INTRODUCTION

Translating Social Media Psychological Research

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Since the advent of the Internet, people have been using it as a means of interpersonal interaction and self-expression. In the recent decade, nowhere is this more prevalent than on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). Social media sites as we know them today are the ultimate culmination of the evolution of the Internet into Web 2.0. They constitute dynamic web sites and smartphone application interfaces, bustling with user-generated content wherein people have the ability to simultaneously share communications and content with any number of networked others. This evolution into the embeddedness of social media in our daily lives has provided researchers with a new and exciting realm in which to study psychological phenomena and develop new research methods for understanding human behavior in a mediated-context that has real world implications for how people see themselves and connect with others.

Social Media Defined

In the extent literature, the terms *social media* and *social networking sites* are used commonly and synonymously. Despite variations in nomenclature, scholars operationally define social network sites as:

> Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211)

For the purposes of this introduction to the social media special issue of *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* and the articles selected for it, we adopt the same nomenclature and definition.

History of Social Media Use

From its early conceptions in the late 1990s (e.g., Six Degrees) until the mid-2000s (e.g., LinkedIn, MySpace), social media use among American adults totaled just 7%. However, by 2006 (with the introduction of popular sites such as Twitter and Facebook), this number has exploded to include 65% of all American adults as of October 2015 (Perrin et al., 2015). This number increases in each younger population segment, becoming almost ubiquitous in American adults under 30, with 90% reporting actively using social media sites. In fact, browsing

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social media sites comprises almost 20% of the time Americans spend online. This rise in social media can be partially attributed to the rise in mobile access to these platforms. In 2016, the vast majority, 79%, of social media consumption in the U.S. took place on either a smartphone or tablet (Lella & Lispman, 2016). These same trends can be seen across developed countries worldwide. Social media is even beginning to penetrate developing markets where access to smartphones and Internet can be limited (Poushter, 2016).

Why Psychologists *Should* Study Social Media

Despite the widespread social media use, psychologists have been late to the game. This is in part due to the technical skills required to acquire social media data (typically offered in the computer sciences) and recent concerns with the inaccuracy of self-reported use of various social media (Junco, 2013). However, psychologists are beginning serious inquiry into the psychological consequences of engaging social media platforms. For example, some studies suggest that Facebook use is associated with decreased well-being (Chen, 2012; Chou & Edge, 2012; Kross et al., 2013) and increased loneliness (Kim, LaRose, & Peng, 2009), while others suggest Facebook use is associated with increased social capital (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009), social bonding (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010), and self-affirmation (Toma & Hancock, 2013). Furthermore other research has shown significant individual and generational differences in social media use (Guadagno, Muscanell, & Pollio, 2013; Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2008; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). Taken together, these disparate findings reveal that (a) much needs to be done to further clarify the processes associated with these outcomes; (b) social media studies can flexibly test interesting, psychological questions; and (c) there is ample room for young researchers interested in computer mediated communications across multiple social media platforms to make their mark on this relatively new area of psychological research.

Although work in this area has begun, *media psychology*, the study of thoughts and social behavior pertaining to the selection, use, interpretation, and effects of communication across a variety of media, made up only 1.6% of peer-reviewed articles in five top-tier psychology

journals from 2003–2012 (Okdie et al., 2014). This number is consistent with the 1.5% previously found in a content analysis of four top psychology journals of the preceding four years between 1998 and 2002 (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2004). It is worth noting that for the purposes of the aforementioned content analyses, mediated communication referred to any communication outside of face-to-face communication, meaning that studies looking at books, e-mail, social media posts, text messages, TV, or letters impact on psychological processes or behaviors would be counted as media psychology articles. Thus, the published studies examining social media specifically are even fewer in number. This is perhaps the case because of a lack of awareness about the various frameworks media psychologists have developed for studying social media with a psychological lens (see Okdie et al., 2014; and Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012 for two such attempts).

The Special Issue

The goal of this special issue is to add to the emerging literature by featuring a series of articles that examine both the psychological and translational issues pertaining to social media use. To that end, our special issue features articles from many areas of psychological science such as: developmental, clinical, cognitive, and social. Furthermore, while the literature reviewed above suggests that much of the extant psychological research on social media has focused on Facebook, we sought articles that examined the issue more broadly by examining other variations of social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Internet Memes). It is the editors' hope that this special issue inspires new psychological inquiry into the implications of social media use for both theory and practice.

Conclusion

The psychological study of social media is important for a myriad of reasons. However, we suggest that the effect social media use has on peoples' self-efficacy in navigating their social environments is of particular importance. However, with the ever-increasing pervasiveness of social media platforms across the globe, the people interacting through social media are exposed to news, information, and a variety of

disparate opinions and behavior. It remains to be seen what impact these experiences will have in the long-term. For instance, mental health and education are two fields that are using an array of mediated forms of communication to try and best serve the needs of patients and students to enhance their well-being and knowledge. For this reason, the psychological study of social media lends itself easily to translational issues because each new finding has the potential to give information on new platforms, update information on previously studied platforms, and the study of the psychological effects of this media has the potential to immediately impact a number of individuals lives in a variety of ways.

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