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Interactants and activities on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter: Associations between social media use and social adjustment to college

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ABSTRACT

Research shows use of social media (SM) has important implications for college adjustment. However, most studies only focused on Facebook and did not attend to specific use patterns. Drawing on the activity-audience framework of social media use and literature of college adjustment, we examined the associations between use of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and college social adjustment. Regression and cluster analyses of survey data from 257 undergraduates ($M_{age} = 19.48$) showed that SM interactants had stronger and more consistent associations with social adjustment than did activities. Using Facebook and Instagram with on-campus friends and family were related to better social adjustment; using Instagram with strangers was related to

poorer adjustment. Students who frequently used all three SM to interact with off-campus friends were less adjusted than those who rarely used the platforms to interact with strangers. Some associations were moderated by SM activities. Implications of college students' development in the digital age are discussed.

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1]It was intriguing that the Instagram scale displayed a different factor structure from the Facebook and Twitter scales despite the similar items included. Different modes of communication (directed interaction and broadcasting) were distinguished only on Instagram. Different from Facebook and Twitter, Instagram is a photo and video sharing platform. Although Instagram users can respond to other people's posts with texts, when they initiate a post on their own page, it has to involve a picture or a video clip; an exclusively text-based status update is not afforded on the site. In other words, the media used for interaction versus broadcasting are more differentiated on Instagram than on the other two platforms, which may be a reason for the different factor structures of the SM.

[2]Twitter is widely used as a channel to keep up with breaking news happening around the world, receive a wide variety of news, and follow news organizations or political parties (Mitchell et al., 2015). Thus, when college students engage in Twitter activities or interact with people on the platform, the focus may be beyond the college life. In

other words, Twitter use may have a more noticeable association with social outcomes such as civic engagement and political participation rather than social adjustment in the college setting.

Additional information

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