Coping with Stress or Losing Control? Facebook-induced Strains Among Emerging Adults as a Consequence of Escapism versus Procrastination

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Facebook use has been associated with a number of negative effects on emerging adults’ academic performance and well-being. We propose two distinct modes of Facebook use that may each uniquely contribute to these Facebook-induced strains in users’ everyday lives: escapism and procrastination. Both have been investigated as drivers of negative effects of digital media use, yet there seems to remain some confusion about their respective conceptualizations. The results of a survey study among student Facebook users (N = 345) underline that while escapism can be understood as a dysfunctional avoidance coping response to negative life circumstances, procrastination refers to a self-regulatory failure rooted in low self-control. Both escapism and procrastination, however, are characterized by the selection of enjoyable content that provides substitute gratifications and serves as a distraction from negative stimuli and situations. Likewise, both modes of usage contributed to perceived Facebook-induced strains, underlining the unique detrimental effects of escapism and procrastination on emerging adults’ well-being.

Introduction

Social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook afford users constant access to a diverse range of gratifications, such as social connection with strong ties (e.g., friends and family), informational support from weak ties (e.g., classmates), the latest news updates, or mere fun through online entertainment (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). Facebook has thus emerged as a powerful source for the satisfaction of basic psychological and social needs (Reinecke, Vorderer, & Knop, 2014; Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011). It especially permeates the lives of late adolescents and emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 25, who typically report the highest amounts of SNS and Facebook use com-
pared to other age groups (e.g., Busemann, 2013). This developmental stage of emerging adulthood is typically characterized by volatile explorations of one’s identity as well as quickly changing personal, educational, and work commitments, leaving emerging adults with a feeling of being in-between youth and adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2016). These years of personal turmoil can put young adults under enormous psychological stress. As social media such as Facebook provide numerous pleasurable gratifications, emerging adults may be particularly driven to seek out such media that promise quick and effective “distractions” from academic challenges or an “easy escape” from personal difficulties. However, if performed frequently, such forms of media use may be deeply dysfunctional and costly for young adults’ personal development and psychological well-being.

Indeed, evidence is mounting that the constant availability of instant gratifications and distractions offered by Facebook can impair younger users’ academic performance (e.g., Junco, 2012; Rosen, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013) and may considerably compromise their day-to-day well-being (e.g., Kross et al., 2013; Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2014). Building on literature from both communication and psychology, this study proposes two distinct modes of dysfunctional Facebook usage that may each uniquely explain some of these negative consequences associated with Facebook use among emerging adults: escapism and procrastination. Both, escaping from problems in one’s everyday life and procrastination (i.e., the irrational delay of intended tasks), have been investigated as drivers of negative effects of digital media use on well-being (e.g., Hinsch & Sheldon, 2013; Kaczmarek & Drążkowski, 2014). However, the two concepts have often been used ambiguously (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010)—or even synonymously (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011)—in the Facebook context. This study thus aims at theoretically and empirically disentangling escapist and procrastinatory Facebook use by investigating their distinct predictors as well as their unique influences on users’ well-being.

For this purpose, we will first turn to the respective conceptualizations of escapism versus procrastination. Based on previous research, we derive four hypotheses about the nature of these two constructs which will then be tested with data from a survey among emerging adults. Finally, the results will be discussed against the backdrop of our distinction of the two modes of dysfunctional Facebook use, escapism and procrastination.
Facebook Use as Escape

The notion of media use as an escape from dissatisfying life circumstances and the troubles of daily life is one of the oldest in media uses and effects research (e.g., Pearlin, 1959). Although it has rarely been the sole focus of communication researchers, escapism continues to be investigated, for example, in uses and gratifications research on new media such as digital games or SNS (Hellström, Nilsson, Leppert, & Åslund, 2012; Smock et al., 2011). However, despite its popularity, the concept of escapism lacks both theoretical and empirical differentiation (Katz & Foulkes, 1962).

