Does Facebooking make us sad? Hunting relationship between Facebook use and depression among Filipino adolescents

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Abstract

The current paper looked at the linkage between the use of Facebook and depression levels of selected Filipino adolescents. Two hundred college students whose ages ranged from 17 to 20, in a private and sectarian collegiate institution were selected through purposive sampling. Goldberg Depression Scale (GDS) and a survey regarding the number of hours allotted in the use of Facebook per week served as data collection instruments. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, the researchers found that there is no significant association between respondents' level of depression and the use of Facebook ($r = 0.04$, $p = 0.70$). Hence, depression cannot be sufficiently linked to the use of Facebook. Implications of the findings to the fields of counseling and psychology were discussed.

Keywords: adolescents; correlation; depression; Facebook; Goldberg Depression Scale

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1. Introduction

In a world that has full of challenges and obstacles to go through, experiencing negative emotions is a matter that cannot be taken away from the realm of existence. Despite our efforts to make ourselves contented and happy with our lives, episodes of negative mood would make its way to counterfeit our inclinations to experience positive emotions. Depression is a feeling of sadness, hopelessness and irritability that impedes the quality of life and that, if untreated, can result in suicide (McCall, 2007). In the context of psychopathology, it is a mood disorder that involves feelings of extraordinary sadness and dejection. It is common to feel depressed. Yet, persistence of the feeling which is characterized by the cognitive triad of hopelessness, worthlessness and helplessness can become alarming given that in few weeks, a clinical condition can be drawn. The type, severity and frequency of depressive symptoms will vary for each person (Dorlen, 2010).

Typologies of depression were identified over the past few decades. Among the most usual types include: a.) major depression which is manifested by a combination of symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, study, sleep, eat, and enjoy once pleasurable activities for a period of two weeks; b.) a less severe type of depression; dysthymia which involves long-term, chronic symptoms that do not disable, but keep one from functioning well; c.) Bipolar disorder which is characterized by cycling mood change in the form of mania and depression. Mood switches are dramatic and rapid, but most often they are gradual. These types of mood disorders have been identified in relation to specific stressors which can serve as triggering or precipitating factors in the emergence of such conditions.

Today, the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Multiply among others has caught the attention of individuals from various age groups. These are internet sites that serve as avenues for interaction with other people through adding them as friends, chatting with them, posting shout-outs, uploading pictures, sharing daily experiences, and even playing games. Such features can be observed in the toolbars of Facebook. Many people got attracted to this socialization medium because of its distinctiveness. Even though it is a widely accepted interactive media in cyberspace and it entails beneficial effects like social capital and friendship articulation (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007), a few number of literature presented some negative aftermaths of using Facebook. Among the non-beneficial outcomes that are linked to social networking sites involved socially aggressive narcissism (Pearse, 2012) and stalking behaviors (Fritzgerald, 2012). In the most recent survey by eBizMBA.com (2012), Facebook was cited as the most popular social networking site across different nation. Though, one of the most controversial issues that emerged is the "Facebook depression" speculations that circulated in the internet. It maintained that there might be a linkage between Facebook use and depression among individuals.

As a response to such conjecture, Jelenchick, Eickhoff, and Moreno (2012) investigated the relationship between the use of social networking sites and depression in older adolescents. In their study, they found that depression cannot be significantly associated to the use of such social networking media among American adolescents. The same findings were evoked in a research done by Feinstein, Bhatia, Hershenberg, and Davila (2012) except for the fact that anxiety was integrated in the said study. Though assertions of these studies appeared to be justifiable, the difference between American and Philippine context might make such findings not applicable to the latter's culture. The collectivistic nature of the Philippine context as opposed to the individualistic feature of the American culture might possibly make a difference given that various outcomes were implicated depending on one's cultural background (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). That being said, our intention of formulating this research is to determine whether depression can be associated with the frequent use of these Facebook among Filipino adolescents. By doing so, recommendations can be drafted regarding the

validity of the alleged link between Facebook use and depression in the Philippine context.

