Relationship between The Fear of Missing Out and The Need to Belong

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Abstract

In this study, the relationship between Facebook and the fear of missing out and the need to belong is explored. I predict that the more Facebook usage would be related to a higher fear of missing out. I also predict that the more Facebook usage would be related to a higher need to belong. The goal of this study is to expand previous research regarding the relationship between the usage of Facebook and a person's fear of missing out, as well as the relationship between the usage of Facebook and a person's need to belong. In three questionnaires, I examine the participants' Facebook intensity level, whether or not the participants have a fear of missing out, and whether the participants have a need to belong. The current study finds that people do not have a fear of missing out nor do they have the need to belong.

Relationship between the Fear of Missing Out and the Need to Belong

Social media has become such a phenomenon that it has seemed to take over most of our daily activities. When we don't want to do homework we check social media, when we want to make the time go by faster we check social media, and when we don't want to miss seeing the pictures of a cousin's first birthday party, we check social media. Not only are we obsessed with social networking websites, it seems to be the only way anyone communicates. Whether it is within or about interpersonal relationships (Fox and Moreland, 2015). Users connect through online social media such as e-mail, online chats, and posting on other users' walls. There are many social network sites that offer a variety of interests and services that a number of people can use. Young adult users may only use online communication media compared to face-to-face (Orr, Sisic, Ross, Simmering, Arseneault, and Orr, 2009), reflected in this media, tasks associated with development in social interactions (Johnston, Tanner, Lalla, and Kawalski, 2013) and understanding oneself (Stronge, Osborne, West-Newman, Milovej, Greaves, Sibley, 2015) are shown using social media like Facebook.

Facebook is a website that allows you to create an online profile to connect with friends, family, or make new friends. According to Facebook (2012), there are over 200 million users on Facebook, and an average user has about 120 friends. More than 3.5 billion minutes are spent on Facebook each day (Facebook, 2012). On average, Facebook (2012) also stated users check their Facebook on their phones 14 times per day, and 1 in 3 people feel more dissatisfied with their lives after visiting Facebook. One reason Facebook is such a popular social networking website is because of all of the availability it provides for its users. The possibilities to share personal

information, build friendships, and potentially gather social support though websites like Facebook are infinite (Clerkin, Smith, and Hames, 2013).

Social networking websites like Facebook can activate many positive and negative emotional experiences. Although, considerable research has been found on the benefits of using Facebook. Nabi, Prestin, & So's (2013), research has examined and considered the relationships between Facebook network size, an individual's social support, and health supports a positive relationship between the amount of friends a Facebook user has and their personal well-being. Recent research done by Clerkin, Smith and Hames (2013) suggests that individuals who struggle interpersonally, communicating on social network websites is valuable to those who long for that connectedness and engagement they have with others. Facebook is a great way to keep in touch with friends and family, by sharing pictures, information, messages, and even join groups others are interested in. Shyness is a personality that avid social network users don't have to struggle with compared to a face-to-face conversation. Facebook provides options for social interactions that typically shy individuals would avoid (Orr et al. 2009).

By being able to interact more intensely on Facebook, individuals engage in what is called the self-presentation theory. A user can use this outlet to shape the way they present themselves on social networking sites, specifically Facebook (Toma, 2013). Facebook motivates self-presenters to construct a more desirable look. Those high in social anxiety feel able to express hidden self-aspects (characteristics they currently hold, but would not normally share in their everyday lives) on the internet (Seidman, 2013).

However, extensive social media use could negatively affect a person's psychological well-being. A study by Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013) examined possible

undesirable predictors of social media engagement, specifically looking at individual's aspects of their need for satisfaction. Although instant messaging allows instant communication, nonverbal social communication cues are not recognized (Sacco and Ismail, 2014). The lack of communication then suspects that social interactions may influence that satisfaction of social belonging. As mentioned above, self-representation can be shown as confidence when an individual is on Facebook for a length of time. But it can also become harmful for a Facebook user. Self-presentation can be used as the need to socialize with others, public self-consciousness online, and self-efficacy (Sun and Wu, 2012). Facebook user's motivation to create self-presentations is to impress other users and be as honest as possible without any deception, but to do so they have to achieve these self-presentations as well.

