

Facebook Use Among Romanian Graduate Students. Influences on Self-esteem and Feelings of Loneliness

Assist. Lecturer **Oana ȘTEFĂNIȚĂ**, PhD

College of Communication and Public Relations
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: oana.stefanita@comunicare.ro

Assist. Lecturer **Georgiana UDREA**, PhD

College of Communication and Public Relations
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: georgiana.udrea@comunicare.ro

Assist. Lecturer **Flavia DURACH**, PhD

College of Communication and Public Relations
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: flavia.durach@comunicare.ro

Prof. **Nicoleta CORBU**, PhD

College of Communication and Public Relations
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: nicoleta.corbu@comunicare.ro

Abstract. *Nowadays, the perceived impact of social networking sites, especially Facebook, is a more and more disputed topic among researchers affiliated not only to the domain of media and communication studies, but also to social psychology. This paper investigates the uses of Facebook among Romanian graduate students with a focus on how the online activity reflects on self-esteem and on the feeling of loneliness. Previous*

studies investigated the relationship between Facebook use and loneliness, providing evidence for both the benefits and the shortcomings of online networking. However, the direction of influence between the time spent on Facebook and coping with loneliness remains unclear: does Facebook usage diminishes or accentuate loneliness and depression? At the same time, several studies suggest a correlation between Facebook usage and self-esteem. High levels of engagement on Facebook are associated with patterns of intense self-disclosure and lead to harsh social comparisons and negative feelings about self. In this context, we aim at providing evidence to clarify the direction of influence of Facebook on loneliness and to better understand the relationship between online networking and self-esteem, in a very specific cultural context (Romanian), for young educated people. Findings suggest only some specific ways of using Facebook rather help coping with feelings of loneliness, most social interaction on this platform remaining rather shallow and meaningless. At the same time, Facebook seems to affect (both in a positive and a negative way) self-esteem, but only on a short term, and with few possible consequences.

Key words: Facebook usage; Social comparison; Self-esteem; Loneliness; Facebook engagement.

Literature Review

Facebook use and the feeling of loneliness

According to some authors, Facebook has become a tremendous success immediately after its emergence, managing to create a new massive domain in which millions of social interactions take place every day (Wilson, Gosling & Graham 2012). Audiences actively seek out media through a goal oriented approach (La-Rose, Mastro & Eastin 2001), in order to gratify their needs including cognitive, affective, tension release needs, or personal and social integrative needs (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas 1973). On this line, Sheldon (2008) identified six main motivations that might drive people to use Facebook: relationship maintenance, the passing of time, community building, entertainment, trend-following, and companionship. Among all these needs and (inner) motivations in Facebook usage, later research has demonstrated that users' desire to stay connected with their (virtual) friends remains the most powerful one (Joinson 2008; Sheldon 2008; Bonds-Raacke & Raacke 2010; Wilson *et al.* 2012).

Avoiding and/or diminishing loneliness (both social and emotional) has been reported as a particular motive for Facebook usage (Lemieux *et al.* 2013; Skues, Williams, & Wise 2012). However, the direction of the influence between loneli-

ness and Facebook use remains unclear and empirically understudied, especially in East-European cultures. Even though Facebook's declared mission is to give people the power to build a community, and bring the world closer together, the number of individuals who suffer from loneliness has increased. At the same time, research on loneliness has demonstrated the devastating effects that this feeling has on people's health. Some studies have shown that loneliness can lead to depression and suicide, can cause cardiovascular disease, increase stress, lead to alcoholism, drug use and even the progression of Alzheimer's disease (Kumari 2015, p. 323). Moreover, it has been shown that loneliness can be as damaging as smoking a number of 15 cigarettes a day (Davidson & Rossall 2014).

Whether loneliness is understood as *emotional* (the lack of attachment in social relationships) or *social* (the lack of social connections and social integration) (Perlman & Peplau 1981; Russell *et al.* 1984), most authors agree that loneliness is an unpleasant, painful experience, usually perceived as a discrepancy between the actual social relationships of an individual and those he/ she wishes or dreams of.

