

Unveiling the Social Media Mirror

Zelete De Leon

Angelo State University

Unveiling the Social Media Mirror

In this study, we are gathering data and information on the relationship between a person's self-esteem and their feedback on social media. It is important to understand the impact social media has on self-esteem, so we can limit factors that can be a result from low self-esteem. Such factors include depression and bullying. Limiting these factors can allow us to discover a more positive environment for social media users.

In an interesting theoretical article, Yang et al. (2021) introduces the Multidimensional Model of Social Media Use. This specific model allows for fellow researchers to understand social media use and the psychological well-being of a young person. There are three different dimensions to this model: activities being done on social media, motives for social media usage, and communication partners connected on social media. Yang et al. use these different dimensions from the model to show the association of type of social media usage and psychological well-being, such as self-esteem. Throughout the article, Yang et al. discuss in further detail what each of these different dimensions consist of. For example, when it comes to activities on social media. Motives can be simplified as the purpose of engaging on social media, such as maintenance of existing relationships. Communication partners would be described as connecting with associates, or befriending strangers. Each of these dimensions play a factor in determining one's overall well-being. Although Yang et al. express that the type of social media usage is important in regards to this model, the final action to ensure that a person has a strong self-esteem, is to limit the overall usage of social media.

Researchers Miljeteig and Soest (2022) are studying the association among social media use and self-esteem between women and men. They hypothesized, that "the relationship between initial self-esteem and social media use is stronger in women than in men" (p. 375). The

researchers also tested self-esteem and the relationship to different platforms of social media. They hypothesized that Instagram and Facebook would have a negative association and that Snapchat to a “lesser degree” because Snapchat “does not facilitate social comparison to the same degree as Facebook and Instagram” (p.375). In this study Miljeteig and Soest used experience sampling methodology, which sends the participants notifications to their phone through an app. This app was specifically designed for this type of study. The notification measures phone usage and asks participants to report all social media usage. After all data were collected, using a multilevel regression analysis, Miljeteig and Soest determined that neither Instagram nor Snapchat showed a relationship with current self-esteem in the participants. According to Miljeteig and Soest, the gender association for social media and self-esteem was the major finding. The study showed that visiting social media predicted women having lower current self-esteem. In conclusion, they stated that “although social media activity might be an attempt to increase self-esteem, the negative association between recent social media use and current self-esteem in women indicates that this strategy does not seem likely to succeed” (p. 381).

In an interesting study, it was found that many people use other’s feedback to “boost self-esteem” (Diefenbach & Anders, 2022, p. 203). In their study, there were three hypotheses formed. The first hypothesis was that self-esteem is negatively correlated with the subjective relevance on the amount of feedback the participant received and what type of feedback was received on Instagram. The second hypothesis was that subjective social status on Instagram is negatively correlated with the subjective relevance of feedback quantity and feedback quality on the Instagram. The final hypothesis from this study was that self-esteem and subjective social status on Instagram are positively correlated. In this study, Diefenbach and Anders used

participants from a university and snowball technique for the same age group. The study primarily focused on Instagram users and the researchers had the participants complete a 9 minute survey about the participants' background and Instagram activities. Diefenbach and Anders found that it was more important for participants to receive likes and followers in general. When it came to feedback importance, the study found that "users who deemed others' feedback important provided more feedback to other users and also reported receiving more feedback from others" (Diefenbach & Anders, 2022, p. 201). It is expressed in this study that self-esteem is negatively correlated to subjective relevance of what type and how much feedback was received on social media. The researchers also found that subjective social status was negatively correlated with the subjective relevance of feedback quantity and feedback quality, regarding the hypotheses (Diefenbach & Anders, 2022). However, the correlation between self-esteem and subjective social status was not significant in this study. Both researchers state that these findings should be taken lightly, but that the findings show the correlation is in line with the mechanism of paying too close attention to the feedback and an addiction to the feedback as a way to boost self-esteem.

For our study, we are predicting that there will be a positive correlation between social media feedback and self-esteem. We have predicted that participants who have positive feedback on social media, will have a greater self-esteem score. The reason for this prediction is solely based on previous research with similar studies.

Method

Participants

For this study, we had a total of 47 participants. Of these participants, 40.4% were Hispanic or Latino, 38.3% were White or European American, 10.6% were Biracial, 6.4% were

Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.3% were Black or African American. There were 80.9% of women participating in this study, and 19.1% were men. Ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 ($M = 19.43$, $SD = 1.63$). All participants were recruited by using the online Sona-systems program utilized by the psychology department.

Design

This design is correlational because we are comparing the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem. We predicted that there is a positive correlation between social media usage and self-esteem. This correlational study will allow us to determine if these two variables are related in any way.

