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Adolescents' differential responses to social media browsing: Exploring causes and consequences for intervention

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Abstract

Browsing Instagram is a daily practice for many teens, yet the relationship between social browsing and psychological well-being remains controversial. Recent research finds that negative social comparisons mediate the relationship between social browsing and ill-being outcomes, such as depression. The current study systematically examined the role of negative comparisons in the relationship between Instagram browsing and affective well-being immediately post-browsing. Teens (n=507) participated in an online survey that included an Instagram browsing experience. Participants were randomly assigned to a 'highlight reel' condition or to one of two browsing interventions designed to reduce affective consequences of comparison. Participants completed the Positive and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS) pre- and post-browsing and reported social comparisons in response to the featured accounts. Regression analyses controlling for baseline emotions indicate that regardless of browsing condition, teens who reported higher levels of negative social comparison had significantly worse post-browsing affect than peers who reported less negative comparison to the stimuli. No main effects of browsing condition were found. However, browsing condition moderated the relationship between social comparison and affective well-being: the interventions reduced post-browsing negative affect for those at higher levels of negative comparison. Results suggest differential responses to both social browsing and social media interventions.

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