When exploring the seen-factor regarding Facebook chats, users tend to have more intense negative emotions when their chat partner does not answer. Making the original user fear ostracism. (Mai, Freudenthaler, Schneider, and Voiderer, 2015). That desire for attachment is why individuals use Facebook immensely. A study by Beekman and Stock (2016) found that being rejected or excluded can suggest motivations and traits. These motivations are why we are on Facebook so much.

Fear of missing out is a motivation that links deficits in an individual's needs to be on social media. Those who have the fear of missing out, social media participation is a prime component (Przybylski et al. 2013). Fear of missing out is known as a comprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which an individual is absent. It can be characterized as the desire to stay connected with what others are doing (Przybylski et al. 2013). This fear plays a role in the explanation that extensive social media engagement motivates individuals to

constantly be involved. According to Hill (1987) motivation is what fuels individuals to have this desire to have emotional support and social comparison.

Chen & Lin (2014) advanced the strong desire to stay continuously connected as potentially dangerous for encouraging people to check in with their social media even when they are driving. The mix of social media and the fear of missing out could lead to general unhappiness, jealousy, or lack of life satisfaction (Alt, 2015). These problems can be concluded by checking Facebook regularly because an individual feels left out. Social comparison is our constant evaluations of ourselves and of others (Fox and Moreland, 2015). With these constant comparisons of one another, sociability sometimes seeks social company because people desire to be accepted (Leary, Kelly, Cottrel, & Schreindorfer 2013). Social media can be thought of as reducing the feeling of being forced to be socially engaged. Facebook provides this advantage because it is a benefit for those who can't face the fear of missing out.

Focusing on individuals who desire to be accepted and belong relate to emotion, thought, and behavior in important ways. By examining these aspects of Facebook surrounds an individual's need to belong (Sacco and Ismail, 2014). The need to belong is a motivation to connect with others and be socially accepted (Leary et al. 2013). These researchers hypothesized that individual differences in their need to belong motivation triggers behaviors that are focused on acceptance and emotional reactions. Such as social anxiety and hurt feelings; these relay people's concerns with how others view and accept them. A study by Sacco and Ismail (2014) compared face-to-face and virtual conversations, finding that only face-to-face interactions enhanced participant's social belongingness needs and a more positive mood. The link between social exclusion and perceived stress is established, finding that being excluded is harmful to a person

and can cause stress (Beekman and Stock 2016). It could be possible that Facebook can help an

individual's low self-esteem rise and they could lead a more prosperous social life by

self-disclosing.

The goal of this study is to expand previous research regarding the relationship between the

usage of Facebook and a person's fear of missing out, as well as the relationship between the

usage of Facebook and a person's need to belong. In this study, I expect to find that the more

Facebook usage would be related to a higher fear of missing out. I also anticipate to find that the

more Facebook usage would be related to a higher need to belong.

Method

Participants

For this study, participants included 42 female college students. Participants ranging from

19 to 34 years ($M = 21.83$, $SD = 3.93$). 88% were Caucasian, 7% were African American, and

5% were Hispanic/Latina. The participants were selected by their volunteering to participate.

Materials

Participants filled out a questionnaire assessing issues related to Facebook. The survey

included two demographic questions, age and race. It also included three different scales that

measured the participant's fear of missing out, their needing to belong, and their activity on

Facebook. In the Facebook Intensity Scale (Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. 2007), there

were a total of 6 statements that were relevant to the participant's Facebook activity. The

participants would rate the 6 statements from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). To find

the score, add up all of the answers. With 6 being the lowest possible score and 30 being the

highest possible score. Meaning the closer the score is to 30, the more intense you are with Facebook. And the closer the score is to 6, the less intense you are with Facebook. A couple examples of the statements are, "I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while" and "I would be sorry if Facebook shut down." In addition to the 6 items in the Facebook Intensity Scale, participants were asked approximately how many friends they had on Facebook, and how many times they checked Facebook. Lastly, there were a few more questions added regarding if the person comments and/or "likes" posts on Facebook, if it bothers them when they are not on Facebook, and when they are on Facebook, do they pay attention to what their friends are interested in. The Cronbach's alpha was .80.

