

The Internet and Mental Health

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Introduction

The internet is a great tool. As technology improves, the capability of the internet also grows. It is used for school assignments, research, and collaboration on group projects. It also allows us to understand and learn about disease, emotional disorders, and other health risks. However, it can also be a source of addiction, depression, and social isolation (O’Keeffe). This paper discusses the internet’s effect on quality of life and mental health.

Quality of Life

Dr. Matthew Whoorley gave a TED talk in 2014 where he discussed the things that cause unhappiness. He said that a sedentary lifestyle will lead to greater unhappiness. He quoted a statistic that the average American spends eight hours a day on average looking at a screen (Whoorley). Most desk jobs require the use of a computer for eight hours a day; this statistic is not revolutionary, but it does require us to stop and think about what we are doing in everyday life and whether that really leads us to happiness.

Dr. Whoorley also made the observation that when we seek our own happiness, we will not find it, but in seeking the happiness of others, we find that we are happy ourselves (Whoorley). I am often selfishly concerned only about myself, my job, my responsibilities, my future, and my progress. The internet only aids in this thinking pattern. Most of the applications offered by the internet lead to some sense of self-gratification, if not self-importance. If we are not mindful about internet usage, this focus on our own happiness and trivial technology may lead us to neglect the people and things that matter most. Ironically, as we ignore others and seek self-gratification, we will find that our selfishness will create the void we were hoping to fill.

Mental Health

The internet is not meant to undermine our happiness or our society, it is a great tool. It does require, however, a conscious effort not to let it overrun our lives. A study done at Leeds University in 2010 suggested internet addiction as a condition resulting from an overuse of the internet. In a study of 1,319 people, 1.4% of them were found to be internet addicts. This internet addiction was also considered to be a warning sign of depression (Gabbatt). This study further emphasizes the point that overindulgence in internet usage can reduce our quality of life, as well as our mental and social capacities. This study could also be interpreted that the internet becomes a means of escape when one is feeling depressed. As stated above, social isolation in the face of depression has a tendency to make the problem worse.

The problem is further intensified as processes that would have required face to face interaction only a few years ago can now be carried out over the internet, requiring little or no human interaction. Online shopping has become prevalent, as is emailing or texting instead of phone calls or personal letters (Davis). This trend is one more that, while not bad, does not promote social or emotional engagement.

Conclusion

The internet is so common that we take it for granted. It has become as essential to our daily lives as electricity and hot water; we rely on it to get us places, pay our bills, and keep us entertained. As a Civil Engineer, I spend eight hours a day on a computer. I am susceptible to this decrease in quality of life and I must be careful about my mental health. It takes a conscious effort to make sure that I keep priorities in line. There is no solid substitute for mindfulness and discipline. I have to set limits on my internet usage, including when and where

it is appropriate to check my phone, email or Facebook. I never want to be so consumed by technology meant to enhance my life that I neglect the things that matter most, or the people around me that need to be loved. I need to make sure I am in control of my technological resources, rather than letting them control me.

Bibliography

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