

Understanding the Influence of Social Media on Individual's Quality of Life Perceptions

Eva Brlek, Jelena Škoda, Biljana Marković and Darijo Čerepinko*

University North, Koprivnica, Croatia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Quality of Life

Social Media

Self-Image

ABSTRACT

Social networks are an integral part of our everyday lives, becoming an indispensable medium for communication in personal and business environment. New forms and ways of communication change the general mind set and significantly affect the quality of life of individuals. Quality of life is perceived as an abstract term, but often people are not aware that they directly affect the quality of their own lives, making minor but significant everyday choices and decisions. Quality of life can be defined broadly but in the widest sense it involves a subjective sense of satisfaction with one's life. Scientific knowledge about the impact of social networks on self-assessment of the quality of life of individuals is only just beginning to be researched. Available research indicates potential benefits as well as a number of disadvantages. In the context of the previous claims, the focus of the study conducted by the authors of this paper focuses on analysing the impact of social networks on individual's self-assessment of quality of life and the correlation between time spent on social networks, and the choice of content that individuals choose to share to present themselves. Moreover, it is aimed to explain how much and in what ways they critically judge the lives of others online. The research aspires to show the positive as well as negative aspects that social networks, primarily Facebook and Instagram, have on creating a picture of individuals and how they compare themselves with others. The topic of this paper is based on quantitative research conducted on a representative sample. An analysis of the results of the survey conducted online has elaborated a hypothesis which claims that content shared by individuals on social networks influences the image they create about themselves. A comparative analysis of the results obtained with the results of similar research has led to the conclusion about the synergistic influence of social networks on the feeling of the quality of life of respondents. The originality of this work is reflected in the approach of conducting research by examining attitudes about an individual's life satisfaction, the way he or she creates a picture of himself/herself through social networks, the extent to which he/she compares herself/himself with others, and what social media applications he/she uses. At the cognitive level, scientific contributions were made through the development of information concepts on quality of life, and at the methodological level through the development of an original methodology for qualitative alignment of respondents' attitudes using statistical analysis. Furthermore, at the practical level through the application of concepts in assessing the creation of self-image and the image of others through social networks.

1. Introduction

Subjective assessment of quality of life is often associated with an individual's general psychological well-being in which indicators such as mental health is directly linked to a wide range of personal, psychological, behavioural, social, interpersonal and intrapersonal communication outcomes (Proctor et al., 2017). Previous analyses of psychological well-being relied heavily on objective indicators such as family income levels, divorce rates, quality of housing, access to recreational facilities and medical health, as well as financial expenditures. However, such objective indicators fail to explain individual and subjective perceptions of

* Corresponding author E-mail address: darijo.cerepinko@unin.hr

quality of life. Whereas, life satisfaction is an individual cognitive assessment of life as a whole (Shin and Johnson, 1978) and one of the well-established indicators of well-being and positive perception (Suldo et al. 2006).

The general assumption is that quality of life is an overall sense of well-being affected by objective indicators, and undoubtedly affected by a subjective perception and recognition of physical, material, social and emotional well-being, personal growth and development as well as individual's purposeful activity. The World Health Organization defines quality of life "as an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad-ranging concept affected in a complex way by a person's physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social relationships and their relationship to salient features of their environment "(World Health Organization, 1998). Generally speaking, there are two approaches to measuring quality of life. The first involves measuring the quality of life as a whole, and so called a one-dimensional approach because quality of life is viewed as a single entity. The second approach is multidimensional and quality of life is viewed as a whole which is a construct of multiple domains. Despite the lack of a universal definition of quality of life, researchers agree on the existence of two basic aspects of the concept - subjectivity and multidimensionality (Vuletic and Misajon, 2011). Furthermore, Cummins (2000) discusses the multidimensionality of the concept, quality of life, implying the influence of both objective and subjective indicators. Subjective quality of life includes seven domains: material well-being, emotional well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, security and community. The objective component, however, includes culturally relevant measures of objective well-being. Similarly, quality of life involves a cognitive and affective evaluation of the attitude object, with life satisfaction being an affective component of attitude toward life (Felce and Perry, 1993). From all of the above, it is evident that the quality of life is a kind of general attitude towards one's life and its aspects.

