The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

1st Nandana H N

*Computer Science And Engineering New Horizon College Of Engineering- BENGALURU* 1NH23CS408@newhorizonindia.edu

2nd Abhishek S

*Computer Science And Engineering New Horizon College Of Engineering- BENGALURU* 1NH23CS400@newhorizonindia.edu

3rd Nirupadi S B *Computer Science And Engineering New Horizon College Of Engineering- BENGALURU*

1NH22CS146@newhorizonindia.edu

***Abstract*—** The pervasive use of social media has transformed communication, connection, and self-expression globally, impacting mental health both positively and negatively. While social media platforms offer individuals avenues for community building, mental health support, and access to information, they also contribute to issues such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem challenges. This paper explores the dual effects of social media on mental well-being, analyzing factors like social comparison, cyberbullying, and digital addiction. Using data from recent studies, we examine the correlation between social media engagement and psychological distress. Furthermore, we discuss the benefits of online support networks and mental health awareness campaigns enabled by social platforms. Our findings indicate that specific usage patterns and individual vulnerability play significant roles in determining social media’s impact on mental health. Recommendations are provided to promote healthier social media habits and enhance user awareness, aiming to mitigate adverse effects while maximizing the positive aspects of these digital interactions.

***Keywords—Social media, mental health, anxiety, depression, online communities, digital addiction, self-esteem***

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media over the past two decades has reshaped how people connect, communicate, and share information globally. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have brought unprecedented access to communication, information, and virtual communities, impacting the lives of billions. These platforms, while offering numerous benefits, have also introduced a complex interplay of psychological effects that significantly influence mental health. Studies have shown that frequent use of social media is linked to various mental health issues, including increased levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and body dissatisfaction. The primary factors influencing these issues are believed to include social comparison, online harassment, exposure to unrealistic standards, and the addictive nature of social media interactions.

According to reports by the World Health Organization and the American Psychological Association, mental health conditions are on the rise globally, with many experts suggesting that social media usage may be a contributing factor. The situation is further complicated by the pervasive nature of smartphones, allowing social media to become an integral part of daily life. Social comparison on social media platforms often amplifies feelings of inadequacy or low self-worth, as users are frequently exposed to idealized portrayals of others' lives. Cyberbullying, another issue, has extended from traditional environments into online spaces, causing lasting psychological distress, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Moreover, excessive use of social media is associated with addiction-like symptoms, impacting sleep quality, personal productivity, and real-world relationships.

While the negative impacts of social media on mental health have gained significant attention, it is also essential to recognize the positive aspects. Social media provides opportunities for individuals to access mental health resources, join supportive online communities, and participate in campaigns that destigmatize mental health issues. These benefits are particularly valuable for individuals who may lack access to traditional support networks. Additionally, social media platforms are used to spread mental health awareness and connect individuals to professional resources, which can foster resilience and well-being.

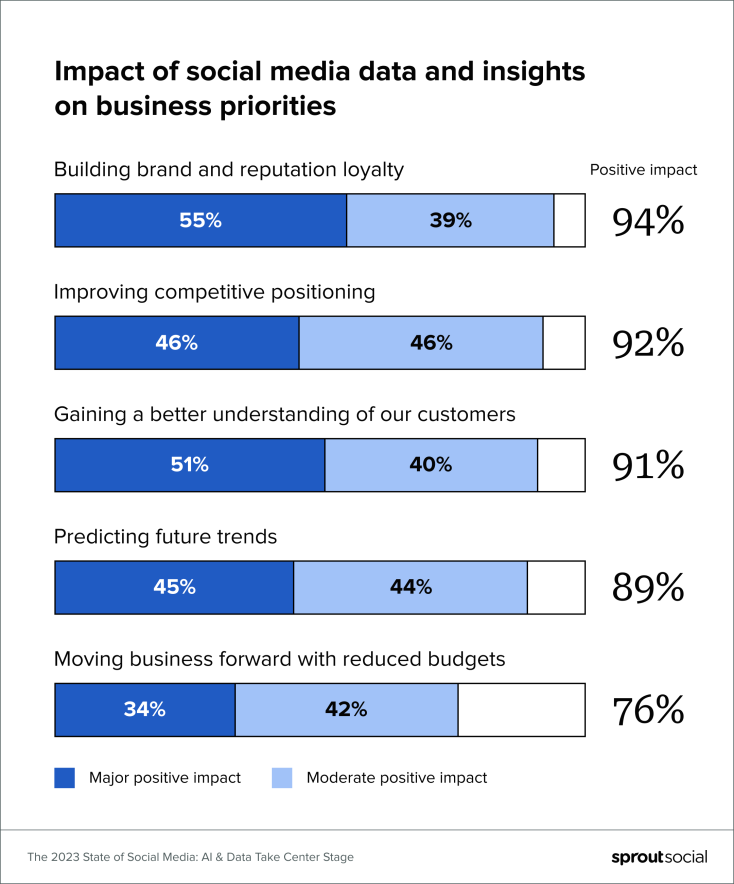
Given these contrasting impacts, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how social media affects mental health, reviewing recent studies and trends to highlight both the risks and benefits. Furthermore, the paper will examine specific behavioral patterns and psychological mechanisms influenced by social media, such as social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and cyberbullying. The paper also explores ways in which users can cultivate healthier social media habits, focusing on balanced usage to maximize positive outcomes while minimizing potential mental health risks. Through a holistic approach, this study seeks to better understand the multifaceted relationship between social media and mental health, contributing to the discourse on how these digital platforms can be used responsibly to support mental well-being.



