
The Influence Of Social Comparison On Envy In People With High Self-esteem

Social media creates a virtual community for people to follow the lives of each other. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are available for all to become users themselves. Individuals can document every moment of the lives on social media through their profiles. For instance, Ellison et al (2007) and Hong et al (2012) both documents how self-presentation and self-disclosure are important factors in motivating social media use. Furthermore, social media aids in connecting one to their environment whether online or offline through the access of communication. This communication enables individuals to stay connected with family and friends. However, privacy can become a concern due to people sharing too much personal information on their social media. This excessive information can result in others creating an ideal image of themselves that they deem socially desirable (Mehdizadeh 2010). Consequently, individual's begin making social comparisons based on this ideal image (Chou & Edge, 2012).

Moreover, daily life is full of social comparison as individuals have a natural habit of comparing their own accomplishments to others (Giesler, Gilbert and Morris, 1995). Festinger's social comparison theory explains how people compare themselves to those with similar characteristics as them (Festinger, 1954). Due to comparing, reflecting and evaluating their own skills and abilities to others, it can be argued that this not only results in social comparisons but also the risk of developing envy. In turn, this envy can lead to negative psychological reactions (Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). This analysis is supported by the work of various researchers who have discovered that those experiencing envy on a regular basis are at higher risk of becoming frustrated (Maurya, 2012), suffering mentally (Piskorski, 2011), having a significant decrease on life satisfaction (Smith and Kim, 2007) as well as developing depressive symptoms (Etchegoyen and Nemas, 2003; Malone et al, 2006).

Furthermore, Smith and Kim describe the term 'envy' as "an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings caused by a comparison with a person or group of persons who possess something we desire" (2007: 49). Envy can have various effects on an individual, including obtaining different levels of self-consciousness and those distrustful of their self-esteem are more prone to experience envy in social comparison. These effects are supported by studies conducted by Buunk and Gibbons. For instance, social self-consciousness is an intense predictor of an individual's tendency to conduct social comparison (2007). According to the self-consciousness level of the individual, one could be more or less involved in social comparison and the experience of envy. Moreover, there is a negative correlation between one's self-image and the inclination to pursue social comparison combined with envy (1999). Overall, we can conclude that through social comparisons, one may experience differing levels of envy.

Arguably, there is a gap in the literature as the given studies investigate the influence of envy on emotion, rather than, how social medias influences envy through social comparison. For example, the recent study conducted by Lim and Yang (2015) clearly associated the act of comparing oneself through social media to the emotion of envy. However, their study questionnaire items (e.g., "I felt unhappy/poor/depressed/miserable when comparing myself with others on a social networking service"; p. 309) measure social comparison more as a mean to negative emotions or low self-esteem rather than envy. Moreover, according to Smith

and Kim (2007) aggressive behaviour, such as, conflicts, crime and malevolent feelings are positively connected to envy. Therefore, to achieve the goal of linking social comparison to envy, the study will follow the questions of whether friends' displayed life on social media can be the influence of envy in people with healthy levels of self-esteem.

As stated before, by addressing these limitations, the hypothesis of those with healthy self-image and self-consciousness who regularly use social networks can result in the social comparison of themselves to their friends, and in turn, resulting in their life satisfaction decreasing. Accordingly, S. Y. Lee (2014) postulated that permanent use of social media such as 'Facebook' induces the probability to engage in social comparison. For this reason, Tandoc et al (2015) and Festinger (1954) discovered that people interested in following their friends' online activity as well as spending more hours using social media tend to feel envy as a result of the social comparison. To conclude, it may be assumed that the number of hours per day spent on social media has a huge influence on envy through the comparison in virtual communications.

Therefore, the question of the current research would focus on whether the use of the social network, in particularly, Facebook can lead to an increase of envy in friends on social media who usually have healthy levels of self-esteem. The goal of the given study extends the knowledge about how the use of social media can induce the feeling of envy. Also, at the same time, it would give more insight about how the increased use of social media impact on one's psychological well-being. Due to the fact that envy might result in negative psychological reactions, including depressive symptoms (Etchegoyen, Nemas, 2003; Malone et al., 2006), it could be of importance to know more about the struggles of social media use, so we could be more aware of the risks. This way, new interventions which can focus on the reduction of social media use can be established since the younger generations uses social media excessively (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Therefore, with interventions, we can prevent unwanted issues faced by young people.

To conclude this essay, I will discuss a method to investigate the question of the influence of social comparison on envy in people with high self-esteem. Firstly, a random population of participants would first be administered a test assessing their level of self-esteem. The participants who score high on their level of self-esteem would then be separated randomly into one of two conditions. The first condition will involve the participants being absent from Facebook for two weeks, whereas, the second condition would have the participants spend three or more hours per day on Facebook. This would be monitored through an app that the participants would need to download in order for their progress to be tracked. Afterwards, all the participants would have to complete a follow-up questionnaire measuring their amount of envy. Then the difference in the results of both conditions would be assessed, drawing conclusions from their initial level of self-esteem to the most current measurement. The prediction of the study is that the participants that were involved in the high use of social media would score significantly higher on their amount of envy they experienced than the participants in the low use of social media condition. Overall, these findings can lead us to better understandings of envy development within social media and can be applied to real life situations.