Social Media Activity Among College Students: Does Frequency of Use Correlate with Cyberbullying and Deception Behaviors?

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Abstract

Research shows that 1 in 5 teens 11-19 have been bullied at some point (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell & Tippett, 2007) and 26% of college students exhibit problematic internet usage with the majority of it occurring on social media sites (Christakis, Moreno, Jelenchick, Myaing & Zhou, 2011). While social media is growing as a popular research area, there has been little research conducted to determine if intensity of social media usage affects frequency of deception on social media and cyberbullying behavior. The purpose of this study was to determine if intensity of social media usage can predict the likelihood of a college student to deceive on social media sites or exhibit cyberbullying behaviors. It was also speculated that a positive correlation between negative feelings toward being lied to and frequency of deception would be revealed. Results did not show support for these hypotheses. Implications for future research will be discussed.
Social Media Activity Among College Students

Over the past decade, internet and social media use has grown exponentially around the world for people across race, age, gender, etc. (Perrin, 2015). Christakis, Moreno, Jelenchick, Myaing, and Zhou (2011) showed independence and lack of supervision as factors that escalate the concern of internet addiction in college students. Christakis and colleagues’ (2011) research noted that approximately 26% of college students exhibit problematic internet usage and the majority of that usage is focused on social media sites like Facebook (Christakis et al., 2011; Kokkinos, Antoniadou & Markos, 2014).

Another fast-growing phenomenon in teens and young adults is cyberbullying, which is defined as, “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell & Tippett, 2007). In Smith and his colleagues’ UK study (2007), 1 in 5 teens (11-19) reported being cyberbullied at some point. One major concern about internet use originates from the assertion that young adults and teens rely on the support they receive from social relationships. Activity on social media is used as a self-esteem builder and identity formation tool (Kokkinos et al., 2014). Cyberbullying can impact a teen reliant on the relationships built online by damaging confidence and self-esteem and intensifying social anxiety and aggression in its victims and perpetrators, (Harman, Hansen, Cochran & Lindsey, 2005; Kokkinos et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2007).

A fascinating by-product of the social media era is the virtual privacy and safety it provides to the user. Though everything posted is public, users can choose who they share with,
what they share, what they withhold and what information is kept private. By giving people this control, social media allows for users to feel comfortable and also gives them the freedom to lie or modify their information to appear more appealing to others (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006; Harman et al., 2005). Caspi and Gorsky (2006) note that deception is common on the internet, especially among teens and young adults. This occurrence can be cited as a by-product of previous bullying or fear of future bullying and can also lead to cyberbullying in teen users as it increases feelings of anxiety and aggression (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006; Harman et al., 2005).

When cyberbullying and deception are combined in a user’s social media life, it can negatively affect his/her self-esteem and lead to a more aggressive and defensive social personality (Harman et al., 2005; Kokkinos et al., 2014). We hypothesized that college students who are more pathological in their use of social media were more likely to also utilize deception in their social media activity. We also proposed that this deception would lead to an increase in aggressiveness when interacting with others on social media site, leading to an increase of cyberbullying.

Method

Participants

Seventeen undergraduate students (14 females and 3 males; average age=19.59, SD=3.083) from a mid-sized university in the Southwest were recruited. The sample consists of 52.94% Caucasians, 17.65% Black/African-American, 23.53% Latino/a or Hispanic, 5.88% Other. Participants volunteered to participate to fulfill course requirements or receive extra credit for a psychology course.

Materials
**Descriptive Data.** A demographics questionnaire was administered to participants covering basic information: age, major, ethnicity, gender, and collegiate year.

**Social Media Activity.** Participants completed a 14-item Social Media Intensity Quiz based on Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe’s Facebook Intensity Quiz (2007). The SMIQ is used to assess how frequently and to what degree participants use social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. Participants responded to items such as “How many total people are you connected with through social media?” with points being allocated based on how intense their use is ranging from 1-9 on one question, 1-6 on another, and 1-5 on all others. Scores from each question were added together at the end resulting in a total intensity score.

**Attitudes toward Deception.** Participants completed a 16-item Others’ Deception Attitude Measure (Curtis, 2015). The ODAM is used to assess how participants feel when being lied to, how they react, and how they feel about people they consider liars. Participants responded to such items as “If you discovered that a person was lying to you, how would that affect liking the person?” scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (significantly decrease) to 7 (significantly increase) with the last four questions having different anchors.