II. P ROPOSED APPROACH

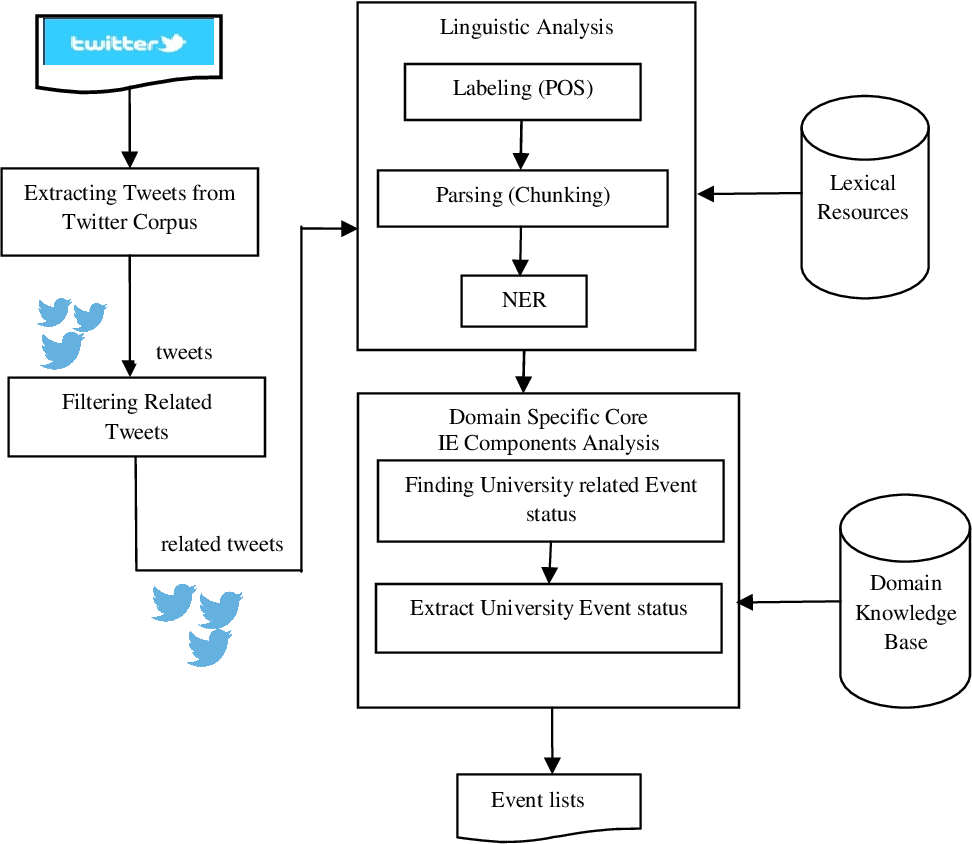
This section outlines a model to analyze the impact of social media usage on mental health, incorporating three stages: data collection, feature extraction, and classification. First, a dataset of social media activity and mental health indicators is compiled from sources such as user surveys, app usage metrics, and psychological assessments. Following this, a set of features related to social media behaviors (e.g., time spent, content type) and mental health metrics (e.g., anxiety levels, sleep patterns) are extracted using data analysis techniques. Lastly, machine learning algorithms are employed to classify and predict the mental health impact based on identified social media usage patterns.

