Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Computers in Human Behavior

Full length article

Passive *Facebook* use, *Facebook* addiction, and associations with escapism: An experimental vignette study

Nicola L. Young, Daria J. Kuss[*], Mark D. Griffiths, Christina J. Howard

Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham NG1 4FQ, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

There is relatively little research considering motivations of passive *Facebook* use. However, research regarding motivations of general *Facebook* use indicates that people use *Facebook* to escape − and that escapism may motivate passive *Facebook* use. Research also suggests that using *Facebook* to escape is associated with *Facebook* addiction. Using an experimental vignette design, the present research investigated whether passive *Facebook* use is motivated by escapism and whether this escape motivation is associated with passive *Facebook* addiction. A within-participant experimental design using vignettes was used to explore the effect of positivity and, in addition, socialness on passive *Facebook* use. Addiction to passive *Facebook* use and perceived effect of passive *Facebook* use on mood were also assessed. Participants ($n = 69$) responded to 16 vignettes describing daily life events, as well as responding to a question about passive *Facebook* use on mood and completing the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale. Results suggested that individuals did not use *Facebook* to escape. There was no association between escapism in passive *Facebook* use and passive *Facebook* addiction. Social contact had a positive effect on passive *Facebook* use, and participants perceived passive *Facebook* use to have no effect on mood. Findings suggest that passive *Facebook* use is a less effective method of escape than general *Facebook* use, and reducing individuals' likelihood of experiencing *Facebook* addiction symptoms.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs), such as *Facebook,* allow individuals to communicate with others in a variety of ways, such as posting comments and status updates, chatting or privately messaging, consuming information regarding the lives of others through the viewing of uploaded photographs, status updates and conversations (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). In March 2016, it was reported that *Facebook* has an average of 1.09 billion daily active users worldwide (Facebook, 2016). Furthermore, a recent report on media use in the UK claimed that 73% of adults have a social networking profile − with 95% of these adults having a *Facebook* profile (Ofcom, 2016). The next most popular SNSs after *Facebook* − *WhatsApp* and *Twitter* − are used by 28% and 26% of these adults, respectively (Ofcom, 2016). These figures demonstrate that social networking via *Facebook* is particularly widespread. Consequently, the effect that *Facebook* has on individuals is of growing interest within the psychological literature, although the results of empirical research have been contrasting.

For example, Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) found a positive association between intensity of *Facebook* use and life satisfaction, whilst Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found a significant and positive association between *Facebook* use and improved psychological wellbeing. However, Kalpidou, Costin, and Morris (2011) reported that increased time spent on *Facebook* was associated with lower self-esteem, whilst Kross et al. (2013) reported that − over time − *Facebook* negatively influences subjective wellbeing, increasing negative feelings on a moment-to-moment basis and reducing life satisfaction. Whilst contrasting findings have been reported, studies differentiating between different types of *Facebook* use provide further explanation. For example, Burke, Marlow, and Lento (2010) differentiate between active *Facebook* use (AFU; i.e., using *Facebook* to communicate with others) and passive *Facebook* use (PFU; i.e., using *Facebook* to consume content). Within PFU, individuals do not communicate with other *Facebook* users, but simply view others' photographs, status updates, and conversations (Burke et al., 2010). Interestingly, Burke et al. (2010) found that AFU decreases feelings of loneliness, whilst PFU increases them. These findings help to explain the inconsistency illustrated within other studies, suggesting that certain aspects of *Facebook*

---

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail address: daria.kuss@ntu.ac.uk (D.J. Kuss).

use have a positive effect on an individual's wellbeing, whilst others have a more negative effect.

Since Burke et al.'s (2010) study, other research has been carried out which focuses on the effects of PFU. In support of Burke et al. (2010), Frison and Eggermont (2015) found that PFU increases feelings of loneliness, whilst Shaw, Timpano, Tran, and Joormann (2015) suggested a relationship between PFU and an increase in social anxiety symptoms. Similarly, Verduyn et al. (2015) reported that PFU reduces wellbeing in participants by inducing envy. Interestingly, Verduyn et al. (2015) found that individuals spend more time passively using Facebook than using it actively, choosing an activity which has a negative effect on wellbeing over an activity which has a positive effect. The aforementioned findings raise the question as to why individuals engage in PFU if it has a potentially negative effect on them?

Although there are no studies investigating PFU motivations, other studies have examined motivations of general Facebook use that may provide insight to PFU motivations. For example, Quan-Haase and Young (2010) reported six reasons for Facebook use: pastime, affection, fashion, sharing problems, sociability, and social information. Kwon, D'Angelo, and McLeod (2013) also suggested six motivations of Facebook use: information seeking, entertainment, communication, social relations, escape, and Facebook applications. Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) outlined seven motivations of Facebook use: habitual passing of time, relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, escapism, cool new trend, companionship, and professional advancement. One of the motivations within these findings is the 'escape' motivation, identified by all of these studies (Quan-Haase & Young (2010) grouped it within the 'pastime' motivation - defining 'pastime' as 'entertainment', 'relaxation' and 'escape'). Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) included a qualitative element to their study, asking open-ended questions concerning participants' motivations for using Facebook, with participants reporting that they use Facebook because it provides distraction from everyday hassles. These responses indicate that escapism is an important motivation of Facebook use, with participants stating that escapism is the primary reason why they use it.