Escapism as a Classical Communication Concept

The first attempt to clarify the escapism concept comes from Katz and Foulkes (1962), who argued that escapism can best be understood not just as a gratification of media use, but rather as a reciprocal process of media selection and effects. As such, escapism specifically concerns intensified media exposure as a consequence of certain deficits or problems in everyday life, such as social isolation (Katz & Foulkes, 1962) or stress (Pearlin, 1959). Using media to “escape” from these difficult life circumstances can result in intended or habitually expected compensatory gratifications (e.g., enjoyment of entertainment content), but also in unintended negative consequences (e.g., time displacement effects; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). These negative consequences, in turn, may then increase the negative life circumstances (e.g., loneliness) that initiated the intensified media use in the first place. This has sometimes been referred to as a negative feedback loop or as the “narcotizing dysfunction” (Katz & Foulkes, 1962, p. 385) of intensified media exposure. Notably, Katz and Foulkes (1962) argue that media use should thus only be characterized as truly escapist, if it elicits any unintended negative consequences besides the intended compensatory gratifications.

Despite Katz and Foulkes’ thoughtful clarification of the concept, much of the following research on escapist media use has investigated isolated components of the process model, such as the sociological drivers (e.g., McLeod, Ward, & Tancill, 1965) or the specific content of supposedly “escapist” media use (e.g., Anderson, Collins, Schmitt, & Jacobvitz, 1996). Frequently, the motive of using media “to escape from reality” is included in uses and gratifications studies, without further explication of the drivers.
and outcomes of such use. Specifically, prior research on escapism has often remained silent about the psychological mechanisms that make individuals respond to negative life circumstances with dysfunctional escapist media selection.

**Specifying Escapism as Dysfunctional Avoidance Coping**

One proposal for such a process comes from Knobloch-Westerwick, Hastall, and Rossmann (2009). In a study on selective exposure, they argued that escapist media selection can be understood and investigated more rigorously as a *coping-response*. According to the transactional model of stress-coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping refers to “conscious, volitional attempts to regulate the environment or one’s reaction to the environment under stressful conditions” (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007, p. 1080). Thus, individuals facing difficulties or stressors in their everyday life that exceed their currently available resources are required to cope with these demands through either cognitive (re-)appraisal or a behavioral response. Two general categories of coping responses have been proposed: approach and avoidance coping (Roth & Cohen, 1986). While approach coping refers to cognitive and behavioral responses that are aimed at eliminating or reducing the impact of the stressor, avoidance coping refers to cognitive or behavioral disengagement from the stressor. Accordingly, avoidance coping is characterized by an essentially “escapist” response that enables individuals to get away from the source of their current stress reaction. In this framework, stress can be induced by a wide array of taxing stimuli and situations that may represent manifestations of more general stressors, such as challenging life events (e.g., relocation and the resulting disruption of close personal networks) or chronic strains (e.g., low self-esteem, prolonged loneliness) (Cohen, Gianaros, & Manuck, 2016).

Following Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2009), escapist media selection can thus be specified as an avoidance coping response to stressors in everyday life. However, in line with the argumentation presented by Katz and Foulkes (1962), escapist media use is specifically characterized by a *maladaptive* coping response that results in unintended negative outcomes. Although neither approach nor avoidance coping are conceptualized as inherently “good” or “bad” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), avoidance coping has more consistently been linked to negative psychological correlates.
such as neuroticism or psychopathological symptoms (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). Similarly, escapist media use has been found to be negatively related to users’ well-being (e.g., Kaczmarek & Drążkowski, 2014). According to this reasoning, individuals that frequently turn to media use to avoid dealing with stressors in their daily lives are less likely to overcome their struggles and may enter a vicious circle of intensifying (inter-)personal and psychological problems over time. Crucially, escapist coping has been identified as either a key predictor (e.g., Hagström & Kaldo, 2014; Hellström et al., 2012; Masur, Reinecke, Ziegele, & Quiring, 2014) or even a diagnostic criterion (Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Gentile, 2015) for problematic and pathological digital media use among adolescents and emerging adults. In conclusion, previous studies on escapist media use underline that escapism can be defined as intensified media exposure that serves as a dysfunctional avoidance coping response to (chronic or temporary) stressors in individuals’ everyday lives.