The relationship between Facebook use and the feeling of loneliness has become a topic addressed in various fields, such as sociology, psychology, communication, and educational science. If people turn to Facebook for fear of staying alone or in order to compensate for a lonely life, if using Facebook reduces rather than increases the feeling of loneliness, or under which conditions people who use Facebook can diminish this feeling, these are some of the most common issues in the dedicated literature.

When examining the relationship between Facebook use and loneliness, Song *et al.* (2014) developed a causality test in which they included two of the most common variables at stake: "shyness" and "low social support". Then, two models were proposed. The first model stating that Facebook use causes loneliness has not been confirmed, while the second one, according to which the feeling of loneliness leads to Facebook use has found some support. The results showed that when loneliness is predicted by the two variables, the level of Facebook usage increases. Specifically, people who are shy or have low social support turn to Facebook to compensate for their lack of social skills. Thus, this research supports both the social compensation model (suggesting that Facebook can be used to offset people's disadvantages), but also the "use and gratification" theory, hence for the people who feel lonely, Facebook can be a means by which they can meet their need of social interaction (Song *et al.* 2014).

Another recent study aimed at examining Facebook connection strategies and emotional attachment to Facebook in relation to four variables: loneliness, anxiety, alcohol and marijuana use. The results have indicated loneliness and anxiety as predictors of Facebook connection strategies, which means that individuals who are socially anxious or feel lonely see Facebook as a source to connect with others.

However, people with a high degree of loneliness are not emotionally attached to this social network. Conversely, anxiety, alcohol and marijuana consumption seem to predict emotional attachment to Facebook (Clayton *et al.* 2013).

The results of a complex research conducted by Louis Leung in 2011 have demonstrated that both loneliness and low levels of social support are significantly related to the preference for online social interactions. Yet, these virtual relationships are mediated by the process of experiencing identity in the online medium. Briefly, the adolescents who feel alone consider online identity and activities much more pleasant than less alone users. The creating of different identities in the virtual environment is a highly enjoyable activity, since it offers them the opportunity to escape from reality while allowing them to live a fantasy (Leung 2011).

Summarizing, loneliness seems to lead to Facebook usage rather than the opposite. Facebook is unlikely to be the cause of loneliness in a person who was not predisposed to experience that feeling before. Still, as Facebook is not the source of loneliness, it cannot be the remedy to it, since it does not provide the necessary social support for the people to feel socially integrated.

Facebook and self-esteem

The users of social networking sites actively construct their online image, and rely on their engagement with their online friends or followers for strengthening their status, credibility, and popularity. Given this focus on self-validation, and considering that self-affirmation is among the major reasons for Facebook use (Toma & Hancock 2013), it is relevant to investigate the impact of Facebook use on self-esteem.

Research on the topic can be placed at the intersection between communication sciences, media studies, and social psychology. Studies so far show that Facebook is not only a place of positive social interaction, but also a virtual playground for excessive self-expression. Facebook can become a locus of anti-social behaviors such as “grandiose exhibitionism” and “entitlement/exhibitionism” (Carpenter 2012). In this vein, evidence suggests that intense use of Facebook is prompted by higher scores in narcissism and lower in self-esteem (Mehdizadeh 2010).

The relation between Facebook usage and self-esteem is under debate in the literature, with contradictory findings. While the fact that people make efforts to enhance their self-esteem through social comparison (Gibbons & Buunk 1999) is well-known, many questions arise regarding the way in which social comparison works on Facebook (Cramer, Song & Drent 2016). It is expected that social media is the go-to venue where people evaluate themselves in relation to others, leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Lee 2014).

The impact of Facebook use on self-esteem was proven to be positive in some studies, and negative in others. On the range of negative effects, scholars found

that high levels of engagement on Facebook are associated with patterns of intense self-disclosure (Brailovskaia & Bierhoff 2016; Buffardi & Campbell 2008; Carpenter 2012; Ljepava *et al.* 2013), and lead to harsh social comparisons and negative feelings about self (Lee 2014). Individuals with low self-esteem are heavy Facebook users, spending more time on the social network (Błachnio, Przepiorka & Pantic 2016; Forest & Wood 2012; Kalpidou, Costin & Morris 2011; Mehdizadeh 2010). Furthermore, individuals with low self-esteem perceive higher levels of social comparison practices (Cramer, Song, & Drent 2016). These practices are rather damaging, since findings show that frequent Facebook users are under the impression that their peers live better, more fulfilling lives than their own (Chou & Edge 2012). Social comparison has a negative effect on body image as well. Facebook users tend to be less satisfied with their outer appearance than people who do not use Facebook at all or regularly, irrespective of gender (Stronge *et al.* 2015).