2. Literature review

2.1 Depression

Affecting 121 million people across the global society, depression is one of the most common medical conditions (World Health Organization). It also ranked as one of the leading catalysts of disability across different nations. What makes it a more pressing disorder is the reality that only 25% of the people afflicted with it have an access to therapeutic modalities. Depression is often referred to as a classification of mood disorder characterized by mild to severe negative emotional patterns. To a greater extent, it is different from sadness and loneliness given that they do not present symptoms that can be seen among depressed clients. There are vegetative signs which can be observed among depressed people such as lack of sleep, loss of appetite, lack of engagement pleasurable activities, excessive sleeping, and eating among others (World Health Organization). In severe cases, however, suicidal ideation and attempts can happen which makes it one of the most pressing clinical conditions in the field of behavioral sciences. If not treated, successful suicidal attempts would enunciate increase in mortality rate. Its symptoms usually occur among adolescents (Hankin & Abramson, 2002, p. 491).

A good number of studies were done to investigate depression as a focus of attention. Some research have identified predictors of depression which involves personality (Bagyby, Psych, Quilty, & Ryder, 2008), perceived pain (Rosemann, Backenstrass, Joest, Rosemann, Szecsenyi, & Laux, 2007), perceived stress (Hamad, Fernald, Karlan, & Zinman, 2007), poor social support (Rosemann, Backenstrass, Joest, Rosemann, Szecsenyi, & Laux, 2007), and self-esteem (Yaacob, Juhari, Talib, & Uba, 2009).

2.2 Social networking sites

As a result of continuous industrial and technological advancement in the global society, the use of social networking sites is highly practice regardless of societal conditions. Social networking sites in the form of Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and Friendster among others have enticed millions of users. Most of them have even incorporated the use of these social networking sites to their everyday living practices (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). It is very clear that there appeared to be an abrupt movement from the usual definition of social networking in the presence of online information system. Before, social networking was known as a process of *"grouping individuals into specific groups, like small rural communities or neighborhood subdivision, workplace and universities"* (www.whatissocialnetworking.com). Nowadays, it has changed gradually from simply a venue where one can meet older friends to a place where favorite music, videos and pictures can be uploaded and shared with other people. Sometimes, it is even used for promotion of industrial and professional endeavors among various individuals who are affiliated with various academic, industrial and clinical institutions.

Websites are the commonly utilized media of communication in online social networking. Most of the times, people who share similar interests, advocacies, skills and aspirations would join a specific social networking site to be able to get acquainted with other people. In the usual process, a user can create a profile or an account and build connection with other people who have accounts on that website (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Consequently, he can now meet new people and friends without necessarily interacting with them in person.

Popularities of social networking sites across different nations have been pretty much pronounced as well. In fact, more than half of all American youths ages 12-17 were using social networking sites for wide array of purposes (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Gender differences were very evident as well with females using social networking sites as a way of strengthening bonds with current and former friends while males utilizing it to meet new friends and to flirt with other girls. Different surveys were executed to identify sites that are most frequently utilized by online social networking consumers. For instance, a survey that was done in the Philippine context

during the year 2010, the top ten social networking sites are as follows: 1.) Facebook; 2.) Youtube; 3.) Blogger; 4.) Twitter; 5.) Multiply; 6.) Friendster; 7.) Tumblr; 8.) Plurk; 9.) Flickr; and 10.) Linkedin. In a more recent survey, the top 15 social networking sites in August 2012 were stated by eBizMBA Rank. These include: 1.) Facebook; 2.) Twitter; 3.) LinkedIn; 4.) MySpace; 5.) Google Plus+; 6.) Deviant Art; 7.) LiveJournal; 8.) Tagged; 9.) Orkut; 10.) CafeMom; 11.) Ning; 12.) Meetup; 13.) MyLife; 14.) My Yearbook; and 15.) Badoo. Apparently, Facebook has emerged to be the leading social networking sites in the American and Philippine contexts. However, there are other sites that seemed to be appealing for other people from various nations.

