Followers of the Façade: The Rising Addiction of Social Media

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Abstract

This research will focus on the psychological effects contributing and resulting from the growing addiction to social media. Social media allows the ability to connect with friends, family and provides a place where ideas and memories can be shared. However, when the content shared is filtered, it creates a false persona established solely to be deemed valued and relevant by followers. The other portion of the research will focus on the inadequacy followers are left with when the content of their reality is not as intriguing as the realities they view online. Social media is a space that allows people to express, influence, and share aspects of their lives, but when these aspects are filtered, it creates a distorted perception of reality.

Keywords: reality, filter, persona, social media, self presentation, self-esteem, facade, positive affirmation
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According to Statista, 2017 as of 2018 nearly 2.62 billion people spend their day checking social media, whether it is capturing the perfect photo for Instagram, keeping up with all the latest tweets throughout the day or posting a thoughtful Facebook status to conclude the night (Statista, 2017). The obligation to capture and post everything has become the new social norm; however, so has the psychological effects and consequences that come with it.

While the rise of social media worldwide is at a high, the multitude of social platforms is affecting the portrayal of reality and bringing it to an all time low. The habit of creating false personalities has turned social platforms into a façades. These false personalities manifest in what authors Levi-Beiz and Turel classify as the “Facebook-self.” In their article, “Characteristics and psychological predictors of false self-presentation on Facebook,” Levi and Turel (2015) examine the psychological factors influencing social media façades. The subjects of the study vary in gender, age, marital status and educational background. Of the 258 participants 74.7% are women, 25.3% are men and 13 have chosen to not reveal their gender. The age demographics are between 20 and 65 years old, and 52.3% of users have either a Bachelors or a Masters degree (Levi and Turel, 2015). Participants’ behaviors are analyzed and compared to their actual lives through a series of questionnaires. The results of the study reveal a correlation between false personalities portrayed online and levels of self-esteem and authenticity that stem from attachment styles of anxiousness and avoidance (Levi and Turel, 2015). Women in particular are shown to have higher anxious attachment levels and lower self-esteem in comparison to men, while single participants have higher anxious levels in comparison to participants who are married. When it comes to educational background, users with a high school education have significantly higher anxious levels than those with a Bachelor’s degree (Levi and
Turel 2015). Overall the study concludes that the average “false Facebook-self” personalities have higher levels of avoidant, anxious attachment styles and lower levels of esteem and authenticity (Levi and Turel, 2015). Levi and Turel conclude that high levels of these psychological factors are responsible for the “short comings in one’s personality” that later overcompensates itself online (Levi and Turel, 2015). Social media platforms such as Facebook become a “playground” for individuals who must overcompensate for their personality due to their inability to express themselves and communicate with others in reality (Levi and Turel, 2015). Also, supporting a similar conclusion is the research conducted by Dr. Cecilie Andraessen, who has published a psychological scale known as “The Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS).” The BFAS concludes that “people with social insecurities were more likely to have greater social media dependency…” (Edwards, 2017). Essentially, social media began as a platform where users around the world could keep in touch with loved ones, former classmates and colleagues. In the past it was a place where memories could forever reside and be remembered; however, this is quickly being overshadowed by the necessity to appeal to followers. Posting and sharing as a way of communicating and maintaining relationships is essentially what social media should be about. Posting only with the intention to be seen as relevant and intriguing through a fictitious lifestyle is a whole other concept that inadvertently reveals more about an individual’s reality than they may want to accept.

In Margeret Hall and Simon Caton’s research article, “Am I who I say I am? Obtrusive self-representation and personality recognition on Facebook,” it is self-reported that individuals who use Facebook in order to be recognized, are half as likely to have offline friends on Facebook in comparison to the rest of the population (Hall and Caton, 2017). The research also
shows that individuals who agree with statements such as, “I can determine myself what I do or do not show others” are less likely to reach out to offline friends, yet more likely to seek out unknown online friends (Hall and Caton, 2017). Hall and Caton’s findings bear a similarity to that of Levi and Turel’s 2015 research, explicating that the lack of communication in reality, reimburses itself through the constant sharing of content on social media in order to be deemed relevant.

