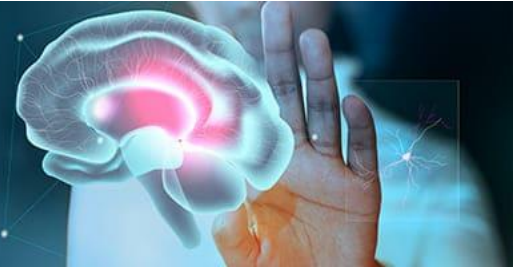


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Scrolling through feelings: Unveiling the impact of social-media on emotion suppression

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Abstract

Emotion regulation, the vital ability to manage, experience, and convey emotions, is increasingly influenced by digital technology, specifically through the lens of digital emotion regulation (ER). This paper explores the nuanced role of social media in employing emotion suppression strategies for emotional management. Social media platforms serve as powerful tools for shaping affective states, including emotions, moods, and stress levels. Conversely, emotion suppression involves the active suppression of ongoing emotional behaviors.

Keywords: Emotion regulation, emotion suppression, social-media, emotional expression

Introduction

In contemporary society, the pervasive influence of social media has transformed the landscape of human interaction and communication. Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, have become integral components of daily life, with individuals spending a significant portion of their day engaged in virtual interactions (Pempek *et al.*, 2009) ^[1]. The advent of smartphones further accentuates this digital dependency, with these devices being the first and last things that individuals encounter daily (Elhai *et al.*, 2016). As a result, the impact of social media on emotional experiences and regulation has become a topic of increasing significance. The significance of social media in communication, relationship-building, and connection formation cannot be overstated, as evidenced by the widespread usage and adoption of these platforms (Haythornthwaite, 2005) ^[3]. While social media facilitates positive aspects of interaction and networking, it also raises concerns regarding the potential impact on emotional well-being and regulation (Beyens, Frison, & Eggermont, 2016) ^[4]. The prevalence of social media use is underscored by the fact that Facebook, with its 1.5 billion active users, stands as the most widely used social networking platform globally (Ryan *et al.*, 2014) ^[5]. This paper aims to explore the intricate relationship between social media usage and emotion regulation, particularly focusing on the cognitive reappraisal and emotion suppression strategies employed by individuals in their everyday interactions. The escalating usage of social media and smartphones prompts an investigation into the role of these digital tools in shaping emotional experiences and responses.

Deficits in emotion regulation have been associated with problematic smartphone and internet use, prompting the exploration of how individuals employ social media platforms to regulate their emotions (Akbari, 2017; Casale *et al.*, 2016; Rozgonjuk and Elhai, 2019) ^[6, 7]. Understanding the ways in which social media is utilized for emotional regulation becomes crucial, given its pervasive presence in various aspects of daily life, especially among the younger generation (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010) ^[8]. As we delve into the literature and empirical findings, we will explore the dual facets of cognitive reappraisal and emotion suppression within the context of social media interactions, shedding light on their implications for individual well-being and emotional health.

Social Media & Emotional Suppression

In the dynamic landscape of social media, the emotional lives of adolescents have become intricately intertwined with online platforms, providing a space for expression, sharing, and connection.

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The studies by Blumberg, Rice, and Dickmeis (2016)^[9], Cauberghe *et al.* (2021)^[10], and Waterloo *et al.* (2018)^[11] collectively shed light on the multifaceted role of social media in shaping emotional experiences among young individuals. This introduction will focus on emotional suppression, a crucial aspect of emotion regulation, and its intersection with social media use. Blumberg, Rice, and Dickmeis (2016)^[9] highlight the significance of social media in the lives of American adolescents, emphasizing its potential to influence emotional expression. While research among adults suggests the capacity of social media to boost positive emotions or mitigate negative ones, the ways in which adolescents employ these platforms for emotion regulation remain less understood. This underscores the need to explore the nuances of emotion regulation strategies, particularly emotional suppression, within the context of social media use among young individuals. Cauberghe *et al.* (2021)^[10] delve into the impact of social media use on teenagers' ability to manage feelings of loneliness and anxiety, focusing on how these emotions are coped with during the COVID-19 shutdown. The study identifies social media as a coping mechanism for anxious teenagers, suggesting a potential link between emotional suppression and the use of online platforms for adjustment and satisfaction. Understanding the role of emotional suppression in shaping adolescents' coping mechanisms on social media is crucial for comprehending its broader implications on mental health during challenging circumstances. Waterloo *et al.* (2018)^[11] provides insights into the standards for expressing emotions on various social media sites among Dutch users. The study reveals preferences for positive emotions across platforms, with variations in the perceived suitability of different platforms for venting negative feelings. Exploring these dynamics contributes to the understanding of how emotional suppression may manifest in online environments and how users navigate the presentation of their emotions on social media.

