Effects of Online Prosocial Acts on Mental Health: A Correlational Study
Liam Pyne & Pat Swanson

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Man</th>
<th>Woman</th>
<th>Non-Binary</th>
<th>Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number (%)</td>
<td>127 (46%)</td>
<td>138 (50%)</td>
<td>8 (2.9%)</td>
<td>1 (.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number (%)</td>
<td>20 (7.2%)</td>
<td>28 (10.1%)</td>
<td>213 (77.2%)</td>
<td>4 (1.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prosocial Behavior</th>
<th>Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Engaging</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Receiving</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Engaging</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Receiving</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates significance at .05
** Indicates significance at .01

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
Buchanan, et al. (2021). Brief exposure to social media during the COVID-19 pandemic: Doom-scrolling has negative emotional consequences, but kindness-scrolling does not. Plos one, 16(10).
Erreygers, et al. (2018). Positive or negative spirals of online behavior? Exploring reciprocal associations between being the actor and the recipient of prosocial and antisocial behavior online. New Media & Society, 20(9), 3437-3456.