Where We are Now:
Youth, Social Media Use, and Suicide
Overview

- Youth Social Media Use Today
- Potential Suicide and Self-Harm Risks of Internet and Social Media Use
- Considerations for Social Media-based Interventions
- Survey of Suicide Detection, Prevention, and Postvention Approaches for Social Media
Youth Social Media Use Today

Social Media Use by Platform, February 2017: Ages 12-24 Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical.ly</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>9%</td>
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</tbody>
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N = 2,000; Sources: Edison Research, Triton Digital, MarketingCharts
Youth Social Media Use Today

*Frequency of Internet Use by Teens, 2015: Ages 13-17 Years*

- 94% of teens who go online with mobile devices do so daily
- 71% of teens use more than one social media platform

(Pew Research Center, 2015)
N = 1,016; Source: Pew Research Center’s Teens Relationships Survey
Potential Suicide and Self-Harm Risks of Internet and Social Media Use
Cyberbullying / Online Peer Victimization

- Targeted harassment by peers toward individuals in the form of emails, social media posts, text messages, or messaging service communications

- Surveys have reported rates of up to 40% of social media users have experienced cyberbullying

- Has been shown to increase feelings of social isolation and hopelessness among those already experiencing mental health stressors

- Has been associated with increased likelihood of suicide attempts among middle school children

(Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Luxton et al., 2012)
Self-harm / Suicide Instruction & Lethal Means Access

- Information on methods for carrying out self-harm or attempting suicide, and means with which to do so, can be accessed online

- Social media platforms, message boards, forums, and websites can host prosuicide content, including how-to depictions and discussion of plans and motivations

- Online pharmacy sites have been implicated in suicide deaths, having provided pharmaceutical-based means to victims

(Beatson & Hosty, 2000; Dyson et al., 2016; Luxton et al., 2012)
Peer Influence & Extreme Behavior Normalization

- Internet sites, including social media platforms, can provide opportunities for prosuicide peer influence to occur

- Behaviors include encouraging suicide, idolizing those who have died by suicide, and forming suicide pacts

- Normalization of suicide and other self-injurious behaviors has been observed in online discussion groups

- More significant effect among individuals who are ambivalent or undecided about a suicide attempt

(Baume, Cantor, & Rolfe, 1997; Bell, 2007; Luxton et al., 2012)
Media Contagion Effects

- Suicide contagion via media reporting of a suicide event is well documented, and has been shown to influence suicidal ideation and methods.

- Occurrence and extent of contagion effect on social media platforms has not been extensively studied.

- Social media sites do provide an access point to media reporting of suicide events, particularly for adolescents and young adults.

- Exposure to discussion of suicide reporting on online discussion forum sites has been linked to increased suicide ideation.

(Dunlop, More, & Romer, 2011; Luxton et al., 2012)
Intervention Considerations and Potential Approaches
Considerations for Social Media-based Interventions

- Varied and rapidly changing landscape of social media:
  - Social media platform popularity and functionality
  - User base characteristics and demographics
  - User engagement approaches (rates, behaviors)

- Ethical concerns:
  - Frequently anonymous nature of social media use (limits follow up to high-risk users)
  - Lack of widely-agreed upon research and implementation guidelines
  - Platform integration challenges (e.g., lack of developed safety and implementation monitoring protocols and systems)

(Robinson, Rodrigues, et al., 2015)
Considerations for Social Media-based Interventions

- Most research describes delivery of online interventions outside of social media context

- Implementation issues are being examined:
  - Feasibility: Can online interventions be sufficiently moderated to detect and intervene in emergency situations, suicide pact formation, or prosuicide peer influence
  - Sustainability: New interventions must be responsive to changing social media platform technologies and user behaviors
  - Safety: Whether participation in interventions induces or worsens suicide ideation

(Rice, Robinson, et al., 2016; Robinson, Rodrigues, et al., 2015)
Approaches: Detecting Suicide Ideation Among At-risk Users

- Currently platforms offer tools which allow users to report or “flag” posts they feel indicate suicide or self-harm ideation or behavior
  - Reported users are rapidly provided a personalized message with online suicide prevention and helpline information

- Potential future direction: Automated detection of content posted by individuals experiencing suicide ideation (Sentiment Analysis; Birjali, Beni-Hssane, & Erritali, 2017)
Approaches: Strengths- and Skills-Building Interventions

- Recently studied intervention used a peer-to-peer online social network focused on building mental health skillsets:
  - Use of strengths
  - Reducing rumination
  - Increasing self-compassion
- High usage of intervention’s social networking system, with most participants rating the intervention as helpful
- Significant improvements at the end of the 12-week study period in number of participants in depression remission compared to baseline
- Showed trend of improved use of strengths among participants

(Rice, Gleeson, et al., 2016; Rice, Robinson, et al., 2016)
Approaches: Strengths- and Skills-Building Interventions

- Intervention focused on increasing participant skills/capacity to:
  - Identify problems and tolerate distress
  - Employ help seeking, problem solving, coping, and reframing behaviors

- Exploratory study paired online, monitored CBT intervention with in-person intervention delivered by school-based mental health staff

- Study found significant decreases in levels of suicide ideation, hopelessness, and depression symptoms, and no increase in distress or suicide ideation

(Robinson et al., 2016; Robinson, Hetrick, et al., 2015)
Approaches: Engaging Users in Intervention Development

- Leverages social media platforms’ high accessibility to proactively engage at-risk users in the development and use of online interventions

- A recent pilot of a postvention intervention used a closed Facebook group to facilitate peer-led development of suicide prevention messaging to be disseminated among peer group on social media platforms

- Intervention showed no increase in suicide ideation among participants and an increase in participant self-efficacy to safely discuss suicide with peers, and to assist their peers in seeking help

(Rice, Robinson, et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2017)
Social Media redefines *local*. 
References


