THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL ANXIETY AND EXPOSURE TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between exposure to social media and the level of social anxiety. Based on the relevant scientific data, we have many indicators that say that social media is an inseparable part of man in today's time, so this study aimed to show the change of social anxiety according to exposure to social media.

The methodology of this study is non-experimental correlational, which included relevant techniques for data collection with 102 subjects in the Republic of North Macedonia with an average age of 28 years.

The results of the study showed a statistically significant weak negative relationship between exposure to social media and level of social anxiety, where simple linear regression analysis showed a statistically significant pattern of predicting change in social anxiety according to exposure to social media. No significant differences were found according to gender, place of residence, employment status and age.

The contribution of the findings of this study is important for all ages, especially for young people, students, parents, various institutions, to provide an important explanation regarding the relationship of social anxiety with exposure to social media.

Keywords: Social media, Social anxiety, Exposure

Introduction

This study deals with an issue that belongs to the field of social psychology and personality psychology. The main problem of this study is that, is there a relationship between the degree of social anxiety and exposure to different types of social media? Does the degree of social anxiety vary according to exposure to social media? The key theory this study relies on for social anxiety is the self-presentation theory of Leary and Kowalski, 1995. This theory defines social anxiety by proposing that people experience social anxiety when they are motivated to make a desired or good impression on others. other people but at the same time doubt that they will achieve it. While the theory I base on the variable "exposure to social media" is the theory of Manning, J. (2014.) who defines the variable as a term used to indicate new media approaches that involve communication between people or groups of people.

Although many people, researchers and professionals in these fields have studied related topics, however, it has never been addressed in this context, also in our country during the reading of the literature, no similar studies were found regarding how different types of social media influence different aspects of well-being respectively the degree of social anxiety in people. The benefits from the study and the greatest interest will be the community, the young age (pupils, children, students, etc.) and the middle age (parents, etc.), at the same time to help young people what impact social media has on their well-being in terms of of social anxiety as well as middle age on how to care for their offspring but also for their personal well-being. The main purpose of this study is to verify the relationship between the degree of social anxiety and exposure to different types of social media. To explain the magnitude of change in social anxiety scores according to social media exposure.

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Theories about social anxiety

Social anxiety disorder is characterized by a significant fear or anxiety surrounding various social situations where an individual may face negative scrutiny and judgment from others. These social scenarios repeatedly cause feelings of fear or anxiety, causing the person to avoid them completely or endure them with intense anxiety. (American Psychiatric Association 2013, cited in: Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair & Thommas Haarklau Kleppeste 2018). According to Öhman (1986), *"his perspective is that we are primed through selection to fear specific stimuli. In the case of social anxiety, the stimuli are specifically dominant and aggressive. Therefore, angry faces are important social stimuli. Therefore, social anxiety is considered part of a trained system of learning to submit."*

"Social anxiety, also known as social phobia, is a psychological condition characterized by intense fear and worry in social situations. Individuals with social anxiety often experience hyperawareness, worry about negative evaluations from others, and avoidance of social interactions. This Anxiety can significantly affect daily functioning, relationships, and well-being, leading to a reduced quality of life. Social anxiety can manifest as physical symptoms, such as sweating, tremors, and rapid heartbeat, and can vary in severity from mild to severe." (American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5 2013)

Leary and Jongman-Sereno (2014) propose an evolutionary perspective on social anxiety, emphasizing self-presentation theory. This theory suggests that social anxiety arises when individuals doubt their ability to make a favorable impression on others. Sociometer theory complements this view by considering the importance of relationships in predicting triggers of social anxiety.

Theories about social media

Social media refers to a variety of online tools that enable users to create and share content collaboratively or individually. Different platforms such as Facebook, Wikipedia, dating sites, YouTube and Instagram are examples of the diversity and widespread use of social media.(Jenny L. Davis 2016).

Social media includes a wide range of digital tools and platforms that provide people and communities with the ability to actively engage in the generation, sharing and consumption of content. These platforms create dynamic online environments, serving as virtual realms where individuals can effortlessly connect, engage in communication, and interact with each other. This interaction is not limited by physical distances or time, as people can cross geographic gaps and time barriers (Andreas M. Kaplan & Michael Haenlein 2010).

