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The Effect of Social Media on Mental Wellbeing: The Good and the Bad

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Abstract

Social media has evolved into a central platform for interpersonal communication and a powerful source of information within contemporary culture. While earlier generations were less accustomed to integrating technology and social media into daily life, current users actively embrace these platforms. Beyond facilitating social connections and networking opportunities, social media also serves as a tool for raising awareness and promoting various causes. However, these benefits are counterbalanced by potential negative effects on users' emotional well-being. This paper critically examines the impact of social media on mental health, focusing on issues such as social media addiction, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. It explores how excessive media use and social comparison contribute to psychological distress,

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highlighting the importance of user responsibility. Ultimately, the discussion advocates for a balanced approach to social media engagement that safeguards mental health while leveraging its positive potentials.

Keywords: Social Media; Mental Health; Anxiety; Depression; Self-Esteem; Internet Addiction; Social Comparison

Introduction

Social media has been integral to society since its inception in the twenty-first century (Tortella et al. 2009). Through social media sites like Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat, we can share pictures and videos and never get bored. These days, many use social media or the newest viral videos as a way to kill time during coffee breaks. These benefits come with a catch: although social media may improve our lives, it may also have detrimental effects on our mental health. The primary drawback is that it could be challenging to distinguish between normal use and overuse (Morgan et al. 2018). Usually, realization happens when the negative consequences become noticeable.

The Positive Side: Connection, Community, and Creativity

The repercussions of social media are profound, as each post, tweet, or like has the potential to either make or break a person's life. With social media, people can share a common experience and cultural moments instantly with the rest of the world, irrespective of geographical locations (Featherstone et al. 2012). Moreover, social media facilitates the showcasing of skills by talented people. Furthermore, it has made remarkable advancements in social justice movements and has created new career opportunities in content creation and digital marketing through advocacy and heightened awareness. As much as social media is viewed with contempt, professional relationships with online influencers and even anonymous self-help groups provide pragmatic and accessible support for individuals looking to find compassion or validation. This may also pertain to the treatment of certain mental illnesses. Such conversations help people to accept that they do not have to bear the burden alone (Vatuk et al. 1990). The global nature of social media serves to remove the stigma of isolation many feel, which is useful in combating suicidal thoughts.

The Dark Side: Comparison, Anxiety, and the Pressure to Succeed

From one social media platform to another, self-marketing and networking like other people create harmful social networking benefits and barriers for us. Scrolling over people's "looks," "lives," relationships, and so-called "achievements" leads to curated images that put us in worse positions than we actually are. Social media, being far, very far from the reality, even though it is idolized, places a sense of worth in people at the mercy of their perception (Lopato et al. 2016).

Teenagers and even young adults actively exploring their identity are the most challenging to work with, especially with social media. Tu et al. argues that the societal expectations of maintaining a perfect facade multiply the pre-existing FOMO, anxiety, and fatigue-fueled romance. With the reality that people with weak psychological makeup are the targets for ridicule, social rejection, cyberbullying, and other formative situations can amplify suicidal ideation (Willard et al., 2007).

Cell Phone Overuse: When Keeping up with Notifications Keeps You Alive

Smartphone attention-seeking is another troubling phenomenon. The social media tools are designed to be addictive. Social media's never-ending 'scrolling,' especially with targeted notifications and 'likes,' activates the brain's reward circuits. We become more engaged in social media and less interested in the real world due to those interactions. For some people, prolonged phone use results in an inability to focus on activities that were once enjoyable, sleeping, or participating in leisurely activities.

Not being in control of one's phone makes several social and physically alarming interactions worse (Beale et al. 2005). In addition to affecting sleep patterns, mental illness, and productivity. Use of smartphones and cell phones after 7 pm exposes users to blue light, which has been shown to suppress melatonin secretion and aid in faster transitioning into sleep. Replacing face-to-face communication with social media fosters emotional alienation between partners. There is merit in the argument of an early age being exposed to screens resulting in stunted attention span and impaired social skills. These are significant problems that demand immediate attention.

Coping Strategies: Finding Balance in a Digital World

To improve something, one must define what is to be changed. It is impossible to have constructive change without understanding the positive and negative impacts derived from social media usage. One way to improve behavior with social media is through a detox. Delete specific applications for two to four days. The proposed habits can also be achieved by limiting the time spent interacting with devices during peak hours and setting personal screen time boundaries (Oulasvirta et al., 2012).

This can also be easily achieved by changing the accounts that one follows. Social media users should unfollow accounts whose depicted coping strategies negatively contribute to their mental well-being. Empowering social media accounts available should primarily serve the purpose of positively uplifting people. Curating feed media greatly helps mitigate and control purposefully manipulating the information one is exposed to while drastically altering and improving emotional experiences. Properly articulating appreciation helps evade the harmful effects of peer comparisons. Ruiz allows social media to impact emotions before and while the unwinding process commences (Ruiz et al. 2024). Filtering out derogatory social stimuli opens up the possibility of creating desirable stimuli. What close friends or coworkers are sharing on social media and how they engage with social media in their day-to-day life greatly shapes motivation, encouraging a sense of social responsibility.

Conclusion

By itself, social media has no value; its usefulness relies on how it is approached. It can be positive and educative but also cause distress. Ultimately, it is we who need to create balance. Since social media is a form of technology, it requires a different approach.

As social media is an essential part of people's lives, they have access to it without dealing with its disadvantages. The micro level, for example, the accounts we follow and the specific times we choose to log off social media, is where social reality can be transformed. A person's mental well-being can benefit from social media. Online and offline, serenity can be achieved by accepting the fact that there is a sword and taking steps mindfully with kindness.

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