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English 1000

15 September 2019

Problem/Solution Essay for Social Media Addiction

As technology and the internet evolves and changes, so are groups and individuals finding new ways to connect with each other. The most prominent form of this is social media. These are a series of internet-connected applications that encourage the sharing of user-generated content and communication on a large scale. Though it can be used as a powerful tool to connect with others, it has a dark side. With all its bells and whistles, it can lead to certain individuals developing social media addiction, a subclass of internet addictive disorder. However, it is not entirely social media's fault. Social media addiction is the side effect of several psychological factors (sense of little control, FOMO, etc) and external factors (addictive social media features) that contribute to its existence. Addiction to social media can be reduced by making changes to the apps, changes in one's personal life, and how they interact with technology.

There is some opposition to the idea that social media use could be harmful. One of these main counter arguments is that social media is their way have staying connected with friends and family. Though social media provides a certain level of convenience, it is outweighed by its capacity to tunnel one's time into incessantly trying to stay up to date with however many friends they are following. A better alternative, if one's social media usage can not be controlled properly, is to connect with friends via narrower social methods like text messaging and calling each other. By doing this, both participants of the social interaction are communicating more of

their real selves and developing a deeper connection as a result that rivals the superficiality that social media tends to impose.

Social media addiction is defined as “a constellation of uncontrollable, impulsive, and damaging behaviors caused by persistent social media usage that continues despite repeated negative consequences” (Viola, 2019). Like other addictions, it is repeated usage of the activity(drug) that leads to harmful effects. Because of its nature of uncertainty (posts, likes, etc), it taps into the minds reward centers. A much more extreme version of this is ephemeral (temporary) media. These are posts or actions on social media that disappear after a set period of time. A good example of this type of media is from Snapchat where posts/messages disappear after 24 hours. It has also been shown that those who feel a lack of personal control in their lives are more likely to get addicted (Viola, 2019). They may feel that they have more control online than they do offline, leading to them using social media more and more frequently. Social media addiction can also potentially develop in those who fear missing out on things. This and other precursors, may lead an individual to begin developing the uncontrollable and impulsive social media usage that affects them negatively in their personal and professional lives.

Social media addiction is caused by several external factors. Many of these factors lie in how social media companies develop and present their product. Much of this research comes from the Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. In their articles, they describe numerous ways that Social Networking Sites (SNS) lend themselves to addiction. When surveying individuals, they found that the most engaging activity was reading/responding to comments on their page as well as other individual posts (Kuss and Griffiths, 2011). The wall feature is a feature that Facebook has that with different variants on other social media

applications. Twitter, Instagram, Reddit and other applications utilize infinite timelines. In addition to this, there is usually the feature to directly mention someone in a comment or post. When users are engaged into active social searching (reading and seeing posts from friends) this has been shown to derive more pleasure than just social browsing (Kuss and Griffiths, 2011). This serves to trigger the user's reward-centers.

There is also the availability theory. As technology has developed and changed, its accessibility and portability has grown as well. Instead of just being able to check Facebook or Twitter on our computer at home. We are able to check, read, and post to social media at anytime of the day virtually anywhere. With the increased availability, it opens up the opportunity to build varying habit cycles that tie to social media usage based on different cues like waiting in a line, listening to a lecture in college, so and so forth. This ties itself to the addiction specificity model proposed by the Journal. Access to the behavior is necessary in order to further develop the addiction, and the existence of smartphones is a powerful way to deliver just that.

Social media addiction is also host to several personal and internal factors that causes it to arise. These include a small locus of control, the fear of missing out, and emotional/psychological factors.

On a paper on life satisfaction and managing internet/social media addiction. It is theorized that, users may initially use the Internet as a way of deriving happiness (Longstreet and Brooks, 2017). This may serve as a building block for Social Media addiction as when the individual's life satisfaction decreases, they may increase the time they spend on the internet spurring on further decreases in life satisfaction. There is also the social conditioning that comes into play. As a society, we have continued to push for integrating more internet-connected

services into our lives while painting it in a positive way. This normalizes the activity of long-term Internet and social media usage. This showcases how the internet and social media usage is initially used to address emotional needs, but can later turn into something addictive that harms our needs rather than addressing them.