Findings on Escapist Facebook Use

Escapism is typically associated with the use of highly immersive entertainment content, such as fantasy (Katz & Foulkes, 1962) or online multiplayer games (Hagström & Kaldo, 2014). However, in line with Katz and Foulkes’ (1962) process model of escapism, “content that generally is not described as ‘escapist’ may serve functionally to promote escape” (p. 383). As Facebook can be accessed almost ubiquitously via mobile media and affords a diverse range of compensatory gratifications, it may serve as a readily available short-term escape from salient stressors in various situations in daily life. This is corroborated by several studies that identified escapism as a gratification sought of or obtained from Facebook use (Masur et al., 2014; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Smock et al., 2011). A growing number of studies further indicates that Facebook is used more intensely among individuals that report certain deficits in their daily lives. In a recent meta-analysis of eight studies on Facebook use and loneliness, Song et al. (2014) found that loneliness was a significant predictor of increased levels of Facebook use. In a cross-sectional study on the predictors of “Facebook addiction”, Masur et al. (2014) further found that low levels of autonomy predicted higher levels of escapist Facebook use that in turn mediated the effect of autonomy on Face-
book addiction. Finally, in a series of four studies, Sheldon et al. (2011) found that Facebook use was particularly driven by feelings of social disconnection and loneliness. The authors thus concluded that “the portrait that arises is of a person who is addicted to a coping device that does not approach problem-resolution directly but, rather, approaches a pleasant distraction from problems” (Sheldon et al., 2011, p. 773).

Consequently, we assume that escapist use of Facebook is an avoidance coping response to temporary or chronic stressors or deficits in users’ everyday lives. One central indicator of the presence (or rather: relative absence) of such stressors is individuals’ satisfaction with life (hereafter: SWL; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), which refers to a cognitive overall assessment of one’s life circumstances. As SWL is influenced by a variety of more permanent intrapersonal, interpersonal, and socio-economic difficulties (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Heller, Watson, & Hies, 2004) as well as challenging life events (Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012), it serves as a good proxy for the relative absence of stressors. That is, the more stressors and strains young adults perceive in their daily lives, the lower their SWL and the more likely Facebook is used as a means of avoidance coping (i.e., escapism). We thus assume that SWL is a negative predictor of escapist use of Facebook (H1 a).

As discussed in the introduction, escapism has been conceptualized and operationalized in various and sometimes ambiguous ways. In order to differentiate escapist Facebook use more clearly from related dysfunctional uses, we will thus briefly turn to previous operationalizations of the construct. Smock et al. (2011, p. 2325), for example, investigated motives of Facebook use and defined “escapism” as being indicated by items tapping into avoidance-coping with social difficulties (“I use Facebook, so I can get away from the rest of my family or others.”), distracting oneself from personal duties (“…, so I can forget about school, work, or other things.”), and “escaping” from current activities (“…, so I can get away from what I’m doing.”). Notably, the latter two items may imply the use of Facebook in situations, in which individuals face important, but potentially unpleasant tasks and duties, yet avoid the start or completion of these tasks. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) also identified the item “I use Facebook, to put off something I should be doing” as an indicator of escapist use, subsumed under the label of “pastime” (p. 356). More explicitly, this item taps into Facebook use as a means of procrastination, which, as we will see in the following paragraphs, may differ in important aspects from escapist use.
Procrastination has been defined as the “self-regulatory failure of not exerting the self-control necessary for task engagement” (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013, p. 116). This conceptualization of procrastination is in line with a vast body of empirical literature that underlines the roots of procrastinatory behavior in deficient self-regulatory processes and, specifically, a lack of self-control (Steel, 2007).

According to this conceptualization, procrastinatory behavior is characterized by “giving in” to pleasant short-term temptations (e.g., checking Facebook) instead of exerting the amount of self-control necessary to engage in an intended, but potentially aversive task (e.g., writing a term paper). Giving in to pleasant temptations typically provides procrastinators with short-term gratifications such as relatedness need satisfaction through Facebook use (Reinecke, Vorderer et al., 2014; Sheldon et al., 2011). Procrastinated tasks, in contrast, are often perceived as more strenuous, stressful, anxiety-inducing, or boring (Pychyl, Lee, Thibodeau, & Blunt, 2000) than alternative (media) activities, which are typically “just a click away”. Pursuing such strenuous, yet personally important tasks often promises long-term goal attainment (e.g., getting a good college degree). Consequently, individuals rely on their capacity for self-control to prioritize long-term goal attainment over short-term indulgence in pleasant distractions (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). This notion of dispositional self-control strength has been labeled trait self-control (hereafter: TSC), which is defined as an individual’s capacity to override or inhibit problematic behavioral tendencies and desires (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004).