Since MySpace attracted most of the people in other countries, others have learned to embrace the social networking site fad. Friendster became very prominent in the Pacific Islands, Orkut became the salient social networking site in Brazil, Mixi gained widespread interest in Japan, Grono enticed Poland, Hi5 became popular in Latin America, South America, and Europe, and Bebo became attractive from people in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia. Popular communication and community services began to adopt social networking sites characteristics.

Aside from its practical use in online social interactions, social networking sites have been utilized in some academic and industrial research. Profile and connection data from social networking sites can be obtained either through automated collection techniques or through datasets provided directly from institutions, continuing an analysis trend that started with examinations of blogs and other websites. For example, Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman (as cited in Boyd & Ellison, 2007) looked at a confidential dataset consisting of 362 million messages retrieved by over 4 million Facebook users for insight into meeting-friends and messaging activities. Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (as cited in Boyd & Ellison, 2007) investigated association between features of profiles and number of Facebook friends, finding that profile fields that reduce transaction costs and are harder to falsify are most likely to be associated with larger number of friendship links. These kinds of data also lend themselves well to analysis through network visualization (Adamic, Büyükkökten, & Adar, 2003).

2.3 Social networking sites and depression

Although the use of social networking sites was directly linked to increase in meaningful and creative ways to keep in touch with other people, some literatures have linked its use to depression. As a fact, in an article written by Aaron Smith of Chicago Tribune newspaper about the social networks and depression, Bryan Forsberg asserted that there are a lot of things going on Facebook like people combating each other for some reasons. He talked in a bit how negative emotional expressions or feelings can be evoked in cyberspace. According to him, even failure to become accepted by a friend will lead to a negative feeling.

English (2011) enunciated that utilizing social networking sites in our daily living experiences can induce various emotions which include negative moods. Social media depression was stipulated in her article which was a term coined for depressive tendencies as a result of using social media. In the article, although it has been mentioned that the link between social networking sites and depression lacked substantial evidences or legitimacy given that there were some alleged studies that demarcated connection between the two though causality of depressive state in lieu of social networking site use appeared to be questionable.

Chalmers (2011) made an article regarding the emergence of a new ailment which is termed as Facebook depression. She demarcated that adolescents are highly susceptible to experience this negative emotional pattern as a result of engaging in social networking sites in excess of the average duration of exposure. In the said article, Dr. Ken Ensroth; a child and adolescent psychiatrist, delineated that it is not possible for social networking sites per se to cause depressive episodes but if the child has low self-esteem, it would be a diathesis for the emergence of depression.

Similarly, Rettner (2011) highlighted a report from American Academy of Pediatrics which hypothesized about the existence of "Facebook depression." This is characterized by uncontrollable amount of time being exposed to Facebook which is followed by depressive episodes. She reiterated that too much use of Facebook

can lead to various risks which include cyber-bullying, sexting among others. She also mentioned about the hypothesis of that the possible emergence of competitive ideation in the cyberspace as a result of friends' achievement, number of friends and the likes would make children feel envy and jealous about those disparities. Consequently, children/adolescents experience negative emotions. To prevent its occurrence, it has been cited that parents are encouraged to be engaged in their children's lives and to let their children engage in variety of activities.

More recently, Feinstein, Bhatia, Hershenberg, and Davila (2012) examined the linkage among depression, anxiety and use of social media. They investigated how the use of social networking sites can aggravate the symptoms of depression and anxiety among 301 young adults over a period of 3 weeks. Findings revealed that social media usage was not influenced by fluctuations in anxious or depressive symptoms. However, elevated depression resulted in negative social media experience which inhibits positive emotions. Subjects with symptoms of depression during the first week were more likely to have bad relationship interactions with their significant others at week 3 than participants with no depressive symptoms. Increases in social anxiety did not lead to maladaptive social networking site use but did increase feelings of anxiousness in typical situations with significant others. They believed that these results could aid clinical psychologists in identifying substrates of mental health conditions that would necessitate probing of social skills by looking at how the clients are interacting with significant others along with his inclination to use social media.

