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To use or be used? The role of agency in social media use and well-being

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In this paper, we develop the concept of agentic social media use: a way of engaging with social media that emphasizes having the beliefs, knowledge, and practices to use it intentionally. In comparison to instances of “mindless” social media use, people who use social media agentially do so with a purpose in mind: they leverage the affordances of social media to do things that are meaningful, useful, or satisfying for them. For example, people can use social media to intentionally build or manage their relationships, to seek out and learn new information about their interests, or to craft a positive image of themselves through the content they post. Crucially, however, there are many other valuable uses of social media that may not be considered conventionally productive but are nonetheless deliberate and useful, such as using social media intentionally to relax, unwind, and entertain themselves in an effort to modulate their emotions. To use social media agentially means to (1) hold an agentic mindset about one’s relationship with social media, (2) have the knowledge and literacy to understand how to navigate social media effectively, and (3) enact practices that assert control over specific elements of social media use, such as curating content and refining algorithmic recommendation. Approaching social media use from the perspective of agency and intentionality allows us to better understand heterogeneous social media effects and to identify new ways of helping people benefit from these technologies.

KEYWORDS

well-being, social media, mindsets, psychological well-being, agency, control, social cognitive theory

Introduction

For many people, social media is integral to daily life—connecting them to a constant stream of information about their friends, their interests, and the world around them (Auxier and Anderson, 2021; Rideout et al., 2022). However, this constant connectivity (Wells et al., 2021; Abeele et al., 2022) raises important questions about the amount of control we have over our experiences with social media: Are we dependent on—or even “addicted” to—social media, or are we engaging with it on our own terms?

It is easy to find narratives that portray social media users as addicted to their devices and influenced by the pull of platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Public editorials (Petrillo, 2021; Haidt, 2022; Stabile, 2022) often emphasize the ways in which people spend more time on social media than they want to (for a review, see Sun and Zhang, 2021), or how specific features are designed to capture and ensnare user attention (Gray et al., 2018; Bail, 2021; Wells et al., 2021).

Based on these dominant narratives of social media as a powerful force that exerts control over individuals, people are often urged to reduce their exposure to social media by disconnecting (e.g., taking a “digital detox,” [Radtke et al., 2022](#)) or deactivating their accounts altogether ([Liao and Sundar, 2022](#)).

However, reduction-based strategies are neither practical nor reflective of recent work on the effects of social media use on psychological well-being. Large-scale experiments show that digital detoxes do not often improve individuals’ lives as theorized ([Radtke et al., 2022](#)), unless people disconnect when social media content is likely to be particularly volatile (e.g., during a contentious election cycle, [Allcott et al., 2020](#)). Instead, abstaining from social media use can even undermine well-being by removing individuals from established networks of social support, which can provide important social and emotional resources like social support and access to new opportunities (e.g., bridging social capital, [Ellison et al., 2011](#)). Indeed, new research from the pandemic era demonstrates how adolescents without social media were significantly more lonely than their digitally-connected peers ([Minihan et al., 2021](#); [Metherell et al., 2022](#)).

Furthermore, it is increasingly evident that the amount of agency people feel that they have over social media can have powerful effects on their lives. Research on *social media mindsets* indicates that people who view social media as something they can control and use (i.e., an agentic mindset) report less depression, anxiety, and stress than those who view social media as inherently harmful and addictive (i.e., a low-agency mindset) ([Lee et al., 2021](#)). Having an agentic, positive mindset—such as viewing social media as a tool that can be used to enhance one’s life—was a stronger predictor of well-being than the amount of time they spent online ([Lee and Hancock, 2020](#)). In light of these findings, deeper considerations of user agency may provide valuable insights into how to live with and benefit from social media. While it may be true that individuals hold less sway over the design of social media platforms than the corporations that run them, at the individual level there are many ways for everyday users to take control of their experiences with social media and optimize their engagement with it.

