



Does personal social media usage affect efficiency and well-being?



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ABSTRACT

Personal social media usage is pervasive in both personal and professional lives. Practitioner articles and news stories have commented on the addicting and distracting nature of social media. Previous empirical research has established the negative effects of distractions on primary tasks. To date, little research has looked at the potentially distracting nature of social media and the negative effects that can arise from usage. This research addresses this gap by investigating the effects of personal social media usage on task performance. To extend this research, I also examined the effects that the personal social media usage has on individuals' technostress and happiness levels. I tested these effects by creating a classroom task environment and measuring subjects' usage of social media and their task performance. From this, it was found that higher amounts of personal social media usage led to lower performance on the task, as well as higher levels of technostress and lower happiness. These results are consistent across different levels of attentional control and multitasking computer self-efficacy. These results suggest that the personal usage of social media during professional (vs. personal or play) times can lead to negative consequences and is worthy of further study.

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1. Introduction

A recent survey found that 86% of online adults in the US and 79% of online adults in Europe use social media (Sverdllov, 2012). It would be hard to argue with the ubiquity of social media, and thus researchers have also paid attention to this growingly popular topic. Within the business disciplines, much research has been conducted on how businesses can leverage social media to increase exposure, profits, and other business goals. These studies have been very useful in examining social media; however, little work has been done on the effects of individual's personal social media usage and negative effects of such usage. There are at least 2.3 billion registered users for the ten most popular social networking websites worldwide combined (Socialnomics.net., 2011). Given this enormous population of users, it comes as no surprise that Facebook.com and YouTube.com are the two most-visited sites on the web, as of August 2014, and that social media usage has become the most common activity on the web (Socialnomics.net., 2012). Due to its ease of use, speed, and reach, social media is fast changing the public discourse in society and setting trends and agendas in topics that range from the environment and politics, to technology and the entertainment industry (Asur & Huberman, 2010).

Social media sites are frequently accessed both at home and at work. Though individuals can maintain a cognitive difference between personal life and professional life, these two aspects are both a part of the whole that is the individual. Understanding effects to both sides of a person's life is important for gaining a holistic picture of the individual. An argument can be made that the time spent using social media is not beneficial to the users, especially in the long term. Popular news outlets frequently report on stories involving negative outcomes of social media usage. For example, though people with low self-esteem consider Facebook an appealing venue for self-disclosure, the low positivity/high negativity of their disclosures elicited generally negative feedback from others (Forest & Wood, 2012). This cycle can lower users' happiness from not receiving the encouragement and positive feedback that they were hoping for. Also, extended use of a technology can lead to greater stresses. These technostresses can lower an individual's well-being.

Social media can also be distracting to users. The hedonic appeal of the technologies along with the ability to be connected to friends and family provides a strong pull to use the systems, both during professional and personal time. A typical worker gets interrupted at least six to eight times a day, which consumes about 28% of a knowledge worker's day (Spira & Feintuch, 2006). Research has shown that workers jump to an interruption about 40% of the time instead of focusing on the original task. When they come back to the primary task from the interruption, it can take up

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to 25 min to return to the original cognitive state (Czerwinski, Cutrell, & Horvitz, 2000). Inefficiencies in task performance can result from the time spent on the interruption and the challenge in mentally returning to the primary task.

For many students, being in the classroom can be analogous to being in a work environment. Students have work tasks to perform while in the classroom and a duty to perform these tasks efficiently, whether listening to a lecture, participating in discussion, working on a task, etc. Students accessing social media sites while in the classroom have the potential to experience many of the same drawbacks as do professionals in the workplace. A survey from Cengage Learning (2014) found that 59% of students are accessing social media in class. Given the potential for individuals to be affected when giving into these distractions/interruptions, this paper investigates this gap by exploring the effect of social media usage on students in a classroom environment. The results from this study will extend the literature concerned with technological distractors, provide preliminary empirical support for or against imposing personal social media usage limits in a classroom, and give justification for further study in more generalizable environments.

RQ: Does personal social media usage affect efficiency and well-being in a classroom environment?

The results of this exploratory study will contribute to the literature on social media and distractions by showing what effects social media usage can have on both external efficiency (performance) and internal states (well-being). As most research investigates only one of these two foci, combining both sides provides value to the literature.

