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Abstract

The present study sought to understand why people may continue to use social media even if it is potentially harming them. Specifically, positive affect, negative affect, social anxiety, social media intrusion, and social media engagement were investigated as predictors of harm belief or difficulty quitting social media, as well as whether mindfulness played a role in the relationship between subjective and objective harm. Perceived barriers from the Health Belief Model were explored as a factor in one's inability to quit using social media despite experiencing harm. Participants were recruited from Brandon University's Introduction to Psychology courses and completed several previously established and original questionnaires related to the variables of interest. The results found that affect and social anxiety could predict harm belief, whereas affect and social media intrusion could predict difficulty quitting social media. Mindfulness was associated with less experienced harm but did not factor into why some harmed participants did not believe they were harmed. Perceived barriers were shown to play a role in the difficulty of quitting social media despite experiencing harm, with participants having more positive reasons to continue to use social media than negative reasons. These findings have implications for how public health messaging should address social media use, particularly for students who are among the most vulnerable. More efforts are needed to combat social media-related harms, improve mindfulness, and alter our often-volatile relationship with social media.

Keywords: social media use, mental health, harm belief, positive affect, negative affect, social anxiety, social media addiction, social media intrusion, social media engagement, mindfulness, health belief model, perceived barriers, public health, university students