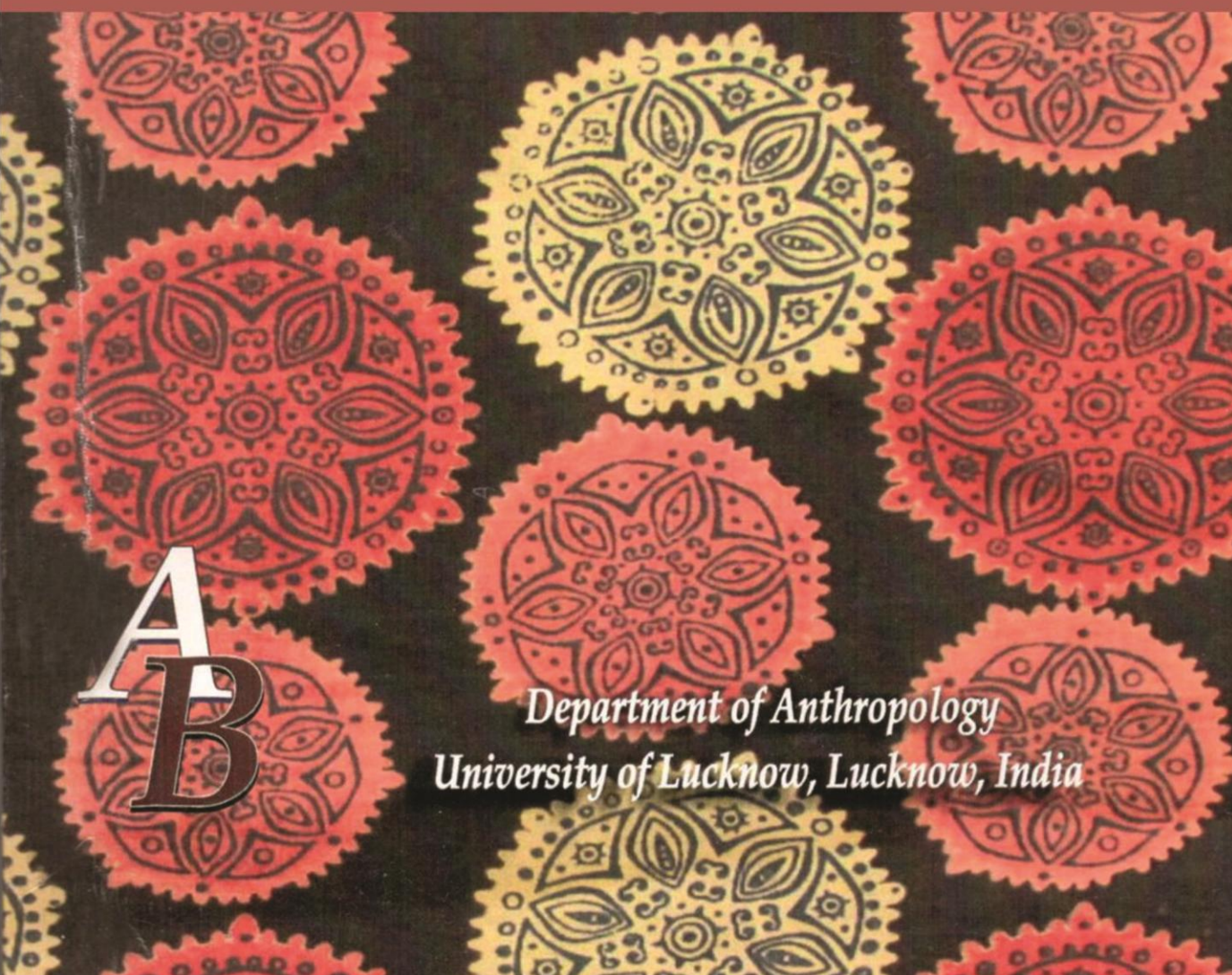


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Social Media Addiction as a Mental Health Concern among Adolescents and Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Research in social media has discovered a connection between social media use and mental health conditions like sadness, stress and anxiety. Excessive use of social media is reported to have exacerbated issues with mental health. Anxiety and depression are conceptualized as two significant mental health outcomes. Spending time on social media can have a favourable impact on the area of mental health; on the other hand it could also have adverse effects too. Since current research is largely cross-sectional in nature it doesn't use analytical methods to look at how people change over time. Recently, a very popular habit of scrolling has entered the disorder diasporas since the American Psychological Association (APA) already has some predefined guidelines for the same. Knowing the key concern areas and identifying the immediate causes of mental health situations invoked by social media may be helpful in designing dedicated therapeutic measures for those affected by it. This paper is aimed at identifying how social media affects the mental health of individuals, with a special emphasis on anxiety and depression among the individuals exposed to social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Health, Anxiety, Depression, Scrolling