By contrast, a number of studies found positive effects of Facebook use on building self-confidence (Gentile, *et al.* 2012; Gonzales & Hancock 2011; Kim & Lee 2011; Mehdizadeh 2010). As Gonzales & Hancock (2011) point out, users enhance their self-esteem by cherry-picking the information they include in their online profile, choosing to present themselves in a positive manner. The low-esteem users are those who have the most social capital to gain from their online activities (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007). For them, Facebook is “a safe, appealing place for self-disclosure” (Forest & Wood 2012) that encourages them to build a sense of community, to share more than in real social interactions and to find comfort in a low risk environment. In this context, we aim to investigate the relation between Facebook usage in terms of frequency and complexity of interaction, and self-esteem in young people.

Research methodology

A first goal of this paper was to identify what drives individuals to use Facebook, and if avoiding or diminishing loneliness (both social and emotional) constitutes a particular motive for Facebook usage. Another objective was to address the relationship between Facebook usage and self-esteem in young people. In addition, we analyze the self-assessed resemblance of students’ online image compared to the offline one, including here the possible consequences on their perceived level of life satisfaction.

The study is based on a qualitative research consisting in 21 in-depth interviews, conducted in January 2016 with master’s students in the area of communication from a medium-size university in Romania. The main questions that guided the research were: RQ1: What are the main uses of Facebook for the Romanian students and what is the influence of Facebook use on their sense of loneliness? RQ2: If and how does Facebook usage influence young people’s level of self-esteem?

RQ3: How does Facebook usage influence students' life satisfaction derived from their online image?

The sample used in this research study comprises 21 Romanian graduates (19 women and 3 men), aged between 22 and 30 years old. The interviewees were all pursuing a masters' degree, and a part of them were already employed. They usually spend between 1 to 10 hours per day on Facebook, mostly between 3 and 6 hours daily, having a discontinuous activity. Their profiles range between 140 and 3,000 friends; the majority of interviewees consider themselves as active users, while the rest engage in passive consumption.

Findings

Loneliness and Facebook usage

Romanian graduate students use Facebook mostly to fulfill their communication, surveillance and entertaining needs. The majority of interviewees are active on Facebook, posting pictures and sharing media content, checking for updates, communicating with others and expressing opinions. The content is mostly personal, although some of the students use the platform to promote their work, to search for opportunities or for academic purposes.

In terms of loneliness, almost all the respondents have dealt with feelings of loneliness either emotionally, by not feeling connected to others or socially, by not having friends to turn to. Their view of loneliness corresponds with the definitions in the literature, being mainly an emotional response to isolation, appearing when one's social relationships are less than desired or achieved, including uneasy feelings, distress, lack of connection or attachment even when surrounded by others, the social relations being perceived as deficient (Russell 1996).

There are many causes that led to the feeling of loneliness among the respondents such as being new in the city, feeling different from others, living alone, having few friends that are now living abroad, not trusting their social circles or not being able to open up enough, or not being in a relationship. The majority of respondents face the lack of true friends or the inability to create more intimate connections which leads to feeling isolated or rejected (*"Yes, I have many moments in which I feel alone, not necessarily because I don't have friends, but because I don't have one good friend to talk to, moments when I have a lot of things to do and there is no one there for me, to help me or listen to me, and is like the whole burden is on my shoulders."* Mădălina, 25).