In this paper, we develop the concept of *agentic social media use*: a way of engaging with social media that emphasizes having the beliefs, knowledge, and practices to use it intentionally. In comparison to instances of “mindless” social media use, people who use social media agentially do so with a purpose in mind: they leverage the affordances of social media to do things that are meaningful, useful, or satisfying for them. For example, people can use social media to intentionally build or manage their relationships, to seek out and learn new information about their interests, or to craft a positive image of themselves through the content they post. Crucially, however, there are many other valuable uses of social media that may not be considered conventionally “productive” but are nonetheless deliberate and useful, such as using social media intentionally to relax, unwind, and entertain themselves (e.g., to modulate their emotions, [Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015](#); [Robinson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2016](#)). To use social media agentially means to (1) hold an agentic mindset about one’s relationship with social media, (2) have the knowledge and literacy to understand how to navigate social media effectively, and (3) enact practices that assert control over specific elements of social media use, such

as curating content and refining algorithmic recommendation. Approaching social media use from the perspective of agency and intentionality allows us to better understand heterogeneous social media effects and to identify new ways of helping people benefit from these technologies.

What is agency and why does it matter?

At a fundamental level, agency means “having the capacity to alter the course of events in some situation” ([Cesafsky et al., 2019](#)). When people feel they have agency, they believe they have some degree of control over the course of their own lives ([Bandura, 2001](#)) and that they can take action to get what they want or need ([Moore and Fletcher, 2012](#)).

These perceptions of agency are essential to well-being. Indeed, some of the most striking evidence of the importance of agency comes from studying its absence: people who feel they have little control over their lives tend to feel more stressed, anxious, and helpless. Indeed, one of the cognitive symptoms of depression is believing that the conditions of one’s life are poor and there is little that can be done to improve it ([Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1986](#); [Maddux and Meier, 1995](#); [Vollmayr and Gass, 2013](#)).

In contrast, people tend to feel more positively about themselves and more satisfied with their lives when they feel capable of taking care of themselves, whether this means feeling a sense of control over their health, relationships, or finances ([Bandura, 2001](#); [Adler, 2012](#); [Moore and Fletcher, 2012](#)). Indeed, perceptions of self-efficacy have long been thought to be essential to maintaining a positive self-image ([Bandura, 2001](#)), in part because these agentic beliefs are important precursors to actions that benefit the individual. For example, people with higher self-efficacy are more likely to pursue beneficial, but challenging, tasks (e.g., a new exercise routine, smoking cessation; [Fletcher and Banasik, 2001](#); [Gwaltney et al., 2009](#)) because they believe they will succeed. Few people, after all, want to choose difficult pursuits they believe they cannot accomplish. The strength of the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and behavioral change is such that many health interventions emphasize the need to build individuals’ confidence that they will succeed as a pivotal first step toward change ([Zimmerman, 2000](#)). Indeed, a recent meta-analysis found that experimentally increasing individuals’ self-efficacy was a strong predictor of individuals’ health-related behaviors ([Sheeran et al., 2016](#)).

People often understand their agency relative to other forces in their lives. Even someone who generally feels in control of their life may feel less agentic in certain situations, like being in a regimented work environment that limit their choices, or in a social setting with strong norms about what is acceptable to share (e.g., the positivity bias on social media content, [Schreurs and Vandenbosch, 2021](#)). Classical research on loci of control emphasizes how beliefs about control over one’s environment can influence well-being in powerful ways ([Klonowicz, 2001](#); [Mirowsky and Ross, 2007](#)). People who view themselves as fundamentally in charge of their own lives and actions (i.e., having an internal locus of control) see themselves as capable of optimizing their experiences, such as being able to make decisions that will help them thrive by harnessing the

tools around them, whether they be digital or analog. In contrast, people who have an external locus of control feel like their lives are dictated by outside forces.

Technologies like social media can be understood as one such force. People can feel controlled by their experiences with platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok if they feel they are spending more time online than they want to or if they find themselves influenced by what they see (Lanette et al., 2018). On the other hand, people can also feel in control of their social media use and capable of using it to get what they want or need (i.e., action initiation, Moore and Fletcher, 2012). These perceptions of agency and self-efficacy (Skurka et al., 2022) may be an important determinant of whether people obtain benefits from their use, or not. In the context of media use, self-efficacy is an important determinant of technology adoption (Waddell et al., 2014) as viewing the self as capable of learning to use new devices or platforms (e.g., smartphones) is an important first step because individuals generally want to do things they believe they can be successful at. In addition to influencing individuals' beliefs about their own potential, conceptualizations about agency can also influence behavior. Indeed, thousands of interventions to date have tried to help people protect their health (Sheeran et al., 2016), well-being (O'Sullivan, 2011), and livelihoods (Shoji et al., 2016) by helping them develop a sense of agency. Considerations of agency may thus similarly improve individuals' experiences with social media.

