**The Negative Effects of Social Media on Mental Health**

*By: Christian Cham, Lionel Tan, Lester Koon, Daniel Alexander Gomes, Wong Zin Yao*

*Computer Science*

*School of Engineering and Technology, Sunway University, Malaysia*

**1.0 Introduction (Lionel)**

In today’s modern age, technology is the key to humans’ longevity and demise. Social media is a technology which has been developed by mankind. However, as there are many benefits, there are many drawbacks. Social media connects individuals around the globe and in a sense makes the world a smaller place, making it seem there are only benefits from this technology. However, there are more drawbacks than perceived, especially on a user’s mental health. The mental health of users is often not associated with social media as the connection between the two seems vague. This research paper aims to discuss the negative effects of social media on mental health- namely loneliness, anxiety, and depression.

**2.0 Loneliness (Christian)**

First and foremost, one of the effects social media has on our mental health is that it is known to increase feelings of loneliness. Loneliness is an adverse state that occurs when an individual’s perception of their relationships is inadequate (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). The keyword here is “perception”, which is critical as it implies that loneliness is a subjective feeling. Those who are alone might not feel lonely, whereas those with many social connections may be lonely (Fumagalli et al., 2021). As a result, although social media provides excellent opportunities to interact and build relationships with others, these platforms may not be as effective as people believe, as feelings of loneliness have been identified as a direct and indirect consequence of social media usage.

Firstly, Fumagalli et al. (2021) stated that social media was linked to increased feelings of loneliness in individuals with the relationship fully mediated by a fear of missing out (FOMO) which was a consequence of social media usage. The researchers demonstrated this by establishing a substantial correlation between social media usage and an increase in FOMO (b = 0.012, SE = 0.004, 95 percent CI [0.004, 0.020]) and FOMO was in turn strongly correlated with loneliness (b = 0.020, SE = 0.05, 95 percent CI [0.113, 0.280]). Thus, despite the relationship being indirect, it is significant (b = 0.002, SE = 0.001, 95 percent CI [0.001, 0.005]). This link between FOMO, social media usage and loneliness can be explained by the fact that when users use social media, they engage in social comparisons, comparing their lives to the perceived lives of others they see on social media. This in turn leads to a belief that others are happier and engaging in more activities, leading them to develop FOMO, which evokes feelings of loneliness. However, these comparisons are unhealthy as they exacerbate FOMO and the profiles we see of others online are inaccurate because users can mould their image online to create a perfect self-presentation (Crabtree and Pillow, 2018).

Aside from that, Twenge et al. (2019) also argue that social media increases feelings of loneliness due to a decline in in-person social interaction. The researchers discovered that at the cohort level, those with high social media usage and low levels of in-person social connection had the highest level of loneliness (F(1, 3357) = 12.37, p<.0.01, d=.06). The researchers also argued that social media usage increases feelings of loneliness as the quality of interactions decreases on social media compared to in-person interactions. This was shown in the article that loneliness decreased when in-person social interactions increased, which outweighed the increase in loneliness caused by social media usage. However, when in-person social interaction was controlled, it was discovered that there was more loneliness with more social media usage (ꞵ = .04, p < .001). This demonstrates that although social media allows for more connections at a faster rate, they yield fewer quality connections than in-person interactions. Fumagalli et al. (2021, para. 4) also stated that “People who are socially isolated may not feel lonely, and people who have many social connections may nevertheless feel lonely. In other words, it is not so much about the quantity of social connections, but their quality.”

In conclusion, it is evident that social media usage does have adverse effects on an individual's level of loneliness. The trend away from in-person interactions to virtual interactions on social media and the reliance on social media for emotional support is getting more frequent, which in turn has implications on the level of FOMO, loneliness and psychological well-being of its users. Thus, there is an additional need to investigate methods of educating individuals on proper and balanced social media usage, especially among the younger generations, whose minds are easily influenced.