Measures

We have designed a 12-question questionnaire, measuring self-esteem based on the feedback received from social media posts. Our questionnaire was scored using the Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Some sample questions include, "*I frequently check the number of 'likes I receive on social media posts or pictures,'*" and "*I have deleted a post or picture on social media due to a low number of likes.*" When collecting demographics, we chose to obtain basic information such as, age, gender, and race. We chose these specific demographics to describe our sample of participants.

Procedure

For this study, we began by recruiting participants using the Sona-system, which is an online recruiting tool used by the psychology department. We collected our data using the online software program Qualtrics, which is a secure platform for collecting data online. Our participants were first presented with a consent form and if they agreed to participate, were then presented with our 12-question questionnaire. Demographics were also collected of each

participant. After completing the questionnaire, participants were given the debriefing, which discusses any background information about the entirety of the study, references to related articles for the study, and the contact information for the faculty adviser.

Results

We predicted that participants who have better feedback on social media will have a higher self-esteem. To test this hypothesis, we used a Pearson's correlation to determine if the two variables were negatively or positively correlated. Social media and self-esteem were positively correlated, Pearson's $r(47) = .63, p < .001$. Participants reported to use Instagram and Spachat most often. These results supported our hypothesis of the two variables having a positive correlation.

Discussion

For our study, we hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and social media activity, suggesting that if a participant receives more likes on social media, they will have a higher self-esteem. We found that social media activity and self-esteem were positively correlated amongst our participants. Our participants self-reported using several different social media platforms. Most of the participants used either Snapchat, or Instagram. The findings from our study are significant in determining how these different social media platforms impact self-esteem. This implies that participants rely on social media feedback when needing validation. Recent studies gathered that, "...it was more important to receive likes and followers in general than specific followers and likes from specific people" (Diefenbach & Anders 2022, p. 201). Our study complimented the previous research in directly assessing how the importance of receiving this feedback is positively correlated to self-esteem.

In our findings, we were able to conclude that social media use and self-esteem have a significant correlation. Few participants in our study self-reported of using multiple platforms of social media. Miljeteig and Tilman (2022) indicated that those with lower self-esteem used multiple platforms of social media. In this study it supported the idea that those with lower self-esteem relied on social media for reassurance. A limitation to our study can include, considering outside factors that might have affected our dependent measure of self-esteem, such as popularity, weight, and mental health disorders. According to Miljeteig and Tilman, Snapchat “does not facilitate social comparison to the same degree as Facebook and Instagram” (p. 375). Based on this study, we can improve our measures of specific social media platforms that directly measure social comparison. Improving the structure of the design, such as simplifying our independent and dependent variables, can limit the effect of all extraneous variables. We can simplify the independent variable by assigning the same social media platform for all participants. We can simplify the dependent variable of self-esteem by measuring for one specific type of usage on social media. For example, simply measuring self-esteem of a participant with a lot of likes on a post. For future researchers, I suggest exploring controlled independent variables to ensure that when measuring the dependent variable, the outcome is simplified.

In this correlational study between social media and self-esteem, we found that our original hypothesis of a positive correlation, was indeed supported. This is important to keep in mind when determining how social media can affect other mental health factors. Our study on social media feedback and the self-reported self-esteem of the participant had some interesting key factors when determining the correlation between our variables. For example, a majority of our participant pool were females, and Hispanic/Latinos, which can both be labeled as minority

groups. The individuals in these minority groups may be more sensitive to social comparison online, that could affect their self-esteem. This is important to note because we can elaborate on our study and form more hypotheses based on our participant demographics. Our study can contribute to preexisting studies because we were able to form a significant outcome on a real-world event.

For our study, we believed that although there may be other considering factors for high or low self-esteem, social media has an important role. Social media has brought many negative experiences among teens and have resulted in heartbreaking events. As social media evolves, these events will continue to occur, but our study can help elaborate on these specific issues. Measuring the correlation between social media usage and self-esteem allows us to understand why there is an impact on how people view themselves, solely based on what is being done, received, and given on social media platforms. By conducting our research, we were able to unveil the social media mirror.

References

- Diefenbach, S. & Anders, L. (2022). The psychology of like: relevance of feedback on Instagram and relationship to self-esteem and social status. *Psychology of Popular Media, 11*(2), 196-207. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000360>.
- Miljeteig, K. & Tilmann, v. S. (2022). An experience sampling study on the association between social media use and self-esteem. *Journal of Media Psychology, 34*(6), 373-382. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000333>.
- Yang, C., Holden, S. M., & Ariati, J. (2021). Social media and the psychological well-being among youth: The multidimensional model of social media use. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 24*, 631-650. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-021-00359-z>.