In the contemporary digital era, where smartphones have become ubiquitous, understanding the intricate relationships between smartphone use, emotion regulation, and psychological well-being has emerged as a critical area of research. The studies conducted by Rozgonjuk and Elhai (2021)^[7] and Fortes, Broilo, and Lisboa (2021)^[12] contribute valuable insights into these complex dynamics, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between smartphone usage patterns, emotion regulation strategies, and mental health outcomes.

Rozgonjuk and Elhai's (2021)^[7] investigation focuses on the relationship between problematic smartphone use (PSU), expressive emotional repression, and specific smartphone usage patterns among college students in the United States. Their findings reveal a notable association between the severity of PSU, process smartphone usage, and expressive repression. Importantly, the study uncovers that the link between expressive repression and PSU severity is fully mediated by process smartphone usage. These results suggest that difficulties in controlling emotions may contribute to increased engagement in process smartphone usage, subsequently leading to more severe PSU. This underscores the intricate connections between emotional regulation challenges, smartphone use patterns, and the potential development of problematic usage behaviors. Fortes, Broilo, and Lisboa's (2021)^[12] study delves into the relationship between smartphone use, emotion regulation, functional

impairment, and psychological well-being. Their findings highlight a negative association between overall smartphone use and psychological well-being, which is partially mitigated by cognitive reappraisal, especially when the phone is used for communication. On the other hand, smartphone use is positively linked to functional impairment, with emotion suppression strengthening this link, particularly in the context of entertainment usage. This study emphasizes the role of different smartphone use types and emotion regulation strategies in shaping mental health outcomes, offering crucial insights into the complexities of the smartphone-emotion-psychological well-being nexus. As we navigate the intricate landscape of smartphone use and its impact on emotion regulation and mental health, these studies collectively contribute to our understanding of the multifaceted nature of these relationships. The following sections will delve deeper into each study, exploring their methodologies, findings, and implications, to provide a comprehensive overview of the insights gained from examining the interplay between smartphone usage, emotion regulation, and psychological well-being. In addition to these perspectives, the prevalence of idealized body images on Instagram is discussed in relation to emotional suppression (Verduyn *et al.*, 2020^[13]; Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004)^[14]. The comparison-induced emotional suppression arising from idealized images can have profound effects on young individuals as they navigate their self-image in social settings. As we embark on an exploration of emotional suppression in the context of social media, it becomes evident that understanding these dynamics is essential for unraveling the complex interplay between emotion regulation, online platforms, and the emotional well-being of adolescents. The following sections will delve into these studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of emotional suppression in the digital age. Ju, Rho, and Hinsley's (2022)^[15] study explores the connections between seeking COVID-19 health information on multiple social media platforms, social norms in communication, and adopting health-protective behaviors during the pandemic. Drawing on the Planned Risk Information Seeking Model (PRISM) and emotion regulation literature, this study underscores the significance of understanding how individuals perceive health-related behaviors as expected norms, and how emotional states like anxiety and fear may influence this association. English, Lee, John, and Gross's (2017)^[16] research delves into the influence of social context and goals on how people regulate their emotions in daily high and low points. The study reveals that suppression, a key emotion regulation strategy, is linked to social aspects, being more frequently used when others are present, especially non-close partners. This finding emphasizes the social dimension of emotion regulation and highlights the importance of studying it in diverse contexts, both positive and negative. Elhai, Tiamiyu, Weeks, Levine, Picard, and Hall's (2018)^[17] study address the impact of smartphone use on mental health, specifically examining the relationship between depression severity, expressive suppression as an emotion regulation strategy, and objectively measured smartphone use. The study contributes valuable insights into the intricate interplay between psychopathology, emotion regulation, and smartphone use patterns. Woods and Scott's (2016)^[18] investigation focused on the association between social media use and well-being among teenagers, revealing the negative effects of emotional engagement in social media on sleep quality, self-esteem, anxiety, and despair. This study

emphasizes the need to scrutinize the usage of social media at night and emotional engagement in connection to sleep and overall well-being. Bettis, Burke, Nesi, and Liu's (2022) ^[19] review explores the dynamic nature of emotion regulation in response to stress, leveraging digital tools such as ecological momentary assessment, wearables, smartphones, smart-home tech, virtual reality, and social media. This review advances our understanding of how these technologies capture the adaptable nature of emotion regulation across diverse contexts. In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital technologies, the intersection of smartphone use, cognitive functioning, and emotional regulation has emerged as a focal point of scholarly inquiry. The following introduction encapsulates key insights from a collection of studies, each contributing unique perspectives to our understanding of the complex interplay between digital technologies and human emotions.

