Social Media Use and Adolescents’ Self-Esteem: Heading for a Person-Specific Media Effects Paradigm

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## Sample

"The sample consisted of 387 early and middle adolescents (13- to 15-year-olds; 54% girls; Mage = 14.11, SD = .69) from a large secondary school in the southern area of The Netherlands. Participants were enrolled in three different levels of education: 44% were in lower prevocational secondary education (VMBO), 31% in intermediate general secondary education (HAVO), and 26% in academic preparatory education (VWO). Of all participants, 96% was born in The Netherlands and self-identified as Dutch, 2% was born in another European country, and 2% in a country outside Europe. The sample was representative of this area in The Netherlands in terms of educational level and ethnic background." (Valkenburg et al., 2021, p. 62)

# Abstract

Abstract
Eighteen earlier studies have investigated the associations between social media use (SMU) and adolescents’ self-esteem, finding weak effects and inconsistent results. A viable hypothesis for these mixed findings is that the effect of SMU differs from adolescent to adolescent. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a preregistered three-week experience sampling study among 387 adolescents (13–15 years, 54% girls). Each adolescent reported on his/her SMU and self-esteem six times per day (126 assessments per participant; 34,930 in total). Using a person-specific, N = 1 method of analysis (Dynamic Structural Equation Modeling), we found that the majority of adolescents (88%) experienced no or very small effects of SMU on self-esteem (−.10 &lt; β &lt; .10), whereas 4% experienced positive (.10 ≤ β ≤ .17) and 8% negative effects (−.21 ≤ β ≤ −.10). Our results suggest that person-specific effects can no longer be ignored in future media effects theories and research.

# Outcome

"Our results showed that the effects of SMU on self-esteem are unique for each
individual adolescent, which may, in turn, explain why the two meta-analyses evaluated the effects of their included studies as weak and their results as inconsistent.
First, our results suggest that these effects were weak because they were diluted
across a heterogeneous sample of adolescents with different susceptibilities to the
effects of SMU. This suggestion is supported by comparing our overall withinperson effect (b ¼ .01, ns) with the full range of person-specific effects, which
ranged from moderately negative to moderately positive. Second, the effects
reported in earlier studies may have been inconsistent because these studies may, by
chance, have slightly oversampled either “positive susceptibles” or “negative susceptibles.” After all, if a sample is somewhat biased towards positive susceptibles,
the results would yield a moderately positive overall effect. Conversely, if a sample is
somewhat biased towards negative susceptibles the results would report a moderately negative overall effect."(Valkenburg et al., 2021, p. 71)