Background:

The human species is a sociable animal. To prosper in life, we require the company of others, and the quality of our relationships has a significant bearing on both our mental health and enjoyment. Social interaction with others has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, improve self-esteem, bring comfort and joy, prevent loneliness, and even lengthen life. On the contrary, a lack of solid social ties can seriously jeopardize your mental and emotional well-being. There has been a significant rise in cases concerning young people getting affected by depression and suicidal thoughts. Mostly it is people who spend multiple hours a day using screens, and more specifically girls. But many of the pressures teenagers feel from social media are actually consistent with developmentally normal concerns around social standing and self-expression. Social media can certainly exacerbate

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these anxieties, but for parents to truly help their children cope, they should avoid making a blanket condemnation. Parents should adapt a facilitating approach towards children ensuring a healthy communication all along the years of their transition from adolescence to adulthood. Behavioural researchers have identified various disorders related to social media use, which include mild disorders such as nomophobia and severe disorders including suicidal tendencies. This paper examines the vulnerabilities of social media use and corresponding mental health situations.

Social Media: Concept and Ideas

Social Media is termed as a collective comprising of different forms of electronic communication such as websites for microblogging and social networking. Social media enables the users to create online communities for sharing information, ideas, personal messages, and videos (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2016). Social media is one of the types of new media that makes the interpersonal communication easier, interesting and economical. Social media makes use of the internet to function as a social bridge between people, communities and groups. Social media initially served as a way to connect with friends and family, but it swiftly evolved into a tool for many more purposes, including education and entertainment. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are just a few of the many platforms and programmes that are classified as Social Media as they allow users to share content, connect with others online, and build communities. Almost 60% of the world's population, or more than 4.7 billion people, use social media. Digital technology known as social media facilitates the sharing of information, multimedia, and material among online communities and networks.

Social Media: Types and Forms:

There are many various types of social media, such as video sharing, social gaming, business networking sites, virtual worlds, review websites, and others. A number of social media tools are used by people to connect with possible employers, find people globally who share their interests, and express their opinions on social networks. Social media is a tool that politicians and governments use to communicate with citizens and constituents. Social networking is an essential tool for companies. Companies use the platform to find customers, engage with them, advertise their goods, track consumer trends, and offer customer service or support. Organizations can focus on marketing strategies and market research thanks to social media's ability to collect data. Social Media such as WhatsApp Business and Instagram have aided in the promotion of goods and services by making it possible to offer potential clients targeted, timely, and exclusive deals and coupons.

People are getting benefitted through social media-connected loyalty programmes. This could also help in establishing, developing and maintaining the client relationships, making it an essential medium for relationship management. Different types of social media exist depending upon the requirements of the users and new innovations are being done so as to fulfill the requirements of the situation and behaviour.

Social Media: Boon or Bane?

According to a Pew Research Center survey from 2019, social media use is associated with having more friends and a more diversified personal network, more specifically in the emerging nations (Silver, Huang & Taylor, 2019). These platforms allow users to interact, discover niche communities, and get real-time information access to hundreds of social networking websites around the world. Due to social media's ability to connect more individuals with one another online, the world appears to be more open and interconnected. Yet, social media may also be used to spread lies, misinformation, and detrimental psychological effects. A recent study conducted at Pew Research Center has categorically mentioned that, 'those who use social media have more friends and more diverse personal networks, especially in emerging nations' (Silver, Huang & Taylor, 2019).

Social media has changed our lives in many ways and it has become inevitable to stay aloof from the communication transformations the world is witnessing at present. An estimate tells that the social media now has more than 4.7 billion members globally. Whether or not each platform appeals to you personally, it provides a channel for connecting customers and companies across disparate communities or interests. From the perspective of business marketing, it offers a crucial means to advertise to a sizable audience, target clients, and eventually motivate them to make a purchase through digital channels. Companies are also using social media marketing to target their customers, generate a fan base of devoted followers, and develop a brand culture. It is estimated that more than 200 million small companies reportedly have used Facebook's platform for marketing.

With hundreds of social media sites globally, these platforms offer users the ability to access information in real time, to connect, and find niche communities. On one hand, social media has helped many individuals find common ground with others online, making the world seem more interconnected and within reach. Yet on the other hand, social media is prone to spreading disinformation, creating polarization, and causing harmful psychological effects.

