

Effects of Online Prosocial Acts on Mental Health: A Correlational Study

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Background

Social Media Usage Statistics

- In 2021, 72% of Americans reported social media use (SMU), such as Instagram or Facebook (Auxier & Anderson 2021).
- A majority of social media users say they use a site daily.

Prosocial behavior

- Prosocial behavior is voluntary behavior that is aimed to benefit particular others or to promote harmonious relationships (Erreygers et al., 2018).
- People tend to engage in more prosocial behavior when they are in a positive affective state, specifically when in a state of gratitude (Bartlett & DeSteno 2006).
- Engaging in prosocial behavior leads to less stress-induced negative mental health (Raposa et al., 2016).

Social Media Issues

- Scrolling through negative content leads to a decrease in affect, while scrolling through positive content has no influence (Buchanan et al., 2021).
- Passive interaction with content leads to a decrease in affect while active interaction has no influence (Verduyn et al., 2021).

Online Prosocial Behavior

- Online prosocial behavior is correlated with F2F prosocial behavior (Wright & Li, 2011).
- When people are the recipient of prosocial behavior online, they are more likely to behave prosocially online (Erreygers et al., 2018).

Hypothesis

Based on research on face-to-face prosocial behavior, we predict that online prosocial behavior will be positively associated with higher self-esteem and lower anxiety and depression.

Engaging in or receiving acts of prosocial behavior in online settings—as with face-to-face settings—is associated with higher levels of mental well-being.

Methods (cont)

Participants: N= 275 U.S Adults

Scales

- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
- PROMIS Depression Scale
- PROMIS Anxiety Scale
- Face-To-Face Prosocial Behavior Scale (developed for study)
- Online Prosocial Behavior Scale (developed for study)

Procedure

- Participants recruited from Prolific.
- Completed Qualtrics survey about SMU, prosocial behavior, and mental health.

Implications

Both engaging in and receiving acts of prosocial behavior are important for healthy well-being.

Online prosocial behavior may help moderate the negative mental health effects of social media.

More research must be done to establish a causal link between online prosocial behavior and healthier mental well-being.

Citations

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Methods

Gender	Man	Woman	Non-Binary	Prefer not to answer
Number (%)	127 (46%)	138 (50%)	8 (2.9%)	1 (.4%)

Race	Asian	Black	White	Other
Number (%)	20 (7.2%)	28 (10.1%)	213 (77.2%)	4 (1.4%)

Prosocial Behavior	Self-Esteem	Depression	Anxiety
Face-to-Face Engaging	.31**	-.18**	-.09
Face-to-Face Receiving	.37**	-.28**	-.24**
Online Engaging	.14*	-.05	.03
Online Receiving	.21**	-.14*	-.07

* Indicates significance at .05

** Indicates significance at .01