

An Exploration of Social Media and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem

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Abstract

Social media is prevalent and its impact on human behavior is still being studied. Of particular concern is the impact social media might have on those who are still developing their identities. We hypothesized that a negative correlation exists between self-esteem and the number of hours a person spends on social media each week. To test this, we presented a questionnaire to 257 psychology students and asked them to estimate their typical social media use and to rate attributes about themselves that reveal self-esteem (the Rosenberg scale). The results showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and social media use.

Introduction

Social Media

Social media use is pervasive. It has become more than a tool for catching up with friends to a tool for making new friends, finding information, and even creating a public identity (e.g., Orehek & Human, 2017).

Social Media and Self-Esteem

Frequency of interactions and type of interactions encountered on social media may impact self-esteem. Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) found that receiving negative messages via social media was associated with lower self-esteem while positive messages may build self-esteem.

Self-Esteem

Positive self-esteem is related to overall health and well-being. Meta-analyses provide mixed results as to gender differences in self-esteem, but any differences found tend to show slightly lower self-esteem for females (Major, Barr, Zubeck, & Babey, 1999). Further, the relationship between self-esteem and gender is affected by other factors like socioeconomic status and ethnicity.



Hypothesis

There is a negative relationship between time spent using social media and self esteem. The relationship will be stronger in females.

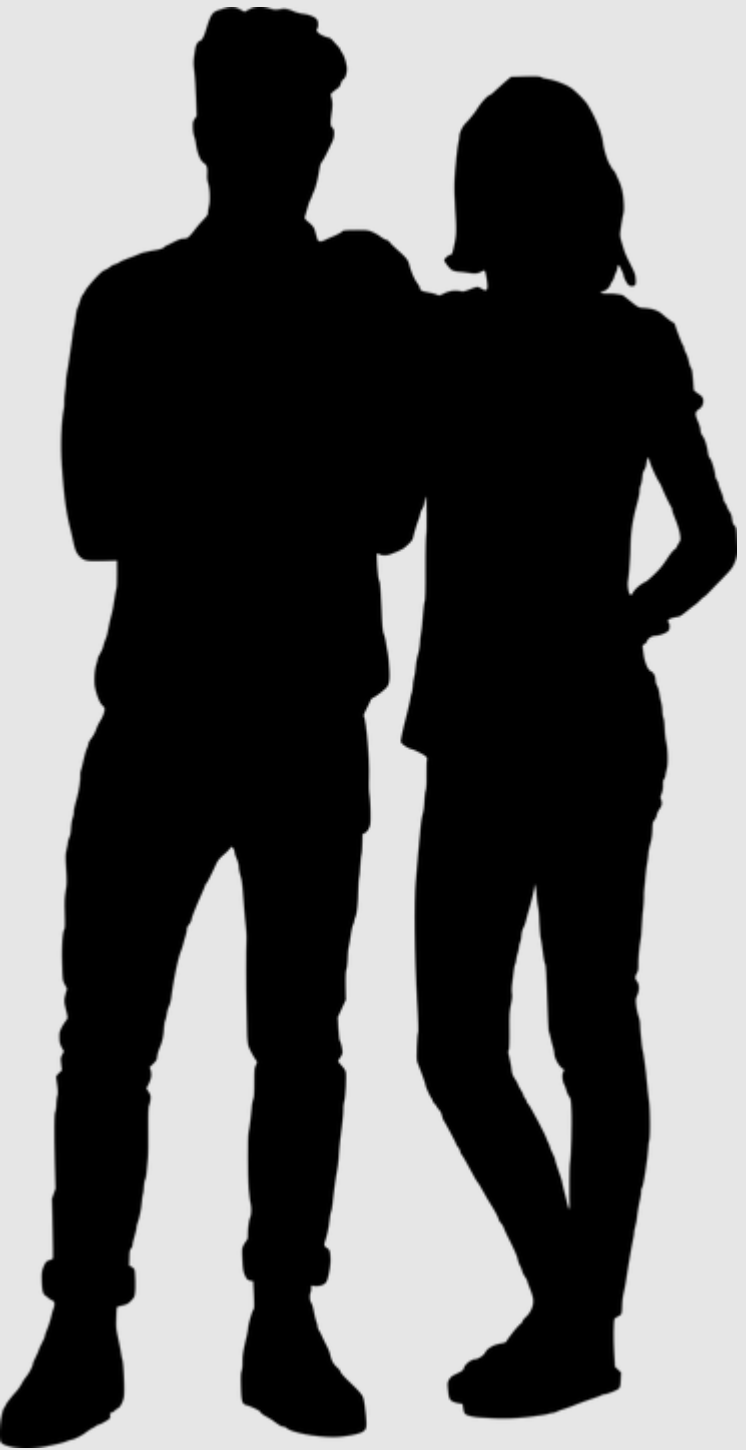
Methods

Participants

257 Old Dominion Psychology students ranging in age from 18 to 57 (Mean age = 25.6) participated in the study for extra credit in their courses.

Other self-reported demographics

- 219 females and 38 males
- 59% Caucasian, 34% African American, 14% Asian, Multiple Ethnicities, or Other
- 16 hours (median) spent on social media each week



Materials

Social Media Use

Participants used a slider to indicate the estimated number of hours (0 – 100) spent on social media each week



Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965)

Participants rated their level of agreement (4-point scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with the following statements:

1. *On the whole, I am satisfied with myself*
2. *At times I think I am no good at all **
3. *I feel that I have a number of good qualities*
4. *I am able to do things as well as most other people*
5. *I feel I do not have much to be proud of **
6. *I certainly feel useless at times **
7. *I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others*
8. *I wish I could have more respect for myself **
9. *All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure **
10. *I take a positive attitude toward myself*

The self-esteem score was computed by summing the responses to each question (* reverse coded). Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem.