Conceptualizing agentic social media use

What does it mean for individuals to use social media agentially? An agentic perspective of social media focuses not on the time people spend on social media, but rather the extent to which they are intentionally or unintentionally using social media to fulfill valued needs and goals. As a first step, people should feel they are in control of the ways they engage with social media, whether this means using it extensively, or not at all. Aided by a basic understanding of how social media systems work, they can then change the ways they use social media in an effort to obtain its benefits while avoiding its harms.

By centering considerations of user agency, we can focus on identifying and analyzing the psychological forces that drive behavior: asking *why* people use social media in addition to documenting *how* they use social media. The same action, like watching a video, can be driven by diverse motivations which may in turn differentially affect people's lives. For example, enjoying a video as part of an intentional ritual of unwinding after a long day may help people relax, manage their stress, and improve their mood (Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Robinson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2021). In contrast, watching the same video to procrastinate unpleasant tasks or to tune out anxious thoughts may undermine well-being by preventing people from necessary and beneficial tasks, such as managing their work lives and processing their emotions adaptively (Robinson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2016; Reinecke et al., 2017). As in prior work on teaching individuals how to best live with and benefit from everyday forces in their lives (e.g., stress optimization theory, Jamieson et al., 2018), we can help people optimize their

experiences with social media by scaffolding the belief systems, literacy, and behaviors they need to make the most effective use of these digital tools.

Our conceptualization proposes that for people to take control of their experiences with social media, they should have a mindset that orients them toward its potential uses, the literacy to understand how social media systems work, and a repertoire of practices that will help them assert control the ways they use social media. We discuss each of the following components below.

Social media mindsets

For people to optimize their experiences with social media, they need to first believe it is possible for them to harness its affordances for their own benefit. This belief system can be understood through the lens of social media mindsets, which are the core beliefs people have about the fundamental nature of social media in their lives (Lee et al., 2021). Just as individuals can have growth or fixed mindsets about the nature of their intelligence (Dweck, 2008), people hold mindsets about the amount of agency they have over their social media use (i.e., high agency vs. low agency) and the expected valence of its effects (i.e., enhancing vs. harmful). These mindsets function like a mental shortcut, offering people simple answers to difficult questions like "How will using social media generally affect me?" and "How much control do I really have over this technology?" that can help guide them toward specific ways of thinking about, responding to, and using social media (Lee and Hancock, 2023).

Having an agentic and positive mindset toward social media use appears to be particularly adaptive. Research on the relationship between social media mindsets and mental health found that mindsets can have important effects on individual well-being. In fact, people's mindsets about the role of social media in their lives were a stronger predictor of their life satisfaction and psychological distress than the amount, frequency, or intensity of their use (Lee and Hancock, 2020). Those who believed that they were in control (agency) and that social media could be beneficial to their lives (valence) not only felt better about their lives, but also reported less depression, stress, and anxiety. In contrast, people with the mindset that their social media was inherently harmful and out of their control tended to feel more psychologically distressed, in line with prior work indicating that perceiving one's own use as "problematic" can undermine mental health (Andreassen et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2019; Cunningham et al., 2021).

Why is it important for people to have such a particular mindset toward their social media use? At a high level, mindsets guide people toward certain pathways of understanding and engaging with social media—mechanisms that have been explored in the context of appraisal effects and behavioral change (Claro et al., 2016; Crum et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2018; Yeager et al., 2019; Paakkari et al., 2021; Przybylski et al., 2021). For instance, people who see themselves as in control of their social media use tend to view instances of their social media use as meaningful and useful. As one participant described in an in-depth interview about their mindset (Lee et al., 2021), social media "is for doing things" that "[make] life easier and more colorful," whether that involves "serious" informational or social tasks like engaging with news

and maintaining friendships overseas, or simply using it to take a moment to relax in the interstitial downtime between events (Squire and Dijkers, 2012; Chess, 2018).