1. Data Collection



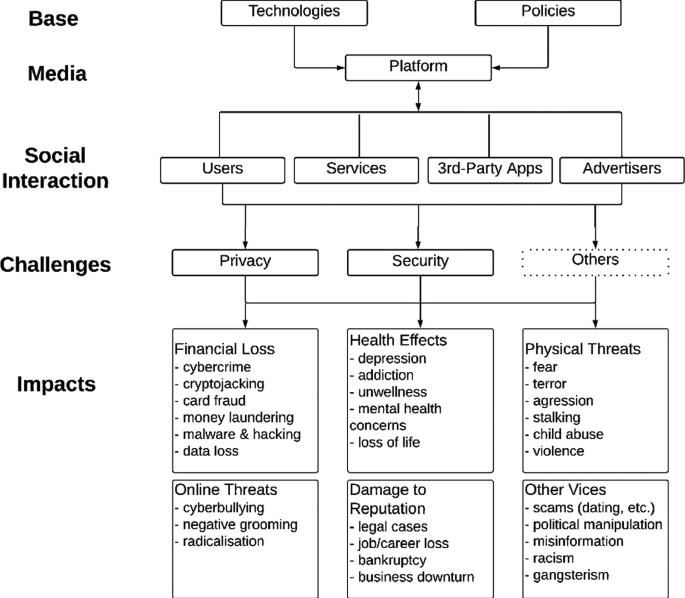
The dataset encompasses information on various social media usage patterns and corresponding mental health indicators. Sources include survey data, app usage statistics, and relevant psychological assessments. This data is divided into subsets, representing individuals with different levels of social media exposure and a range of mental health states (e.g., high vs. low anxiety). The dataset size and distribution are optimized for analysis, with features standardized to ensure consistency.

1. Feature Extraction



Feature extraction focuses on identifying key factors that influence mental health, such as usage frequency, engagement with specific content types (e.g., comparisons, news), and usage timing (e.g., nighttime use). The data is pre-processed through normalization and cleaned to minimize noise. Techniques such as clustering and natural language processing (NLP) are applied to extract deeper insights, such as mood changes and self-esteem indicators based on posts and interactions. The features are then reduced to relevant dimensions to improve classification accuracy.

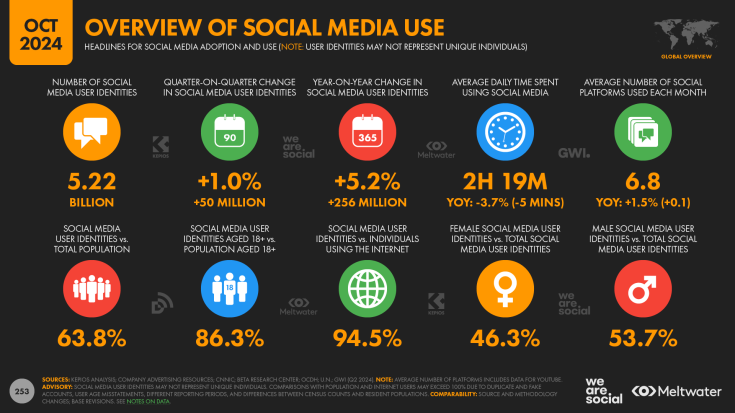
1. Classification



Support Vector Machine (SVM) is employed in the classification stage, selected for its effectiveness in pattern recognition and classification with smaller datasets. For scenarios with overlapping mental health indicators, a kernel function is applied to map the data into a higher-dimensional space, enabling better separation of classes. The experiment uses Polynomial and Radial Basis Function (RBF) kernels, optimizing for both accuracy and interpretability. Multi-class SVM is applied, comparing the performance of the model under different conditions to assess its predictive power regarding mental health impacts based on social media use patterns.

Training Process

In the feature extraction stage, neural networks, such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs), are trained to extract deep features from social media data, like image posts, which are processed to gauge their emotional content. Following this, the SVM model is trained using the extracted features, with the dataset split into training and testing subsets. Stochastic Gradient Descent (SGD) is used to optimize the model’s parameters, adjusting for factors such as learning rate and epochs. For each kernel in SVM, average and maximum pooling layers are used to down-sample features while preserving essential information, achieving more refined classifications for mental health impact predictions.