Most of them turned to Facebook when they felt lonely, but the efficiency in diminishing their solitude varied. Those who declared having overcome the feeling, did not rely on Facebook, they went out with friends or called someone, most of them a parent (*"I prefer to go out, to see someone face to face because it seems so different than talking on Facebook so I prefer to leave the house, to get away from that solitude*

if I feel that way.", Alexandra, 22). Those who turned to Facebook and find it useful, used it for its messaging function, as a mean of communication to reach out to someone (*"To contact people, otherwise I would feel lonelier to see they are doing all sorts of stuff. So I use it just to communicate"*, Paul, 23). However, most of them did not find it useful because people might not reply right away and that increases the sense of isolation. Those who did not manage to talk to others when feeling lonely, declared an intensification of the state when using Facebook, especially as a cause of passive scrolling that exposed them to other's happy or successful lives. Those who entered Facebook just to see what has been happening, did not find any benefit for their state of spirit (*"I think I feel lonelier when I see pictures because I have moments when I say, look, I don't do anything interesting, I didn't go out during this busy time, it seems those people make the time, how do they do it..."* Stefania, 22).

However, when asked if Facebook helps them feel more connected to others, the majority said it does, especially through its potential to reach people, to know they are there and one can communicate with them (*"It is a very useful way to be connected with those around by not doing anything"*, Ionela, 25). Some of them experience short times of Facebook deprivation and when they are online, they experience the sense of being connected again to their circles (*"When a period of time goes by and I don't have internet, I feel weird like I don't know anything anymore, and when I'm back again I'm like, wow, what has been happening in the meantime, I feel connected to the world again."* Patricia, 22).

The paradox comes when the loneliness is brought back into discussion, because this sense of connectedness to the world through Facebook dissipates if people cannot establish meaningful communication, beyond greetings. Some expect others to initiate communication or to see their interest in checking up on them, others feel ashamed to tell they are lonely or perceive online communication as inauthentic, so their bad mood worsens (*"Facebook pushes you away from friends, you grow apart. I've noticed people around, they work a lot and when they get together they stay on Facebook, checking on others or posting. I think we'll get to communicate through Facebook when sitting next to each other and we won't know how to communicate face to face, how to express ourselves."* Lucian, 24). Some even get a guilty feeling besides not ameliorating their emotional state (*"I feel guilty... If I sit like that for a while and I look on Facebook and I realize those things didn't bring anything to me, I get to feel guilty... I've wasted my time uselessly!"* Stefania, 22).

Even though when it comes to loneliness Facebook does not prove too useful, the interviewees think it can bring some value to their social relations, by helping them to reconnect or stay in touch with others (*"You can get to know better the relatives you wouldn't see otherwise, you get to find former classmates you didn't know anything of for quite a while, you find each other easier through Facebook."* Diana, 23). Some find it helpful because, since they lack the availability to meet with people, they

can follow their activity online and get reminded through pictures or statuses to check on them. However, one can question the authenticity of friendships that are maintained online (*"It helps me because I don't have the time to meet with friends and then I see a pic and I remember... hey, I haven't talked to this friend for two months, let's check how they are. It adds up to my interpersonal life because it reminds me of others."* Ana Maria, 22).

However, 9 out of 21 said Facebook does not bring any value and it can only be useful as a mean of communication if it is easier to reach another person that way. Many interviewees denounced the lack of authenticity in online communication (*"It doesn't bring any value because when you talk to someone face to face it's different, online, the relationship stays at one level, you don't know what really lies behind the screen. When you meet, you realize that person is so different from the image they've displayed on Facebook, it was just a mask."* Violeta, 22). Some of them are friends in the virtual space, but not in real life (*"There are people that give you a lot of likes and comments, but if they met you face to face, they might not even say hello."* Alina, 23). Therefore, Facebook can be a useful tool in reaching out to people, but not in maintaining meaningful relations or in fighting loneliness feelings, unless followed by offline communication or meetings.

Self-esteem and life satisfaction under the influence of Facebook activity

Most of the respondents do not see Facebook as a safe environment for self-disclosure, and they usually make their pages available only for friends. In the case of public content, this is work related, neuter or related to aspects that do not expose them at a personal level, as they do take into account the possible reactions of unknown people (*"It's not a safe environment, but it depends on how you manage your personal security and privacy. Still, it's not safe, all my pics are restricted."* Diana, 30; *"From my view, it's not safe and it's definitely not the right environment where to share all sorts of private stuff."* Valentina, 23; *"My posts are public, but I don't find FB a safe place for that, I always take into account the possible reactions to what I'm posting. There are so many categories of people and some might not accept what I'm posting, so I have to take that into account and be reticent towards my posts, restrict the ones that might offend."* Eliza, 24). Some of the respondents consider that making the posts public can attract opportunities from employers or clients for their services, therefore this is a case in which they opt for less privacy and the content is work related.