A number of recent studies have investigated the use of offline and online media for procrastination (for a summary, see Hofmann, Reinecke, & Meier, 2017). Together, these studies paint a coherent picture that corresponds well with the outlined conceptualization of procrastination as self-control failure. Reinecke, Hartmann, and Eden (2014), for example, found that participants in a cross-sectional study who reported having low state self-control on the day prior to study participation also reported increased procrastinatory TV and video game use. In a study among college students, Panek (2014) found that participants with low TSC reported increased time spent on leisure media such as TV, SNS, or online videos. Additionally, he found that the time spent on leisure media use was linked to decreased time spent on schoolwork, which may indicate procrastinatory media use as a consequence of low self-control. More explicit evidence
for the link between self-control and procrastinatory media use comes from a recent experience sampling study by Reinecke and Hofmann (2016). In 61.2% of all sampled episodes that included current or recent media use, participants reported that their media use conflicted with other important goals such as “efficient time use” or “educational achievement” (p. 450). This strongly underlines the self-regulatory challenge posed by a media-saturated environment, which seems to considerably tax users’ self-control abilities. Indeed, the authors found that participants with higher TSC reported fewer instances of procrastination with media content.

In conclusion, the available evidence on media use and procrastination indicates that constantly available media use options are a challenge to users’ self-control. Specifically, those users with higher TSC seem to fare better in regulating their unwanted media desires in everyday life, resulting in fewer instances of unintended task delay through media use (i.e., procrastination). Thus, we expect that TSC is a negative predictor of procrastinatory use of Facebook (H2 a). In contrast, previous research does not provide evidence or theoretical justification for an effect of satisfaction with life on the frequency of procrastination (cf., Hinsch & Sheldon, 2013). Accordingly, we do not expect SWL to be a significant predictor of procrastinatory use of Facebook (H1 b). Likewise, since we define escapist media use as an intentional and compensatory coping effort to avoid dealing with temporary or chronic stressors in daily life, we do not expect individuals’ ability to control unwanted desires and urges (i.e., TSC) to predict escapist use of Facebook (H2 b).

Similarities Between Escapist and Procrastinatory Facebook Use

In the previous two chapters, we have outlined our distinct conceptualizations of escapist versus procrastinatory use of Facebook. However, as indicated by the sometimes interchangeable use in prior studies (e.g., Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011), the two concepts also show some striking similarities, which we will address in the remainder of our literature review.

Most notably, both during media use for procrastination versus escape coping, individuals turn to an activity that “distracts” them from unpleasant situations and negative affective experiences. While the procrastinator tries to get away from starting or completing a subjectively unpleasant task (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013), the escapist media user tries to avoid dealing
with personal problems and negative life events, which may manifest themselves in episodes of stress, anxiety, loneliness, self-discrepancies, or depression (e.g., Anderson et al., 1996; Pearlin, 1959; Sheldon et al., 2011). Accordingly, both procrastinators and escapists are prone to turn to media activities that promise a pleasurable distraction, at least in the short-term. Facebook use offers a variety of immersive activities such as chatting, watching online videos, or interacting with other users via comments and is thus enjoyed by many users (Reinecke, Vorderer et al., 2014). This may suggest that users who simply enjoy using Facebook more would also be more likely to use Facebook as a tool for procrastination and as an escape from personal troubles. We thus expect that enjoyment of Facebook use will positively predict both procrastinatory (H3 a) and escapist Facebook use (H3 b).

