How Adolescents Use Social Media to Cope with Feelings of Loneliness and Anxiety During COVID-19 Lockdown

# Details

## Year

2020

## DOI

10.1089/cyber.2020.0478

## Issued

2020

## Language

English

## Start Page

## End Page

## Authors

Cauberghe V.;Van Wesenbeeck I.;De Jans S.;Hudders L.;Ponnet K.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking

## Publisher

Mary Ann Liebert Inc

## Topics

## Sample

2,165 Flemish (northern Belgium) adolescents between 13 and 19 years old

# Abstract

Next to physical health problems and economic damage, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and associated lockdown measures taken by governments of many countries are expected to cause mental health problems. Especially for adolescents, who highly rely on social contacts with peers, the prolonged period of social isolation may have detrimental effects on their mental health. Based on the mood management theory, the current study examines if social media are beneficial for adolescents to cope with feelings of anxiety and loneliness during the quarantine. A survey study among 2,165 (Belgian) adolescents (13–19 years old) tested how feelings of anxiety and loneliness contributed to their happiness level, and whether different social media coping strategies (active, social relations, and humor) mediated these relations. Structural equation modeling revealed that feelings of loneliness had a higher negative impact on adolescents’ happiness than feelings of anxiety. However, anxious participants indicated to use social media more often to actively seek for a manner to adapt to the current situation, and to a lesser extent as a way to keep in touch with friends and family. The indirect effect of anxiety on happiness through active coping was significantly positive. Participants who were feeling lonely were more inclined to use social media to cope with lacking social contact. However, this coping strategy was not significantly related to their happiness feelings. Humorous coping was positively related with
feelings of happiness, but not influenced by loneliness or anxiety. To conclude, social media can be used as a constructive coping strategy for adolescents to deal with anxious feelings during the COVID-19 quarantine.

# Outcome

"Most of the adolescents indicated a heightened social media use during the lockdown. Media use is driven by a need to self-regulate one’s (negative) emotions, to feel better. It was the most beneficial strategy to use social media to self-regulate mood during the lockdown. Using social media to actively face the situation relieved their feelings of distress and anxiety to some degree, increasing
happiness feelings. A higher feeling of loneliness among the participants predicted social media use to keep in touch with peers and family, but it was not associated with happiness. Using social media as a substitute for physical social relations makes adolescents feel less happy. Adolescents’ feelings of loneliness are more strongly (and negatively) related to feelings of happiness than those of anxiety. The enormous amount of distributed (dis)information on social media may disorient
and overwhelm individuals. In addition, emotional COVID19-related tweets may amplify feelings of anxiety and depression. Yet, social media can be used as an instrument to actively cope with the situation to relieve feelings of anxiety, and feel better. Distribution of reassuring information and self-efficacy on social media might make anxious adolescents feel better. Also, humor on
social media is beneficial for adolescents’ well-being during lockdown." (Cauberghe et al., 2020, pp. 6-7)