**3.0 Anxiety (Daniel)**

Secondly, social media harms mental health because it causes anxiety. This is because social media leads to anxiety as a direct consequence of posting anxiety and social media related withdrawal symptoms. Shabahang et al. (2021) strongly argued that social media leads to posting anxiety, which is defined as a type of anxiety that an individual may experience when they post content or information on social media platforms. Certain topics, such as politics, religion, and personal information, are more likely to cause anxiety compared to other less sensitive topics. Similarly, the privacy of the individual posting also plays a vital role in determining posting anxiety (Shabahang et al., 2021). Research conducted by Shabahang et al. (2021), in which participants were questioned about their anxiety experiences when using social media, displayed results that support this argument. For instance, in the aforementioned research, the results indicated that approximately 44.6 percent of individuals feel anxiety when they post about information pertaining to politics, while 43.6 percent of people experience it when they post about information that is deemed personal. In addition, a sizable proportion of participants, 77.2 percent, stated that posting under their real names causes them more anxiety than posting under incognito accounts.

In addition, Brailovskaia et al. (2021) claimed that using social media can lead to addiction, which in turn causes withdrawal symptoms and thus anxiety. Brailovskaia et al. (2021) defined problematic social media use as the excessive usage of these platforms over an extended period of time. Furthermore, problematic social media use positively correlates with social media addiction and withdrawal symptoms that ultimately lead to anxiety (Brailovskaia et al., 2021). The results obtained from the quantitative study conducted by Brailovskaia et al. (2021) validate this statement. Firstly, the participants were assessed based on their time spent on social media and the withdrawal symptoms that they exhibit when not using social media. Those who spent a substantial amount of time on social media and exhibited withdrawal symptoms were then classified into a high-symptom group, while those without these traits were put in the low-symptom group. These groups were then queried to find out their anxiety levels. The results procured by these queries showed that the participants in the high-symptom group had significantly higher levels of anxiety, with a mean anxiety of 10.25, as opposed to those in the low-symptom group, with a mean anxiety of 4.57.

Hence, it is undeniable that social media causes anxiety directly via posting anxiety and social media related withdrawal symptoms. Both posting anxiety and withdrawal symptoms from social media can have severe impacts on an individual’s anxiety levels. Hence, social media users should avoid spending too much time on social media in order to reduce anxiety and addiction.

**4.0 Depression (Zin Yao)**

Thirdly, high usage of social media applications is strongly linked with depression symptoms as shown by much research.According to Haand and Shuwang (2020), social media addiction has a significant relationship with depression, and depression predicts social media addiction strongly. A comprehensive survey to measure the social media addiction and depression levels was given to 384 students from three universities Shaikh Zayed, Ahmad Shah Abdali, and Pamir University in Khost, Afghanistan. The results revealed a positive correlation between depression and social media addiction. Depression was found to be a major predictor of social media addiction in a simple linear regression study. The author concludes that the student's depression level rises in direct proportion to his or her level of addiction.

Other than that, Schodt et al.(2021) argued that depression was linked to more cyberbullying victimization and perpetration among men, especially among those who used social media more often. 530 adults in the United States completed a 15-minute online survey that contained questions about cyber bullying victimization, depression, anxiety, substance use, and social media use frequency and descriptives, bivariate correlations, regression analyses are done. The results indicate that men who suffer from depression reported more cyberbullying victimization, and these effects were worse among males who said they used social media on a daily basis.

These two studies find a significant link between depression and cyberbullying. More care should be given to cyberbullying victims as they might have already developed and suffering from depression symptoms.

**5.0 Self-expression (Lester)**

Despite a substantial portion of the general populace criticising the detrimental effects social media has on mental health, many would still argue otherwise due to the extensive features and connectivity of social media. One of the most prominent benefits of social media is that it provides people with a safe and comfortable outlet for self-expression by allowing the users to control and personalise the information they share with the rest of the world. Self-expression is defined as a vital presentation of an individual's beliefs and feelings by exhibiting one's distinctive and unique traits (Hu et al., 2019). Health RSPH (2017) firmly states that social media platforms can be a beneficial medium that enables individuals to express themselves positively and accurately. Accuracy in the study carried out by Orehek and Human (2016), is defined as the extent to which an individual's self-reported traits correspond to impressions of the social media personality. For instance, the preceding research suggests that social media enables individuals to carefully curate how they are presented online through both implicit and explicit information sharing. Thus, having a high tendency to facilitate both normative and positive profiles, which are more socially desirable through the dynamic and interactive context of social media. Additionally, Hu et al. (2019) identified that social media encourages individuals to express themselves more accurately and honestly due to its connectivity and anonymity, which reduces the fear of disapproval and rejection.