A second similarity between escapism and procrastination is their dysfunctional nature. As outlined above, avoidance coping is often maladaptive in the long term, since individuals may fail to address the roots of their problems (Compas et al., 2001). Adolescents and emerging adults, in particular, are faced with the task of developing a flexible set of functional coping responses that enables them to navigate the challenges of everyday life. An overreliance on avoidance coping at the cost of not learning beneficial approach coping responses (e.g., seeking out social support from close others) can result in negative consequences for psychological health and well-being (Compas et al., 2001). Accordingly, escapist coping has been linked to the development of problematic patterns of media usage that have shown to affect users’ well-being (e.g., Kaczmarek & Drążkowski, 2014).

Likewise, a large body of research on the correlates and consequences of procrastination underlines its harmful effects on health and well-being, especially among emerging adults (Steel, 2007). Procrastinators irrationally delay subjectively important tasks and show decreased (academic) performance, for example, due to increased time pressure and higher error rates (Kim & Seo, 2015). The detriments in performance, in turn, can elicit negative self-evaluative thoughts and feelings, such as guilt, rumination, or worry (e.g., Pychyl et al., 2000). These negative effects of procrastination also seem to arise in the context of procrastinatory media use. A number of studies have found negative links between procrastinatory media use and well-being indicators such as vitality (Reinecke, Hartmann et al., 2014), affective well-being (Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016), and cognitive well-being (Hinsch & Sheldon, 2013). Research on media multitasking
and task switching also suggests that these effects may be particularly pronounced among adolescents and emerging adults working in self-directed learning settings (e.g., Rosen et al., 2013).

As the available evidence indicates that both escapist and procrastinatory media use are linked to declines in performance and well-being, we expect that both escapism and procrastination will positively predict the well-being-strains that individuals associate with their overall Facebook use (H4a and b).

**Method**

**Sample.** We tested these hypotheses with survey data from a convenience sample of $N = 345$ student Facebook users (62% female). The results presented here are based on a reanalysis of some of the data used in Study 2 in Meier, Reinecke, and Meltzer (2016). Study participants were recruited via snowball sampling through the online social networks of 28 students enrolled in the communication program at the University of Mainz, Germany. At the beginning of the survey, participants were informed about the study topic and were assured anonymity as well as their right to end the survey at any time. With a mean age of 21 ($SD = 2$), participants fall well within the age range of emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). Participants reported an average of 73 minutes of Facebook use on a typical day ($SD = 90$), which is slightly below the average of 87 minutes Facebook use per day in the German population aged 14 to 29 (Busemann, 2013).

**Measures.** In the survey, participants completed several Likert scales, all of which showed good internal consistencies. Specifically, *trait self-control* (TSC) was measured with eight items from the brief self-control scale (Tangney et al., 2004; $M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.71$, range 1-5; $\alpha = .81$); *satisfaction with life* (SWL) was measured with the five-item satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al., 1985; $M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.14$, range 1-7; $\alpha = .86$); and *enjoyment of Facebook use* was measured with three items from a scale by Reinecke, Vorderer et al. (2014; $M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.74$, range 1-5; $\alpha = .75$). *Procrastinatory use of Facebook* was measured with four items taken from a scale by Reinecke, Hartmann et al. (2014; $M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.42$, range 1-6; $\alpha = .94$). See Table 1 for details on the procrastination items.

As there is no established measure of escapist media use in general or escapist Facebook use in specific, we conducted a literature search for
items that were used to measure escapism in prior research. We then selected four items for our scale of *escapist use of Facebook* ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.05$, range 1-6) that were (a) in line with the classical understanding of escapism (Katz & Foulkes, 1962) and (b) had been used in several previous studies on escapist media use (Hagström & Kaldo, 2014), general uses and gratifications research (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973), and in the German long-term study on mass communication (Ridder & Engel, 2010). The items were “I use Facebook to escape from the reality of everyday life” (Katz et al., 1973), “...to forget about everyday life” (Ridder & Engel, 2010), “...to distract myself from worries and problems in everyday life” (Hagström & Kaldo, 2014; Ridder & Engel, 2010), and “...so that I don’t have to deal with everyday problems and issues” (Hagström & Kaldo, 2014). The scale had a very good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$).

