

Handling Ostracism with Social Media-A Meta-analysis

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Abstract

Ostracism is a prevalent social phenomenon that can have negative consequences on an individual's well-being. Social media has become an increasingly popular platform for individuals to cope with ostracism by seeking social support, engaging in self-expression, and practising self-care. However, the effectiveness of using social media for handling ostracism remains unclear. This meta-analysis synthesizes the findings of 20 studies that investigated the role of social media in coping with ostracism. The studies included in the meta-analysis examined the effects of social media use on various outcomes, including emotional distress, social connectedness, and self-esteem. The results of the meta-analysis revealed that social media use was associated with significant improvements in emotional distress, social connectedness, and self-esteem among individuals who experienced ostracism. The effect sizes of social media use were moderate to large, indicating that social media can effectively handle ostracism. However, the results also suggest that the effectiveness of social media use may depend on the type of social media platform used, the frequency and intensity of social media use, and the individual's personality and coping strategies. Overall, this meta-analysis provides evidence for the effectiveness of social media in handling ostracism and highlights the need for further research to identify the most effective ways of using social media to cope with ostracism.

Keywords: Ostracism, social media, Media, Self-Esteem, Self- Expression, Meta Study

Introduction

Ostracism is generally defined as being ignored and excluded by a group. It is a social phenomenon that has occurred in face-to-face interactions for millennia and has begun to emerge in digital spaces as well (Nezlek et al., 2012). Ostracism historically has been used as a social strategy to punish deviance and maintain group identity and has been found both cross-culturally and in both human and non-human animals. Ostracism threatens fundamental human needs, including belonging, self-esteem, meaningful existence, and control (Schneider et al., 2017). Ostracism requires some form of shared or coordinated response by the members of a group who ignore, exclude, or move away from those targeted. The consequences of ostracism can be both emotional and physiological, and understanding the biological functions of this phenomenon can help us create more effective laws and regulations (Alexander, 1986; Ali et al., 2023; Hayes et al., 2018). Internet users, including Instagram, use social network sites like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter for communication and connecting with family, friends, and acquaintances (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Research on social platforms has explored negative outcomes such as cyberbullying, unrealistic social comparisons, stress from information overload, and narcissism, (Dredge, Gleeson, & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014; Kwan & Skoric, 2013; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015; Wingate, Minney, & Guadagno, 2013),

Researchers found the impact of perceived ostracism on self-esteem and belongingness, as well as the implications for continued social media use (Hayes et al., 2018). (Lutz & Schneider, 2021) suggest that receiving dislikes in social media is still better than being ignored, as participants who received negative feedback reported lower levels of need threat and higher levels of coping responses compared to those who were ignored. Humans are social beings, and they are highly attuned to cues that signal a threat to their social connections. These cues are organized under social exclusion, with rejection and ostracism being fundamental human experiences (Wesselmann, Williams, & Nida, 2016; Wesselmann, Nairne, & Williams, 2012). Baumeister and Leary (1995)

found that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation. They argued that humans have an especially strong desire to belong and that threats to that need, such as ostracism, can have serious negative physical and psychological consequences. They proposed that the need to belong is a basic human need that is just as important as the need for food, water, and shelter. Rejection involves explicit information that one is not wanted or valued, while ostracism involves being ignored and excluded by others. Both types of exclusion experiences cause negative physiological and psychological outcomes, leading to feelings of alienation, depression, helplessness, and meaninglessness (Riva, Montali, Wirth, Curioni, & Williams, 2017).

Background and significance of ostracism in social media

Social media can have positive effects on adolescents' social connectedness. For example, social media can help foster a sense of belonging among adolescents by providing opportunities for them to connect with peers regardless of their physical location or the time of day. Additionally, online communication may encourage lonely and socially anxious adolescents to self-disclose with their peers, enhancing their feelings of social connection. Social media can broaden adolescents' friendship groups and positively affect perceptions of social integration and bonding (Allen et al., 2014).

Research questions

1. What is the overall effect of ostracism experienced in social media on individuals' psychological well-being?
2. What coping mechanisms and strategies are commonly used by individuals to handle ostracism in social media?
3. How effective are these coping mechanisms in mitigating the negative psychological impact of ostracism in social media?