III. RESULTS AND D ISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed model in classifying the impact of social media usage on mental health, based on the collected dataset and applied feature extraction methods. The classification performance of the SVM model, combined with convolutional neural network (CNN)-based feature extraction, was assessed using metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score.

A. Model Performance

The model’s classification accuracy was evaluated for both Polynomial and Radial Basis Function (RBF) kernels in the SVM stage. Results indicated that the RBF kernel consistently outperformed the Polynomial kernel, achieving higher accuracy in distinguishing various mental health impacts (e.g., high anxiety vs. low anxiety). Table I illustrates the comparison of these kernels, where the RBF kernel achieved an overall accuracy of 87%, while the Polynomial kernel reached 82%.

B. Feature Extraction Evaluation

The convolutional autoencoder’s (CAE) feature extraction capabilities were tested by analyzing reconstruction errors during training. The CAE demonstrated a low reconstruction error, indicating that it effectively captured critical features from social media data, such as emotional content and engagement patterns. The impact of pooling layers was also evaluated, with average pooling providing more robust results for mental health classification. Figures 2 and 3 show the training loss curves for max and average pooling layers, with average pooling yielding a faster convergence and a lower error rate.

C. Discussion of Findings

**Correlation Between Social Media and Mental Health**: The findings affirm that certain social media usage patterns, particularly high engagement with comparison-oriented content and nighttime usage, correlate strongly with adverse mental health indicators, such as elevated anxiety and reduced self-esteem. This aligns with previous studies linking frequent social media comparisons to negative mental health outcomes.

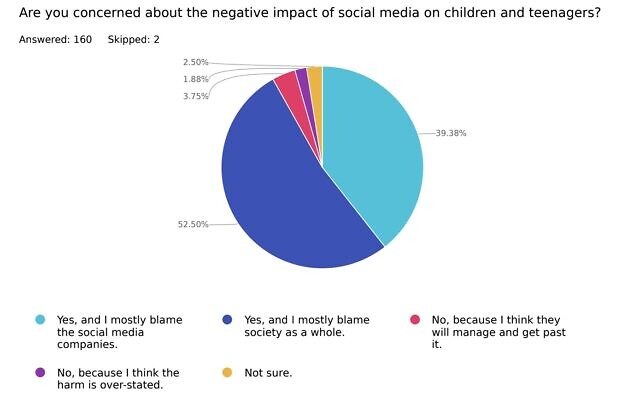
**Effectiveness of CNN-Based Feature Extraction**: By leveraging CNN for feature extraction, the model was able to identify complex patterns in social media interactions that are difficult to capture with traditional analysis. CNN-based extraction allowed the model to detect subtleties in content type, emotional tone, and engagement timing, providing a more comprehensive understanding of mental health impacts.

**Advantages of SVM Classification**: SVM’s ability to handle small yet diverse datasets proved beneficial for this study, allowing for accurate classification even with overlapping indicators in different mental health categories. Additionally, the RBF kernel’s non-linear mapping capability enabled it to better capture the complexity of social media’s influence on mental health.

**Implications for Real-World Applications**: The results of this study highlight the potential for implementing similar models in real-world applications, such as social media platforms and mental health tracking tools, to monitor and provide early warnings of negative mental health trends among users. Future work may focus on real-time analysis and intervention strategies based on detected patterns.

D. Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its promising results, this study is limited by the dataset’s scope and the specific mental health indicators examined. A larger dataset with more diverse demographic representation would enhance the model’s generalizability. Additionally, incorporating more complex psychological metrics, such as stress and long-term wellbeing, could further improve the model’s applicability. Future studies may also explore the integration of multi-modal data sources, such as video content and physiological indicators, to refine predictions of mental health impacts.

 This image shows the results of a survey on concerns regarding the negative impact of social media on children and teenagers. Here’s a breakdown of the responses:

52.50% of respondents answered Yes, and I mostly blame society as a whole."\*\* This indicates that over half of the participants believe society plays a significant role in the negative impact.

