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Effects of Social Media on Mental Health: A Review

Hilal Bashir^{1*}, Shabir Ahmad Bhat²

ABSTRACT

From past two decade social media beheld a sporadic enhancement in quantity, quality and utility. As the body of an individual is nourished by the intake of necessary mineral elements obtained through nutrition, likewise human mind is nurtured by the availability of nutrition for thoughts. Now a day's which is readily available through the advancement of technology, thereby opening a platform for discussion between social media and mental health of present era. From the dawn of internet and social networking sites human resources of contemporary world have become more social virtually but less practically. This virtual life is isolating present man from other fellow beings thereby affecting his health (mental & physical) and overall balance. Increased usage of social networking among adults of the present era is a matter of concern for the parents, society & researchers, as there are always two sides (positive & negative) of every innovation. The aim of present research is to explore the effect of social media on mental health. To achieve said purpose, the investigator reviewed and synthesized available related literature. Literature summed so far reveals that younger generation operates susceptibly. As a confronting population of the present era, younger generation is experiencing embryonic stage of life and is at higher risk of serious mental health problem. Younger generation of present era is acting as active users of social media which has affinity towards the problems of mental health. The present perilous situation requires more understanding, to know relation between social media and mental health problems is just a kick off point. Exploring and understanding the means with the help of which social media is affecting mental health of present younger generation is succeeding step which can illuminate the connections which are at play among these variables of young generation.

Keywords: *Social Media, Mental Health and Adolescents*

The imbalance created by the excessive usage of social media is a great concern for parents, researchers and society regarding the mental health of individuals. One of the most common activities of present generation is excessive use of social media web sites. Social media can be considered as those websites which allows interaction through web 2.0 & 3.0 sites

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including application like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, online gaming, virtual worlds like Second Life, Sims, YouTube, Blogs and so on. These sites of present era are growing exponentially and act as easy available portals for communication and entertainment for younger generation. Merriam-Webster (2014) defined social media as, “forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).” Virtual platforms of social media like Facebook, Twitter etc. significantly enhanced the virtual environment from past decade by facilitating users to interchange their feelings, ideas, personal information, pictures and videos at an unprecedented proportion.

Further, social media users have speedily adopted online social communication as an essential part of daily life, as evidenced by the increasing figure of daily users. In fact, Facebook alone reported an estimated 1 billion active users in 27 august 2015. It means one in seven people on earth used Facebook in a single day to stay connected with their friends and family (posted by Mark Zuckerberg on Thursday, August 27, 2015).

Consequently social media lays substantial influence on different aspects of present digital life apart from online communication, from marketing to politics to education to health to basic human interaction. In many of these areas, social media presents clear benefits; however, social media phenomenon is relatively new, number of empirical studies evaluated the overall influence of regular use of social media on the well-being and mental health of its users.

This lack of understanding is predominantly a grave concern in the context of present younger generation, as teens and young adults spends their good amount of time in online socialization and hence are potentially experiencing a greater risk of negative effects. A number of research studies classify connection between use of social media and its undesirable outcomes like increase in anxiety, stress, depression and loneliness. The increased usage of social media by younger generation raises alarms regarding its adverse effects.

Social Media & Anxiety

Link between social media and compulsive behavior has been reported by various studies. It has been found that forty five percent of British adults feel restlessness when they are not able to access their social networking sites (**Anxiety 2012**). In **Rosen et al. (2013)**, it is reported virtual generation (Net & iGeneration) oftenly check the message on their social networking application. It is also found that younger generation feels restlessness when they were not able to access messages of their social networking applications apart from their counterparts, giving rise to Phantom vibration syndrome (PVS). Which is a nothing but the perception of an addict person regarding the vibration of his cell phone (**Drouin, et al., 2012; Rothberg, et al., 2010**) any victim of PVS reflects obsession of frequent checking of social messages exhibits manifestation of anxiety caused by cell phones.

Social Media & Stress

In present era addiction of social media is incredibly increased, once an individual gets on, it is difficult to refrain from its use. Comments and likes acts as positive reinforcement and making it more difficult to stop it. Certain people compare their lives with the immaculate lives of their friends. **Dick (2013)** reported with the use of free social networking services (Facebook & Twitter) people remain connected with friends and read productive content but at the same time lose a lot of discretion and privacy. In present world Anxiety is one of the fundamental mental health problems. People fret about the likes and comments of their uploaded pictures and videos. In the present era hardly any person is immune in context of social media. **The Hearty Soul (2016)** asserts that longer time you spend on social media more you are depressed, further it also reported that usage of social networking applications like Facebook and Twitter are less helpful to students in remaining more focused and less stressed. **Kaur & Bashir (2015)** explored both positive and negative effects of social media on mental health of adolescents, positive effects include socialization, enhanced communication, learning opportunities and access to health information. While negative aspects include depression, online harassment, cyber-bullying, sexting, fatigue, stress, suppression of emotional and decline of intellectual ability. In present world almost every individual from age of 11-93 is connected to the social media. According to a research conducted by **Strickland (2014)** young adults are the most active users of social media and predominantly are at risk of developing mental health issue at a high rate of concern. Another study conducted by **Park, Song & Lee (2014)** indicated that Social media application like Facebook is positively associated with acculturative stress of college students. Similarly Kaur and Bhat (2016) made an extensive investigation of stress on mental health of students and suggest that stress can negatively affect on mental health of students. Therefore we can conclude that excessive usage of social media can affect on mental health of the younger generation.