In contrast, people who see themselves as dependent on their social media—or subject to its influence—feel worse after they spend time on social media, whereas those with more agentic mindsets do not (Lee and Hancock, 2020). Similar results were observed in Ernala et al. (2022), where Facebook use was associated with reduced subjective well-being when people perceived their Facebook use as bad, but not when they perceived it as good. If people already hold the mindset that their social media use is not under their control, they may appraise further use as a failure to resist temptation (e.g., self-control failures, Lanette and Mazmanian, 2018; Lanette et al., 2018). This may be particularly harmful to individuals' self-esteem given the highly fragmented nature of social media use throughout the day (e.g., through push notifications and repeated phone pick-ups, Reeves et al., 2021; Brinberg et al., 2022), which may serve as a constant reminder of their perceived lack of self-control. Therefore, holding an agentic mindset that allows individuals to consider the potential ways in which they can use it for their own benefit may be an important precursor to positive experiences with social media.

Social media literacy

People can also use social media more intentionally when they understand the technical and social workings of social media platforms. Knowing more about how platforms function may be particularly important as “social media” comes to encompass an increasingly broad set of technologies, ranging from conventional feed-based platforms like Twitter to video- and game-based platforms like TikTok and Roblox (Bayer et al., 2020)—each of which presents unique affordances and challenges.

Social media literacy can improve people's ability to make informed choices about the ways they engage with social media. While everyday users may not need to understand the details of how platforms run under the hood, they can better optimize their experiences with social media if they have a working knowledge of core features (e.g., algorithmic recommendation systems) and common social dynamics on social media (e.g., self-presentation biases when presenting content) (Schreurs and Vandenbosch, 2021; Schreurs et al., 2022). Indeed, research on self-efficacy emphasizes that domain-specific knowledge is important to helping people translate a general sense of agency in their lives into action in specific facets of their life (Bandura, 2001; Mirowsky and Ross, 2007; Skurka et al., 2022). Knowing more about a particular concept—such as how social media is curated both by platforms and by people—can complement an agentic mindset in helping people assert control over their experiences with social media content.

Consider, for example, the ways in which increased literacy about content curation can support people in obtaining greater benefits from social media. It is now the norm for most platforms to use personalized algorithms to recommend content to their users (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022). Algorithm audits (Metaxa et al., 2021) and internal documents (Wells et al., 2021) indicate that feeds like the TikTok For You page and the Instagram Explore page

curate content by identifying users' interests through an analysis of digital trace data, like the posts they look at, like, share, or skip. While the specifics of these processes are rarely made known to the general public—much less everyday users—knowing how these algorithm-based systems work can help people have more agency over what they see and share. For instance, research on the algorithmic crystal finds that people who understand how the algorithms reflect elements of their own identity can better shape and refine its recommendations for them by changing their own behaviors (Lee et al., 2022). Literacy can also help people manage the ways they are seen by others, through the algorithm. Research on adaptive folk theorization reveals that people with a stronger working knowledge of algorithms were better equipped to maintain their desired self-presentations (e.g., sharing certain facets with certain communities, DeVito, 2021), even in light of updates to the algorithm over time.

Literacy can also help people make intentional decisions about the ways they think about and engage with content produced by others, whether they are creators, peers, or strangers. A notable example can be seen with regards to social comparison on social media (Nesi and Prinstein, 2015; Keles et al., 2020). We know from media psychological research that self-presentations on social media are often biased toward the positive (Walther et al., 2015; Yau and Reich, 2019) as individuals strive to put their “best foot forward” and to share the highlights of their personal, professional, and romantic lives (Schreurs and Vandenbosch, 2021). Everyday users may not realize this, however, and may instead interpret these idealized self-presentations as realistic glimpses into the lives of others (Fan et al., 2019)—potentially triggering harmful processes of downwards social comparison (Chou and Edge, 2012; Frison and Eggermont, 2016; Lee, 2020). Research on the Social Media Literacy model (Schreurs and Vandenbosch, 2021) indicates that literacy may buffer against such effects. People who understand the ways in which the positivity bias of social media content distorts what they see online are protected against the adverse effects of seeing idealized content on their self-esteem (Schreurs et al., 2022). Interventions have demonstrated that teaching adolescents about these biases can improve well-being by changing how people responded to idealized social media content (Weber et al., 2022).