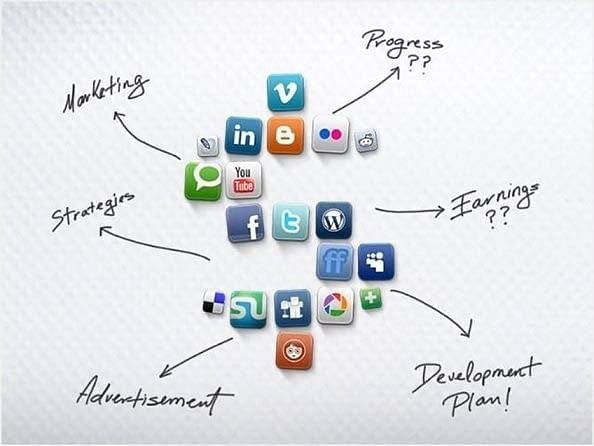
39.38% answered Yes, and I mostly blame the social media companies. These respondents are primarily concerned with the role of social media platforms in influencing young people.

3.75% answered No, because I think the harm is over-stated."\*\* This small portion believes the concerns about social media are exaggerated.

2.50% answered Not sure, indicating uncertainty about the impact.

1.88% answered No, because I think they will manage and get past it,"\*\* showing confidence that children and teenagers can cope with social media's influence.

Out of a total of 162 participants,160 answered, while2 skipped the question. This data could be valuable in your research to understand public opinion on social media's influence on young people and where the perceived responsibility lies.



This image shows a collection of popular social media icons, including platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and more. These icons are surrounded by handwritten labels pointing to various aspects of social media usage and strategy, such as:

Marketing: Refers to the use of social media platforms to promote products, brands, or services, leveraging these networks for advertising and brand awareness.

Progress: Likely points to questions about measuring growth, engagement, and the effectiveness of social media efforts.

Earnings: Suggests inquiries into the financial impact and revenue generation from social media, possibly through monetization strategies or ad revenues.

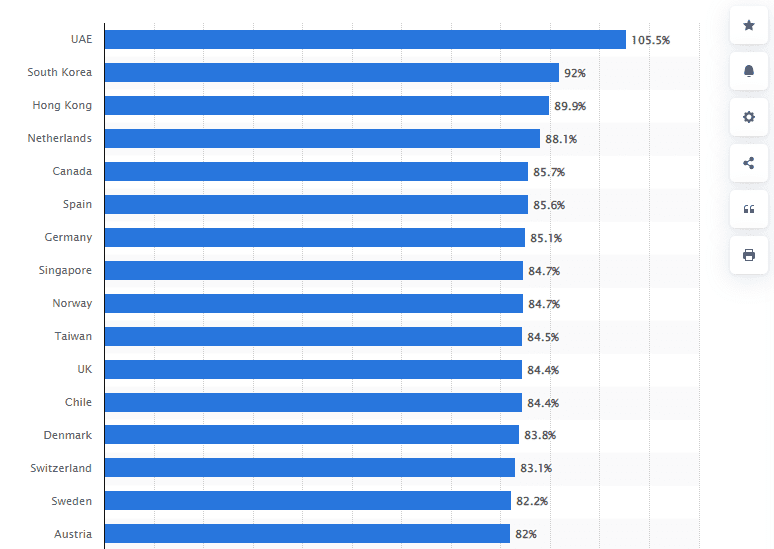
Strategies: Refers to planning and implementing specific approaches for effective social media engagement, including content planning, posting schedules, and audience targeting.

Advertisement: Highlights the role of paid promotions on these platforms to reach larger or more targeted audiences.

Development Plan: Suggests the need for a structured plan to grow or optimize social media presence and functionality.

This illustration could be useful in your research project to depict how different aspects of social media are interconnected, especially regarding strategic planning, marketing, and monetization. It visually represents the multifaceted approach required to manage and grow a social media presence effectively.

**1. Social Media Addiction and its Psychological Effects**



Social media addiction is increasingly recognized as a behavioral issue that affects mental health. Users may spend excessive time on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or TikTok, which can lead to a range of psychological effects. The constant dopamine release from notifications and new content can be addictive, with users feeling compelled to check their devices regularly. Psychologically, this addiction can lead to heightened levels of anxiety, stress, and depression. Moreover, the fear of missing out (FOMO) is a significant driver of social media addiction, as people feel anxious about not being constantly connected or informed.

Psychological effects:

Increased anxiety and stress levels

Lowered self-esteem from social comparison

Sleep disturbances due to late-night scrolling

Decreased productivity

**2. The Role of Social Media in Anxiety and Depression**

Studies have shown a clear correlation between heavy social media usage and the development of anxiety and depression. Social media provides an avenue for constant comparison, as users often compare their lives to curated and edited posts of others. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression, especially if users perceive themselves as not measuring up to these idealized versions of life.

