

Social media, self-esteem and suicide

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In nations where corruption is rife it seems that citizens these days find an escape from the everyday problems that trickle down to their lives by using online social media more than those elsewhere. Research to be published in the International Journal of Web-based Communities also suggests that these two factors - more corruption, more social networking - also correlate with lower suicide rates.

Adam Acar, an Associate Professor at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies in Japan, reports that more than half the population of developed countries is now active on [social networking](#) sites, such as Facebook, Google Plus, LinkedIn and Twitter. The vast majority of users are English speakers, but research suggests that the adoption of so-called Web 2.0 of which these sites are part is widespread across the globe. Indeed, it has been suggested that the use of social networking is almost culture-independent, partly because the interfaces to the online systems does not, on the whole, reflect cultural boundaries.

"Culture is directly related to country-level social media use which may also be related with country-level self-esteem, pace-of-life, happiness, suicide rates, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, median age and corruption," Acar explains. "In countries where people use social media heavily there is low suicide, high corruption, low GDP, high self-esteem and high respect for traditions. At the same time societies with low social media use rates tend to be older, less emotionally expressive, less happy, score low on openness and conscientiousness, have higher GDP and higher social capital."

However, Acar is concerned with the idea that of the almost two billion people now using [online social networks](#) and social media the likelihood is that there are indeed cultural differences in adoption, use and motivation in different parts of the world. Acar has carried out a statistical analysis of the large database represented by the comScore report "It's a Social World". The database was published at the end of 2011 and contains a wealth of information on social media activity, region, age, gender, income and other factors.

The data analysis suggests that fundamentally there are indeed cultural differences across the globe in social media use. "We found that there are low levels of suicide, more happiness and more corruption in societies that use social media heavily," Acar reports. He points out that these correlations do not imply a link, just that there are observed differences in behaviour. "We do not speculate that social media increases happiness, openness, national self-esteem and corruption," he says. "By the same token we do not claim that social media use reduces suicides."

Nevertheless, one might extrapolate from the data analysis to posit a testable hypothesis that the presence of higher levels of [corruption](#) might lead to lower levels of life happiness and feelings of personal security and that social media use acts an escape or a distraction from these.

The author also points out that nation-level self-esteem is an important factor influencing [social media](#) use. Israel has the highest nation-level self-esteem and spends the most time on online social networking while Japan has the lowest nation-level self-esteem and spends the least time on online social networking.

More information: "Culture, corruption, suicide, happiness and global social media use: a cross-cultural perspective" in *Int. J. Web Based Communities*, in press.

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