Social Media Addiction: Disorder of Digital Age

It has been observed that excessive social media use causes substantial psychological impairment in people of all ages, including severe sadness, anxiety, and sleep deprivation. It is evident through research literature that social networking platforms can become addictive, especially for young people. A 2017 study found that over the course of a year, a greater proportion of users acquired Facebook Addiction Disorder (FAD). FAD was more likely to occur in people with narcissistic personalities or other detrimental mental health factors (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2017). Unchecked internet usage and social media addiction may seem less harmful than addiction to drugs or gambling but they are quite related. Like any other addiction, social media addiction can still have detrimental, long-lasting repercussions on mental health. According to a 2017 study of teenagers published in Plos One, 4.5 percent of young adults struggled with social media addiction (Marchant et. al. 2017).

A research study in United Kingdom has revealed that young people, particularly girls, were more prone to depression and low self-esteem due to online harassment and sleep problems brought on by prolonged media use. The data also indicated a cyclical relationship between depression and social media use. Particularly, sad teenagers often turn to social media to cheer themselves up only to discover that negative posts filled with hatred or aimless comparisons worsen their despair (Kelly, Zilanawala, Booker, & Sacker, 2018).

A research study at University of Pennsylvania concluded that restricting daily social media use to 30 minutes dramatically reduces feelings of fear of missing out (FOMO), sadness, loneliness, and difficulties falling asleep (Hunt, Marx, Lipson & Young, 2018). Yet, if you want to improve your mental health, you don't have to drastically cut back on your social media usage. The same study found that you can raise your mood and level of concentration by just paying more attention to how you use social media. Even while aiming for 30 minutes a day might not be realistic. An article that appeared in June 2019 issue of New York Times article featured a newlywed couple who almost divorced after their honeymoon. Less time was spent with her husband and more time was spent planning the vacation and posting selfies.

Several specialists have noted an increase in youngsters' insomnia, loneliness, anxiety, and reliance, which has been linked to the introduction of the first iPhone ten years ago. According to one study, 48 percent of teenagers who use electronic devices for five hours per day had at least one suicide risk factor, compared to 33 percent of those who use them for at least two hours per day. All of us have heard accounts about teenagers who become

overwhelmed with emotions as a result of the continuous contact and comparisons that social media encourages.

The Addiction Binary: Use v/s Abuse

Griffiths (2013) has found that social media addiction also has the same characteristics as substance abuse addictions. He has explained that there are six core components which characterize addictive behavior. These include salience, mood modification, conflict, tolerance, relapse and withdrawal symptoms. Social networking sites can become the most compulsive activity for some people, which results in preoccupation or salience. It has been noticed that the sites' activities produce happy feelings, but more time is needed to keep getting the same gratifying results.

Griffiths (2013) has also claimed that these people experience withdrawal when they stop using social media, which causes them to relapse. Researchers have also put on record that social media overuse may also become an addiction if it results in, neglect of personal life, escapism, tolerance, concealing the addictive behaviour, mental preoccupation and mood modifying experiences.

Mental Health Concerns

Social Media Addiction has affected people physically and psychologically through the addictive behaviour it instills and because of the impact it has on the brain. A recent research study at Harvard University found that self-disclosure on social networking sites activates the same region of the brain as using addictive drugs. Decisions and feelings are influenced by the reward region of the brain and its chemical communication pathways. Dopamine levels increase when someone engages in rewarding behaviour or consumes an addictive substance because dopamine-producing neurons in the brain are engaged. Consequently, the brain experiences a reward and tends to link the substance or action to a beneficial reinforcement (Drushel, 2010).

Social media use, poor mental health, and low self-esteem clearly have links, according to research. Social media sites have their advantages, but overusing them can lead to a feeling of loneliness and unhappiness. These unfavourable emotional responses are brought on by the comparison of material possessions and lifestyles that these websites promote as well as the social obligation to share goods with others. Users see curated content on Facebook and Instagram, which consists of posts and adverts that are expressly created to appeal to people depending on their interests. Users might experience happiness or inspiration as a result of seeing other people post about their fantastic careers, wonderful partners, or lovely homes. But, some people could view these images and experience jealousy, depression, or even suicidal thoughts since their own lives are not as ideal as those they see on Facebook or Instagram.