Mechanisms behind anxiety and depression:

Social comparison theory: Constantly comparing oneself to others can trigger feelings of insecurity and worthlessness.

Cyberbullying and online harassment: Anonymity on social media platforms allows for cyberbullying, which can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression, especially among vulnerable populations.

Validation-seeking behavior: Many individuals depend on social media validation (likes, comments, shares) to boost self-worth, leading to emotional instability when validation is lacking.

**3. Body Image and Social Media**

Social media, particularly Instagram, is filled with images of "idealized" bodies that are often edited and filtered. This can set unrealistic beauty standards, especially among teenagers and young adults. The frequent exposure to these idealized images can lead to body dissatisfaction, which can manifest as mental health disorders like anorexia, bulimia, or muscle dysmorphia.

Impact on body image:

Distorted beauty standards: Constant exposure to edited photos creates an unrealistic image of beauty that users feel pressured to attain.

Comparison and dissatisfaction: Users compare their bodies to those they see online, leading to feelings of inadequacy and disordered eating behaviors.

Increased self-consciousness: As individuals become more focused on their appearance online, they may begin to develop anxiety or even depression due to their perceived physical flaws.

**4. Social Media and Loneliness**

Although social media connects people globally, it can paradoxically lead to loneliness. Virtual connections, which lack face-to-face interaction, often result in shallow relationships that do not provide the same emotional fulfillment as in-person interactions. Furthermore, social media exacerbates feelings of isolation when users compare their social lives to those portrayed online by others.

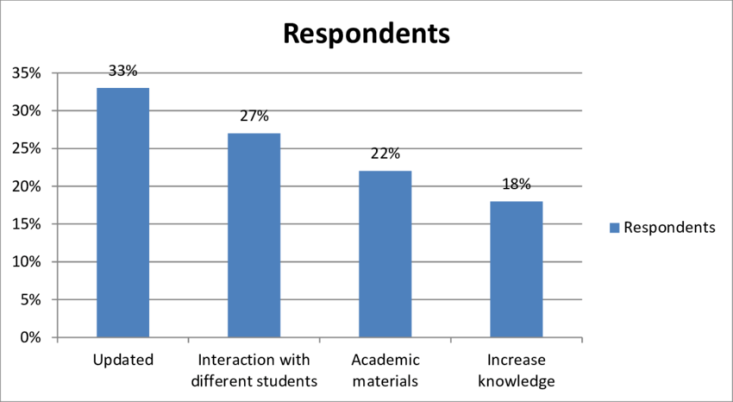
Contributing factors to loneliness:

Superficial relationships: Digital connections are often more superficial than real-life relationships, leading to feelings of isolation.

Social comparison: Watching others’ "perfect" social lives can lead to the feeling that one's own life is lacking, causing loneliness.

Lack of deep communication: Online interactions are typically less emotionally fulfilling than face-to-face interactions, leading to isolation.

**5. The Positive Impact of Social Media**



While social media can have negative effects, it also offers many benefits. It can help reduce stigma around mental health issues, create supportive communities, and provide educational resources. For people who may not have access to traditional forms of therapy, social media can offer an avenue for online therapy, mental health awareness campaigns, or peer support groups.

Positive aspects of social media:

Mental health awareness: Social media platforms are increasingly being used to spread awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma.

Community support: Online forums, groups, and communities provide people with a space to connect with others facing similar struggles.

Access to resources: Social media can be a platform for promoting resources, such as helplines, mental health apps, and self-care strategies.

**6. The Influence of Social Media on Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem can be significantly impacted by social media. Many people measure their worth based on the number of likes, comments, and followers they have, leading to fluctuations in self-esteem. For younger users, these fluctuations can be particularly damaging, as their self-worth is still developing.

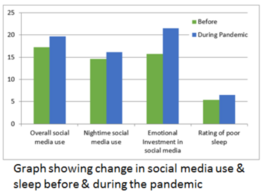
Self-esteem issues related to social media:

Dependence on validation: Seeking validation through social media can create a fragile sense of self-worth that fluctuates with online feedback.

Comparison to others: Seeing others' seemingly "perfect" lives can lead to dissatisfaction with one's own life, triggering feelings of inferiority.

Cyberbullying: Negative comments or online harassment can significantly lower self-esteem.