The organization of the paper is as follows. The next section provides background on prior work on social media and the theoretical lens of Distraction–Conflict Theory. The research models, both the efficiency model and the well-being model, are presented along with their hypotheses. Next, the methodology is described and the analysis is performed. Finally, the discussion of the results is presented along with the conclusions.

2. Social media

Social media are a group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (UGC) (Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)). UGC, which describes the various forms of media content created by end-users outside of a professional context and is publically available (Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)), is what differentiates social media from other more traditional forms of media. As an example, online newspapers, such as the New York Times, are not considered UGC due to the professional nature of the material. The comments that can be posted about an article on an online newspaper can be considered UGC due to the creation by end users using their own creativity and its non-professional motivations.

Social media are ubiquitous in today's society. Social media have been tools used to organize political activism and coordinate revolution from the Philippines and Belarus to the 2011 activities in Tunisia and Egypt (McCafferty, 2011; Shirky, 2011). These tools can also be utilized to allow the public to voice their opinions to large firms like Bank of America (Change.org., 2011). It must be noted that social media themselves do not incite this upheaval; social media are tools that allow revolutionary groups to lower the costs of participation, organization, recruitment and training (Papic & Noonan, 2001).

From a psychological aspect, previous research has established three personality traits that are central to social media use:

extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience (Ross et al., 2009; Zywicki & Danowski, 2008). People who are more open to experiences tend to be drawn to social networking sites, as are those with high levels of neuroticism (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010). While extraversion and openness to experiences were positively related to social media use, emotional stability was a negative predictor (Correa et al., 2010). The strength of these predictions varied by gender: Correa et al. (2010) found that only the men with greater degrees of emotional instability were more regular users of the social media applications. Social media applications are used by all different types of people: happy and sad, rich and poor, healthy and sickly, old and young, etc.

Social media usage can also have negative impacts in the workplace. From the results of a large survey conducted by KellyOCG, the Kelly Global Workforce Index (more than 168,000 respondents worldwide), 43% of respondents believe that the use of social media in the workplace negatively impacts productivity (Kelly Services, 2012). In the university classroom, Jacobsen and Forste (2011) found a negative relationship between usage of various types of electronic media, including social networking, and first-semester grades. Heavy Facebook use has been seen in students with a lower grade point average (GPA); though it cannot be said that Facebook is the cause for the lower GPA, there was a significant relationship between usage and GPA (Boogart, 2006). Much of the argument about the negative impacts have been owing to the distractions that are created for an individual while he/she browses social media sites while at work or class. Thus, to examine the negative impacts, the distractions literature is leveraged to provide a foundational background.

3. Distraction–Conflict Theory

Distraction–Conflict Theory (DCT) (Baron, 1986; Groff, Baron, & Moore, 1983; Sanders & Baron, 1975) provides a theoretical lens for understanding the effect that distractions and interruptions have on performance. The distraction–conflict model can be broken down into three causal steps (Baron, 1986): (1) others are distracting, (2) distraction can lead to attentional conflict, and (3) attentional conflict elevates drive. This elevated drive leads to impaired performance and motor behavior on complex tasks. DCT provides insight into evaluating social media as a technological “other” that distracts individuals from their primary tasks.

When a decision maker is exposed to an interruption or distraction, they may forget some of the information needed for processing the primary task and, therefore, some cues are lost or never enter working memory (Speier, Valacich, & Vessey, 1999). As the decision maker completes the interruption task and returns to the primary task, a recovery period is needed to reprocess information that was forgotten while attending to the interruption or lost from working memory due to capacity (incoming cues being greater than a decision maker can process) and structural interferences (decision maker has to attend to two inputs with the same physiological mechanisms) (Kahneman, 1973). Consequences of interruptions include mental attention and effort difficulties (Baeker, Grudin, Buxton, & Greenberg, 1995), resource rationing (Baron, 1986), and impaired task processing (Cellier & Eyrolle, 1992; Schuh, 1978). Fig. 1 shows a timeline of how an interruption can consume time previously allocated for the primary task. Concerning social media, its ubiquity and ease of access make it a potentially powerful distraction mechanism. With the example of the social networking site Facebook, distractions can be initialized by sound (when a user receives a chat message) and by sight (when the web browser blinks colors or changes page titles for receiving a new chat message or relevant posting). Even simply knowing that one's friends and family may be available through the social media at any given moment can be a distractor.

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