The next scale was Przybylski, Murayama, DeHann, & Gladwell's (2013) Fear of Missing Out Scale. This scale consisted of 10 statements, which the participant rated 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 5 (*extremely true of me*). To get the score for this scale, add up all of the answers. With 10 being the lowest possible score and 50 being the highest possible score. The closer the score is to 10 means there is little fear of missing out, the closer the score is to 50 means there is a higher fear of missing out. A couple examples of one of the statements is, "I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to" and "It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with friends." The Cronbach's alpha was .77.

The last scale used was the Need to Belong Scale (Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2005). In this scale the participants would rate each of the 10 statements from a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). To find the score for this scale, add up all of the answers. With 10 being the lowest and 50 being the highest. The closer the score is to 10, the lower the need is to belong. The closer the score is to 50, the higher the need is to belong. A couple examples from this scale

are, "My feelings are easily hurt when I feel that others do not accept me" and "I want other people to accept me." The Cronbach's alpha was .67.

Procedure

The research design of this study was correlational as it studied the relationship between Facebook and the fear of missing out, and Facebook and the need to belong. Informed consent forms were handed out for participants to read and sign. More than half the participants were given the survey while in a classroom setting. A few were recruited by conveniently passing them in the hallway. The amount of time it took to take these questionnaires was roughly 5 minutes. There was no compensation for participating in this study. Once the participants were finished and handed the surveys back, they were then debriefed and thanked for their time.

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Results

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The first hypothesis is that the more Facebook usage would be related to a higher fear of missing out. When examining the relationship between Facebook intensity and the fear of missing out using the survey items of the Fear of Missing Out Scale, using a Likert Scale from 1 *(not at all true of me)* to 5 *(extremely true of me)*. Unlike our prediction, Facebook ($M = 18.12$, $SD = 4.42$) and the fear of missing out ($M = 21.31$, $SD = 6.05$) were not significantly correlated, $r(41) = -.02$, $p > .05$. Apparently, Facebook is unrelated to a person's fear of missing out. The second hypothesis is that the more Facebook usage would be related to a higher need to belong. When examining the relationship between Facebook and the need to belong using the survey items of the Need to Belong Scale, using a Likert Scale from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 5 (*extremely true of me*). Unlike our prediction, Facebook ($M = 18.12$, $SD = 4.42$) and the need to

belong (*M* = 28.21, *SD* = 5.48) were not significantly correlated, *r* (41) = -.17, *p* > .05. Similarly, Facebook is unrelated to a person's need to belong.

Although this was not predicted, the fear of missing out (*M* = 21.31, *SD* = 6.05) and the need to belong (*M* = 28.21, *SD* = 5.48) was significantly correlated, *r* (41) = .44, *p* <.05. This result suggests that participants who have a higher need to belong tend to also have a higher fear of missing out.

Discussion

Both the fear of missing out and the need to belong are important factors when a person is on Facebook. However, in this study, the more Facebook usage did not relate to their need to belong nor did the more Facebook usage relate to their fear of missing out. The ability to be on Facebook and interact with friends and family should relate to more interpersonal interactions. Although, research exists that the more an individual is on Facebook the higher the fear of missing out (Alt, 2015)