Literature Review

(Schneider et al., 2017) provided a theoretical background on the temporal need-threat model, which explains the harmful effects of ostracism on fundamental human needs. The model consists of three stages: 1) In the reflexive stage, having detected only minimal signs of ostracism, the affected individuals feel social pain in terms of negative affect, because they experience their belonging, self-esteem, meaningful existence, and control needs are threatened. 2) Afterwards, the individuals start to reflect on the meaning of the ostracism episode and try to fortify the threatened needs. During this so-called reflective stage, contextual factors, and the individual's character play an important role for restoring need-levels. 3) In case of prolonged ostracism, the individuals' resources for coping with the effects of ostracism are depleted leading to a resignation stage. The inability to fortify the thwarted needs is likely to lead to alienation, depression, helplessness, and unworthiness signifying a form of "social death". Nezelek et al., (2012) examined ostracism as it occurs in daily life, focusing on people's reflective reactions to being ostracized in their daily lives and on the nature of the ostracism they experience. For 2 weeks, 40 participants (adults residing in the community) described what happened each time they felt ostracized using a diary method modelled after the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR; Wheeler & Nezelek, 1977). The study found that ostracism is a part of everyday life, with respondents recording an ostracism episode a day. Episodes occurred in formal and informal face-to-face social situations, over e-mail and chat rooms, with strangers, and relatives, for reasons deemed to be oblivious, accidental, defensive, and punitive. Schneider et al., 2017 describe social media ostracism can have a significant negative impact on fundamental human needs, mood, and well-being. Brief periods of ostracism on social media can lead to decreased need satisfaction, worsened mood, and reduced well-being. Using Facebook for coping purposes did not mitigate the negative effects of ostracism. These findings have important implications for social media use, suggesting that users should be aware of the potential negative effects of ostracism and consider appropriate coping strategies for need restoration. The Ostracism Online tool used in the study may provide a useful framework for further research and intervention.

Effects of ostracism on psychological well-being

Schneider et al., 2017 discuss various paradigms that have been used to investigate the consequences of being ostracized, rejected, or socially excluded in social settings online as well as offline. One of the most used

paradigms to study the effects of ostracism is Cyberball, in which participants sit in front of a computer and are supposed to engage in a ball-tossing game in which they must mentally visualize who they are playing with. Participants either receive the ball throughout the game (inclusion) or do not receive the ball again after a couple of initial throws (exclusion). The study also mentions the use of a new computerized tool called Ostracism Online, which was used in two experiments to manipulate ostracism on social media. Nezelek et al., (2012) highlight the negative impact of ostracism on mental health and well-being, including hurt feelings, aggression, and reduced prosocial behaviours. It also suggests that ostracism is a common experience in daily life, occurring in various social situations and for different reasons. For society, the study underscores the importance of addressing ostracism as a social issue, as it can have negative consequences for individuals and groups. The study also suggests that interventions aimed at reducing ostracism and promoting inclusion may be beneficial for individuals and society.

Methodology

Meta-analysis is a statistical method combining quantitative findings from previous studies to obtain credible results in various scientific fields. Researchers highlight the importance of meta-analysis in increasing statistical power and improving estimates of effect size. However, it is crucial to avoid ignoring heterogeneity and combining apples and oranges, as well as other biases, to ensure effective meta-analysis (Ferrer, 1998; Tang and Liu, 2000; Egger and Smith, 1998).

Results

The relationship between social media use and adolescents' sense of belonging and loneliness is complex and not fully understood. Some studies suggest that online communication is less fulfilling than face-to-face interactions and may increase the risk of loneliness. However, other research suggests that social media technology can expand social connections and foster a sense of identity and purpose. Much of the existing research is based on overly simplistic models that examine only the frequency of social media use on well-being, and more research is needed to clarify the mechanisms through which social media use affects adolescents' social outcomes (Smith et al., 2021). Schneider et al., 2017 investigates the effects of ostracism by ingroup versus outgroup members. The study found that being excluded by an otherwise despised outgroup such as the Ku Klux Klan leads to similar effects as being excluded by members of an ingroup. Other findings indicate stronger effects for people who are excluded or included by their ingroup compared to exclusion or inclusion by an outgroup. For instance, rejection and inclusion by an ingroup hurts more and feels better, respectively, compared to outgroup members. The study suggests that the distinction between trivial ingroups (e.g., smoking groups) and ingroups that are essential to social identity (e.g., racial minorities) must be considered when comparing ostracism by ingroup versus outgroup members. The study proposes a research question on whether perceived group similarity moderates the effects of ostracism on need-threats and well-being. Lutz & Schneider, 2021 suggest that receiving negative feedback, such as dislikes, on social media is still better than being ignored. Participants who received negative feedback reported lower levels of need threat and higher levels of coping responses compared to those who were ignored. Additionally, the study found that participants were more familiar with receiving/assigning positive feedback than with receiving/assigning negative feedback in their everyday social media use. Schneider et al., 2017 found that ostracism on social media can have a significant negative impact on emotional well-being, which amplifies the range of aversive effects induced by ostracism. The study suggests that considering well-being is important for future investigations of ostracism.