As opposed to the findings of Feinstein, Bhatia, Hershenberg, and Davila (2012), Pantic and his colleagues investigated the effects of online social networking use in the depression levels of high school students in Central Serbia. 160 high school students were recruited as participants of the study. In the study, a statistically significant positive correlation was discerned from the participants' duration of online social media use per day and levels of depression. Physiological implications of the findings were integrated in the analyses to achieve a clearer picture of the link between the two constructs.

In the Philippine context, Canaberal (2012) wrote a recent article in Manila Bulletin newspaper that zeroed in on the "Facebook Depression". It capitalized on the possible link that can be surmised between Facebook use and depression. Facebook anxiety was also stated as a condition of dread with respect to using Facebook due to previous undesirable experiences of being humiliated on that social networking site. Specific directions were recommended to avoid it like separating virtual from reality and refraining from over-sharing information in the cyberspace.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

The study used a descriptive-correlational research design. Correlational research involves measuring and describing relationship between two variables without attempting to explain the cause of the relationship. Correlational designs are also useful for discovering new relationships (Heiman, 1998). In the current paper, the number of hours the respondents were allotting in their use of Facebook served as the independent variable while their depression levels served as the dependent variable. Relationship was explored between the two aforementioned variables.

3.2 Participants

Two hundred Filipino adolescents were selected through purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique wherein selection is based on the criteria defined by the researcher to reflect the specific purpose of the study (Myers & Hansen, 2006). The criteria of selection include the type of academic institution (private and sectarian institutions) and year levels (1st year to 3rd year college). Surveys were distributed during free time of the respondents. Informed consent was included in the survey to ensure

ethical guidelines in the conduct of the study.

3.3 Research instruments

The researchers used Goldberg Depression Scale and a self-made questionnaire in determining the level of depression and frequency of Facebook use. Goldberg Depression Scale is an eighteen-item test utilized to assess the depression level of individuals which includes likert scale of 1 to 5. It was made by Dr. Ivan Goldberg, an American psychiatrist who is involved in studying mood disorders of American patients. The test is a reliable measure of negative mood with its alpha coefficient ranging from .74 to .81 in some validation studies executed to ensure its dependability (Kim et al., 1997). Current reliability of the scale is .83.

3.4 Data analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0) was used to calculate for the mean, standard deviation and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Mean was used as a measure of central tendency while standard deviation was utilized to see the relative distance of the respondents' scores from one another. A significance level of $p < .05$ which is the standard level of significance for social scientific research was adopted for correlation coefficients. Pearson r is a measure of the extent to which paired scores occupy similar and dissimilar positions within their own distributions (Pagano, 2007).

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Depression levels of respondents

As the table clearly manifests, the respondents garnered below average scores on the Goldberg Depression Scale as evidenced by a mean value of 5.00 which signifies that they have very low levels of depression. Their responses seemed to exhibit a relatively low disparity which can be noticed by its standard deviation value.

Table 1

Respondents' depression level based on Goldberg Depression Scale

Factor	M	SD	N	Interpretation
Level of depression among the respondents	5.00	0.82	200	Very low

4.2 Facebook use of respondents

Based on Table 2, it might be possible that the respondents are moderately using their Facebook accounts on a weekly basis as shown by the mean value for the number of hours used in using that social networking site. Though, it is essential to consider that the usage varies considerably from one respondent to another with its standard deviation. It suggests that they have marginal differences as regards to using Facebook.