Both of the predicted hypotheses stated in this research were not supported by data. The first hypothesis, more Facebook usage would be related to a higher fear of missing out, had insignificant findings for survey items regarding an individual's fear of missing out. The reason for those findings could be because the participant's personal definition of "the fear of missing out" might be different than others. Another option on why the results were insignificant between Facebook and the fear of missing out could be how the questions were worded and how the participant's answered them. Facebook and the fear of missing out could be unrelated, the questions could potentially be "bad", or the participants endured social desirability because they did not want to commit to being afraid of such things. Social desirability is a key factor in why participants would not want to admit that they do have these emotions regarding Facebook

(Seidman, 2013). Regarding the second hypothesis, more Facebook usage would be related to a higher need to belong, there was no significant correlation with the need to belong scales total score. This insignificant finding indicates that an individual's Facebook intensity does not lead to a higher need to belong.

Alt (2015) wanted to develop a better understanding of the motivation that college students lack due to the amount of social media usage and the fear of missing out. He found that both motivational variables were positively associated with fear of missing out, which in turn led to increased levels of social media usage in classrooms. The current research did not find that the fear of missing out is significant with more Facebook use. Thus, it was not supported by Przybylski et al. (2013) when they explained social media engagements link individuals to the effects of their fear of missing out. Also, the current study proposed that the need to belong would be more relative due to more Facebook use. This finding was not supported by Leary et al. (2012) when they explained how the feeling of needing to belong is necessarily mandatory for an individual to be on Facebook for a long amount of time. Although, not hypothesized in the current study, the fear of missing out was significant to the need to belong. This finding was supported by Beekman and Stock (2016) when they found that traits of need to belong and rejection sensitivity impacted stress and affect. Facebook reassurance seeking has lower levels of self-esteem which in turn heightens feelings that a person does not belong and they feel like they are a burden (Clerkin, Smith, Hames, 2013).

With the impression that the more time spent on Facebook will help submerge those feelings of fear and need, Forest and Wood (2012) expanded the topic of self-disclosure. By self-disclosing, individuals can develop an opportunity to be intimate with their social network friends. Within

that community on Facebook, user's self-disclosures are associated with their need to belong (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). An individual's self-esteem then either rises or falls depending on how crucial their need was. If that need was not met, they then fear social exclusion, which then cycles back around to rising that need to belong. This everlasting cycle of a user's fear and need only gets met when they log onto Facebook.

One of the limitations of this study was sample size. Only 42 individuals participated, one of which did not even have Facebook. Another limitation was that I was limited to only females as participants. More in-depth data and results could be obtained with more survey items regarding Facebook, the fear of missing out, and the need to belong. This study was also limited by the type of data collected. When conducting a survey, there is no real assurance that the participants are answering honestly or accurately. As mentioned, social desirability is important to some participants, by not admitting that they do have a fear of missing out. Or even admitting the real amount of times they check Facebook. Therefore, the results may be diverse or false. Due to this potential threat, participants' accuracy on their feelings towards the fear of missing out and the need to belong were unknown. Questions in the survey regarding the number of friend's participants have on Facebook and how many times they checked Facebook also may be a limitation. Does the time the participants checked their Facebook account, while answering the questionnaires to look at their number of friends they had, count? Therefore, future researchers may want to continue this type of research experimentally. Perhaps in a lab setting, take away the participants' cell phones or laptops, that way they are unable to check while filling out the questionnaires. This possibly could lead to a feeling of stress or anxiousness since their technology has been taken from them. Also, future researchers may want to track Facebook

usage as well in a lab based experiment. It would be interesting to try male participants instead.

Possibly, comparing both males and females on their emotions towards social networking.

This research broadens the topics of the fear of missing out and the need to belong on Facebook.

It continues to reiterate these types of fears and needs along with previous research, showing that

Facebook usage does play an important role in our emotions. Many users have different reasons

to get on Facebook that are important to them. By researching issues like lack of social support,

lack of self-esteem, and lack of self-concept, there is awareness on why social networks like

Facebook make users have the feelings of fear of missing out the need to belong. These issues

are important to consider when engaging on social media, and hopefully this research will shed

light onto Facebook users struggling with these questions – do I need to belong or fear missing

out?

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