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The Dark Side of Social Media Use – Relationship between Addictive Social Media Use, Social Media Flow, Daily Stress, and Sense of Control

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The use of social media (SM) such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter belongs to everyday life. In the short-term, the use contributes to the experience of positive emotions. However, in the long-term, the positive experiences can foster the development of a strong emotional bond to the SM and a pathological need to stay permanently online. This phenomenon was termed as addictive social media use (SMU). Addictive SMU can negatively impact mental health (e.g., foster depression and anxiety symptoms). The present cross-sectional study investigated potential predictors of addictive SMU. In a sample of 1,171 SM users (age: M(SD) = 23.87(7.21)), daily stress, sense of control, SM flow (experience of intense enjoyment and happiness during SMU), and addictive SMU were assessed by an online survey. In a moderated mediation analysis, the positive relationship between daily stress and addictive SMU was significantly mediated by the level of perceived sense of control. SM flow significantly moderated the relationship between sense of control and addictive SMU. Specifically, the link between both variables was significant only for medium and high levels of flow. The current findings disclosure potential mechanisms that could foster addictive SMU. Daily stress could reduce individual’s sense of control that contributes to addictive use of SM. The experience of flow during the online activity could foster this relationship. The present results should be considered when assessing individuals at risk for addictive online behavior and when planning specific interventions to deal with this problem of the current age of digital revolution.