Social Media Depression Overcome
The Unintended Effects of Our Favorite Pastime

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Abstract

The researcher in this paper read and reviewed Trevor Poulin book *Social Media Depression Overcome The Unintended Effects of Our Favourite Pastime*. The book discusses how the use of social media can effect an individuals mental capacity and offers suggestions on how to prevent social media addiction and depression. There were discrepancies in the information and the review discusses them and offers suggestions.

Key Words: depression, social media use, communication, technology

Social Media Depression; Overcome The Unintended Effects of Our Favourite Pastime, by Trevor Poulin. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015. 84 pages.

Introduction

Trevor Poulin studies communications because he is concerned with assisting individuals improve their ability to interact with one another. He helps individuals communicate information in a way that improves their peer relationships and interactions. Poulin argues that so much depend upon our ability to communicate effectively. Poulin helps individuals feel confident that they send the right message to reach their goals. Through the evolution and perpetual development of social media and the Internet, the use of cell phones has increased enormously. Some social media apps track the number of steps an individual take (Steps Pedometer & Steps Counter, Pacer, Argus, and Map My Walk) (Pappas, 2015), the number of hours a person may sleep (Sleepbot, Sleep Cycle, Beddit, and Sleeptime) (Horowitz, 2015), and the caloric intake (Lose It, MyFitnessPal, MyNetDiary Pro, and Food Diary) (Pappas, 2015). Since the launch of online social media sites, such as Facebook, individuals feel the need to connect to their colleagues, peers, friends, and family. Research made by Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan, and Marrington (2013) "showed clear relationships between Facebook connectedness and psychological outcomes" (608). The rapid increase of cell phone use can be due to the increased use of social media platforms. Poulin discusses the possible links between social media use and depression. This book discusses the trends and effects of social media dependence.

Chapter Review

Trevor Poulin has written numerous books including How to Start a Conversation and Keep it Going: Master Small Talk to Flirt, Sell, and Network with Charisma, The Body Language Training You Need to Look like a Leader: Learn the Essential Nonverbal Communication Optimizing Habits, and Impromptu Speaking: Your Name Has Been Called, It's Your Turn to Speak, What Do You Say? Poulin's recent book contains twelve chapters, which discuss the comparison problem, social interaction, validation seeking, and how to minimize the negative effects of social media.

Social Media Depression; Overcome The Unintended Effects of Our Favourite Pastime begins with a Hawaii vacation scenario from two perspectives. The first perspective is from an individual who is not having a good time on vacation due to inclement weather. The second point of view is an individual who appears to be having a great time on social media. The purpose of the introduction is to get readers to think of about how some users on social media platforms deceive or "mislead" their "followers" or readers into thinking or believing one thing, which is not true. Poulin suggests that this is the number one problem for individuals who may develop social media depression. Poulin argues that when individuals browse social media they are more than likely being "duped" from their post, which causes damages to the persons who are browsing the post. He states that people who are deceived by the post feel envious, jealous, doubtful, and even begin to compare themselves (lives and current situation) to the life of the individual's deceitful post.

According to the PEW Research Centers 2014 Social Media Update, among all American adults ages 18 and older, 58 percent of individuals who completed the omnibus survey are on Facebook and 23 percent are on LinkedIn. In the second chapter of the book, Poulin states that "the effects of using social media are not completely understood" (7), yet the author did not note any research supporting that claim. Jung (2011) states that there are five negative effects of social media on society and individuals including: A false sense of connection, cyber-bullying, decreased productivity, and privacy. There is an abundance of research on the effects of social media use, and Poulin's statement implied otherwise.

