



The Association Between Social Media Screen Time and Eating Disorder Symptoms During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background

- A study by Schlegl concludes that approximately 70% of patients report that eating, body shape, weight concern problems, physical activity, loneliness, sadness, and inner restlessness increased their ED symptoms during the pandemic
- Another study by Santarossa explored the relationship between social networking sites and eating disorder symptoms/concerns, found a positive correlation between greater exposure to social media messages and eating disorder symptoms as well as a higher concern over body image and a decrease in self-esteem

Objective

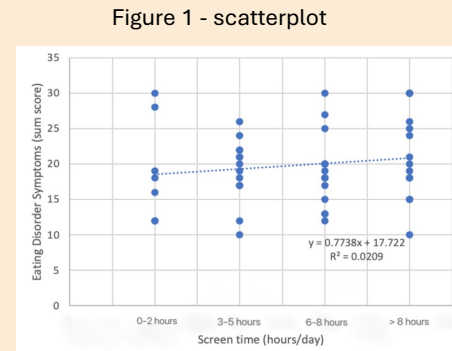
The purpose of this project was to investigate if there is an association between increased social media consumption and eating disorder behaviors as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research on this topic is fairly new as the full effects of the pandemic are still being assessed.

Method

A self-developed questionnaire was used to measure the consequences of eating disorder symptoms in the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire link was posted on various platforms, such as Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram. All participants' information is anonymous. All analyses were conducted with SPSS Statistics.

Results

Figure 1 is the Pearson correlation value and the R², which equal to 0.0209 for the regression graph. We correlated the responses to ED symptoms questions in relation to their responses for screen time, measured in hours per day.



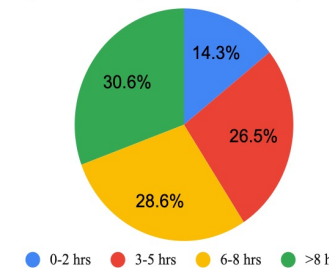
A regression analysis was performed using SPSS, and the p-value was equal to 0.412. It is not statistically significant and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. There is no relation between the exposure and the outcome. As the social media screen time increase, it will not aggravate the eating disorder symptoms.

Table 1: Participant Demographics (N=49)

Age	
18-23	42 (85.7%)
24-30	4 (8.2%)
31-37	1 (2%)
38-44	2 (4.1%)
45+	0 (0%)
Gender	
Male	5 (10.2%)
Female	41 (83.7%)
Prefer not to say	0 (0%)
Other	3 (6.1%)

Most respondents are female and 18-23 years old

Fig. 2: Average Screen Time (hours)



Most respondents spend >8 hours on social media apps

Conclusion

- Longer screen time on social media apps did not have any positive or negative effects on eating disorder symptoms.
- However, increased social media exposure heightens the risk of reinforcing or contributing to ED symptoms.

Policy Implications

- Advocate for more surveillance by improving school-based curriculum to include information on preventing eating disorders.
- Requirement to train for early identification and prevention of ED.

Future Directions

- Improve future study designs to gather more qualitative data:
 - Explore more social media platforms
 - Use a computer tracking system instead of self-reported data
 - Analyze social media activity

References

- Schlegl, S., Maier, J., Meule, A., Voderholzer, U. Eating disorders in times of the COVID-19 pandemic—Results from an online survey of patients with anorexia nervosa. *Int J Eat Disord.* 2020; 53: 1791–1800. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23374>
- Santarossa, S., Woodruff S. #SocialMedia: Exploring the Relationship of Social Networking Sites on Body Image, Self-Esteem, and Eating Disorders. *SAGE Journals.* 2017: 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117704407>