Practices

Using social media agentially also requires individuals to enact specific strategies to assert control over their experiences with social media. Whereas holding an agentic mindset is an important precursor to obtaining benefits from social media, and literacy can enhance individuals' ability to translate self-efficacy into action, people should also put agency into practice by changing their behavior. We define agentic practices as those where individuals modulate the ways in which they engage with social media by intentionally considering the ways in which its affordances may serve them in fulfilling valued needs and goals.

In a recent review of media use efficacy, Skurka et al. (2022) highlight how feeling capable of using media for one's own benefit is a powerful predictor of positive behavioral change. Indeed, decades of interventions on behavioral change have helped people be

healthier, spend more wisely, and live more meaningfully (Bandura, 1992; Baldwin et al., 2006; Schwarzer et al., 2008) by boosting their self-efficacy and teaching them useful practices (e.g., how to create an exercise routine, how to budget, how to maintain meaningful relationships).

In a similar vein, people can apply agentic social media use practices to learn how to obtain more benefits from their social media use. Take, for example, the ways in which people can better control their engagement with their feeds. People may feel that their feed is shaped by what is most popular overall, and therefore showing them content from interests that are not relevant to them (Eslami et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2022). Alternately, they may also feel that the algorithm is not dynamically keeping up with changes in their self-concept, and is instead showing them content from facets of their identity that are no longer important to them (e.g., pictures from out-of-touch friends, past partners, or old hobbies, Lee et al., 2022). A simple, yet powerful, way that people can increase their control over social media content is by making judicious use of features like the block, unfollow, and “show me less” functions (e.g., information repertoire filtration, Zhang et al., 2022). Just as people spring-clean their houses, it may be valuable for individuals to iteratively or routinely sort through their social media content to prune what is no longer useful and appreciate what brings them joy. For instance, people can remove themselves from communities they are no longer interested in or unfollow accounts that do not enhance their lives. On the other hand, people should also use existing features to positively curate their feeds by deliberately following new creators and joining new groups. Furthermore, people can manage their audience preferences by setting “close friends” lists or creating group-chats to take control of who sees their posts, and thus better manage social boundaries (Litt, 2012).

In a similar vein, people can assert control over the recommendations provided to them by personalized algorithms by using the practice of strategic refinement. Theory and research on the algorithmic crystal (Lee et al., 2022) emphasizes that individuals can shape the algorithms’ model of their preferences by changing how they engage with content on the platform. Guided by the notion that their behaviors inform personalization processes (e.g., a personal engagement folk theory, DeVito et al., 2017), they can strategically increase or decrease their interaction with specific forms of content to change the algorithm’s recommendations. This practice increases individuals’ agency over their feeds by providing individuals a pathway to refine what they see *via* the algorithm, so that its recommendations either better align with their self-concept (e.g., learning that they enjoy specific music, fashion, humor, or views) or who they might like to be (e.g., new hobbies they want to try, new perspectives they want to consider). In one noteworthy example, a white adolescent who realized her feed was mostly other white adolescents was able to strategically refine her TikTok algorithm to show her videos from more creators of color to support more diverse artists, musicians, and activists (Lee et al., 2022). To do so, she began to watch, like, and comment messages of support on posts from BIPOC individuals. The same practice of strategically modulating engagement behaviors can similarly be applied to help individuals take a more active role in the process of curating content received through personalized algorithms.

Implications for theory and interventions

Considering agency in experiences with social media can advance theory on the differential effects of technology use on well-being. Furthermore, it can illuminate new pathways for interventions to help everyday people make the most out of these ever-present digital tools.

Understanding the extent to which individuals are using social media intentionally or unintentionally may enrich how we describe, study, and assess social media use. As increasing work confirms that social media affects people differently (Beyens et al., 2021; Pouwels et al., 2021), it is clear that using social media can both help and harm people’s lives (Orben, 2020; Meier and Reinecke, 2021; Hancock et al., 2022), and that these effects cannot be explained by differences in time spent with social media alone (Przybylski et al., 2020; Parry et al., 2021). Examining the extent to which people use social media intentionally or unintentionally may help explain when social media is most enhancing. Already, research on social media mindsets indicates that people who hold more agentic mindsets experience better well-being, whereas low-agency mindsets are associated with worse well-being. Furthermore, Cunningham et al. (2021) found that the component of social media use that was most detrimental to adolescent depression was teenagers’ perception of their own use as “out of their control” (i.e., problematic social media use).