The concern of self representation on social platforms leads to a great amount of self-censorship, brought on by individuals’ abilities to create and present their own reality. Sites such as Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and Facebook become a form of escapism for those displeased with their lives. On social media individuals can take on the role of whomever they want, adopt various personas, create elaborated myths regarding their achievements and skills and present a life, that unbeknownst to followers, ceases to exist after logging out. Author Zizi Papacharissi’s journal, “Without You, I’m Nothing: Performances of the Self on Twitter” expands on the heightening of “self-awareness and self-monitoring” which occurs through a “constant state of redaction” (Papacharissi, 2010). According to Papacharissi self-monitoring and self-censorship are “strategies for negotiating the self across multiple media networked audiences” (Papacharissi, 2010). The habit of editing and filtering one’s self is a way of conveying “a compelling narrative about the self, aimed at maintaining a socially coherent environment” for an audience that may be “collapsed, imagined or actual” (Papacharissi 2010). Papacharissi’s journal sustains the idea that the initial concept of social media has been eradicated and replaced with the necessity to appeal to an audience.
In their study, *Selective Self-Presentation and Social Comparison Through Photographs on Social Networking Sites*, authors Jesse Fox and Megan Vendemia conclude that “the emergence of social technologies will continue to shape how individuals craft their public personae.” With the evolution of technology, comes even more pressure to present a façade of reality. Fox and Vendemia’s study covers the issue of “Objectification and Social Media” (Fox and Vendemia, 2016) found particularly in women. Women experience a greater social pressure when it comes to self-appearance in comparison to men (Fox and Vendemia, 2016). This pressure carries itself onto social platforms where women reportedly post and edit their photos more frequently in order to appease their “Self-presentation” and elicit positive affirmation from peers (Fox, and Vendemia, 2016). The urge to receive positive affirmation from peers is also especially true in adolescence.

As adolescents begin their quest towards “developing cohesive self-identities, they typically engage in greater levels of social comparison and interpersonal feedback-seeking” (Harter, 2012). Generally the path to finding one’s self can be a long trying journey; however, when social media is thrown into the path of identity it can make the process far more strenuous. There is nothing more important to adolescents than the approval of their peers, which easily makes them fall victims to the façade of social media and feedback-seeking, simply because of how willing they are to filter and self-censor their identities in order to appease others. In the research, “*Self-concept Clarity and Online Self-Presentation in Adolescents,*” authors Chris Fullwood, Billy James and Chao-Hwa Chen Wilson conclude a correlation between self representation and self-concept clarity. Social media allows adolescences that lack clarity in their sense of self to “try out different self presentations,” in an “attempt to resolve identity crises”
(Fullwood, James and Wilson, 2016), reinforcing the idea of how easy it is to fall victim to façades especially when there is obscurity in one’s identity. This obscurity is what leads adolescence to seek feedback and affirmation from their peers. Positive affirmations elicit the addiction of social media. The reward of being deemed valued by peers, through likes, and heart icons, the re-blogging and commentating of content, is essentially what coerces 2.62 billion to social media (Statista, 2017). Positive affirmation can be pleasing, it is satisfying to know that there are others cheering you on and basking in your glory; however, it is very easy to get lost in the spotlight.

In the online study published in “Computers in Human Behavior” researchers Elliot Panek, Yioryos Nardis and Sara Konrath claimed that, “Facebook is a mirror and Twitter is a megaphone” (Panek, Nardis and Konrath, 2013). The study concluded that “among young adult college students” those who posted more frequently on Twitter “scored higher in certain types of narcissism” while “middle aged adults” narcissists updated their status more frequently on Facebook (Panek, Nardis and Konrath, 2013). Panek explicated the concept behind this correlation quite simply; “It's about curating your own image, how you are seen, and also checking on how others respond to this image," he said. "Middle-aged adults usually have already formed their social selves, and they use social media to gain approval from those who are already in their social circles" (Panek, 2013). In college students, users use Twitter as a “megaphone” where they can “over evaluate the importance of their own opinions” (Panek, 2013). The research concluded that overall “narcissistic college students and their adult counterparts use social media in different ways to boost their egos and control others' perceptions of them” (Panek, 2013). The thrill of being noticed is a natural high, that when experienced, it is
hard to come down from. Unfortunately, not everyone gets to experience this high. Society has sold the idea that fulfillment comes with creating the “perfect” self presentation on social media, but when the outcome of self-presentation does not live up to expectations, feelings of inadequacy begin to surface.

The article, “Laughing and crying” by Marcus Gilroy discuss a 2017 research which indicates a correlation between “posting updates, liking other people’s posts and clicking on links posted by other users” had a negative correlation with well being. Another study presented in the article explicated an association between the more strangers, relatives and friends you follow on “picture sharing networks” such as Instagram, with symptoms of depression (Gilroy 2017). The survey conducted by, “The Royal Society for Public Health” indicated that “Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram all led to increased feelings of depression, anxiety, poor body images and loneliness” (Rachel Ehmke 2018). The decline in mental health occurring through adolescence is result of the inadequacy that occurs when the expectations of self-representation are not met while the need for comparison remains.

The rising addiction of social media has placed self-representation to an unconceivable level, coercing social platforms users to stop at nothing in order to reach it, even if it means creating a façade of personalities and realities. The damage that can occur through the addictions of receiving self affirmation or comparing realities with other users can have an immense effect. It is essential that social media users are able to distinguish between the filtered realities of the online world with the true reality, learning to detach yourself from the need for perfect self-representation, comparison and facades of platforms, saves you from succumbing to a deteriorating mental health and addiction of social media.
Work Cited