When they feel appreciated on Facebook, almost all the students report a better state of spirit, but only some of them feel encouraged to post more as a result of positive comments and likes, while the rest post only when they feel they have something worth sharing. Pictures usually tend to attract more positive reactions, so picture posting is a fast way to attract likes and attention. The respondents were asked to self-assess their self-confidence to see how they perceive themselves and

how they act on Facebook in relation to their perception of self. Most of them perceive themselves as having a low level of self-confidence, followed by those with a medium self-confidence, these persons being more sensitive to the reactions they receive on social media. Only few of them declared having a high self-esteem and described themselves as extraverts, the same people who tend to be more active on Facebook.

Most of the interviewees believe Facebook can influence their self-confidence temporarily, and only some that it can help increase it on the long run (*"Yes, I admit I feel better towards myself when on Facebook, especially on my birthday when I get hundreds of messages, so I feel more confident, I feel appreciated."*, Violeta, 22; *"I felt the benefits when I used to change my appearance and the positive reactions made me feel better and more confident in the way I looked at that moment."*, Catalina, 23; *"Yes, I Think FB has an impact, it's impossible not to feel better when you get positive comments. We might not like to admit it, but we are happy to get appreciation, likes, and positive comments. I think they have a positive effect on anyone's personality. Even when it's something negative, it makes you think about it and improve something."*, Ionela, 25). Some tend to compare with others and become more aware of their own accomplishments, so they have a better self-image. Some feel positively recharged when it comes to their work, they enjoy receiving likes and appreciation for their work, they feel more confident in their abilities (*"I love when my work-related posts receive likes, I feel appreciated for my job, it makes me more confident."*, Camelia, 25). Those who get positive reactions state that the appreciation makes them feel good not only in relation to their online profile, but on a day to day basis, and it fulfills their need for attention.

However, many stated that Facebook has no effect in what regards their self-confidence, and their self-image does neither depend on their popularity on Facebook, nor on other people's reactions (*"It doesn't matter what kind of reactions I get, even if they are positive because until I validate something, I don't care what others are saying, I get fixed on my idea."* Ștefania, 22; *"Facebook has nothing to do with my self-confidence. I could have a high level of self-confidence without Facebook as well."* Ana Maria, 22). Only a few think Facebook can shake one's trust through negative comments. Overall, the majority of respondents think Facebook has an influence when it comes to confidence, be it temporarily or on a larger scale. They also feel better when building their online image and making changes to their profiles, especially when they promote their work.

Another purpose of this research was to assess the extent to which people tend to get influenced by the way they think others will react on Facebook and adapt their online activity accordingly. Most of them declared not taking into account other people's reaction and post something they enjoy even if it would not attract likes (*"I posted things even if I knew I won't get likes. For example, I once posted a simple*

check in from a harp concert that I found wonderful, a great experience but I knew they will not appreciate this type of activity. They would have reacted better to a pic or check in from a club.”, Valentina, 23; “I haven’t changed or deleted anything because of a lack of appreciation. Sometimes I’ve edited my posts but because I wanted to change something. Of course, I see what comments and likes I get, but I only notice them, I don’t make changes.” Mădălina, 25). A few admitted having deleted posts or refrained from posting something they anticipated to attract few likes. They were mostly afraid of negative comments or no reactions (“I have thought many times about how a post will be received, I have analyzed if I should post or not something on my wall, thought about the reactions, I’m more of a perfectionist. But honestly, if a person says mean things publicly it can change my state of spirit and affect me emotionally, so I better avoid it and give up posting.” Ionela, 25).