Procedure

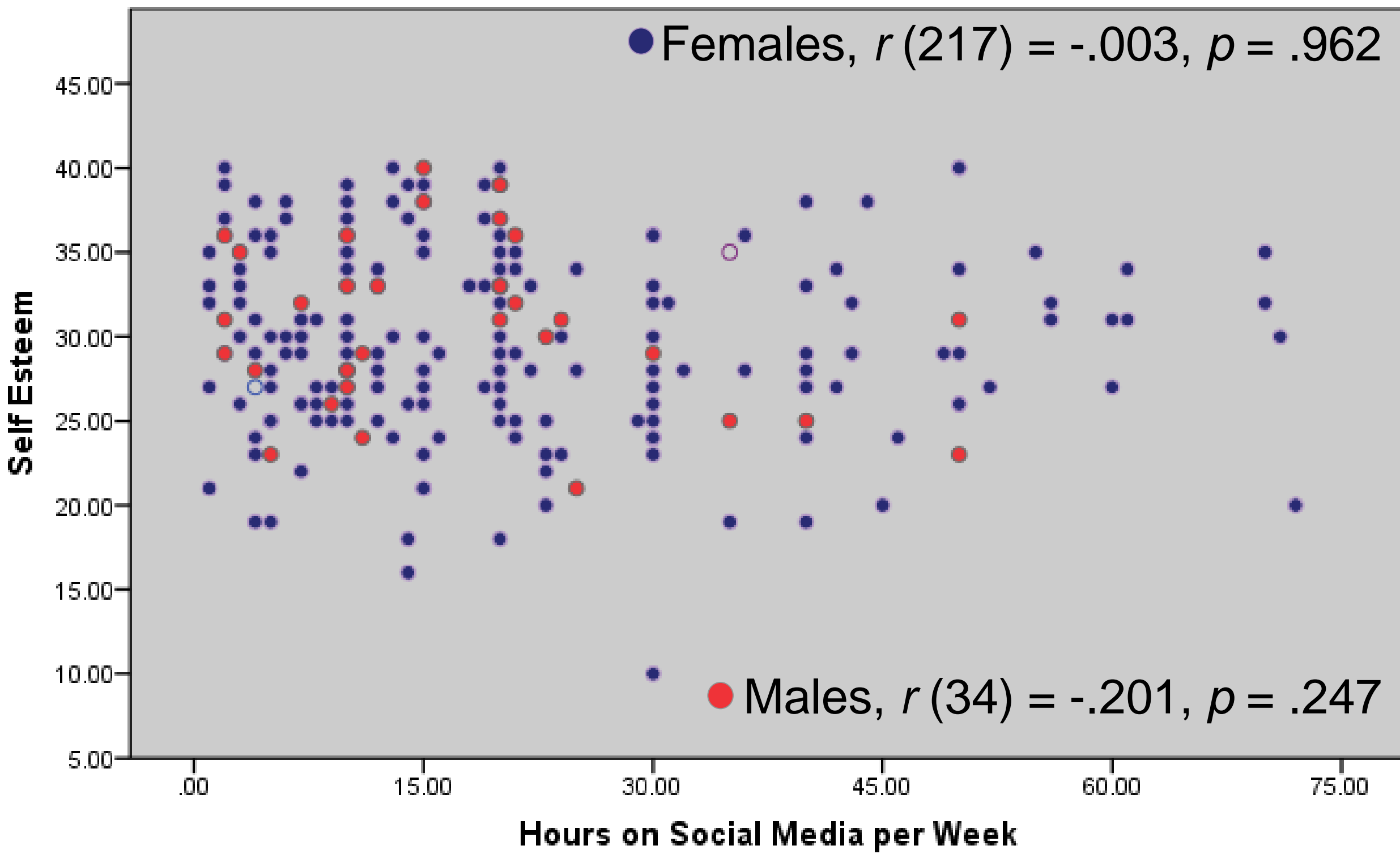
Participants completed an online survey containing these materials as well as other measures of social media use and person perception.

Responses were anonymous and were completed at the participants' discretion (e.g., time, location).

Results

Correlation

A Pearson's correlation revealed no significant relationship between time spent on social media and self-esteem, $r(255) = -.021, p = .741$



Self-Esteem and Use of Specific Social Media Apps

Instagram

Females, $r(181) = .10, p = .18$; Males, $r(19) = -.28, p = .22$

Facebook

Females, $r(206) = -.02, p = .74$; Males, $r(29) = .20, p = .28$

Conclusions

There was no statistically significant relationship between time spent on social media and self-esteem regardless of participant gender.

If anything, males showed a stronger relationship but even that may depend on the social media outlet being used.

Ethnicity and Gender and Self-Esteem

Major et al. (1999) found that white females demonstrate lower self-esteem than white males, but no significant self-esteem differences between African American females and males.

Limitations

Relatively small number of male participants
Unreliable self-report of time spent on social media

References

- Major, B., Barr, L., Zubek, J., & Babey, S. H. (1999). Gender and self-esteem: A meta-analysis. In Eds. W.B. Swann, Jr., J. H. Langlois, and L. A. Gilbert's, *Sexism and Stereotypes in Modern Society: The Gender of Janet Taylor Spence*, p. 223-253. doi:10.1037/10277-00985.
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