

Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescent Males Versus Females

Natalie Molstad

Abstract

With the ease of social media accessibility and the rise in usage, there are many unknown implications for adolescents. Teenagers are at a critical point in their development in which social media can significantly impact feelings of self-worth or connection with their peers. The study aims to examine the relationship between gender and connectedness among adolescent social media users. Additionally, the study analyzes the relationship between depression and gender among social media users. The data was titled *Social Media, Social Life: How American Teens View Their Digital Lives*, which was collected in the United States during the spring of 2012. There were 1,030 participants in the study. A secondary data analysis was conducted from the original cross sectional designed study. The researcher for the current study conducted a chi-square inferential statistics test to find the gender difference social media can have. This study concluded that there is a significant relationship between gender and connectedness regard to use of social media. Females had higher rates of connectedness than males. The relationship between depression and gender produced no significant findings. These results have implications for social work practice by allowing clinicians and practitioners to be aware of the how social media usage impacts the mental health of the different genders.

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

- Approximately 95% of American adolescents have a smartphone and 45% of adolescents say they are active online constantly throughout a typical day ("Teens, Social Media & Technology", 2018).
- On average, adolescents are online nine hours a day, not including the time they spend online for homework ("Social Media and Teens", 2018).
- Over the past ten years, technology has significantly changed and has evolved into something that can be addictive but can also create a sense of community for many adolescents.

Gender Differences between Social Media and Depression

- When using social media online, girls are more likely than boys to experience negative emotions, as well as harassment and bullying (Kreski et al., 2021).
- Adolescent females have a greater risk of developing symptoms of depression as a result of their social media use and are more likely to be unable to cope with the stressors in their life compared to their male counterparts (Kreski et al., 2021).

Gender Differences between Social Media and Connectedness

- Social media plays a significant role of the connectedness in both males and females (Lombardi, et al., 2018).
- Adolescent males tend to have more friends on social media than females do (Basem Abbas Al, 2018).
- Eighty-two percent of adolescent males have social media accounts, while 75% of adolescent females have social media sites (Basem Abbas Al, 2018).

Research Questions and Hypothesis

What are the effects of gender differences in teen connectedness among social media users?

- The researcher hypothesized that social media will have a greater effect on the connectedness rates of males than females.

What are the effects of gender differences in teen depression rates among social media users?

- The researcher hypothesized that social media will have a greater effect on the depression rates of females than males.

Methodology

Research Design

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from *Social Media, Social Life: How American Teens View Their Digital Lives*, which was collected in the United States during the spring of 2012 (Rideout, 2021).
- This original study focuses on the social and emotional impacts of social media during this critical period in adolescent development (Rideout, 2021).

Sample and Sampling Method

- A GFT Company sampled 1,030 adolescents ranging in age from 13-17 years old.
- The study recruited a relatively even number of males and females to participant in the study with 446 males and 584 females.
- The survey was conducted by two different sampling approaches using address-based sampling and random-digit dialing.

Data Collection Procedures

- Once the participants were identified, they would be emailed the survey to take online. Participants who were Knowledge Network members could log on to the Knowledge Network website and access the survey.
- Parent or legal guardian consent was collected for individuals to participate in the study due to the fact that participants were minors.
- Participants had from February 22nd through March 11th 2012 to complete the survey.

Measures

- The measurement of the construct "depression" is based on feelings of depressed mood, low self-esteem, low self-worth, and hopelessness.
- The measure of "connectedness" is defined as feelings of togetherness between friends and feelings of belonging to a particular group or community.

Statistical Analysis

- The analysis in this research study was conducted using Statistics Packages for Social Science Version 27 to provide descriptive statistics.
- This study utilized the chi-square statistical analysis test to determine to relationship between the gender and depression and connectedness.

Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	n	%
Teen Age		
13	137	13.3
14	181	17.6
15	218	21.2
16	250	24.3
17	244	23.7
Parent Education		
Less than high school	54	5.2
High school	179	17.4
Some college	343	33.3
Bachelor or higher	377	36.6
Teen Race		
White, Non-Hispanic	634	61.6
Black, Non-Hispanic	73	7.1
Other, Non-Hispanic	38	3.7
Hispanic	227	22.0
2+ Races, Non-Hispanic	58	5.6
Teen Gender		
Male	446	43.3
Female	584	56.7
Current Employment Status		
Working employee	72	7.0
Working self-employed	12	1.2
Not working-layoff	1	0.1
Not working-looking	6	0.6
Not working-retired	3	0.3
Not working-disabled	2	0.2
Not working-other	934	90.7
Household Internet Access		
No	47	4.6
Yes	983	95.4
Marital Status		
Married	84	8.2
Divorced	11	1.1
Separated	3	0.3
Never Married	928	90.1
Living with partner	4	0.4