Another way of being influenced by Facebook in terms of self-confidence is by making comparisons with others’ achievements or popularity. Almost all are up to date to what their friends are doing and see their posts on Facebook, they declare this only to be a means of staying in touch with each other. However, most of them are motivated to improve and try to achieve more because of these comparisons and declare they do not feel discouraged by others’ success or feel envious (“I do compare with others but because I like to learn about new things. For example, I can find out someone traveled to a cool place and then I want to visit it as well and I try to get there. Or I see they bought something of high quality and I feel motivated to save money and buy something similar, so they activate my ambition.” Mădălina, 25). Only a few felt discouraged or frustrated that others have a lot of accomplishments, but only until they have managed to find balance in their own lives as well (“There were moments when I was frustrated that others had a better job, that they fulfilled so many wishes, while I failed in doing the same. But I got over the negative feelings.” Valentina, 23).

Overall, after spending time on Facebook, the respondents tend to feel better, it helps them relax or find out interesting things or just to stay in touch. However, if people feel they have exaggerated and wasted time on Facebook, they experience feelings of guilt, boredom, frustration; at the same time, if they are comparing themselves too much with others, young people feel bad about themselves (“It depends on the activity. If I find myself scrolling and scrolling I get to wonder what do I do, why can’t I read a book, study, work on my projects, have a nice conversation with someone and I feel a bit disappointed.” Mariana, 22). Conversations with others are indicated as the most effective in improving their state of mind.

When it comes to students’ life satisfaction derived from their online image, the respondents think mostly that Facebook does not affect this area. They see life satisfaction as a more stable feeling than self-confidence that can be prone to momentary influences (“I opened my FB account in high school because I needed it to communicate with those who left abroad, but along the way it didn’t influence me that much. I mean, yes, it might influence some of my opinions or it makes me think over some things,

but I don't build my life or my future according to FB so my satisfaction does not depend on an online image." Violeta, 22).

Some feel Facebook has a positive influence on their life satisfaction because they tend to compare to others and realize they are better than others (*„Yes, I feel better in the sense that I see what others are doing and I found out more in the online world than from the offline about them. So afterwards I feel satisfaction with my accomplishments and with what one can see from my posts and from my profile." Eliza, 24*). Others perceive the influence as one that has the potential to motivate them to accomplish more and increase their satisfaction. When there are some negative feelings, these are seen as contextual and temporary (*„Yes, sometimes I'm sad or upset I can't do something. During winter I saw people on holidays in warm, exotic places and I felt bad I can't afford that, so I was annoyed, but only the day when I saw the pics. Overall, I'm not affected by it." Bianca, 23*). Only few started thinking about changes in their lives in relation to their passive consumption of Facebook (*„I use to scroll on FB, I'm not that active, mostly a passive user. I feel sometimes I have no interesting activity to do, so I enter Facebook and everyone around seems to have an interesting or exciting life, and even my close friends that are not that available, so it makes me feel lonelier. It makes me think of my life, that I should change it or do something else with it, to change my perceptions." Alexandra, 22*). Nonetheless, these people were not satisfied with their lives in general and Facebook comparisons only added up to the feeling.

In terms of resemblance or discrepancy between the online profile and the offline image, most of the people said their image is the same. Those who said there were discrepancies, indicated that they are not that active so since they only post a little, the Facebook page does not reflect all the accomplishments they had (*“My profile doesn't reflect me as I am, because I am very outgoing and communicative, but my online activity doesn't show that, I use Facebook more as an instrument for private messages." Valentina, 23*). Therefore, their offline image is better. However, the question can lead to socially desirable answers, therefore people might find it hard to admit that their online profile indicates a better self. When talking about others, the students mention Facebook is a virtual environment where you want to seem as if you had a lot of friends, a richer social life, that you keep in touch with others. Moreover, although a like is something superficial, it requires no effort, one could also venture their opinion because it does not require the same courage as in real conversations to support or argument one's points of view (*“A lot of people try to amaze through the use of Facebook, to look as if they are someone else, to hide their real personality, to hide what they are as humans." Lucian, 24*).

All in all, Facebook does have an influence on self-confidence or life satisfaction, but the influence is mainly positive or contextual and stimulate people to strive to do better. Individuals who perceive a lower level of self-esteem tend to be less active on Facebook, while, on the other hand, people who perceive a higher

level of self-esteem tend to be more active on Facebook, keener on receiving positive feedback from other people and, thus, more confident in themselves.