In a paper on locus of control and shyness as markers for internet addiction, the conclusion was drawn that those who expect control over their life, are less likely to get addicted to the internet (Chak and Leung, 2004). The converse being those with less control, more likely to get addicted. Those with a lack of internal locus of control find it hard to limit their internet use and are at risk for damaging parts of their personal lives (Chak and Leung, 2004). When it comes to shyness, it seems they are more likely to turn to the internet/social media usage, as it allows them a safe and secure environment for social interaction (Chak and Leung, 2004). This is further compounded with the ability to stay relatively anonymous in social interactions on the net. No one is forcing you to tell them exactly who you are. This yields an unprecedented level of social and expressive freedom when it comes to social behavior. Those who have a small locus of control hold the belief that other people exercise more control in their lives than they do. In addition to this, how much they believe chance contributes to their experiences is a contributing factor to the one's locus of control (Chak and Leung, 2004).

Another internal factor is the Fear of Missing Out. This is also known by the acronym of FOMO. This is the feeling of needing to stay connected in order to not miss out on events on social media or other happenings (Harmon, 2017). This causes individual anxiety about others having fun or rewarding activities while they are not in the loop. In a study looking at smartphone addiction, fear of missing out and perceived competence, it was found to be a

contributing risk for social media addiction (Tunc-Aksan and Akbay, 2019). Because of this debilitating fear of missing out on something that they perceive as important, this may lead to one impulsively checking social media to always be in the loop (Harmon, 2017). It has also been shown to cause stress, sadness and loneliness. This ties back to a previous life satisfaction article, where one would initially use social media and the internet as a way to find happiness in their life (Longstreet and Brooks, 2017).

This problem has numerous detrimental effects. It affects those who are already addicted to the Internet/Social Media and those who are at risk. In addition to those who are directly affected, it affects those who interact with the individuals on a daily basis as they are subject to the negative effects that an addiction has. Some examples of this are neglect, laziness, and withdrawal from regular activities. This is mainly in the workplace and with family/friends.

For those who are addicted, they are subjected to the effects of any addictive behavior. This includes but is not limited to depression, anxiety, withdrawal from activities, and others. There are also the secondary effects as well. Given that one could get absorbed in technology, it may also lead one to develop psychosis and other neuroses. They may also start directly tying their sense of self-worth/esteem to their online profile.

There are three ways that one can address and help alleviate the problem of social media addiction. One can reduce addiction to social media by making changes to the apps, changes in one's personal life and how they interact with technology.

Social media apps contain their own set of addictive features as previously mentioned. Though it may not be economic interest to remove features since they want to keep users on their platform as long as possible. One way to potentially work around this is incorporating a break

reminder just like the old Wii systems. This breaks them from the continuously scrolling and brings them back to reality even if temporarily. Another potential method is by continuously prompting the user for their mood and other usage behaviors. If the results seem to signify addictive behavior, lock them out of the app for a certain duration of time (sadly). This can be seen as a naive approach to solving the issue with loop holes. However, through trial and error it can reach a better and safer compromise than the social media companies doing nothing at all.

The second way is to make changes in one's personal life. Namely, work to increase one's personal locus of control and reducing Fear of missing out. These have been shown to be two key contributing factors to social media addiction. To increase one's personal locus of control, they can begin with what they believe they have control of and work towards pushing that internal boundary. Our locus of control hinges on the beliefs of how much we have control over what happens to us and how much chance plays a factor in our lives. By actively working to change these beliefs in a more positive and realistic manner, we inevitably gain a better sense of control in our lives and make healthier decisions. Decreasing Fear of Missing Out is a similar process. It has been found that FOMO is correlated with one's proper fulfillment of basic psychological needs. (Przybylski, et al, 2013) These are one's efficacy (ability to perform an intended action), autonomy (ability to make meaningful choices), and relatedness (feeling connected to others). By working to improve these basic psychological needs, FOMO will decrease as a result. As a result, of reducing FOMO and increasing one's internal locus of control, one can use social media in a much healthier manner.

The final way to reduce addiction is to change how one interacts with technology. One can start scheduling the time that they can use social media or the Internet and actively cut the

time allocated to smaller and smaller times. By doing this, they condition themselves to view social media and Internet as a scheduled activity that only done maybe once or twice instead of continuously throughout the day. This allows for breathing room to replace time spent on social media with other activities are in response to certain cues that would normally trigger social media. There are also apps that can prevent you from using other apps during certain periods of the day. This allows one to stay focused on the task at hand and not fall into the addictive reaffirming behaviors.

In conclusion, social media addiction is a new and frightening addiction that branched off Internet addictive disorder with the rise of social media. Though social media has the power to connect with others and provide a forum to share and communicate ideas, it can also serve as a bottomless well that taps into our fears, insecurities, and lack of control to keep us addicted. Certain aspects of social media are also designed to keep users coming back each and every time. The good news is that social media addiction can be curbed by changing the apps, ourselves, and how we interact with technology on a daily basis.

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