

# Autism, Social Media & Quality of Life

Eleanor Gay u1725912@uel.ac.uk

- What is the relationship between autism traits and social media use?
- How do adults with autism use social media?
- Does social media have the capacity to impact positively on the quality of life of adults with autism?

Key Stats

Most autistic people are adults - however the UK spends just 7% of autism research funding on adults (Autistica 2019)

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Mental health in autism is poorly understood and researched (Cassidy & Rodgers 2017). Adults with ASD are at high risk of co-occurring mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, **self-harm & suicidality** (Hedley & Uljarevic, 2018).

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79% of autistic people are socially isolated, and this a contributor towards reduced quality of life and mental health concerns. This may stem from reduced ability to communicate and therefore socialise neurotypically. (National Autistic Society, 2016)

Autistic people are among the most isolated and lonely in the uk - 4 times more likely to be lonely than the general public (National Autistic Society 2017). The impact of loneliness is as damaging as smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Campaign to end loneliness, 2010)

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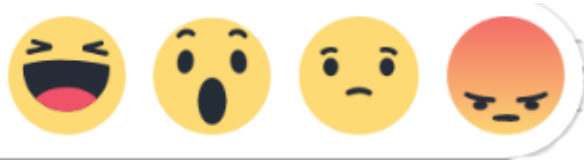
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Previous studies have shown that in neurotypical populations using social media less can reduce **depression** and **loneliness** (Huang, 2010)

But other research has linked social media use and wellbeing - specifically '**happiness**' - in adults with autism (Mazurek, 2018)

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## Study Design

The study will measure 3 variables which will be assessed by a series of online self-report questionnaires. See the table below.

Variable	Measurement Scale
1. Autism traits (IV)	Autism Quotient Questionnaire
2. Social Media Use (IV)	Social Media Intensity Scale (adjusted from Facebook Intensity Scale)
3. Quality of life (DV)	3 scales related to social functioning: a) Satisfaction with life scale b) Rosenberg self esteem scale c) UCLA loneliness scale

- The study will look at adults with a self-reported low IQ. It will target adults with high functioning autism, as those with more severe needs may not be able to engage in social media sites in the way we are assessing.
- A minimum of 120 participants is required with roughly a quarter of these scoring highly requiring a high score on the autism quotient test in order to provide a range of results for analysis.
- The questionnaire will be developed in Qualtrics and disseminated using a range of online and offline methods to obtain the data required.
- The data will then be analysed through a series of bivariate and multiple regression models using SPSS software in order to establish if there are predictive correlational relationships between the variables.
- Key hypothesis:

### Autism Traits + Social media usage > Quality of life

- The models will be repeated for different kinds of social media use (i.e. type of content posted). Quality of Life will be analysed both as a combination of scores on the three scales used (see left) but also looking at these scales individually.

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## Impact

- The negative impacts of Social media (particularly on our mental health) is the zeitgeist, its detrimental effects being prolifically analysed and presented (eg. Mitchell, Lebow & Uribe, 2011). Social media is a powerful tool, but are there specific circumstances where it can be harnessed to positive effect?
- This study aims to investigate the impact of social media use on the quality of life of adults with ASD. It may be that social media can act as a supportive communication tool within this population.
- Social isolation is one of the main issues for people with autism and this stems partially from difficulty with communication. Could social media provide a positive alternative for people with ASD?

Where an adult with autism may lack confidence expressing themselves or reaching out to an old friend, an online network may give them a **structured framework** to do this.

**Asynchronicity** of messaging allowing time to process and respond.

A social network may offer a sense of **belonging** and **community** within a socially isolated population.

Less reliance on **non-verbal cues** (facial expressions) - alternative to face to face communication.

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