Recent studies of life satisfaction include the aspect of digital communication and its impact on the relationship between personal perceptions of quality of life and the creation of a self-image. With numerous different types of social media being used, social comparison platforms are continuing to expand. Not only can we compare ourselves to the same person in the same room, we compare ourselves to millions of people on social networks. In addition to content that we find through social networks about others, we also share our own photos, life events, preferences and reflections, and in that way, we also build our own self-image, our "virtual self". The research of influence of online communication on social networks on the individual's quality of life observed that personality traits influence social comparison on Facebook and subjective well-being, as well as both life satisfaction and well-being (Gerson et al., 2016). Furthermore, research exploited the capacity in which Facebook is perceived as a useful tool to meet human needs, which predicted continued Facebook use of participants' in the future, and their satisfaction with life (Mackson et al., 2019). Additionally, the consequences of interacting with social networking sites for subjective well-being are going to be explored, that is, how people feel moment-to-moment and how satisfied they are with their lives.

2. Materials and methods

In the Republic of Croatia there is not in-depth research dealing with the influence of social media on the quality of life of an individual and their creation of self-image. The aim of the research conducted for the basis of this paper was to explain the influence of social networks usage on the perception of individual's quality of life in the Republic of Croatia. At the same time, the intention was to determine how and to what extent do social networks influence self-image individuals create about themselves. An analysis of the results of a survey conducted

online has elaborated the hypothesis that claims that content shared by individuals on social networks influences the image they create about themselves.

The survey lasted for four months, from April to September 2019, applying the online Google Questionnaire which was formed on the basis of Facebook social comparison rating scale (Feinstein et al., 2013) and the Public Health Surveillance Well-Being Scale (Bann et al., 2012). The questionnaire consisted of 28 questions answered by the respondents. It took an average of 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questions are divided into two categories; firstly, personal characteristics and behavioural characteristics of the respondents were examined (age, relationship status, preferred social networks, average time spent on social networks, number of friends, preferred content, and preferred devices). The second category of questions examined respondents' attitudes and perceptions of themselves and the image they have of themselves. Among other things, the following variables were explored: how much they feel included, different, talented, stronger, confident, attractive, and desirable compared to others on social networks as well as to what extent are they satisfied with life, the meaning of their life, within family and business environment. A 10-point Likert scale was chosen to provide the answers. Considering that this is a research of the connection between the use of social networking sites and the construction of a self-image, the sample of respondents was intentional, consisting of 360 respondents living in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

3. Results

According to socio-demographic characteristics, most respondents 29.6% (107) are between 35-45 years of age and 29.4% (106) are between 25-35 years old as seen in Fig. 1.

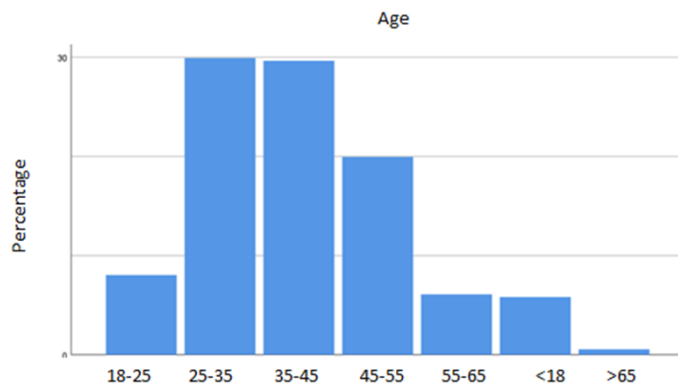


Figure 1. Respondents' age

Most respondents live in a marital community 50.4% (N=182), 23.8% (N=86) of respondents are single, while 23% (N=83) of the respondents are in a relationship, and the rest of them are divorced or widowed.

As far as social networking is concerned, most respondents use Facebook (96%), followed by Instagram (89%), and other networks such as Pinterest, LinkedIn, Reddit etc.

Most respondents use social networks to connect with friends and family (34.6%), for fun (31.6%), to share content of photos, videos, posts, information (16.6%), and business (11.4%), while other respondents use a combination of all of the above.

More than half of the respondents, or 51.8% Fig. 2. spend an average of 1-3 hours on social networks daily, having 539 friends on average.