The next two chapters discuss how individuals compare themselves to others. Poulin suggests that "when people see others excel in an area, or obtain something interesting, they believe they should also have those accomplishments in their own life" (7) meaning that people compare themselves to how and what other people are doing trying to "keep up with the Joneses." Social media celebrities, in fact, make their money by advertising products given to them by different companies, which is a new marketing scheme. Businesses use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest to market products such as jewelry, clothing, weightless supplements, and technology to get their product spread across the world. Harris and Rae (2009) state "social networks will play a key role in the future of marketing" (26). There are many celebrities that are paid to advertise to their thousands even million of followers on the social media sites and platforms, which portrays a certain image to their audience. In a study by Saeed and Bhatia (2014) suggest, "celebrities consumers are concerned about social acceptance, and the opinion of others or product relates to charms … and helps with persuasion" (2). Consequently, Poulin argues that when individuals are bored, they browse their social media feeds when their current mood is already low and ultimately end up comparing the exaggerated lives of others to their "bland, boring moment." However, Poulin also notes that "the apparent difference in the quality of life seem drastically more significant" (16) when making that comparison. The Centers for Disease Control (2011) defines the quality of life as a "broad multidimensional concept that usually includes subjective evaluations of both positive and negative aspects of life," yet the health-related definition includes determinants of health and their correlates (risk, conditions, socioeconomic status, social support and functional status). Poulin's statement suggests that when making this comparison from one life to another lowers the quality of life of the individual who makes the comparison. Poulin also suggests, "comparing yourself to individuals who are at different stages of life is an unequal comparison to … the boring moments of your own life" (20). Furthermore, there is an abundance of research and theories on human development, including Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, Maslow's hierarchy or needs, and Freud's stages of psychosexual development yet Poulin had not mentioned any of these stages to solidify his argument.

There are many social media platforms to choose from such as YouTube, Pinterest, Twitter, Facebook, Tumbler, and LinkedIn. An article by Stobing (2015) suggests combining all social media platforms into one source to keep up with all of the applications. When combining everything an individual see's in social media from hundred's of people is what Poulin calls a "social media super person" (21). Poulin notes that this comparison is unrealistic, and the social media user is creating an "impossible standard to live up to" (22). Poulin also notes that making this comparison will set an individual up for a "guaranteed failure" (22). Moreover, this is an impracticable assumption that people would even think to make this type of comparison, in which the author is assuming that most individuals are not able to realize that it is possible. In this case, Poulin needs an accurate, reliable, and valid source to persuade readers that he has proven this assumption. Going further into the chapter, Poulin notes that, "some people might have more money than you, but you might have more free time then they do …. the super person has everything, so why can't you?" (23). Poulin's perspective or point of view is unclear in these two statements, and the tone is very discouraging to readers. Is he suggesting that most people are poor, and individuals should be more like the super person or Poulin suggesting that people should not be like the super person and save money on realistic things? Still, Poulin also states "no one can beat the super person" (26). Nevertheless, the statements are contradicting, and there is no research to support or refute this claim.

The next chapter discusses how most people would only post or discuss their extravagant details or moments of their lives on social media and leave out the boring or average moments. The author mentioned the example of individuals who post pictures of their dinners from five-star restaurants but never post photos of their boring or average meals. The purpose of this chapter was to inform readers that most people with hundred and thousands of followers or friends live the same ordinary life that the average person does, but only show the "best parts making it look more interesting" (29) than it is. Furthermore, posting about their "best parts" makes it more entertaining, and depending on what entertains you, your social media feed will be tailored to fit your entertainment needs whether it is beauty, shopping, cars, food, or the newest technology.

Social media websites such as Instagram, Tumbler, and Twitter can give followers access to an individual's life. Research by Stever and Lawson (2013) suggest, "celebrities use Twitter to reach out to fans and make their relationship with them more real" (350). In the next chapter, Poulin discusses celebrities, and how in this generation, we have more access to celebrities then we have ever had. The author discusses how celebrities can interact with their fans through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Yet, Poulin states how this can directly influence social media users in a negative way through comparison. Poulin notes that making the comparison of "boring life… to the life of the rich and famous" (38) makes the person life seem and feel even more boring than it is. Poulin's statement infers that individuals are in fact doing this, and it can lead to depression. However, research by Stever and Lawson (2013) indicate that individual's follow or favorite celebrities because they "are viewed as role models for positive social change" (351). Poulin's argument should include both the positive and negative aspects of following individuals who are rich and famous, and in the same social (economic) group. Poulin later suggests following groups that portray support and individuals who heighten confidence (63).

