Concept Pitch:

Social Media & Well-being for Adolescents

Space of Exploration

It is overwhelmingly evident that in today's society, use of social media networks including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and Reddit play a massive part in the lives of younger adults, as well as teens and adolescents.[10] While the advantages afforded by social media are well known and have been long understood, the drawbacks to extended use of social media networks have only come into the public understanding over the recent months. Although demonstrated by many academic papers and studies since the rise of social media, there is only a vague understanding by many now that social media can lead to adverse effects for mental health and well-being in the long term. [7][8][9][10] With usage not kept in-check, too much time spent on networks like Facebook can lead to lowered self-confidence and life satisfaction, feelings of exclusion from society, lowered self-awareness and even reduced physical health. [7][10]

It is following this that the research question may be explored: *How can we reduce the negative effects of social media in the younger generation without requiring drastic changes in behaviour, or taking away the current advantages that it affords?*

Connection to Researched Topic

The research conducted as part of the annotated bibliography focused precisely on the mental health effects of Social Media on teens and adolescents. What was learnt throughout the process of evaluating literature relating to the topic was that in almost all research conducted, some adverse effect was found in relation to social media. Surprisingly however, positive effects stemming from use of social media were also found, and it is for this reason that the proposed space of exploration involves continuing use of social media whilst attempting to mitigate the harm which can be done.

Possible Initial Approaches

There are a variety of approaches that could be taken to understand and explore this problem space further, with many being inspired from either perspectives taken in the journal articles reviewed, or ideas covered through the DECO3500 course content. Some of these are outlined below.

1. Changing our Culture

One of the most interesting research results found was from an experiment evaluating the results of social media usage on emotion, well-being and perceptions of exclusion between students in the United States and Germany. [8] In this study, it was found that although social media usage led to decreases in well-being, American students tended to be more impacted by social media than German ones and a conclusion was drawn this was down to cultural differences between the two countries. For further research, the factors leading to these findings could be investigated more closely. What is it about American culture which makes its adolescents more susceptible to the harms of social media? Following this, work could also be done in investigating how cultural attitudes may be influenced in Australia to reduce the likelihood of problems arising from social media usage.

2. Educating the Younger Generation

It was shown in many research articles that some parts of social media that are better for well-being than others. For example, passively browsing Facebook promotes comparison with others and leads to feelings of exclusion or inferiority while active posting or even communication with peers creates opportunities for self-expression, understanding of one's thoughts and feelings, and building friendships. [6][7][9][10] Perhaps educating children on how various activities on social media may affect them may lead to more conscious decisions on how time is spent online growing up. Exploration may be done in what children generally think, and how they may be brought to understand the problems that social media has created.

3. Taking Countermeasures

Since we know that the main problems arising from social media are feelings of exclusion and inferiority [7][10], it is speculated that the problem at hand may be addressed by ensuring that adolescents are included and taught to appreciate the things that they are given. The research has shown that offline face-to-face interactions can induce more positive emotions than interactions online, and this could be used to our advantage. The solution to this approach could either be technological, or societal.

4. Actively Monitoring

This would be the most forceful way to address the problem. Through the development of some monitoring technology, adolescents could simply be warned when it appears that their social media usage patterns are 'unbalanced'. Research could be done on how receptive adolescents would be towards this sort of technology after understanding its benefits, and experiments could be done relating to how a warning service could implemented to have the most impact.

Refer to references from Pair Annotated Bibliography