**Cyberbullying.** Participants completed the 11-item Cyberbullying Survey (Are you a cyberbully?, n.d.). The Cyberbullying Survey measures how often and intensely participants cyberbully on social media websites. Participants responded to such items as “Have you ever posted rude comments about someone online?” on a 1-4 scale with points being allocated based on the intensity of participants’ cyberbullying tendencies. Points from each question were totaled together at the end resulting in a total cyberbullying score.
Deception on Social Media. Participants completed the Deception on Social Media Survey adapted from the Deception in Intimate Relationships Survey (Peterson, 1996). The DSM is intended to measure participants’ frequency and intensity of deceiving on social media. Participants were given a paragraph example of an individual who uses Facebook frequently and lies often about things such as his height, the car he drives, whether his pictures have a filter on them, and posts stories about his life that are highly embellished and over-dramatized. Participants were then asked to answer questions like “How many times have you made this type of statement on social media?”

Procedure

As participants entered the classroom, they were instructed to sign in and sit at a desk. Participants were given a standard consent form and given instructions on completing the materials upon completing the form. First, participants completed a demographics questionnaire, immediately followed by the Social Media Intensity Quiz, the Others’ Deception Attitude Measure, the Cyberbullying Survey, and the Deception on Social Media Survey. After completing all the forms, participants were fully debriefed and dismissed.

Results

A bivariate correlation was conducted between Social Media Intensity Quiz (SMIQ), Cyberbullying Quiz (CBQ), Others’ Deception Attitude Measure (ODAM), and Deception on Social Media Questionnaire (DSM). It was hypothesized that those who were more active on social media (high in SMIQ scores) would be more likely to be a cyberbully (high in CBQ scores) and more likely to deceive on social media (high in DSM scores). Another interesting correlation to the researchers was whether participants who scored higher in negative feelings
toward being lied to (high in ODAM scores) would be more likely to deceive on social media (high in DSM scores). There was no significant correlation found between intensity of social media use (M= 55.24, SD=11.03) and frequency of cyberbullying (M=5.53, SD=4.94), r = .31, p > .05. There was also no significant correlation between intensity of social media use (M= 55.24, SD=11.03) and frequency of deception on social media (M= 3.18, SD=.29), r = .10, p > .05.

Finally, though reading and examining our results is what developed the researchers’ interest in correlation between negative feelings toward being lied to, as indicated by ODAM scores, (M= 3.59, SD=.49) and frequency of deception on social media (M= 3.18, SD=.29), there was no significant correlation revealed for this combination of factors either.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether frequency of social media activity in college students affects frequency and intensity of deception on social media and cyberbullying.

The researchers hypothesized that participants who reported greater social media activity would report greater cyberbullying frequency and frequency of deception on social media. The current results found no support for these claims. The second hypothesis predicted that participants who scored higher in negative feelings toward being lied to (high in ODAM scores) would be more likely to deceive on social media (high in DSM scores) and was not supported by significant correlations.

Park, Na, and Kim (2014) carried out face-to-face surveys of over 1200 adolescents between the age of 12 and 15 from South Korea. They found that bullying others on social media, being bullied, and witnessing cyberbullying are all positively correlated with the amount of time spent on social media. Indeed, they found a reliable correlation between social media
intensity and cyberbullying frequency (Park et al., 2014). However, our findings were unable to replicate this.

Caspi and Gorsky (2006) recruited in 14 different Israeli groups attempting to recruit individuals to respond to a questionnaire. Two hundred fifty seven people ranging from 14 to 70 years old completed a questionnaire over demographic details and online competence and responded to questions like “In your opinion, to what extent is online deception (someone who intentionally gives incorrect details about himself) prevalent?” (on a 1-5 Likert-type scoring scale). One of the many very interesting findings in this study is that frequent users deceived reliably more than non-frequent users (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006). This finding was inconsistent with our results.

Caspi and Gorsky (2006) found no significant correlation between negative feelings toward being lied to and frequency of deception on social media which is consistent with our findings. However, most people do expect others to deceive on social media and harbor negative feelings toward it.

Limitations

There were some limitations worthy of note in this study. The primary limitation was the small sample size. With a larger small sample size, we may have been able to find stronger correlations between gender or ethnicity and cyberbullying/deception on social media. Additional limitations were the uneven ratios of males, females and ethnicities (originating primarily from the small sample size). A longer study period may have also been helpful in alleviating these limitations.

Concluding Remarks
To the best of our knowledge, no study has been done to determine if intensity of social media affects frequency of cyberbullying behaviors or deception on social media. Results revealed that there is no significant reliable correlation between these variables. The researchers’ results were not supported by previous research which did find reliable correlations in both of these variable relationships. Lastly, researchers found no correlation between negative feelings toward being lied to and frequency of deception. This result is supported by previous research (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006).

References


