

Joshua Davis 3MT Transcript | University of Guelph 3MT Campus Final 2020

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Title: Under the Influence: The Effect Social Media has on our Thinking

Transcript: Imagine you step through a portal into a parallel world. And in this world, you have the same friends, acquaintances and social structures, but everything is a bit more extreme. Relationships seem better, people seem more fit, and partying seems crazier. Now, you understand that this parallel world is not reality, but what happens when you start spending more time in that extreme world? Will spending more time there start to shape what you think is normal back in the real world? Well, this is essentially the question I wanted to investigate, except the parallel world are our social media accounts, the portal are the devices we use, and the behaviour I am interested in is partying behaviour.

Currently, there are popular social media accounts that are dedicated to displaying partying behaviour at Canadian universities. It's not uncommon to see on these accounts students drinking a whole bottle of liquor or smashing a beer can against on their head before drinking it. So, I wanted to see whether exposure to these types of videos was changing students' perceived drinking norms. Now, a student's perceived drinking norm is how much alcohol they think a typical student will drink on a night out.

And researching a change in drinking norm perception is important because people typically like to behave within their norm perception. So, if social media is skewing one's perceived norms to a more extreme position, then universities and communities may see an increase in the negative types of behaviours that are associated with extreme drinking like vandalism, sexual assaults, lower GPA, and decrease in mental wellbeing.

So to investigate this I designed an experiment, it was a longitudinal experiment with 3 time point and at each time point I measured student's perceived drinking norms. At time 2, however, I exposed participants to two and a half minutes of partying videos taken from social media.

I found that after exposure to these videos, student's perception of the drinking norm increased a full drink compared to time one, and that this effect was sustained at time three. Now, this is just after two and a half minutes of exposure to videos, imagine what is happening to our norm perception after years of being inundated with this content?

Recently, mental health researchers have called for policy change around the amount time someone can spend on social media. Policy change requires research, and a lot of the research examining the effects

of social media are correlational or self-report. My supports past research by showing some of the first experimental evidence that exposure to social media is changing one's thinking. And I hope that my current research and future research will help to fuel policy change in the future.

So, the next time you go onto social media, take a moment to consider how this is impacting your thinking.

Thank you.

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