

Relationship between depression, anxiety and Social Networking Sites addiction: The role of Fear of Missing Out and preference for online social interaction

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are virtual communities where users can create individual public profiles, interact with real-life friends, and meet other people based on shared interests. Among Internet users, there are approximately 2 billion SNSs users. In addition, this number is expected to grow as mobile device usage and mobile social networks are becoming even more popular. However, along with the propagation of Social Networking Sites in recent years, there is growing scientific evidence suggesting that excessive use of those platforms may result in symptoms traditionally associated with substance addictions.

Social Networking Sites addiction (SNS) addiction is recognized as an example of behavioural addiction. The symptoms of this addiction are described as permanent thinking about SNSs use, engaging in SNSs use in order to change/improve mood, the need to increase amount of time devoted to SNSs, grooving nervousness, restless, or irritation when individual cannot use SNSs, ineffective attempts to reduce SNSs use, as well as experiencing negative consequences (e.g., problems in work/school and conflicts with family and friends) because of permanent and intensive SNSs use.

Theoretical models that explain why people become addicted to Social Networking Sites emphasized the role of certain disorders and symptoms (e.g., depression and anxiety) in development and maintenance of this addiction. Those models postulated that SNS addiction could be conceptualized as a result of ineffective emotional regulation, dysfunctional strategy of coping and/or maladaptive cognition among individuals who suffer from mental health problems. Nonetheless, a major limitation of previous research investigated proposed models is emphasis on single, cross-sectional study design. Therefore, it is difficult to make a legitimate conclusion about the nature of the relationships between those disorders. Accordingly, there is insufficient evidence to conclude about the developmental trajectories, which are essential to scientifically gain knowledge about this addiction. Furthermore, SNS addiction is considered to be the consequence of interactions between predisposing factors (e.g., vulnerability of people experienced psychiatric disorders, such as depression and anxiety), and meditative factors related to individual beliefs about Internet use, as well as emotional responses to perceived social situation of an individual. As SNS addiction is a relatively new phenomenon, there is a need to study comprehensive models that include, on the one hand, risk factors for behavioural addictions well-anchored in the clinical literature, and on the other hand Internet-specific variables that are considered as crucial risk factors according to theoretical notions and research findings in the field of SNS addiction. The proposed model, as well as research plan including two independent samples, assessing the aforementioned phenomena with diverse research methods, could meet aforementioned needs.

In this project, as an example of dysfunctional belief about Internet use we admit preference for online social interaction that reflect individual beliefs that one is safer, more efficacious, more confident, and more comfortable with online interpersonal interactions and relationships than with traditional face-to-face activities. Furthermore, as emotional response to perceived social situation we admit Fear of Missing Out as an emotional response, related to apprehension that others might be having interesting and attractive experiences from which one is absent or excluded. Therefore, the goal of the proposed project is to investigate the relationship between symptoms of depression and anxiety and SNS addiction. Furthermore, the aim of the current project is to examine whether Fear of Missing out and preference for online social interaction mediate the relationships between symptoms of psychiatric disorders (i.e. depression and anxiety) and SNS addiction. The project might contribute to improved understanding regarding the role of pre-existent disorders (i.e. anxiety and depression) as vulnerabilities for SNS addiction, which for some individual as such can be considered as a secondary disorder, as well as cognitive and emotional factors related to Internet-specific disorders.