"Social media includes digital platforms and applications that facilitate the creation, distribution and exchange of user-generated content, enabling individuals to connect, communicate and engage with each other in real-time or asynchronously. These platforms promote participatory culture, enabling users to contribute, curate, and consume content and often serve as catalysts for social interactions and information dissemination" (Nicole B. Ellison 2007).

Social media includes digital platforms that enable users to create, share and exchange user-generated content. These platforms foster interactive connections, allowing different networks to engage and participate in public discussions. Users not only consume, but actively co-create content, amplifying voices and shaping narratives. Through digital connectivity, social media empowers individuals for self-expression, collaboration, and various social and cultural endeavors (Axel Bruns & Jean Burgess 2015).

The relationship between social media use and social anxiety in college students

In an age of social networking, more college students are dealing with social anxiety. Lai Fengxia, Li Tian, Jiyin Zhang (2023) study examined the relationship between social media use and social anxiety among 1,740 students from seven Chinese colleges. Passive use of social media is associated with higher anxiety, while active use is associated with lower levels of anxiety. Communication skills played a role in mediating this relationship. Improving communication skills, especially through active social media engagement, can help alleviate social anxiety among college students. Higher active social media use and lower passive social media use were positively related to lower social anxiety. Active use of social media was negatively associated with social anxiety (r = -0.342, p < 0.001) and positively with communication capacity (r = 0.514, p < 0.01). Passive use of social media was positively related to social anxiety (r = 0.525, p < 0.01) and negatively related to communication capacity (r = -0.253, p < 0.01) (Lai Fengxia, Li Tian, Jiyin Zhang, 2023) .

While social media provides positive interactions, it also brings negative effects such as anxiety. Indonesia ranks 4th globally in social media use, averaging 8 hours 51 minutes per day. Adolescence, a vulnerable stage for anxiety, combined with intensive use of social media, raises concerns about increased anxiety and potential social anxiety due to reduced real-world communication. This study aims to explore how the intensity of social media use is related to levels of social anxiety in adolescents. Based on the data analysis test results, the value of p = 0.00 (p < 0.05) was obtained. In conclusion there was a correlation between the intensity of social media use and social anxiety (Zahrul Khafida Silmi, Wiwin Renny Rachmawati, Angga Sugiarto, Tulus Puji Hastuti, 2020).

Participants included 505 college students, of whom 241 (47.7%) were female and 264 (52.3%) were male. Ages ranged from 18 to 22 years, with a mean age of 20.34 (SD=1.16). Scales of social anxiety and problematic internet use were used in data collection. In the findings of this study, it is clear that improved educational opportunities for women and their increased social inclusion have made women more active, effectively reducing the gap in social anxiety levels between men and women. The study also found that men face more challenges when it comes to avoiding personal problems, tend to engage in excessive Internet use, and experience more interpersonal problems with their significant others due to Internet use. Consequently, men are at a higher risk of experiencing social difficulties caused by Problematic Internet Use (PIU). In summary, these results highlight a significant correlation between social anxiety and PIU, with this association being more pronounced in males. (Baloğlu M, Özteke Kozan Hİ, Kesici Ş, 2018).

In the study of Bora Özkara (2020), with a sample of university students studying in Erzurum and Trabzon in the spring semester of the academic year 2017-2018 regarding the Social Appearance of Anxiety Scale assessed that the appearance of social anxiety of students regarding their place of residence, there is no significant difference.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to verify the relationship between the degree of social anxiety and exposure to social media. This paper also aims to find the extent of change in social anxiety from social media exposure. Another aim is to verify differences according to gender, work status, age and type of residence in the scale of social anxiety and social media.

The population and sample

The population of this study is all Albanian citizens in North Macedonia, from the age of 15 and above, without defined quotas, due to the nature of the variables and the purpose of the study, which was suitable for all age groups. The selection of the sample was done in a deliberate way, namely the snowball technique, since only users of the Facebook social network had access to filling out the questionnaire. A total of 102 subjects participated in this study, of which 75 were women and 27 were men. According to the place of residence, 61 from the city and 40 from the village, where one subject did not answer this question. According to employment, 38 employed, 8 employed but without a regular work contract/pension-health insurance, 7 unemployed, 12 looking for a job, 32 students and 4 students. The average age of the sample in this study is 28.