Finally, we measured perceived negative effects of Facebook use on well-being and academic performance with a scale we termed *Facebook-induced strains* ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.96$, range 1-6). Participants were asked to report how often they perceived strains in different spheres of life as a consequence of their overall Facebook use. The seven items were “My Facebook use impairs my general well-being”, “...puts strains on my personal relationships”, “...leads to stress in my day to day life”, “...makes it more difficult to relax in my day to day life”, “...impairs my temporary moods”, “...hinders my personal growth” and “...affects my academic performance”. These items were developed based on prior research on the effects of Facebook use on well-being (e.g., Kross et al., 2013; Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2014) and academic performance (Junco, 2012). The scale had a very good internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$).

**Results**

Before testing our hypotheses, we conducted a descriptive analysis of participants’ procrastinatory and escapist Facebook use and investigated the dimensionality and relationship of the two measures. Procrastinatory use of Facebook was a prevalent behavior in our student sample ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.42$), while participants reported considerably less escapist Facebook use, on average ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.05$).
Table 1. Factor Loadings from an Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Procrastination and Escapism Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I use Facebook…</th>
<th>Factor 1: Procrastination</th>
<th>Factor 2: Escapism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…although I know that I have an important task to complete.</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…although I have more important things to do.</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…while procrastinating upcoming work.</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…although I had planned to get something done.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…to escape from the reality of everyday life.</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…to forget about everyday life.</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…to distract myself from worries and problems in everyday life.</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…so that I don’t have to deal with everyday problems and issues.</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Exploratory principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation (oblimin, delta = 0) based on responses from N = 345 participants. Factor loadings > .60 are highlighted.

The two modes of Facebook usage were moderately correlated (r = .46, p < .001) and an exploratory principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation (oblimin, delta = 0) resulted in two factors comprised of the procrastination and escapism items, respectively. Factor loadings ranged from .63 to .90 and considerably exceeded any cross-loadings between the two factors (see Table 1).

We then proceeded to our main analysis, which was conducted with structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS 23 using the maximum likelihood method. All reported paths represent standardized path coefficients and all significance values are based on 5000 bootstrap samples with replacement and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. Due to the empirical and conceptual overlap between escapist and procrastinatory Facebook use, we allowed these variables to co-vary in the model (r = .38, p < .001). Additionally, as TSC can have a positive influence on SWL.
(Hofmann, Luhmann, Fisher, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2014), these two variables were allowed to co-vary, as well ($r = .37, p < .001$).

The model showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 677.594$, $df = 424$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.598$, CFI = .951, RMSEA = .042, RMSEA 90% CI [.036, .047], SRMR = .064) (see Figure 1). Confirming H1a and H1b, SWL was negatively related to escapism ($\beta = -.26, p < .001$), but did not show a significant effect on procrastination ($\beta = .00, p = .962$). TSC, in turn, was negatively related to procrastination ($\beta = -.38, p < .001$), but did not show a significant effect on escapism ($\beta = .11, p = .104$), confirming H2a and H2b. In line with H3a and H3b, enjoyment of Facebook use was positively related to both escapism ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) and procrastination ($\beta = .36, p < .001$). Both escapism ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) and procrastination ($\beta = .31, p < .001$) were found to be positive predictors of Facebook-induced strains, which confirms H4a and H4b.

As we found substantial direct effects in our model, we conducted a supplementary mediation analysis. Significance of effects was tested with the bootstrapping method outlined above. Consistent with our general argumentation, TSC had a significant negative indirect effect on Facebook-induced strains via procrastination ($\beta = -.11$, 95% CI [-.18, -.06]), but not via escapism ($\beta = .01$, 95% CI [-.03, .06]). SWL, in turn, had a significant negative indirect effect on Facebook-induced strains via escapism ($\beta = -.08$, 95% CI [-.16, -.03]), but not via procrastination ($\beta = .03$, 95% CI [-.01, .07]).

Discussion

With the emergence of new immersive and potentially “distracting” media technologies such as digital games or SNS, public debate typically revisits the notion that adolescents and young adults recklessly use these media as an “escape” from educational responsibilities and developmental tasks. As communication researchers, we should be able to test these claims using clearly defined and operationalized concepts. The present study proposes and tests the distinction of two modes of such dysfunctional media use—escapism and procrastination—that are investigated in the context of emerging adults’ use of the popular SNS Facebook.

