

# Investigating The Impact Of Social Networking On Mental Health: The Effects of Facebook Intensity on Overall Depression Anxiety and Stress

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## Abstract

- The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between an individual's Facebook intensity, meaning how active or inactive an individual is on Facebook, and their overall depression anxiety and stress levels.
- A significant relationship was found between how many Facebook friends a participant has and their overall depression, anxiety and stress. There was also a significant result found in the difference in depression anxiety and stress between males and females.



## Understanding The Rationale (Facebook).

- In the modern world, technology is always becoming increasingly easy to access. Originally, the internet was used by a very select few individuals. Now, in 2018, computers have become available to the majority of Irish homes where according to The Central Statistics Office 89 percent of homes in Ireland can easily gain access to the internet (2017 pg. 1).
- Among the many social networking sites that exist, Facebook may be most popular. Facebook was originally programmed in 2003 by Mark Zuckerberg (The Harvard Crimson, 2003). Facebook overtime, grew in popularity through universities in America (Philips, 2007) and soon dominated the world of social networking.
- Facebook is used regularly as a platform to broadcast the great life events and achievements that people go through. Facebook users, while active, are steadily exposed to post after post containing images and scripts that may make everyone else's life seem better than their own. In these situations, a social comparison occurs.

## Social Comparison

Baron, Byrne, & Branscombe, (2006) describe social comparison as "a psychological mechanism that analyses how good or bad we are at something or establishing some sort of baseline line by comparing our abilities to the abilities of others".



- Previous research has shown, with the application of the Higgins self-discrepancy theory, that social comparison can cause depression and anxiety (Higgins, et al 1985).
- It's possible, that past studies (Labrague, 2014) which have shown a positive relationship between Facebook intensity and depression, anxiety and stress, could have occurred as a result of heightened social comparison.

## Methods:

Firstly, a self-reporting merged questionnaire was created which consisted of the Facebook Intensity scale (Ellison et al, 2007) and The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond et al, 1995).

The questionnaire was then generated into digital form and administered through various social networking sites. During the administration process a sample of 216 participants was obtained, all of whom were above the age of 18 years.

After the data was collected a single multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test was run (Independent variable: gender. Dependent variable: DASS). Three separate multiple regressions were also run. Independent /Predictor variable = Facebook intensity. Dependent/Criterion variable = depression, anxiety and stress (one at a time).

## Hypothesis and Aims:

The research question was aimed at shedding light on whether or not high Facebook activity/intensity has any predicting factors in an individual's depression anxiety and stress. The information attained through this study is useful for any and all people who either use Facebook regularly or are living with depression anxiety or stress.

- Hypothesis 1: There will be gender differences in depression anxiety and stress levels among participants.
- Hypothesis 2: There will be no gender differences in depression anxiety and stress levels among participants.
- Hypothesis 3: Facebook intensity will have an effect on overall depression.
- Hypothesis 4: Facebook intensity will have an effect on overall anxiety.
- Hypothesis 5: Facebook intensity will have an effect on overall stress.
- Hypothesis 6: Facebook intensity will have no effect on mental health and mood disorders.



## Discussion:

## Results:

During a MANOVA investigating the variance between gender and depression anxiety and stress A Wilks' Lambda found a significant difference in overall depression anxiety and stress scores in males and females where Wilks' Lambda = 0.95,  $F(3,209) = 3.88, p = .01$ .

While running each multiple regression it was found that the number of friends each participant had, had a significant relationship to their overall depression anxiety and stress scores where:

Depression = ( $R^2 = .097, F = (8,207) = 2.77, p < .006$ ).

Anxiety = ( $R^2 = .166, F = (8, 207) = 5.14, p < .005$ )

Stress = ( $r = .335, n = 216, p < .001$ )

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of social networking on mental health, more specifically, the research question pertained to whether or not an individual's Facebook intensity effects their overall depression anxiety and stress levels. According to the data it has been shown that among males and females, depression and anxiety is more prevalent within males. The current study also suggests that females have a higher stress level than males. In relation to the effects of Facebook Intensity on depression anxiety and stress, the findings are suggesting that several elements or variables in the Facebook Intensity scale do not predict or pre-determine any effects on an individual's overall depression anxiety and stress. One element of the Facebook intensity scale, which pertains to how many Facebook friends an individual has, has shown a significant relationship with the participants depression anxiety and stress scores. It can be concluded that males and females of 18 years or above can have higher levels of depression anxiety and stress when they have an above average number of connections or friends on Facebook.

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