Thinking about social media use in terms of its intentionality can also complement and extend existing approaches to parsing enhancing and harmful social media effects. For example, it has been commonly theorized that active social media use (e.g., posting, sharing, commenting) can improve well-being whereas passive use (e.g., browsing, watching videos) undermines it (Verduyn et al., 2015). However, new research indicates that we should go beyond examinations of type of use alone to understand heterogeneous social media effects (Valkenburg et al., 2022). For instance, eye-tracking studies like Ellison et al. (2020) find that users spend equivalent time gazing at social media content that they do and do not click on, suggesting that actions that appear “passive”-like watching a video or scrolling through a feed-may involve active thought and consideration. In fact, intentional actions that are not captured by clicks, such as calling someone after seeing a social media post, may be more powerful for relationship development and well-being than one-click “likes” or “shares.”

Indeed, there are many ways for active use to be harmful (e.g., cyberbullying, Giumetti and Kowalski, 2022) and for passive use to be restorative (e.g., watching videos to relax, Cauberghe et al., 2021). Considering these two activities with an orientation around user agency highlights the fact that social media use can be a means of pursuing a goal-which can be to hurt another person (Mishna et al., 2016), or to regulate one’s own emotions (et al., 2020).

Adopting an agency-centered approach can also support the development of interventions to improve individuals’ experiences with social media, without necessarily requiring them to reduce their use. Indeed, research from the person-specific framework indicates that reducing social media use may be enhancing for some individuals and harmful for others (Beyens et al., 2021), and therefore may not be a useful recommendation for all (Radtke et al.,

2022). Instead, when we think about social media use from the perspective of individual agency, we can encourage individuals to develop the belief systems and behaviors to identify how best to use social media in their own lives.

For example, Lee and Hancock (2023) helped individuals develop a more agentic, positive social media mindset through a series of self-guided reflective writing exercises. The intervention scaffolded a new way of seeing social media by asking individuals to reflect on questions like “What are some ways in which you already take advantage of social media to do things that are important or useful to you?” and “What can you do differently to make the most of social media in your life?” In addition, participants also developed a personalized plan for supporting their own agentic social media use going forward by listing several ways in which they could take control of their experiences. Results showed that the intervention was successful in not only cultivating more adaptive mindsets, but also more agentic social media use. One participant in the treatment group wrote, “I have specific goals when I’m using social media... It’s not controlling, it’s just a tool I can use” and described how they would leverage social media in the future: “I can use social media as a support system I can go to even during difficult times like COVID-19.”

An advantage of this interventional approach is that it allows individuals to develop their own plans for using social media agentially at an individual level. As the field comes to recognize the ways in which both social media use and mental health vary between, and within, individuals (Ram and Gerstorff, 2009; Valkenburg et al., 2021), interventions to improve peoples’ experiences with social media should be flexible enough to account for such differences. Consider the challenge of supporting individuals in optimizing their experiences with diverse forms of social media content. While some forms of content, like extreme violence, will hurt all individuals, other kinds of content may enhance well-being for some and hurt it for others. Photos and videos of travel destinations may inspire some, but evoke envy or fear of missing out for others (van der Wal et al., 2022). Furthermore, the same person can respond to the same content in different ways at different points in time. For example, looking at photos of a romantic partner may elicit substantially different affective responses depending on the current well-being of the relationship. Providing a normative recommendation for how individuals should engage with most forms of content may thus be challenging. An agency-oriented intervention could instead support individuals in developing the beliefs, literacies, and practices they need to manage their own content streams to optimize their own well-being (e.g., by guiding individuals with reflective questions like “What kinds of social media content tend to make you feel better or worse, and why?”). By teaching individuals how to take control of their own exposure to social media content and to enact agentic practices for curating their feed, with knowledge of its underlying functionalities, we may be better able to support individuals in making the most out of their experiences with social media.

Conclusion

If social media is to be a part of our lives, we should find a way to harness its benefits and minimize its harms. Identifying the ways in which we can use social media agentially can advance theory on social media effects by introducing the intentionality of one’s social media use as an important potential determinant of positive outcomes. We build on prior research to argue that people may be better able to obtain benefits from their social media use when they have an agentic mindset that empowers them to use it for valued goals, understand enough about the workings of social media to be informed users, and enact practices that allow them to exert control over their engagement with social media.

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