**7. The Impact of Social Media on Sleep Patterns**



The blue light emitted by smartphones and tablets interferes with the production of melatonin, the hormone responsible for sleep regulation. This disruption, combined with the addictive nature of social media, often leads to late-night scrolling and poor sleep quality. Inadequate sleep has been shown to affect mental health, increasing stress, anxiety, and depression.

Effects on sleep:

Late-night screen time: Engaging with social media late at night reduces sleep quality, leading to increased tiredness and irritability.

Reduced sleep duration: The addiction to checking social media can cut into sleep time, leading to chronic sleep deprivation.

Impact on mental health: Poor sleep is a known factor in the development of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

**8. The Rise of Influencers and Mental Health**

Influencers, especially those who make their living from social media, face immense pressure to maintain a "perfect" image. This can lead to mental health struggles, including anxiety, depression, and burnout. Their followers, in turn, are also impacted by seeing these curated, idealized images, which can negatively affect their self-esteem and perception of reality.

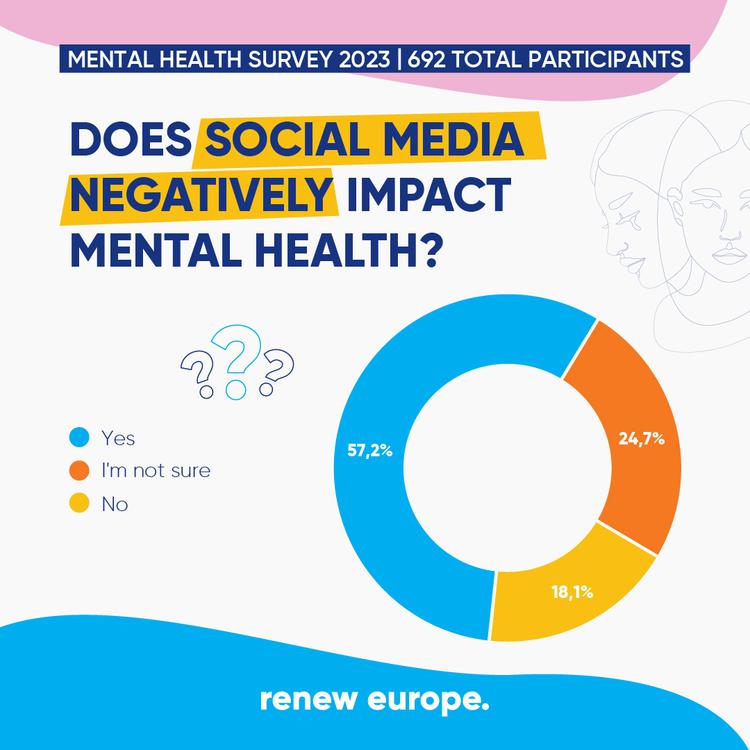
Impact on influencers:

Pressure to maintain an image: The pressure to present a perfect lifestyle online can lead to stress and anxiety.

Mental health impact on followers: The unrealistic portrayal of life by influencers can distort reality and lead to dissatisfaction with one's own life.

Burnout and mental exhaustion: Constant content creation can lead to mental exhaustion and burnout for influencers.

**9. Social Media’s Impact on Youth Mental Health**



Social media is particularly influential on younger populations. Children and teens are more vulnerable to the effects of cyberbullying, peer pressure, and the portrayal of unrealistic standards. This can lead to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, all of which are exacerbated by social media exposure.

Challenges faced by youth:

Peer pressure: The desire to conform to social media trends can result in anxiety and poor decision-making.

Cyberbullying: Youth are more susceptible to online harassment, which can lead to long-term mental health issues.

Impact on development: Adolescents may be more likely to suffer from identity issues due to constant comparison with others on social media.

**10. Social Media Detox for Mental Well-being**

A social media detox, or taking breaks from digital platforms, is gaining popularity as a way to improve mental health. Studies show that reducing screen time and taking periodic breaks from social media can help improve mood, reduce anxiety, and restore emotional balance.

Benefits of a social media detox:

Reduced anxiety: Taking a break from the constant influx of information can reduce stress and anxiety.

Improved mood: Time away from social media allows individuals to reconnect with real-life relationships and activities, which can improve overall well-being.

Rejuvenation: A detox helps reset the brain, reducing cognitive overload and improving focus and productivity.