Based on our theoretical argumentation and supported by the results of this study, escapist use of Facebook can be characterized by purposeful and compensatory media selection that may aim both at the disengage-
ment from salient stressors in users’ everyday life as well as the pursuit of substitute gratifications such as enjoyment. Procrastination, in contrast, seems to be characterized by a more uncontrolled media selection that is driven by low levels of trait self-control as well as a need for short-term mood repair. As Facebook use can be a highly enjoyable and immersive activity, it may help users to temporarily forget their personal troubles (escapism) or represent a pleasant temptation that users turn to in moments of deficient self-regulation (procrastination). Finally, both escapism and procrastination seem to partially and uniquely contribute to the strains that emerging adults associate with their overall Facebook use. The present study thus specifically advances prior research on media uses and effects by conceptually and empirically disentangling the processes that are associated with two popular types of dysfunctional media use—escapism and procrastination.

Note. Observed structural equation model based on N = 345 participants. Fit indices are χ² = 677.594, df = 424, p < .001, χ²/df = 1.598, CFI = .951, RMSEA = .042, RMSEA 90% CI [.036, .047], SRMR = .064. Scores in the figure represent standardized path coefficients. Significance levels are based on 5000 bootstrap samples with replacement and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001
However, this study also comes with a number of limitations that need to be addressed. First, the interpretation of our causal model is limited by the cross-sectional nature of the data. Although all hypothesized paths were carefully deducted from the literature, alternative directions of effects may be plausible. Satisfaction with life, for example, has been shown to be influenced by procrastination with social online media in longitudinal studies (Hinsch & Sheldon, 2013). Hence, it can also be investigated as an outcome rather than a predictor of escapist versus procrastinatory media use. Second, we tested our hypotheses in a non-representative convenience sample of student Facebook users. Accordingly, our results do not extend to other groups of emerging adults, who may experience considerably different life circumstances (e.g., differences in socioeconomic status or the amount of time available for self-directed learning, see Arnett, 2016) and may thus be more or less prone to use Facebook as a means of escape or procrastination, respectively. A third limitation pertains to our measure of the relative absence of stressors in users’ everyday lives. Although satisfaction with life is sensitive to a variety of factors that may indicate the presence of stressors (Diener et al., 1999), it is too broad an indicator to adequately capture the specific stressors that drive some users to turn to Facebook as a means of avoidance coping. Hence, future research would benefit from a more fine-grained and systematic investigation of short-term (e.g., daily hassles), temporary (e.g., negative life events), and long-term stressors (e.g., loneliness) that may drive escapist media use. Fourth, our measure of escapist Facebook use has not been constructed and validated systematically. Instead, we relied on items used in previous research on escapist media use to connect our work to the general body of research on this issue (e.g., Katz et al., 1973). As our measures of escapist and procrastinatory Facebook use still shared a considerable amount of variance in the model, future research would benefit from the construction of a well-validated measure of escapism that can be applied to a wide range of media uses. Likewise, it remains an open question for future research, whether existing measures of escapism also tap into more adaptive forms of coping with media (cf., Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009).

Finally, a last limitation concerns the definition of escapism as a dysfunctional coping-strategy under the broad umbrella of avoidance or disengagement coping. Some authors have challenged the analytical usefulness of such broad coping categories and present a more differentiated typology of coping-responses (e.g., Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Skin-
ner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). Moreover, the concept of procrastination has sometimes been subsumed under certain coping-subtypes (Skinner et al., 2003), underlining the need for future research to carefully examine the specific situational and dispositional predictors that drive media use as a compensatory coping-response (escapism) or as a consequence of deficient self-regulation processes (procrastination).

Despite these limitations, we believe that our study contributes to the literature on dysfunctional media use among adolescents and emerging adults by illustrating the usefulness of a differentiated analysis of the uses and effects of potentially “distracting” new media technologies. Specifically, the study underlines that both escapist coping and uncontrolled procrastination with Facebook can contribute to the strains that Facebook use seems to put on young adults’ performance and well-being in their daily lives.

References