When people use social networking sites as a significant coping strategy to deal with stress, loneliness, or despair, social media use becomes problematic. These users receive ongoing benefits from social media use that they do not receive in real life, leading them to partake in the activity more frequently. This constant use eventually causes numerous interpersonal issues, including the neglect of real-life relationships, obligations from work or school, and physical health, all of which can compound someone's bad moods. As a result, people increase their social networking activity as a means of coping with dysphoric mood states. The degree of psychological dependence on social media rises when users of social networks continue this cycle of using social media to lift unfavourable moods.

Causes and Remedies

There are several factors that might cause social media addiction and needless to say that it is an addiction of similar magnitude than that of substance abuse. Many variables contribute to social networking addiction, claims a report published in the International

Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. These elements include a smartphone addiction, a fear of missing out (FOMO), nomophobia, and pre-existing mental health issues (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). According to a paper presented in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, several factors contribute to social networking addiction. These factors include a Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Smartphone addiction, Nomophobia, and Pre-existing mental health problems.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

The anxiety that one would miss out on a wonderful event that others are having is known as fear of missing out (FOMO). According to the study, increased Facebook involvement is correlated with higher levels of FOMO. FOMO can also indicate harmful online behaviour.

Smartphone Addiction

According to the study, it is debatable if smartphone users are more dependent on their devices than alcoholics are on booze. Mobile phone users are particularly fond of using social media apps; for instance, around 75% of Facebook users visit the website through their phones.

Nomophobia

Nomophobia is fundamentally a fear of being disconnected, and research has associated it to problematic Internet use, according to the study. Addiction to social media and dread of public places are closely related. The fear of living without a phone is known as nomophobia.

Pre-existing Mental Health Problems

Those who already have mental health problems are frequently more prone to develop a social media addiction. For instance, a Texas University study demonstrates that people who already display symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder frequently turn to social media in an effort to reduce their worry but end up feeling much more nervous as a result.

Excessive anxiety about social media, an insatiable want to access or use social media, and spending so much time and energy on social media that it interferes with other important elements of one's life are all signs of social media addiction. Social media checking and browsing have become more commonplace during the last ten years. The situation might well meddle with the sanity of individuals in coming times because of the media overload and actual human tendencies to encode, store and retrieve information. Psychologists have been working on approaches to check this media overload and developing remedial measures for individuals of all ages who use social media.

Despite the fact that most users of social media do not engage in dangerous behaviour, a small percentage of users acquire an addiction to social networking sites and engage in compulsive or excessive use of them. Studies have also shown that the steady stream of likes, shares, and retweets from these sites triggers the same kind of physiological response in the brain's reward centre as cocaine. Social media interaction has been compared by neuroscientists to the internal administration of dopamine. Clearly, the human brain is being directly impacted by the information overload invoked by social media, the options have overgrown the requirements and hence it becomes imperative to put a check on what to use and how?

Conclusion

Frequent social network users tend to think that other users are happier and more successful than they are, even if they don't know those individuals very well in real life. Social media encourages a culture where individuals compare their imperfect, filtered, and edited online personas to their realistic offline selves, which can be harmful to one's mental health and sense of self. Social media is often used as a source of immediate gratification,

being used as a pacifier during unpleasant experiences; it does emerge as an intervention. Going by the principles of classical conditioning social media also tends to reduce the reaction time of individuals as they frequently deal with prompt issues and prompt gratification. This ultimately affects the stimulus-response equilibrium of people.

Excessive social media use can increase the chance of acquiring mental health conditions including anxiety and depression in addition to making users unhappy and generally unhappy with their lives. Continuous comparison to others can result in feelings of inadequacy or a demand for order and perfection, which frequently presents as social anxiety disorder. This can be very well seen in how people use social media: when they receive a notification, such a like or a mention, their brain releases a burst of dopamine and sends it along reward pathways, making them feel happy. For comparatively small inputs, social media offers an unending supply of instant rewards in the shape of other people's attention. Through this positive reinforcement, the brain rewires itself, making people crave likes, retweets, and emoticon reactions.

The brain's reward regions are most active when people are talking about themselves, which contributes to social media addiction in another way. An estimate tells that people talk about themselves between 30 and 40% of the time in non-virtual settings; yet, since social media is all about showcasing one's life and achievements, people talk about themselves an astounding 80% of the time there. Any individual who posts a picture online may receive supportive comments from others, which prompts the brain to produce dopamine, rewarding the action and sustaining the social media use as an enduring habit. In absence of the anticipated responses on the subsequent posts of individuals, they develop anxiety. The recurrence of such anxieties might result in depression that is largely invisible and is diagnosed in strategic manner. Therefore keeping an effective check on social media use might protect people from new breed of anxieties and depressions.

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