Adjustment to College, Media Engagement and Fear of Missing Out

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Conference: ECER 2015, Education and Transition
Network: 22. Research in Higher Education
Format: Paper

Session Information
22 SES 13 D, Teaching and Learning
Paper Session
Time: 2015-09-11
11:00-12:30
Room: 340. [Main]
Chair: Jani Petri Ursin

Contribution
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Theoretical framework
Millennial students are described as having a focus on social interaction and connectedness with friends, family and colleagues by using social media tools (McMahon & Pospisil, 2005). On the up side, these technologies might play a large role in keeping college students connected to family and friends to obtain social support as they grapple with a host of academic, personal, and social pressures (Gemmill & Peterson, 2006). On the down side, technology may also disrupt and occupy the time of a college student, and that could enhance higher levels of perceived stress, sensitivity, depression and anxiety (Alabi, 2013; Alavi, Maracy, Jannatifard, & Eslami, 2011). These concerns about the consequences of the alarming rate of mental problems related to use of social media among university students have recently raised awareness about a new phenomenon termed Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). This phenomenon has been defined as an anxiety, whereby one is compulsively concerned that one might miss an opportunity for social interaction, a rewarding experience, profitable investment or other satisfying event (Anderson, 2011; Kellner, 2013). FoMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing and is especially associated with social media technologies which provide constant opportunity for comparison of one’s status (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013).

Because the transition to college is often associated with high levels of loneliness, emotional maladjustment and depression (Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000), this study is aimed at assessing the assumption that psychological need deficits could lead some toward a general sensitivity to FoMO as suggested by Przybylski et al. (2013). More specifically, the mediating role of FoMO linking maladjustment to college life to social media engagement lies at the
core of the present study.

The present research

The concerns about the consequences of the alarming rate of mental problems related to use of social media among university students give additional reasons to expect FoMO linked to deficits in mood and satisfaction with life. Taken together with the wider literature on social media engagement and students’ well-being, the possible role of FoMO in linking individual variability in adjustment to college life to social media engagement will be examined in this study.

Two research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

(H1) Students who are more adjusted to college life (e.g., like their classes, social life and college in general) would be less connected to family and friends via social media to obtain social support. Whereas students who experience general negative emotions about coming to college are expected to be more connected to family and friends to obtain social support as a buffer to the levels of academic, personal, and social pressures they experience.

(H2) Drawing on the assumption that psychological need deficits can lead some toward a general sensitivity to FoMO, it is possible that FoMO could serve as a mediator linking maladjustment to college life to social media engagement.

Method

Method

Participants
Data were gathered from 296 undergraduate Social-Science students (14.7% males and 85.3% females) from one major college located in Israel. The distribution regarding ethnicity was: 65.9% Jewish students, 27.3% Muslim students, 5.1% Christian students, and 1.7% Druze students, with a mean age of 25.4 (SD=7.1) years.

Instrumentation

Student characteristics
Data were gathered using a questionnaire aimed at measuring the student's cultural group, gender, age, socioeconomic-status (SES), year of study, and current education achievements.

Social Media Engagement (SME) questionnaire
This 10- item scale was specifically designed for this study to measure the extent to which students used social media in the classroom. The scale includes three factors:
1. Social engagement - refers to sharing individual or social information with the close social environment.
2. News information engagement - includes activities with relation to news, for example, responding to alerts or getting updates via social media sites.
3. Commercial information engagement
Each item was given a Likert-type score ranging from 1 = never to 5 = always. A confirmatory factor analysis was used to verify the SME's structure, high overall and within factor reliability results were shown.

Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOs)
Przybylski et al. created a scale meant to reflect the fears, worries, and anxieties people may have in relation to being in (or out of) touch with the events, experiences, and conversations happening across their extended social circles. The overall scale included 18 items, scored on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = not at all true of me to 5 = extremely true of me. (Cronbach's alpha range from .70-.83).

The College Adjustment Test (CAT)
This study used 15 items from the original survey (Pennebaker et al., 1990). Participants were asked to tap the degree to which they have experienced a variety of thoughts and feelings about being in college. Items were scored on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = almost never to 5 = almost always for all the items. Two factors were measured: The first factor (maladjustment) taps general negative affect about coming to college (Cronbach’s alpha equals to .82). The second factor (adjustment) refers to positive affect or optimism (Cronbach’s alpha equals to .80).

Expected Outcomes

Findings

The first hypothesis (H1)
A structural model was constructed to assess the connections between the adjustment/maladjustment and social media engagement constructs. The goodness-of-fit of the data to the model yielded sufficient fit results ($\chi^2 = 625.254$, df = 245, $p = .000$; CFI = .911; RMSEA = .07). Results indicated a positive low coefficient between the maladjustment and SME constructs ($\beta = .23$, p < .01). An insignificant path coefficient was found between the adjustment and SME constructs.

The second hypothesis (H2)
In order to test the second hypothesis, several background variables and the FoMO latent variable with its three latent variables: Social FoMO (FO1), news information FoMO (FO2), and commercial information FoMO (FO3) were entered into the model ($\chi^2 = 1434.245$, df = 722, p = .000; CFI = .910; RMSEA = .05). The results showed a positive high coefficient between the FoMO and the SME factors ($\beta = .76$, p < .001), and a positive low connection between the maladjustment and FoMO factors ($\beta = .29$, p < .001). Insignificant coefficient results were indicated between the adjustment and FoMO variables, and between the maladjustment and SME factors.

Discussion
The results showed that students who experienced general negative emotions about coming to college were more inclined toward using social media tools. However, when this link was mediated by FoMO, the significant direct connection between maladjustment to college and social media engagement was no longer valid. These findings illustrate the robust mediating role of FoMO in explaining social media engagement. It could be inferred that the link between maladjustment and social media engagement is more likely to be indirect, and that those emotions of frustration could be linked to social media use only insofar as they are linked to FoMO, in accordance with Przybylski et al.’s (2013) findings.

References

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