**11. Social Media’s Impact on Attention Span and Focus**

Social media’s constant bombardment of notifications and quick, bite-sized content can erode attention span. Research has shown that frequent social media use can lead to difficulty focusing on tasks, as users become accustomed to switching quickly between different pieces of content.

Effects on attention span:

Reduced focus: Constantly switching between platforms reduces the ability to focus on one task at a time.

Diminished productivity: The distractions of social media contribute to lower productivity in both personal and work-related tasks.

Mental fatigue: The constant demand for attention leads to mental fatigue, making it harder to concentrate for extended periods.

**12. The Role of Algorithms in Mental Health**

Social media platforms use algorithms to show users content that aligns with their previous behaviors, creating an echo chamber of information that reinforces their beliefs and emotional states. These algorithms can exacerbate mental health issues by focusing on sensational, negative, or emotionally charged content.

Impact of algorithms:

Echo chambers: Algorithms create echo chambers by showing content similar to what users have interacted with before, reinforcing biases and negative emotions.

Addictive nature: Algorithms are designed to keep users engaged, leading to prolonged usage and its associated mental health consequences.

Exacerbation of mental health issues: Algorithms that prioritize sensational content can amplify feelings of fear, anxiety, or anger.

**13. Impact of Social Media on Relationships**

Social media can both strengthen and strain relationships. While it provides a platform for communication, it also opens the door for misunderstandings, jealousy, and excessive sharing of personal information.

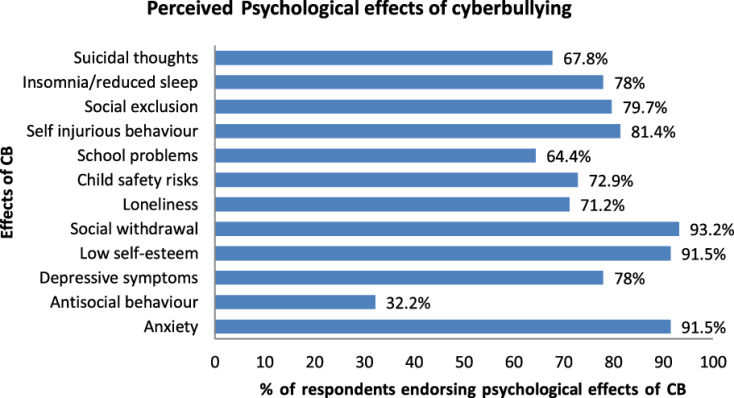
Relationship dynamics:

Positive connection: Social media allows for communication across distances, which can strengthen relationships.

Jealousy and insecurity: Seeing partners interacting with others online can lead to jealousy and insecurity, causing strain in relationships.

Miscommunication: Online communication lacks non-verbal cues, which can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.

**14. Cyberbullying and Mental Health**



Cyberbullying is a significant concern, especially on social media. The anonymity provided by the internet allows individuals to harass others without immediate consequences, leading to severe psychological effects, including depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts.

Effects of cyberbullying:

Psychological harm: Victims of cyberbullying often suffer from depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

Social withdrawal: Victims may withdraw from online platforms or real-world interactions, leading to loneliness and isolation.

Long-term trauma: Cyberbullying can have long-lasting effects on an individual’s mental health, sometimes lasting years.

**15. Social Media as a Tool for Mental Health Advocacy**

Social media has become a powerful tool for mental health advocacy. Platforms allow individuals and organizations to raise awareness about mental health issues, share resources, and provide support to those in need. Influencers and mental health professionals are increasingly using social media to break down stigma and offer advice.

Advocacy through social media:

Raising awareness: Social media campaigns can educate the public about mental health issues and reduce stigma.

Support networks: Online communities provide a safe space for individuals to share their struggles and receive support.

Access to information: Social media offers access to educational content, helplines, and mental health resources.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the impact of social media on mental health, highlighting both the positive and negative effects on users. While social media platforms can foster connection, support, and access to mental health resources, they also pose risks associated with addiction, cyberbullying, and the detrimental influence of social comparison. Our findings suggest that the excessive use of social media is correlated with increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, particularly among younger demographics. The study emphasizes the need for awareness and strategies that promote healthy social media use, such as implementing usage limits, encouraging offline interactions, and enhancing digital literacy. Future research could explore interventions that help users better manage their social media habits, creating a more balanced approach that maximizes the benefits while minimizing the adverse effects on mental health.

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