Social Media and Depression

From the above literature it is clear social media is the basic agent that not enhances but also nourishes the mental health problems. Excessive use of Social media leads an individual to disastrous results that starts with anxiety and leads to the depression. In **(Pantic et al., 2012)** it is revealed that depression and time spent on Facebook by adolescents is positively correlated. **Rosen et al., (2013)**, mirrored these findings and revealed that symptoms of major depression has been found among the individuals who spent most of their time in online activities and performing image management on social networking sites. Similarly **(Lou et al., 2012)** asserted that students who use Facebook intensely reports enhanced loneliness. It is also found that social media usage also enhances the psycho-social problems like adjustment & self-esteem **(Kalpidou et al., 2011)**. Research conducted by **Davila (2012)** reflected severe depression symptoms among younger generation are associated with less positive and more negative social interactions. In contrary evidence of inverse relation between depression and internet usage has been reported by the **Kraut et al., (1998)** and **Shah & Grant (2002)**, they further suggest that various social forms like gaming & chatting diminish the depression risk.

Social media and loneliness

Social media usage is growing at a remarkable rate predominantly among young adults, surprisingly in spite of having greater interconnectivity, present young generation is lonelier than other groups and even loneliest ever (**Pittman & Reich 2016**). Loneliness is one of the prime concerns of present virtual society, as it is intimately related to serious health problems (**Patterson & Veenstra, 2010; Biovin, Hymen & Bukowski, 1995**). Loneliness can be understood as discrepancy among desired level and practical level of social contacts of an individual's social life. According to **Kim, LaRose, & Peng, (2009); Yao & Zhong (2013)** uncontrolled, unhygienic and compulsive usage of internet resources enhances loneliness over the time also higher level of internet usage among young generation enhances the emotional loneliness (**Moody, 2001**). While Mental Health foundation of United Kingdom asserts 60% of the young adults of age group 18-34 admitted loneliness despite of having all social media applications and facilities to run these applications (**Murphy, 2010**). Likewise researchers **Skues, Williams, & Wise, (2012)** revealed more the Facebook friends a student have higher the level of loneliness he/she reports. In contrary to this, researchers **Deters, & Mehl, (2012)** revealed people who consumes less social networking revealed higher score of shyness and loneliness, they are also socially less active, similarly problem of loneliness also gets reduced due to increase status updating **Sheldon, (2012)**.

Social Relationships and Mental Health

Friendship is a vital component in protecting our mental health (Mental Health Foundation). According to **Umberson & Montez, (2010)**, quality and quantity of social relationships affect health behavior, physical health, mental health and mortality risk. A number of empirical studies determine that social support can prevent hopelessness (**Johnson et al., 2001**) demoralize avoidant coping (**Weaver et al., 2005**), suppress loneliness (**Schneider et al., 1991**), and strengthen positive states of mind (**Gonzalez et al., 2004**). On contrary depression are associated with negative social interactions and social isolation (**Schuster et al., 1990; Chou et al., 2011**) and suicide (**Holma et al., 2010**). **Reich et al., (2010)** inveterate, that social support is related with better mental health. A social relationship plays a pivotal role in boosting mental health. But the fact is there is disagreement among investigators relating what components of social relationships have an impact on mental health. With the amplified social support from relatives and friends grieved less from mental health problems after a traumatic life event owed to stress-reduction function of this social support (**Maulik et al., 2011**).

CONCLUSION

This investigator reviewed and synthesized extensively related literature of social media and some factors of mental health. The relation between usage of social media and depraved mental health determines the significance of the topic. Social media usage have dangerous effects for younger generation because problems related mental health which gets developed during young period can act as an epidemic for any individual throughout the life. The significance of continual enquiry and examination on this construct can't be overstated. Present literature reflects the deprived association between usage of social media and mental

health of younger generation and also demonstrates the significance of present topic. It is clear that adverse effects of social media usage obligate propounded consequences for present generation especially for younger ones. The literature reviewed in various section of present paper elucidates the substantial value of association between social media usage and mental health problems of present era; also present paper illuminates the complexity of relationship. Present Paper offers an insight in the complex connection of social media usage and mental health problems of younger generation. These problems can be identify as online harassment, depression, sexting/texting, stress, fatigue, loneliness, decline in intellectual abilities, cyber bullying, emotion suppression and lack of concentration. These all things directly or indirectly effects on mental health of younger generation. Literature summed so far reveals that younger generation operates susceptibly. As a confronting population of the present era, younger generation is experiencing emerging stage of life and is at higher risk of serious mental health problem. To reduce these risks proper steps should be taken like information and counseling sessions can be structured at schools and colleges. A proper awareness movement can be organized to understand the effects of usage of social media on mental health on younger generation. The social networking sites should be constrained to certain age limit. Any social media application that has not positive effect like discrimination, violence and racism etc. should be dissolved at once completely

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