Instruments

Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media Users (SHAS-PMS). The SHAS-PMS is a self-report questionnaire developed by Alkis et al. (2017) with 21 items covering four dimensions of social anxiety related to social media use, for example, "I am worried about being ridiculed by others for the content I have shared." Items are scored on a four-point (scored 1–4) frequency-based "never" to "always" response format. The "shared content anxiety" (SCA) dimension includes seven items related to anxiety about sharing or creating content on social media. The second dimension "privacy concern anxiety" (ASHP) consists of five items related to personal information and the possibility of such information being shared on social networks. The third dimension "interaction anxiety" (AN) includes six items related to anxiety resulting from social interaction on social media. The last dimension "self-esteem anxiety" (AVV) includes three items related to negative self-esteem anxiety. Reliability through intercorrelation analysis of questions is Alpha=.901.

The Scale for Measuring Exposure to Different Types of Social Media represents a pioneering instrument, created by the author himself and presented for the first time in this study within the subject of the diploma. In an era where social media has become an integral part of our daily lives, the instrument offers a new approach to comprehensively assess and categorize individuals' exposure to various social media platforms. This instrument is composed of 8 items or self-report questions and is specifically adapted for the purposes of the study and for the measurement that is made based on the topic. Items are also scored on a four-point (1-4) frequency-based response format of "never" to "always". The internal consistency of the scale is Alpha=.527.

Data collection

The data was collected through the online questionnaire, the link of which was shared on Facebook. In order to avoid negative effects during the measurement, the distribution was done through other foreign persons from different settlements, in order to include a larger and more controlled sample. Initially, 4 people were found from Tetova, 2 from Skopje, 1 from Kirčova and 1 from Struga, who in full compliance and with appropriate instructions shared the link on their profiles. The selection of people was made keeping in mind that they do not know each other and do not have mutual friends in the network. During the entire time of data collection, the progress of the study was supervised, giving necessary clarifications in case of any ambiguity, at the same time in the questionnaire, the contact information was highlighted. Participants were guaranteed complete anonymity and withdrawal from the study at any time. No data identifying the relevant subject has been recorded in the online database. The post on

the social network included the same instructions and text, with no variation between subjects. Ethical research rules were respected, mainly the anonymity of the respondents, their voluntary participation in the study, and the protection of personal data. All data were processed with the SPSS program, using relevant statistics at a tolerance level of .05.

Findings

Based on the processed data, the average of social anxiety found from the sample included in the study results with M=41.74 and standard deviation SD=10.84, which is below the expected possible average according to the instrument with M=52.5. The distribution of the values found according to Skewness Skw=.420 is a clear indicator that the level of anxiety appears in low or below average proportions. The distribution of the variable is within the limits of normality according to the tendency of centrality.

According to the correlation coefficient, there is a weak negative statistically significant relationship between social anxiety and exposure to social media (r=-.316, p=.001). This result shows that with increased exposure to social media, the level of social anxiety decreases. The main hypothesis of the study is accepted. Simple linear regression analysis showed that 9% of the variation in the level of social anxiety is explained by variation in exposure behaviors on social media, with a valid statistical model.

Table 1. Correlation between social anxiety and exposure to social media

		Exposure to social media
Ankthi social	Pearson Correlation	-.316**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	102

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).,
R2=9%
t=-3.329
p=.01
B=-.316
Variabli i parashikuar: Ankthi social

For the level of social anxiety, p=.423 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between males and females. The value t=-1.242 suggests a small negative difference, but this difference is not significant. For social media exposure, p=.675 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between men and women. The value t=1.146 shows a small positive difference, but again, this difference is not statistically significant. According to this there is no significant difference between men and women in terms of social anxiety level or exposure to social media.

According to the analysis of the comparison of the level of social anxiety, it results that the average level of social anxiety for women was M=42.53, while the average level of social anxiety for men was M=39.52. The data suggest that, on average, women in our study had slightly higher levels of social anxiety than men, but the t-test comparison analysis shows that there is no statistically significant difference (p=.217).

According to the exposure on social media, it turned out that the average level for women was M=20.30 and for men it was M=21.08. According to this, the data suggest that, on average, men in our study were slightly more exposed to social media than women, but the t-test comparison analysis shows that there is no significant statistical difference (p=.254).

According to the analysis of the comparison of the level of social anxiety, it results that the average level of employed persons was M=38.45 and of unemployed persons M=44.00. From the data we can conclude that, on average, unemployed people have a higher level of social anxiety compared to

employed people, but the t-test comparison analysis shows that there is no significant statistical difference (p=.195).

