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Degree: Master of Science in Interactive Digital Media

Dissertation title: Social anxiety disorder in the digital age: How do social networking sites, devices and the Internet affect socially anxious individuals?

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Abstract:

This research paper looks at socially anxious individuals' use of three forms of digital media: cyber-technological devices, general Internet use, and social networking sites. It aims to discover whether individuals with social anxiety are thriving more than ever in the digital age because they are now more connected to people than ever before, or if dependence on these digital mediums can worsen their social anxiety and stop them from overcoming it. A systematic literature review was undertaken to explore the existing research and to compare and contrast their findings. It was found that socially anxious individuals experience less anxiety in online interactions than they do in face-to-face interactions, meaning that individuals were able to build friendships online that they otherwise felt unable to do offline. However, socially anxious individuals were at risk of becoming dependent on digital media, potentially becoming addicted and using it as a form of escapism, replacing face-to-face interactions. This had negative effects on their well-being, with levels of depression and social isolation rising. In conclusion, digital media had both positive and negative effects on socially anxious individuals. It was proposed that socially anxious individuals should use online interactions in conjunction with offline interactions to help them to overcome their social anxiety, rather than substituting them completely. Further research could consider online forms of therapy to help individuals with social anxiety and could also look at what factors determine pathological Internet use in socially anxious individuals.