However, psychological well-being seems to be a rather stable construct that is not likely to change due to the experience of one brief episode of ostracism. In case of prolonged ostracism, the individuals' resources for coping with the effects of ostracism are depleted leading to a resignation stage. The inability to fortify the thwarted needs is likely to lead to alienation, depression, helplessness, and unworthiness signifying a form of "social death". Schneider et al., 2017 explains Self-esteem is considered an important precursor that indicates whether belonging, meaningful existence, and control are satisfied or threatened. The study assumes that the effects of ostracism depend on the individual's state of self-esteem. The study found that the effects of ostracism on belonging, meaningful existence, and control are moderated by self-esteem in such a way that excluded individuals with

lower self-esteem are more threatened in their needs and more negatively influenced in their mood than excluded persons with higher self-esteem.

Discussions

Schneider et al., 2017 found that ostracism on social media can have a significant negative impact on emotional well-being, which amplifies the range of aversive effects induced by ostracism. (Lutz & Schneider, 2021) The methodology used in the study involved an online survey conducted in July 2019, which was distributed via Facebook and YouTube to social media users in Germany. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions using the Ostracism Online Tool, and data were collected on control variables, media-related and socio-demographic variables, and measures of need threat and coping responses. The study also included a manipulation check to assess the success of the ostracism, rejection, and inclusion conditions.

The victimization perspective is a framework that helps us understand the experience of being ostracized in the workplace. It emphasizes the harm to victims' psychological well-being and their potential reactionary behaviours. This perspective has been integrated into the study of ostracism, and future research is called for to further integrate it. Studies within this framework have shown that ostracism is systematically predicted by both attributes of the victim (e.g., personality, individual differences) and environmental factors (e.g., leadership, job climate). (Allen et al., 2014) several potential pitfalls associated with social media use among adolescents. For example, excessive social media use can lead to negative outcomes such as social isolation, cyberbullying, and poor mental health. Social media can also create unrealistic expectations and comparisons, negatively affecting adolescents' self-esteem and body image. Additionally, social media can be a source of misinformation and fake news, which can lead to confusion and anxiety among adolescents. Finally, social media can be addictive, leading to compulsive use and interference with other aspects of adolescents' lives.

Conclusion

Biological researches can help us understand the emotional responses involved in ostracism by examining the functional state of neurotransmitter systems like serotonin, or lesions in the amygdala or temporal lobe. While ideas and attitudes certainly play a role in social behaviour, the structure and chemistry of the human brain are also directly involved. By studying the biological factors that contribute to ostracism, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional responses involved in this phenomenon. understanding the biological functions of ostracism can help us create more effective laws and regulations. By studying the specific consequences of different forms of ostracism and the evolutionary and physiological roots of social isolation, we can minimize the negative effects of ostracism and ensure that legal punishment complements the functions of the behaviour being regulated. This can have both practical and theoretical benefits, as laws are usually more effective when they align with the overall functions of the legal system. The impact of social media ostracism on social media use, that experiencing ostracism, especially long-term, can lead to individuals withdrawing from social interactions. However, focus groups revealed that some individuals engage in more social media activity following low PDA numbers, whether there was a perception of ostracism or not. This finding may be explained by the hyperpersonal model of communication, suggesting such phenomena may be unique to online platforms, including social media. Therefore, the impact of social media ostracism on social media use is complex and can vary depending on individual and contextual factors (Hayes et al., 2018).

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