

Understanding the Link between Social Media Use and Mental Health Issues

Mohammed Yunus

9, Wheeler Road Extension, St. Thomas Town, Bangalore, Karnataka, INDIA.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the connection between social media use and mental health, with an emphasis on the potential negative consequences and techniques for promoting positive well-being. It examines previous research on the psychological factors underlying social media's impact on mental health, such as social comparison, FOMO, cyberbullying, and online social support. The article additionally highlights vulnerable demographics, such as teenagers, young adults, and people with pre-existing mental health disorders, who may be especially prone to social media's harmful consequences. It emphasises the significance of responsible social media use and moderation in reducing negative outcomes and suggests viable interventions, legislation, and recommendations to develop a better digital environment that promotes mental well-being.

Keywords: Social media use, Mental health, Psychological mechanisms, Vulnerable populations, Responsible social media use, Interventions and policies.

Article Information

Received: 02-10-2023

Revised : 20-10-2023

Accepted: 29-10-2023

Correspondence

Mr. Mohammed Yunus

9, Wheeler Road Extension, St. Thomas Town, Bangalore-560084, Karnataka, INDIA.

Email: y419142@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has become a widespread force that has changed the way people connect, share information, and communicate with each other. With the rise of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tiktok, and others, people from all over the world are able to communicate with each other instantly and make virtual communities that don't depend on where they currently live. With billions of busy users all over the world, social media has had a huge impact on today's society.

Social media platforms provide distinctive opportunities for networking, entertainment, and information transfer, making them an essential part of people of all ages' everyday lives. Social media has revolutionized the way individuals interact and engage with the world around


them, from teens recording their lives in real-time to professionals networking for career advancements.

However, as social media usage grows, so does the amount of attention surrounding its possible consequences on mental health and well-being. Researchers and mental health professionals have started to look at the complex relationship between social media use and mental health disorders, showing a complex and varied picture.

While some studies have highlighted the benefits of social media, such as increased social connectivity, support networks, and opportunities for self-expression, others have focused on its negative sides. A rising corpus of research suggests disturbing correlations between excessive social media use and an array of mental health issues such as anxiety, sadness, loneliness, and low self-esteem.

The aim of the article is to look into and unravel the complex relationship between social media use and mental health disorders. We can better navigate the digital environment and promote a balanced and responsible approach to social media use that supports overall well-being by understanding the influence of social media on mental health.

Access this article online

Website: www.jcramonline.com	Quick Response code
DOI: 10.5530/jcram.3.3.7	

Importance of studying the relationship between social media use and mental health issues

The study of the correlation between social media use and mental health disorders has grown in importance in the discipline of psychology. As social media becomes more prevalent in modern society, understanding its impact on mental health has significant implications for people, communities, and even public health.

The rapid growth of smartphones and high-speed internet access over the last decade has resulted in an unparalleled increase in social media activity. People spend a significant amount of time connecting with various social media sites, from looking through news feeds to posting life updates and multimedia content. The enticement of virtual communities, combined with the rapid pleasure of social validation, has created a digital environment in which online presence frequently overlaps with real-life identity. Concerns regarding the potential effects of social media use on mental health have developed in the midst of this digital revolution. Researchers and mental health professionals have noticed an increase in mental health difficulties among those who spend a lot of time on social media. While correlations do not always imply causation, the rise of mental health issues has created an urgent need to investigate the underlying mechanisms and potential connections.

Social media can be a beneficial channel for self-expression, social support, and information sharing for some people. It can be a source of motivation and inspiration by connecting people who have similar interests and goals. Others, on the other hand, may suffer psychologically from persistent exposure to idealised self-presentations, social comparisons, cyberbullying, and continuous Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).

Understanding the complex relationship between social media use and mental health is important for a number of reasons. To begin, mental health concerns are a major global concern that affects millions of people. We can identify possible risk factors and develop focused interventions to improve mental well-being in the digital era by investigating the function of social media.

Second, the influence of social media on mental health goes beyond personal experiences. It affects interpersonal interactions, workplace dynamics, and community well-being. Policy decisions and guidelines can be informed by research in this area, resulting in a safer and more compassionate online environment. Individuals can adopt healthier online behaviours and strive for a more balanced

approach to digital involvement by raising awareness of the potential effects.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH

Positive Effects of social media on Mental Health

1. Social Support and Connectivity: Social media platforms can help people connect with friends, family, and supportive communities, which can lead to increased social support and less loneliness.¹

2. Access to Mental Health Information: social media may give vital mental health information and resources, as well as raise awareness and reduce the stigma associated with mental health disorders.²

3. Empowerment and Expression: Social media platforms empower people by allowing them to share their stories, express their emotions, etc.³

A study by Valkenburg *et al.* looked at the relationship between adolescents' use of friend networking sites (also called "social media") and their happiness and social self-esteem. Adolescents who engaged in good online interactions and received social support via social media platforms reported better levels of well-being and social self-esteem, according to the study. Increased social connectedness and support were related to these favourable outcomes.⁴