Non-verbal communication is an assemblage of expressions and body language an individual communicates. Poulin mentions in the next chapter that there have been studies shown that nonverbal communication makes up 90 percent of our communication. However, Poulin does not cite any research. Facial expressions, eye behaviors, gestures, postures, and tone of voice are all examples of

nonverbal communication that helps to provide feedback, regulate the flow of conversation, and facilitate face-to-face conversation. Conversely, communication through text messages, social media sites, and platforms can be very misleading and misinterpreted. Research shows that the lack of non-verbal communication in online media, such as text messaging, emails, and social media, can cause problems for a receiver trying to interpret the message (Sarbaugh-Thompson & Feldman, 1998). Poulin then explains that the invention of emoticons has tried to solve the problem of nonverbal (Mis) communication yet others would argue that the use of emoticons enhances the conversation. Poulin argues, "social media strips our communication down to words alone" (44); missing that real connection you might have received if the conversation was in person or face to face. Poulin goes on to explain "that feeling of being connected to other people is one of our fundamental human needs" (47) and "social media provides a platform where people can express themselves … to seek validation" (49). Implying individuals addicted to social media use different platforms to become more connected, to get a sense of acceptance from their peers, and to seek validation. Individuals reading this book should interpret the statement as a lecture and suggestion. Previous research challenges the idea of building online relationships, and argues online relationships are more hostile and less fulfilling than traditional in-person or face-to-face relationships (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis, 1998). Whereas other researchers argue electronic communication provides a sense of intimacy without the emotional investment that leads to close and enduring relationships (Slouka, 1995). Ultimately, it is up to the individual to decide what and how to focus their social (media) relationships. However, Poulin should offer information on the impact of both face-to-face and online relationships.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are worth billion(s) of dollars (Unknown, 2015). In the last few chapters of the book, Poulin discusses that social media is inevitably a business. Poulin also argues that social media is a forum for free entertainment, and the customers are the individuals who advertise on the sites and the individuals' time and attention to the products are buying the products that the advertisers are selling. Poulin also notes that the social media applications and platforms create alerts for the cell phones and computers, to entice the users to open the application or web address increasing the time spent on the social media platforms daily implying that this would eventually become a habit then ultimately an addiction. To decrease the adverse effects of social media, Poulin suggests "don't compare the moment you're bored, and just trying to pass time using social media, to the exaggerated highlights posted by your friends and celebrities" (60) but to "balance your social media feed by following people and groups who makes post which boost your confidence and support you" (63). Additionally, Poulin suggests changing social media habits, ignoring or turning off the alerts, log how much time spent on social media, learn a new skill, find real world activities to fill time, and doing something more productive.

Summary

Trevor Poulin's book, Social Media Depression Overcome The Unintended Effects of Our Favourite Pastime, offers a guide discussing current communication trends and discusses how the use of social media can affect an individual's mental capacity and offers suggestions on how to prevent social media addiction and depression. Although Poulin was not able to write about or offer medical suggestions, the author notes other suggestions in a non-medical capacity. The first impression of the book was that it was very opinioned and bias and not tailored to a certain audience. However, the Poulin noted different capacities onto which an individual may become "depressed" or affected by social media negatively. There were many concepts the Poulin developed that hold truth to social media. For example, it is possible and highly likely that individuals compare themselves with other people on social media. However, there is no evidence to prove that a social media user would compare themselves to their entire newsfeed and create a social media super person. Moreover, Poulin provided an abundance of information, which can be supported and reinforced by legitimate sources or evidence that confirms his statements are accurate and truthful and not just hypothesized and assumed. For example, Poulin noted, "the effects of using social media are not completely understood" (7). Research by O'Keeffe and Clark empathizes there are both benefits and risks of children and adolescents using social media including socialization and communication, enhanced learning opportunities, and accessing health information, the risk includes cyberbullying and online harassment, sexting, Facebook depression, the influence of advertisements on buying and more. In addition, there were no specifications on the age of addiction or categories of individuals, such as a teenager in high school or freshmen in college. Poulin mentioned, "comparing yourself to individuals who are at different stages of life is an unequal comparison to … the boring moments of your own life" (20) is an unfair comparison yet; Poulin does not give any example for the reader to apply his statement. Meaning, many individuals are using the Internet, research by Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr proposes, "usage of different social networking sites varies by gender and race." However, Poulin's argument was not clear and there is an urgent need for clarification. On another note, Poulin recognized that this is an emerging issue, and serious precaution is necessary. Poulin offered several suggestions to prevent addiction and encouraged his readers to focus on enjoying the fundamental elements of life. In conclusion, Poulin's book serves as a good starting point for bringing this emerging issue into discussion and there is a severe demand for exploration in this field.

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