Discussion and conclusions

As stated in the literature, people use Facebook to connect, to self-express or present themselves, to gather information or obtain validation. Loneliness soothing and self-affirmation are among the needs the interviewees try to satisfy through the use of Facebook. If people feel lonely, there is an increase in the level of Facebook use as they utilize this medium to gratify their need of social interaction. However, if people do not engage in active behaviors on Facebook, if they do not communicate with others or take the interaction outside the online environment, their feeling of loneliness increases.

Therefore, Facebook alone does not provide the necessary social support for the people to feel socially integrated, and its efficiency in diminishing people's solitude varies according to the type of activity they perform. Although it helps people reach to their connections, Facebook does not provide an environment for meaningful communication and for an authentic sense of connectedness. Facebook can add some value to social relations by helping people reconnect or stay in touch with others, but unless followed by interaction or offline meetings, the advantage dissipates. Passive Facebook consumption is indicated as bringing more disadvantages to one's state of spirit and self-perception than gratifications.

People have the tendency to socially compare with others and evaluate themselves when they spend time on Facebook. The influence on self-esteem in terms of support or diminution varies and it is perceived to be mostly temporarily. The results are in line with the studies that found positive effects of Facebook use on building self-confidence by selecting and presenting information that puts people in a positive light and by receiving positive reinforcements (Gonzales & Hancock 2011; Kim & Lee 2011), but only for those that are more active on Facebook and expose more. The benefits are mostly for those who already have a high or medium self-esteem, as those with a low self-esteem tend to avoid Facebook exposure if they do not have significant achievements to present due to fear of rejection, and they engage more in comparisons and passive scrolling with a negative outcome in terms of self-image.

Being a socially-desirable topic, most of the interviewees declared social comparisons motivate them to become better or achieve more, and potential negative feelings are only momentary, without interference on their self-esteem or life satisfaction on long term. Positive reactions reinforce the self-esteem and the feeling of connectedness, while passive behavior on Facebook and the lack of feedback can negatively reflect on the feeling of acceptance or integration in those who were already feeling lonely or having a lower self-esteem.

Even though in-depth interviews might be one of the most suited methods of investigating people's feelings, the method has its shortcomings. We could argue for the potential moderation effect of people's own level of self-confidence and level of Facebook usage on the potential of Facebook usage to increase self-esteem. But such an interaction effect could only be proven by a quantitative method. At the same time, results are limited to young, educated people, from a cultural context that has specific features, such as a specific general level of social desirability pressure, need to conform to social image, etc.

Overall, we can state that Facebook mainly intensifies traits or feelings that are already present in the respondents, and it does not bring solutions. The social network can be used in dealing with feelings of loneliness as a mean to communicate with others. It is an environment that encourages social comparisons, and this reflects on self-assessments. Those who actively involve in building an online image and receive positive confirmations from their online community benefit the most in terms of consolidating their self-image. Spending time on Facebook for short periods and displaying active behavior can be beneficial in fulfilling some of the needs related to the online activity, while longer periods and passive behaviors lead to negative influences.

References

1. Błachnio, A., Przepiorka, A., & Pantic, I. (2016). Association between Facebook addiction, self-esteem and life satisfaction: A cross-sectional study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55: 701-705.
2. Bonds-Raacke, J. & Raacke, J. (2010). MySpace and Facebook: Identifying Dimensions of Uses and Gratifications for Friend Networking Sites. *Individual Differences Research*, 8(1): 27-33.
3. Brailovskaia, J., & Bierhoff, H. W. (2016). Cross-cultural narcissism on Facebook: Relationship between self-presentation, social interaction and the open and covert narcissism on a social networking site in Germany and Russia. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55: 251-257.
4. Buffardi, L. E., & Campbell, W. K. (2008). Narcissism and social networking web sites. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34: 1303-1314.
5. Carpenter, C. J. (2012). Narcissism on Facebook: Self-promotional and anti-social behavior. *Personality and individual differences*, 52(4): 482-486.
6. Chou, H. T., & Edge, N. (2012). They are happier and having better lives than I am: The impact of using Facebook on perceptions of others' lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(2): 117-121.
7. Clayton, R. B., Osborne, R. E., Miller, B. K., & Oberle, C. D. (2013). Loneliness, anxiousness, and substance use as predictors of Facebook use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29: 687-693.