According to the analysis of the comparison of exposure in social media, it results that the average level of employed persons was M=20.28 and of unemployed persons M=20.57. From the data we can conclude that, on average, unemployed people have a slightly higher level of social anxiety compared to employed people, but the t-test comparison analysis shows that there is no significant statistical difference (p=.814).

The correlation coefficient r=-.251 between age and the level of social anxiety shows that there is a weak negative relationship between them. Sig=.011 indicates that the relationship between age and level of social anxiety is statistically significant. In other words, as individuals get older, they tend to have lower social anxiety scores, suggesting that social anxiety tends to decrease with age.

The correlation coefficient r=.095, and sig=.341 between age and exposure to social media shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between them. In other words, age does not appear to be strongly related to changes in levels of social media exposure.

Discussion

From the findings of this study, we found that there is a weak negative relationship between social anxiety and exposure to social media. By this we understand that with increased exposure to social media, the level of social anxiety decreases. This result is consistent with the aforementioned study of Zahrul Khafida Silmi, Wiwin Renny Rachmawati, Angga Sugiarto, Tulus Puji Hastuti (2020) done in China, their results showed that active use of social media has a negative relationship with the level of social anxiety. The agreement of the findings is found in the fact that this study also means that with the increase in the use of social media or the more active we are exposed to them, the more the level of social anxiety decreases.

From the findings of the study based on the level of social anxiety compared to gender, the results from the data suggested a slightly higher presence of social anxiety in women than in men, but differences that were not statistically significant based on the comparison analysis. These results and findings were consistent with a similar study done in Turkey "Gender Differences and the Relationship between Social Anxiety and Problematic Internet Use" where the findings were similar to our study where there were no statistically significant differences based on gender in level of social anxiety (Baloğlu M, Özteke Kozan Hİ, Kesici Ş, 2018).

Based on age and social anxiety in our study, the results showed that there was a weak but statistically significant negative relationship between them. Through these results, we find that with increasing age there is a tendency for social anxiety to decrease. These results are contrary to a study that was mentioned above in similar studies, "Does social anxiety increase with age", where the results of this study also showed that there were no statistically significant differences in self-reported social anxiety between children and adolescents aged 6 to 16 years. The differences between the results may be due to the fact that the age of the sample used in the two studies is different, in our study the average age was 28, while in the similar study the average age was much lower 11.4. The differences may also be due to the number of the sample, where our sample with 102 subjects is much smaller than that of this study with 1291 subjects, as well as differences in the nature of the study, where our study was extended to an indefinite age and wider limits, while the participant age in the other study was relatively smaller, limited to 6-16 years. Referring to the study of Neziri and Tairi (2022), employed people usually have a low level of loneliness, so social anxiety is likely to be lower.

Conclusion

The study aimed to find a relationship between the level of social anxiety and exposure to social media, comparing the differences with gender, employment status and age. This study brought a statistically significant conclusion, that with the increase in exposure to social media, the level of social anxiety marks a significant decrease, i.e. the level of anxiety changes negatively by 9% of the variable with the increase in exposure to social networks, respectively all social media. Participants by gender did not show significant differences in the level of social anxiety

and exposure to social media, although higher social anxiety and lower exposure to social media appeared in females. Non-employed persons showed a higher level of social anxiety, but the difference is not significant. As the age of the participants increases, social anxiety tends to decrease. This association with age is within the limits of statistical reliability.

Usually exposure to social media is seen as a wrong action and with many negative side effects, but in this study a very significant effect has been shown for reducing social anxiety. Of course, the next studies should also prove the connections with other variables.

Limitations of the study

An important limitation of this study is that the sample was not selected through a completely random selection process. Non-random selection methods such as purposive sampling may limit the extent to which findings can be generalized to the wider population.

A limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size, consisting of only 102 subjects. The limited sample size may have limited the generalizability of the findings and the statistical power to detect more precise effects. As a result, the study's ability to draw definitive conclusions for the general population may be limited.

One of the limitations of this study is that the instruments used were not ideally matched to our sample, potentially introducing measurement errors. Furthermore, an instrument, the "Scale for measuring exposure to different types of social media (SME-MS)", was used for the first time, raising concerns about its reliability and validity.

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