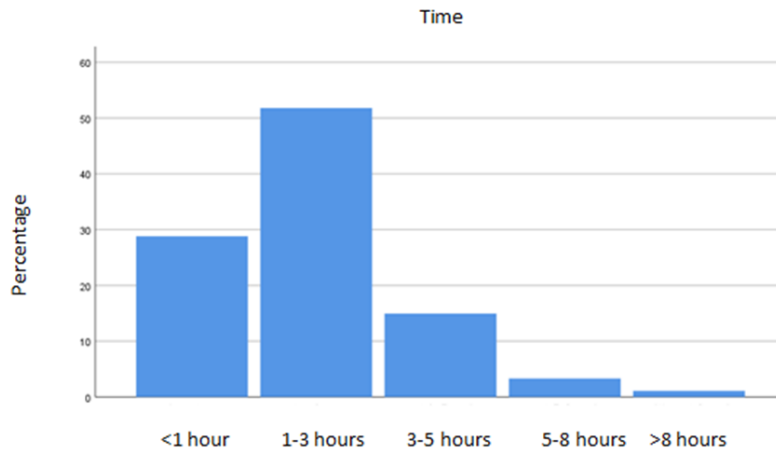


Figure 2. Time spent daily on social media sites

Most respondents (61.8%) use cell phones to access social networks, 23% of them use laptops, while others access social networks via tablets.

In order to determine the correlation between the time spent on social networks and the satisfaction with their own lives, an analysis using a cross tabulation of answers to the two questions was conducted Tab.1.

Table 1.

Time spent on social media and life satisfaction

		Life satisfaction			Total
		I agree	I partly agree	I disagree	
Time spent on social media	< 1 h	75	24	4	103
	1 -3 h	134	51	2	187
	3-5 h	37	13	3	53
	5-8 h	4	7	1	12
	>8 h	0	4	0	4
Total		250	99	10	359

The results show that there is a statistically significant difference in the sense of satisfaction with one's life depending on the time spent on social networks Tab. 2. and although some statistically significant relation between the observed variables was found, the correlation between the variables is extremely weak Tab. 3.

Table 2.

Chi-Square Test Time spent on social media and life satisfaction

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23,341 ^a	8	,003
Likelihood Ratio	22,453	8	,004
Linear-by-Linear Association	9,436	1	,002
N of Valid Cases	359		

Table 3.

Symmetric Measures for time spent on social media and life satisfaction

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	,162	,058	3,109	,002 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	,100	,055	1,891	,059 ^c
N of Valid Cases		359			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Also, the results show that there is a statistically significant difference Tab. 4. in the answers about the meaning of their own lives depending on the time the respondents spent on social networking sites.

Table 4.

Time spent on social media and the meaning of life

		The meaning of life			Total
		I agree	I partly agree	I disagree	
Time spent on social media	< 1 h	73	28	2	103
	1 -3 h	138	43	6	187
	3-5 h	33	14	6	53
	5-8 h	2	8	2	12
	>8 h	0	3	1	4
Total			96	17	359

Further analysis of the results Tab. 4 and Tab. 5. shows that respondents who used social networking sites and services for more than 5 hours a day had a significantly lower sense of meaning of their own lives than those who used the services for a shorter period of time.

Table 5.

Chi-Square Tests for time spent on social media and the meaning of life

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	34,772 ^a	8	,000
Likelihood Ratio	32,392	8	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22,666	1	,000
N of Valid Cases		359	

a. 7 cells (46,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,19.

Table 6.

Symmetric Measures for time spent on social media and the meaning of life

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	,252	,057	4,912	,000 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	,152	,056	2,896	,004 ^c
N of Valid Cases		359			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

In the answers in which the respondents compared their self-image in respect to others, with correlation to the amount of time they spend on social networks for none of the nine observed dichotomies (inferior-superior; excluded-perceived; different-same; untalented-talented; weak-jack; self-confident-self-confident; unattractive-attractive; undesirable-desirable; left out-

group) statistically significant difference ($p < 0.005$) was found in the answers, nor was a correlation of time spent on social networking sites and self-image in social comparison with others.

4. Discussion

The entire social life, especially of the young generation, is moving from "real life" communication, to "virtual" environment that social networks provide, above all Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter and others. They affect the social life of an individual: emotional life, shopping habits, learning habits, media use, communication with people, ways of advertising, ways of exchanging ideas, life habits, free time organization, and often they are the drivers of social change. Social media have a potential to shape an individual's lifestyle, thereby influence the subjective perception of life satisfaction.