8. Cramer, E. M., Song, H., & Drent, A. M. (2016). Social comparison on Facebook: Motivation, affective consequences, self-esteem, and Facebook fatigue. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 64: 739-746.
9. Davidson, S., & Rossall, P. (2014). *Evidence Review: Loneliness in Later Life*. Age UK.
10. Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook ,Friends'. Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4): 1143-1168.
11. Forest, A. L., & Wood, J. V. (2012). When social networking is not working: Individuals with low self-esteem recognize but do not reap the benefits of self-disclosure on Facebook. *Psychological science*, 23(3): 295-302.
12. Gentile, B., Twenge, J. M., Freeman, E. C., & Campbell, W. K. (2012). The effect of social networking websites on positive self-views: an experimental investigation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28: 1929-1933.
13. 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*, 76(1): 129-142.
14. Gonzales, A. L., & Hancock, J. T. (2011). Mirror, mirror on my Facebook wall: Effects of exposure to Facebook on self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(1-2): 79-83.
15. Joinson, A. N. (2008). Looking at, looking up or keeping up with people? Motives and Uses of Facebook. *CHI 2008 Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, pp. 1027-1036. ACM, 2008.
16. Kalpidou, M., Costin, D., & Morris, J. (2011). The relationship between facebook and the well-being of undergraduate college students. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 14(4): 183-189.
17. Katz, E., Haas, H., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). On the use of the mass media for important things. *American sociological review*: 164-181.
18. Kim, J., & Lee, J. E. R. (2011). The Facebook paths to happiness: effects of the number of Facebook friends and self-presentation on subjective well-being. *CyberPsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14: 359-364.
19. Kumari, C. (2015). Elderly Perception of Loneliness and Ways of Resolving it through Positive Ageing. *Indian Journal of Gerontology*, 29(3): 322-330.
20. LaRose, R., Mastro, D., & Eastin, M. S. (2001). Understanding Internet usage: A social-cognitive approach to uses and gratifications. *Social science computer review*, 19(4): 395-413.
21. Lee, S. Y. (2014). How do people compare themselves with others on social networksites? The case of Facebook. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 32: 253-260.
22. Lemieux, R., Lajoie, S., & Trainor, N. E. (2013). Affinity-seeking, Social Loneliness, and Social Avoidance Among Facebook Users. *Psychological Reports: Mental & Physical Health*, 112(2): 545-552.

23. Ljepava, N., Orr, R. R., Locke, S., & Ross, C. (2013). Personality and social characteristics of Facebook non-users and frequent users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4): 1602-1607.
24. Mehdizadeh, S. (2010). Self-presentation 2.0: Narcissism and self-esteem on Facebook. *Cyberpsychology, behavior, and social networking*, 13(4): 357-364.
25. Russell, D. (1996). UCLA loneliness scale (Version3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66: 20-24.
26. Shaw, L. H., & Grant, L. M. (2002). In defense of the Internet: the relationship between Internet, communication and depression, loneliness, self-esteem, and perceived social support. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 5(2): 157-171.
27. Sheldon, P. (2008). The Relationship Between Unwillingness-to-Communicate and Students' Facebook Use. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 20(2): 67-75.
28. Skues, J., L., Williams, B., & Wise, L. (2012). The effects of personality traits, self-esteem, loneliness, and narcissism on Facebook use among university students. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28: 2414-2419.
29. Song, H., Zmyslinski-Seelig, A., Kim, J., Drent, A., Victor, A., Omori, K., & Allen, M. (2014). Does Facebook make you lonely? A meta-analysis. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 36: 446-452.
30. Stronge, S., Greaves, L. M., Milojev, P., West-Newman, T., Barlow, F. K., & Sibley, C. G. (2015). Facebook is linked to body dissatisfaction: Comparing users and non-users. *Sex Roles*, 73(5-6): 200-213.
31. Toma, C. L., & Hancock, J. T. (2013). Self-Affirmation Underlies Facebook Use. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(3): 321-331.
32. Wilson, R. E., Gosling, S. D., & Graham, L. T. (2012). A Review of Facebook Research in the Social Sciences. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 7(3): 203-220.