However, the same aspects and features of social media that allow individuals to freely and positively express themselves can also facilitate the development of narcissism as well as narcissistic behaviour. McCain and Campbell (2018) defined narcissism as the need to garner attention and admiration through interpersonal and intrapersonal strategies. Social media are theoretically the idyllic communicative environment to fulfil narcissistic goals, as its various aspects offer an excellent medium for obtaining recognition and exhibiting grandiosity (Barry & McDougall, 2018). For example, the ability of individuals to precisely control and manage the expression of their identity on social media enables individuals to create vane, grandiose and exaggerated self-presentation (Casale & Banchi, 2020). Furthermore, Casale and Banchi (2020) argued that receiving visual and quantitative recognition, such as positive feedback and "likes" almost instantaneously from a large audience on social media, could increase one's narcissism.

In summary, even though social media is an idealistic platform for self-expression with no boundaries, it may also facilitate the development of mental or behavioural disorders such as narcissism if misused. Thus, individuals should regulate their usage of social media as a platform for self-expression by following social norms and etiquette.

**6.0 Improve Social Skills (Lionel)**

Moving on, social media can be used to improve an individual's social skills. Users of social media can improve their social skills through social media by interacting with others online. Social media which is a virtual platform allows users to interact with one another without much effort and commitment. According to Décieux et al. (2018), interactions with other users increased when social media was the mediator for both parties. The study showed that the youth of Luxembourg interacted more with the use of social media. The reason behind this is that it requires less effort and eliminates the need to set aside time to meet the other party in person. It was also stated that due to the low effort needed when interacting with an individual over social media, users could also multitask (Décieux et al.,2018). Additionally, social media has effectively eliminated many limitations of physical interactions. For instance, time constraints, physical distance and effort needed. Additionally, Joo (2017) states that social media accommodates various ways of communication. This would make social media very appealing in contrast to traditional interactions and communication. For example, research shows that of the 89 Malaysian respondents in the study, 60 percent utilized Facebook primarily, to communicate and share ideas with friends and family (Joo, 2017). Articles and images can be shared easily with the use of social media such as Facebook thus opening the opportunity to share ideas, articles, images and videos easily with a large sum of people. Therefore, the availability of features social media offers trumps over traditional communication which is very limited due to its nature.

In contrast, social media may cause individuals to feel a reduced sense of social connections. This is due to the consumption of social media at a large rate and very little to no interactions with others on social media. Consumption of social media comes in the form of watching and observing other individuals' lifestyles while interactions come in the form of commenting on other individuals' posts. For example, Verduyn et al. (2017) mentioned that individuals who only consume social media and do not interact with them in one way or another feel a negative social connection. This is because individuals who only consume without interacting feel left out and jealous of individuals who have a more exciting life in comparison to theirs.

In summary, social media can improve the social skills of individuals. However, it depends on how social media is used by the individual. When used to interact with others benefits are shown. When used to consume content mindlessly, there will be negative effects.

**7.0 Conclusion (Lionel)**

In conclusion, social media has its benefits which can be implemented in our lives and drawbacks which could cause harm to our mental health. Loneliness, anxiety and depression are negative impacts on mental health caused by the use of social media. The feeling of loneliness is experienced by users as social media develops FOMO and does not offer any emotional support. Social media users also experienced higher levels of anxiety as social media is closely related to posting anxiety and withdrawal symptoms. Users of social media are more susceptible to depression as cyberbullying and addiction do meet with any repercussions. However, social media is a powerful tool invented by mankind to help us close the gap between individuals. When used correctly users open the doors to many opportunities to enhance their lifestyle. However, with great power comes great responsibility. Users need to be careful and be responsible when using social media as the drawbacks on mental health can be detrimental and have a lifelong effect. Thus, users need to be aware and self-conscious of their usage of social media in their daily lives.

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