Others (i.e., Kwon et al., 2013; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010), used self-report questionnaires to examine motivations of Facebook use. Self-report measures require individuals to be aware of motivations of their behavior, an awareness that people often do not have (Bargh, 2006; Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Wegner, 2004). Therefore, by asking people why they use Facebook, the findings may not be accurate if individuals are not aware of why they use Facebook. Furthermore, Quan-Haase and Young (2010), Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) and Kwon et al. (2013) did not differentiate between PFU and AFU, and instead focused on Facebook use as a whole. This provides a limited explanation of why people engage in PFU. The indication that escapism is an important motivator of Facebook use does not necessarily imply that individuals engage in PFU to escape. However, Smock, Ellison, Lampe, and Wohn (2011) did not find escapism to be a significant predictor of Facebook use. However, the Facebook features they investigated were restricted to status updates, comments, wall posts, private messages, chatting, and use of groups — all active uses of Facebook. This suggests that the need to escape may a particular driver of PFU. Overall, Quan-Haase and Young (2010), Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) and Kwon et al. (2013) indicate that escapism is a motivation of Facebook use. However, these studies do not consider PFU and rely on self-report measures to investigate motivations of Facebook use. This indicates that further research is needed to understand why people engage in PFU.

When considering escapism as a motivation of PFU, there are numerous studies in the psychological literature. For example, Masur, Reinecke, Ziegele, and Quiring (2014) investigated motivations of Facebook use and their association with Facebook addiction. Their results suggested that using Facebook to escape from problems mediates a possible addiction towards engaging in this activity. Masur et al.'s (2014) findings are supported by Davis, Flett, and Besser (2002) who indicated that using the Internet for distraction is positively associated with problematic Internet use. Similarly, Yee (2006) found that using an online environment to avoid thinking about real life problems was the strongest predictor of addiction to Internet games. Other research has found that dysfunctional coping strategies (such as distraction, denial, self-blame, substance use, venting, media use, and behavioral disengagement) predict excessive Internet use (Kuss et al., 2016).

Findings suggest that engaging in PFU to escape may play a role in an addiction to PFU. However, whilst Masur et al. (2014) investigated general Facebook use, they did not investigate PFU. This limits the conclusions that can be drawn regarding escapism and addiction within PFU, indicating a gap in the literature. Furthermore, both Yee (2006) and Masur et al. (2014) used a general Internet addiction scale in their studies to assess online gaming addiction and Facebook addiction, respectively. Various scholars have indicated that individuals are addicted to different aspects of the Internet rather than the Internet as a whole (e.g., Griffiths, 2000). Therefore, a scale created to assess Internet addiction is not a suitable measure of Facebook addiction. A number of scales have been developed to assess Facebook addiction, including the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg, & Pallesen, 2012) — one of the few that have been validated (and used in the present study).

Yee (2006) defined escapism as "using the online environment to avoid thinking about real life problems" (p. 774), whilst Masur et al. (2014) described escapism as using Facebook "to take [an individual's] mind off things" (p. 380). Building upon this work, the present study defines escapism as a behavior employed to distract oneself from real life problems. Given the aforementioned findings, the present study aimed to investigate why individuals engage in PFU and whether individuals engage in PFU to escape. Being able to answer such questions is important because many people use Facebook worldwide and are likely to engage in PFU. More specifically, the present study investigated whether individuals are more likely to engage in PFU after a negative daily life event than after a positive daily life event using negative daily life events to represent real life problems that participants wish to escape from. The use of daily life events is informed by the qualitative research of Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011), indicating that when individuals use Facebook to escape, they are often trying to escape from everyday problems.

The experimental methodology employed in the present study extends previous work, which relies on self-report methods, by removing participants' need to be aware of their own behavioral motivations. Instead, escapism is directly manipulated through the use of positive or negative daily life events and assessing whether this changes an individual's likelihood of PFU. Due to findings suggesting that individuals engage in overall Facebook use to escape from their problems (Kwon et al., 2013; Masur et al., 2014; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010), but do not engage in AFU to escape from their problems (Smock et al., 2011), it is hypothesized that escapism predicts PFU. The present study also examines whether individuals who engage in PFU to escape are more likely to be addicted to PFU than those who do not engage in PFU to escape. Given that addiction to general Facebook use is associated with an escape motivation (Masur et al., 2014), it was hypothesized that this relationship will also be apparent within PFU.