Table 2

Respondents' frequency of Facebook use based on number of hours used per week

Factor	M	SD	N
Level of depression among the respondents	16.0	19.90	200

4.3 Relationship between Facebook use and depression

It can be deduced that depression levels of the respondents cannot be substantially linked to their use of

Facebook. This can be seen on its negligible correlational coefficient value (r=.04, p=.73) which enunciates an absence of statistically significant association can be drawn given that the probability value exceeded the standard level of significance (α=.05). Hence, it can be asserted that Facebook use alone cannot predict or forecast one's level of depression, an inference coincide with the beliefs of Dr. Ken Ensroth (as cited in Chalmers, 2011). In essence, the results tend to reflect that depression is a multifaceted and relatively complex construct in the field of psychology which will necessitate understanding core dimensions that contribute to its emergence. For instance, in Beck's cognitive triad which constitutes negative view of self, world and future are pivotal and necessary factors in understanding the psychopathology of depression (Abela & D'Alessandro, 2002). Result of the study was consistent with the findings from previous studies done in the Western contexts which found no significant connection between frequency of Facebook use and depression levels (Jelenchick, Eickhoff, & Moreno, 2012; Feinstein, Bhatia, Hershenberg, & Davila, 2012). Though contextual differences are present, the current study validated formulations from such past researches that were done to shed light on the controversial link between such constructs. However, it did not conform to the hypothesis that established statistically significant link between depression and Facebook use (Pantic, Todorovic, Bojovic-Jovic, & Pantic, 2002).

5. Conclusion

With reference to the findings of the current inquiry, the frequency of Facebook use of the Filipino adolescents who joined the study are not substantially linked to their levels of depression. It provided additional evidences that using Facebook alone cannot make individuals vulnerable to experience a state of negative emotional experience which was validated recent studies done in the USA (Jelenchick, Eickhoff, & Moreno, 2012; Feinstein, Bhatia, Hershenberg, & Davila, 2012). It also proved that the alleged "Facebook depression" would remain to be a dubious hypothesis given that there is no significant path that can connect them from one another. In effect, believing to speculations about Facebook depression may be inappropriate given that depression is a condition that can be triggered by multifaceted factors. As such, other technologically-relevant correlate of negative emotional states are suggested to be tested given that social networking sites like Facebook could not be regarded as a salient predictor of depression. It can possibly pave the way towards using social networking sites as tools for helping the adolescents achieve a state of psychological well-being instead of linking it with negative emotional patterns such as depression and anxiety. In that way, introduction of interventions that would increase psychological wellness can be perpetuated instead of focusing on reducing depression among the intended populace.

5.1 Recommendation

Based on the results of the study, specific recommendations are addressed to the following population:

For guidance counselors. The results of this empirical inquiry will serve as evidence that Facebook use per se might not be predictive of depressive state among adolescents. This will allow them to explore other technologically-relevant factors that would lead to depression among adolescents. Given that depression is a multidimensional psychopathological condition, biological, social and psychological substrates must be given more priority in understanding the course of its progression. Since there was no significant correlation between the use of social networking sites like Facebook and depression, counselors can also look at the possibility of taking advantage of Facebook as a tool in getting much needed therapeutic gains among the intended clients.

For adolescents. The findings of the study will help them approximately discount the possibility of being afflicted with depression due to the use of social networking sites like Facebook. However, they are suggested to use Facebook moderately since excessive engagement in an activity would lead to other psychopathological conditions like internet addiction.

For Facebook users. With the results of the current paper, they will be clarified more about the notion that

Facebook use can induce depression. They are encouraged then, not to easily believe on claims or conceptions that were not grounded from empirical studies. In view of the fact that Facebook use is not linked to depressive levels of the respondents, they can continue using social networking sites as a mean of socializing in cyberspace without worrying about possibilities of acquiring depression.

For future researchers. They are recommended to increase sample size to magnify the practical utility of the findings. This can possibly increase the chance that more statistically relevant values can be drawn. Given that there was not significant relationship drawn from the study, other technologically-relevant variables must be taken into consideration like use of text messaging, chatting, blogging, and etcetera.

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