



Gender and Facebook motives as predictors of specific types of Facebook use: A latent growth curve analysis in adolescence



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ABSTRACT

Despite increasing evidence that specific types of Facebook use (i.e., active private, active public, and passive Facebook use) are differently related to adolescents' well-being, little is known how these types function over the course of adolescence and whether gender and Facebook motives may predict the initial level and changes in these types over time. To address these gaps, Flemish adolescents (ages 12–19) were questioned at three different time points, with six months in between ($N_{\text{Time1}} = 1866$). Latent growth curve models revealed that active private Facebook use *increased* over the course of adolescence, whereas public Facebook use *decreased*. Passive Facebook use, however, remained *stable*. In addition, gender and Facebook motives were related to initial levels of specific types of Facebook use, and predictive of dynamic change in specific types of Facebook use over time. The discussion focuses on the understanding and implications of these findings.

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The use of social networking sites (SNSs) among adolescents has grown fast in recent years. Reports indicate that 92% of European adolescents report being a member of at least one SNS (Tsitsika et al., 2014). Of these SNSs, Facebook remains the most widely used (Lenhart, 2015). Due to the high amount of time spent on Facebook (e.g., Junco, 2013), concerns have been raised about the potential outcomes of Facebook use on teens' well-being. However, studies have shown that specific types of Facebook have been related to different well-being outcomes (e.g., Frison & Eggermont, 2015). Nevertheless, these studies disregarded the possibility that specific types of Facebook use may display different dynamic processes throughout adolescence. Besides that, it is also unknown whether these types of Facebook use develop differently for boys and girls and for adolescents with specific Facebook motives. This three-wave panel study therefore aims to examine dynamic changes in adolescents' active private, active public, and passive Facebook use over time, and to explore whether adolescents' gender and Facebook motives may predict (the dynamic changes in) these types of Facebook use over time.

This study hereby extends prior research in the following ways. First, by using a developmental framework to examine specific types of Facebook uses over multiple measurement occasions in adolescence, this study not only offers a deeper understanding of potential trends in specific types of Facebook use over time, but may also inform future prevention and intervention programs that aim to reduce harmful types of Facebook use (e.g., Verduyn et al., 2015). Second, by examining

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adolescents' gender and Facebook motives as predictors of variation in use and trends, this study allows to acquire greater insight in adolescents' gender as a potential vulnerability factor of their Facebook use and how Facebook motives can help explain the impact of using Facebook on teens' well-being.

Specific types of Facebook use: prevalence

It is not surprising that concerns have been raised about the potential negative outcomes of adolescents' SNS use, as spending time on SNSs, including Facebook, has become part of many teenagers' daily activities. For instance, Junco (2013) indicated that college students report spending an average of more than two hours per day on Facebook. However, scholars (e.g., Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010) argue that time spent on Facebook can be filled out in various ways; some use Facebook primarily to interact with others, whereas others mainly use Facebook to know what is going on in other people's lives. In line with the study of Frison and Eggermont (2015), this study differs between active and passive Facebook use.

Active Facebook use refers to "activities that facilitate interaction between the user and other Facebook friend(s)" (Frison & Eggermont, 2015, p. 4). These activities can occur either in a public or private Facebook setting. Active private Facebook use thus includes activities such as Facebook messaging, whereas active public Facebook use refers to activities such as status updating or photo sharing. Passive Facebook use, on the other hand, refers to "the monitoring of other people's lives by viewing the content of others' profiles without direct exchanges between the users" (Frison & Eggermont, 2015, p. 4). A passive Facebook user thus consumes content on Facebook but does not communicate with the content owner about it. According to Frison and Eggermont (2015), adolescents engage the most in active private Facebook use, followed respectively by passive and active public Facebook use. In line with these findings, other studies indicated that Facebook users engage more in passive, than in active (public) use (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; Tobin, Vanman, Verreynne, & Saeri, 2014; Verduyn et al., 2015).

Facebook use in adolescence: developmental considerations

Adolescence is characterized by various changes; biological, psychological, and social (Steinberg, 2005). One of the central developmental tasks facing adolescents is that of achieving a coherent identity, i.e., a strong and stable sense of self (Erikson, 1950, 1968). A second major task is that of developing close relationships with peers (Brown, 2004), as teens face an increasing need for autonomy and independence. At the same time, research has shown that when entering adolescence, teens spend greater amount of time on SNSs (Rideout, 2015). This is not surprising as SNSs offer adolescent users an ideal social context to cope with the developmental tasks they are facing (Borca, Bina, Keller, Gilbert, & Begotti, 2015; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). We therefore believe that adolescents will turn to specific types of Facebook use to cope with these developmental challenges and will even change their Facebook habits to meet their specific developmental needs. These expectations are built on the *co-construction model* (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). This model argues that adolescents construct and co-construct their online worlds, which may lead to psychologically connected online and offline lives. As a result, online worlds offer adolescents a new social setting to combat the developmental tasks faced in their offline worlds.

First, we expect that teens will turn to *active private Facebook use* throughout adolescence, as interacting on Facebook in a private setting is the ideal tool to satisfy teens' growing need to establish and maintain close relationships with peers. However, we expect that teens will turn away from *active public Facebook use* throughout adolescence. The public Facebook setting in particular offers adolescents a perfect platform for self-presentation and thus for satisfying their need for identity exploration. Especially during young adolescence, self-presentation becomes particularly important, as teens are just starting to explore their identity (Brinthaup & Lipka, 2002). Livingstone (2008), for instance, found that younger adolescents presented their identity more often on SNSs compared to older adolescents. Similarly, Subrahmanyam and Smahel (2011) suggested that sharing photos to manage one's self-presentation may be especially important for younger adolescents.

Second, we expect that teens will turn to *passive Facebook activities* throughout adolescence, as Facebook browsing allows users to be easily reminded of one's personal connections and thus to satisfy adolescents' need to belong to a peer group. In other words, through passive consumption of Facebook content, users can constantly update themselves about other people's lives, which may fulfill teens' belongingness needs (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). In addition, teens may also turn to passive Facebook features more during the course of adolescence, as it provides them a convenient tool for coping with increased feelings of boredom (Spaeth, Weichold, & Silbereisen, 2015).

Gender as a predictor

Although little is known about why some adolescents use Facebook more than others, the literature does suggest that adolescents' gender may partly account for these differences. Based on previous studies, we particularly expect that girls will have higher initial levels of all three types of Facebook use than boys. Moreover, various studies reported that girls spend more time on SNSs than boys (e.g., Rideout, 2015; Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015; Tsitsika et al., 2014). With regard to Facebook, research showed that female college students use Facebook more than male college students (e.g., Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011). For instance, studies have shown that female Facebook users spent more time passively using Facebook (e.g.,

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