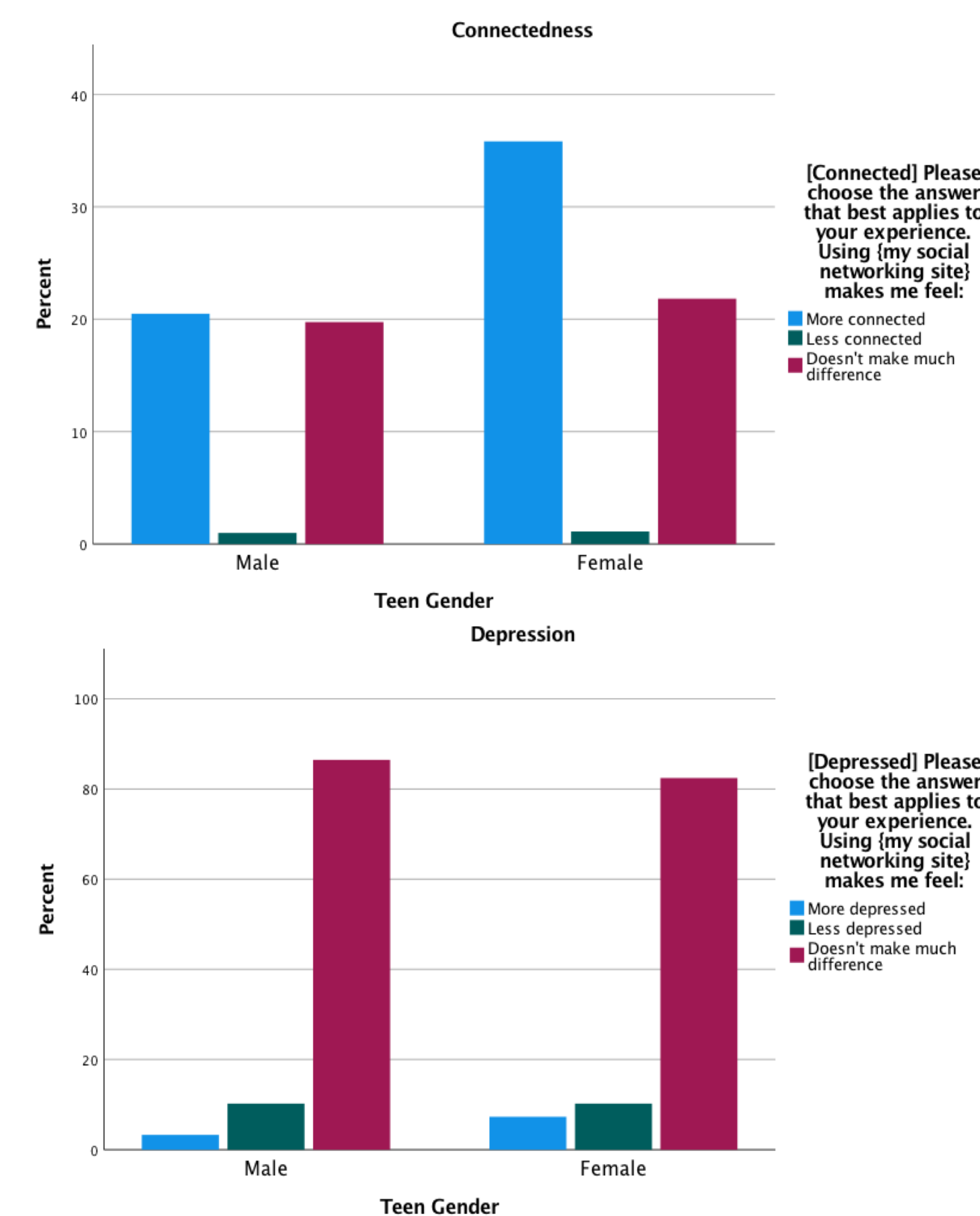
Results

Connectedness and Gender

- The chi-square test was run looking into connectedness among males versus females.
- There is shown to be a significant association between gender and connectedness ($\chi^2 (2) = 10.175, p = .006$).
- However, there is a weaker connection according to the Cramer's V test (.112). The majority of females reported that social media made them feel more connected with 61%, as opposed to 49.7% of male teenagers.
- A small percentage of both males (2.4%) and females (1.9%) reported feeling less connected after using social media.
- Also, a significant number of both males (47.9%) and females (37.2%) stated that it does not matter one way or another.

Depression and Gender

- In table 4 and figure 2, you can see that the chi-square test was calculated comparing the frequencies of the males and females to depression among adolescents who use social networking sites.
- There was not a significant association with found in gender and feeling more depressed ($\chi^2 (2) = 5.936, p = .051$).
- The Cramer's V also shows a weaker association (.086). Five percent more females reported feeling more depressed (7.3%) than males did (3.3%).
- Males and females reported the exact same rates of feeling less depressed (10.2%).
- The majority of both males (86.5%) and females (82.5%) reported that it does not make much of a difference one way or another.



Discussion

Results Analysis

- Connectedness and gender have a significant relationship, showing that females have much higher rates of feeling connected than males do.
- This means that adolescent females are more likely to be connected to friends and family on social media, boosting feelings to connectedness.
- The relationship between depression and gender was only slightly over the significant range on the chi-square analysis test, meaning that the result of the test was not significant.
- However, in comparing the gender of the small percentage of adolescents who chose the "more depressed" answer, more females than males stated that social media made them feel more depressed.

Limitations

- This study was important because in 2012 there was not a lot of research about adolescents and social media available, however it is now ten years old.
- Another limitation that was posed in the study was the lack of ethnic diversity in the participants. Over 60% of participants were White, non-Hispanic which can be problematic in getting an accurate representation of all teens across the United States.

Future Research Directions

- Future research should include in-depth analysis on the overall mental health differences of adolescent males and females in regard to social media usage.
- Continuing to compare the genders in social media usage and mental health could lead to more comprehensive results and help find interventions to better find the adolescents based on their gender.

References

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