Multiple discrepancies theory tells us that individuals are constantly comparing what they have achieved to what they want and comparing their own achievements with those of others. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction arises as a result of these constant comparisons. The level of expected satisfaction will directly motivate the individual to take actions to achieve and maintain satisfaction. This theory assumes that age, gender, education, cultural affiliation, income, self-esteem, and social support will have a direct impact on all discrepancies, pleasures, and actions of the individual (Brajković and Vuletić, 2011). Culnan and Armstrong (1998) developed a research model based on privacy theory that showed that perceived cost and perceived benefits have a significant impact on online self-disclosure. The most important factor that encourages people to reveal their personal information on social networking sites are the relationships they establish with others. Although satisfaction with one's own life is generally associated with more intense relationships within social network and larger number of an individual's social contacts, research shows that happier people often have an extended and broader social network (Tomini et al., 2016). Therefore, it can be assumed that relationships with others have a positive effect on life satisfaction, consequently, people who are more satisfied are often more extraverted and more capable of developing and maintaining a wider social network. Our research corroborates this claim, with the majority of respondents who rated their satisfaction with the quality of life as positive, and stating that they have more than 500 friends on average on social media sites profiles. As a result, they most commonly use social networks to keep in touch with friends and family, that is, to encourage the development of their social relationships, which are the most important predictor of an individual's quality of life.

Conceptualized life satisfaction within the paradigm of subjective well-being refers to the different ways in which people evaluate and experience their life in a positive way. A person with high levels of life satisfaction in ideal conditions often feels positive emotions, rarely negative emotions, and evaluates their life as a whole very satisfying (Tov & Nai, 2018). People sometimes use social comparisons to validate their own lives unconsciously. Comparing oneself with others is a frequent social phenomenon (Gallinari, 2013) and it is very widespread in society. The social theory of comparison embraces the idea that individuals intend to acquire accurate self-assessments of themselves through comparison with others. Social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves to others in terms of abilities and personal characteristics. Certain scholars (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007) have suggested that some individuals are more inclined to compare themselves than others, assuming that the tendency to engage in social comparisons may be a personality trait. A "typical" individual with a high tendency to engage in social comparison is characterized by certain characteristics, such as increased sensitivity to others' behaviour and a degree of self-doubt, along with a great need to reduce this uncertainty and improve one's self-worth (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Individuals of low self-esteem, who are inconsistent and insecure, are particularly interested in social

comparison (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). This tendency towards social comparison can be facilitated by modern technologies that have transferred many social relations from the private to the public sphere, exposing people to the constant flow of information (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Our study found no correlation between time spent on social networking sites and comparing oneself to others. Researchers who have focused mainly on the consequences of using social networks for social comparisons (Feinstein et al., 2013): proved that social comparison on Facebook can predict depression, rumination and lower life satisfaction. However, some authors (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015) have hypothesized that depressive symptoms precede and predict social comparisons on Facebook, stating that people with low self-esteem who are prone to depression are more likely to spend more time on Facebook by participating in higher levels of social comparison. This view seems to suggest that a greater tendency for social comparison could increase the use of social networks, motivated by the search for information about others (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018). Consequently, individual differences in personality may impact how social comparison on Facebook affects individuals' subjective well-being (Gerson, 2016)

5. Conclusion

Using social networks greatly enhances an individual's social network. Aspects of network communication are different from face-to-face communication since they lack verbal and non-verbal communication features. Individuals build an image of themselves on social network profiles by sharing personal content like photos and videos, sharing opinions through groups or sharing posts, and expressing personal preferences through the content they choose. Communication through social media only assumes the "interlocutors" or people with whom one communicates, but one can never really be sure who is reading or watching the content they publish.

The research we conducted shows that respondents use social networks in a high percentage. This is not necessarily a bad thing if this impact is positive and contributes to increased knowledge, general awareness and involvement in monitoring social events. Our research shows as well as do the results by Verduyn et al. (2017) that active use of social network sites predicts subjective well-being by creating social capital and stimulating feelings of social connectedness. Using social networks as a kind of escape from reality can have a negative impact on an individual's emotional life. On the other hand, our research has shown that respondents who spend more time on social networks perceive their quality of life and life satisfaction lower than others. Consequently, that respondents who use social networks for more than 5 hours a day have a lower sense of meaning of their own lives.

Although there is an inherent human need to compare oneself to others, because of the particularity of communication on social networks, through the sharing of "edited" images of physical appearance and life events, individuals tend to feel worse than the people they communicate with through social media. Therefore, time spent on social networks should be limited so that one can more easily "transition" from the virtual environment to real social occasions, and further educate himself/herself about the potentially misleading nature of social networks. One should be aware of the suggestive nature of posts on social media sites, and through the reduced time spent on social networking sites, make it easier to build and accept an image of oneself, not only through online profiles but also through interpersonal communication. In this way, individuals will also potentially be able to increase their level of life satisfaction.

Acknowledgment

Publication of this paper was supported by a grant from the University North to which the authors of this article are grateful for the big support.