Wilmer, Sherman, and Chein's (2017) ^[20] comprehensive review scrutinize the potential impacts of smartphone use on cognitive functioning, ranging from attention to memory and the delay of gratification. This study underscores the necessity for more rigorous scientific examination to establish definitive findings, addressing existing methodological shortcomings and highlighting the intricacies of smartphone-induced cognitive effects.

Blumberg, Rice, and Dickmeis (2016) ^[9] delve into the role of social media in the emotional lives of American adolescents, emphasizing the potential of adult influences to shape positive or negative emotional experiences. Yet, the study underscores the need for a deeper understanding of how adolescents utilize social media for emotion regulation.

Caubergh, Van Wesenbeeck, De Jans, Hudders, and Ponnet's (2021) ^[10] investigation during the COVID-19 shutdown explores how teenagers use social media to manage feelings of loneliness and anxiety. The findings underscore the nuanced relationship between social media use, emotional well-being, and coping mechanisms, particularly in the face of challenging circumstances. Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter, and Valkenburg's (2018) ^[11] study delves into the standards for expressing emotions on various social media sites among young Dutch users. The study illuminates the nuanced choices individuals make in communicating both positive and negative emotions, shedding light on the intricacies of emotional expression in the digital realm.

Verduyn, Gugushvili, Massar, Taht, and Kross (2020) ^[13] highlight the emotional consequences for young women arising from idealized body images on Instagram. The study underscores the role of upward appearance-based comparisons in provoking suppressed emotions in social settings, contributing to the broader discourse on body image and emotional well-being. Rozgonjuk and Elhai's (2021) ^[7] exploration of problematic smartphone use among college students unveils the intricate relationship between severity of use, expressive emotional repression, and specific usage patterns. The findings suggest the potential influence of emotion regulation difficulties on the escalation of smartphone use, leading to more severe problematic smartphone use. Fortes, Broilo, and Lisboa's (2021) ^[12] investigation into smartphone use's relationship with emotion regulation and psychological well-being underscores the nuanced dynamics between different types of smartphone use and emotion regulation strategies. Ju, Rho, and Hinsley's (2022) ^[15] study investigates the connections between seeking COVID-19 health information on social media platforms,

social norms in communication, and health-protective behaviors. The research sheds light on the influence of emotional states, such as anxiety and fear, on the relationship between social media use and health-related behaviors. English, Lee, John, and Gross's (2017) ^[16] exploration of how social context and goals influence emotion regulation provides insights into the social aspects of emotion regulation, emphasizing the varied use of suppression, distraction, and reappraisal in different contexts. As we navigate through these diverse studies, the subsequent sections will delve into each research endeavor, offering a nuanced analysis of methodologies, key findings, and implications, with a specific focus on the role of emotion suppression in shaping individuals' responses to smartphone use and social media engagement.

Conclusion

The diverse array of research showcased the nuanced ways individuals employ emotion regulation techniques, such as suppression, when engaging with social media platforms. The studies emphasized the impact of social context, goals, and emotional states on the regulation of feelings, shedding light on the complex interplay between online experiences and emotional well-being.

Insights from investigations into smartphone use, social media engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the connection between social media and mental health underscored the multifaceted nature of emotion regulation in the digital age. The review also delved into the consequences of problematic smartphone use, highlighting its association with expressive emotional repression and, in turn, the severity of negative outcomes.

Moreover, the exploration of adolescent experiences on social media revealed correlations between emotional engagement, nocturnal usage, and overall well-being. These findings underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of how different aspects of social media usage can impact emotional health, especially in vulnerable populations like adolescents.

The study also discussed the emerging field of digital emotion regulation, recognizing the increasing trend of using digital technologies, such as smartphones, for managing emotions. The importance of bridging psychological research on emotion regulation with computing research was emphasized, pointing towards the need for an interdisciplinary approach to comprehend the nature and significance of digital emotion regulation fully.

As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of social media and digital technologies, it is evident that emotions are not only expressed but also regulated within these virtual spaces. "Scrolling through Feelings" has provided a comprehensive exploration of the current state of knowledge on emotion suppression on social media, offering valuable insights and paving the way for future research in this dynamic and evolving field. Understanding the intricate connections between emotion regulation, social media use, and well-being is essential for developing strategies to foster positive online experiences and support mental health in the digital age.

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