individual’s conformability online. ($F(2,153) = 9.76$, $p < .05$, $R^2_{adj} = .102$)

| Variable | β | t | Sig. |
|-----------------------|---------|-------|------|
| (Constant) | .80 | 3.34 | .001 |
| Online Comfortability | .20 | 2.92 | .004 |
| Spirituality | -.06 | -2.93 | .004 |

Discussion

- Consistent findings with correlations between some of the variables, but when put together in a regression analysis no mediation occurred.
- In a broad sense, theme of social media use and depression is linked through multiple studies.
- The variables of spirituality and depression in other studies suggest that although “spirituality” mediates depression, it’s the practices of spirituality that plays a larger role (e.g., giving worries up to a “higher power”) rather than being spirituality itself.
- Spirituality shown to have a strong association with self-regulation (McCallough & Willoughby, 2009). Self-regulation shown to have strong association with mediating social media use and depression (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Current findings shows no mediation for spirituality and depression. Why?
- Limitations:
 - Interaction of scales used may have affected results.
 - Operational definition of I.V (social media use) may not have been clear in the scale.
 - PHQ-9 depression scale is self assessment of depression levels rather than clinical depression.
- Future studies can look into different mediators other than spirituality, or use different scales of measurements.
- Future studies can look at doing a pre and post test experiment measuring depression and the effects of social media on it to get a more accurate measure of how much of an impact does social media have on depression.
- Policy change for social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, see the addictive effect of their platform and it’s correlation to depression. Changes of the “like” option will now be more limited.