References

- Bann, C.M., Kobau, R., Lewis, M.A. et al. (2012) Development and psychometric evaluation of the public health surveillance well-being scale. *Quality of Life Research*. vol 21, pp. 1031-1043. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11136-011-0002-9>
- Bergagna, E. & Tartaglia, T. (2018) Self-Esteem, Social Comparison, and Facebook Use *European Journal of Psychology*. vol. 14(4), pp. 831–845. Available: doi: 10.5964/ejop.v14i4.1592
- Brajković, L., Vuletić, G. (2011). Teorije subjektivne kvalitete života. Vuletić (Ur.), *Kvaliteta života i zdravlje*, 17-20. Osijek: Hrvatska zaklada za znanost.
- Buunk, A. P., & Gibbons, F. X. (2007). Social comparison: The end of a theory and the emergence of a field. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 102(1), pp. 3-21. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.09.007>
- Culnan, M. & Armstrong, P. (1998). Information Privacy Concerns, Procedural Fairness and Impersonal Trust: An Empirical Investigation. *Organization Science*. Vol 10. DOI:10.1287/orsc.10.1.104.
- Cummins, R.A. (2000). Personal Income and Subjective Well-Being: A Review. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. 1 (2), 133-158.
- Feinstein, B. A., Hershenberg, R., Bhatia, V., Latack, J. A., Meuwly, N., Davila, J. (2013) Negative social comparison on Facebook and depressive symptoms: Rumination as a mechanism. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, vol 2(3), pp. 161-170
- Felce, D., & Perry, J. (1993). Quality of Life: A Contribution to Its Definition and Measurement. Cardiff: Mental Handicap in Wales Applied Research Unit.
- Gallinari, E. (2017). “Likes” for Self-Love? The Effects of Social Media on Self- perception. *Undergraduate Review*, 13, 100-105. Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol13/iss1/13
- Gerson, J., Plagnol, A.C., Corr, P.C. (2016). Subjective well-being and social media use: Do personality traits moderate the impact of social comparison on Facebook?. *Computers in Human Behavior*. vol. 63, pp. 813-822, ISSN 0747-5632, Available: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.06.023>.
- Gibbons, F. X., & Buunk, B. P. (1999). Individual Differences in Social Comparison: Development of a Scale of Social Comparison Orientation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. vol. 76, pp. 129-142.
- Mackson, S.B., Brochu, P.M., Schneider, B.A. (2016) Instagram: Friend or foe? *The application's association with psychological well-being New Media and Society*. vol. 21 (10) pp. 2160-2182
- Nesi J, Prinstein M. J. (2015) Using Social Media for Social Comparison and Feedback-Seeking: Gender and Popularity Moderate Associations with Depressive Symptoms. *Abnormal Child Psychology*. vol. 43(8), pp. 1427-1438. Available: doi:10.1007/s10802-015-0020-0.
- Proctor, C., Linley, P. & Maltby, J. (2017). Life Satisfaction. Encyclopedia of Adolescence, R.J.R. Levesque (ed.) International Publishing AG DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-32132-5_125-2
- Shin, D.C. & Johnson, D.M. Social Indicators Research (1978) vol. 5, pp. 475. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00352944>

- Subrahmanyam K, Greenfield P. (2008) Online communication and adolescent relationships. *Future Child*. vol. 18(1), pp. 119-46.
- Suldo, S., & Huebner, S. (2006). Is Extremely High Life Satisfaction During Adolescence Advantageous? *Social Indicators Research*. vol. 78, pp. 179-203. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-8208-2>
- Tomini, F., Tomini, S.M. and Groot, W. (2016). Understanding the value of social networks in life satisfaction of elderly people: a comparative study of 16 European countries using SHARE data. *BMC Geriatrics*. vol. 16, pp. 203 DOI 10.1186/s12877-016-0362-7
- Tov, W. & Nai, Z. L. S. (2018). *Cultural differences in subjective well-being: How and why*. In J. E. Maddux (Ed.), *Subjective well-being and life satisfaction* (pp. 50-73). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Verduyn, P., Ybarra, O., Résibois, M., Jonides, J., & Kross, E. (2017). Do social network sites enhance or undermine subjective well-being? A critical review. *Social Issues and Policy Review*. vol. 11(1), pp. 274-302. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12033>
- World Health Organization (1998). Programme on Mental Health. WHOQOL. Measuring Quality of Life. Available: <https://www.who.int/healthinfo/survey/whoqol-qualityoflife/en/>