Negative Effects of social media on Mental Health

1. Anxiety and Depression: Excessive social media use has been related to increased anxiety and depression symptoms, particularly with a focus on social comparison and self-presentation.⁵

2. Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying abounds on social media, resulting in poor psychological effects such as low self-esteem and increased emotional discomfort.⁶

3. Excessive Use: Excessive social media use, particularly before use, particularly before night, has been linked to sleep disruptions and poor sleep quality.⁷

Primack *et al.* explored the association between social media use and perceived social isolation among young individuals. Individuals who spent more than two hours each day on social media had a higher likelihood of expressing experiences of social isolation, according to the study. This research implies that excessive social media use is associated with feelings of loneliness and social detachment.⁸ Lin *et al.* also assessed the link between social media use and depression symptoms in young adults. It discovered that people who frequently used social media

platforms were more likely to suffer from depression symptoms. The study also discovered that people who reported more frequent social media use before night were more likely to have sleep problems, which can exacerbate mental health issues.

MECHANISMS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES

The impact of social media on mental health is influenced by a number of psychological mechanisms and processes. Let's look at some of the important concepts underlying this relationship:

Social Comparison: Social media platforms offer users to compare themselves to others, which generally leads to upward social comparisons. People on social media may compare their own life, accomplishments, and appearance to well-controlled and idealised depictions of others. This constant comparison can lead to emotions of inadequacy, jealousy, and a sense of not measuring up, all of which contribute to low self-esteem and poor mental health.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): FOMO is a psychological condition characterised by the dread of missing out on social events or interesting experiences that others are sharing on social media. When users view posts of friends or acquaintances participating in fun activities or events without them, they may feel nervous or left out. This fear of missing out can lead to an insatiable want to be connected to social media, even at the cost of real-life events, resulting in tension and worry.

Cyberbullying: Social media platforms can foster cyberbullying by subjecting individuals to harassment, rude comments, or personal attacks. Cyberbullying has serious psychological implications, such as increased anxiety, sadness, and social isolation. The online environment's anonymity and distance can amplify the impact of cyberbullying on mental health.

Confirmation Bias and Echo Chambers: Social media algorithms frequently customise content to users' likes and interests, resulting in echo chambers in which users are exposed to information that confirms their pre-existing ideas. This reinforcement of pre-existing attitudes can lead to confirmation bias, in which users seek and interpret information that supports their pre-existing beliefs, potentially intensifying polarization and emotional suffering.

Impression Management: Social media sites encourage users to project a positive image of themselves by highlighting the best aspects of their lives. This image management approach can result in the development of an idealised online persona that may not fully reflect an individual's real-life experiences and feelings. The need to

keep up this carefully cultivated image can lead to feelings of inauthenticity and psychological strain.

Excessive social media use can lead to compulsive behaviours, in which people feel forced to check social media frequently, even if it interferes with everyday activities or sleep. Addiction to digital media can interfere with real-life social connections and contribute to feelings of social isolation and anxiety.

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Because of developmental stages, psychological features, and pre-existing vulnerabilities, certain groups may be more vulnerable to the harmful effects of social media. Here's a glimpse at some vulnerable populations:

Adolescents

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage marked by considerable physical, emotional, and social changes. Adolescents may be especially exposed to the harmful effects of social media at this time period for the following reasons:

a. Identity Formation: Adolescents are actively building their identities and seeking peer validation. Social media allows for self-presentation and social comparison, which can exacerbate feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about one's own worth.

b. Cyberbullying: Adolescents may be especially vulnerable to cyberbullying because social media is a common way of communication among their peer group. Cyberbullying can have serious mental health repercussions, causing feelings of loneliness, depression, and, in extreme situations, suicide ideation.

c. Impression Management: As adolescents seek social approval and fear negative judgements from their peers, the need to maintain an idealised online image might be heightened. The persistent demand for validation can cause tension and anxiety.

Young Adults

Young adulthood is a phase of transition and exploration, with important life changes such as pursuing further education, entering the workforce, or building new relationships. Because of the following variables, young adults may be more vulnerable to the harmful impacts of social media:

a. Comparison and Achievement: Social media can encourage a culture of comparison in which young adults feel forced to compare their accomplishments and achievements to those of their peers. Constant exposure to the achievements of others might lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

b. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): The fear of missing out on social activities and experiences can be especially acute in young adulthood. This anxiety and stress can be exacerbated by increased social media use and a constant urge to keep connected.

c. Balancing Social and Professional Identities: On social media, young individuals frequently need to balance their personal and professional identities. Maintaining a positive online image can cause controversy and stress, particularly in professional situations.

Individuals with Pre-Existing Mental Health Conditions

People who already have mental health issues may be more vulnerable to the harmful impacts of social media because of the following factors:

a. Triggering Content: Individuals on social media may be exposed to triggering content linked to their mental health disorders. Self-harm, suicide, or graphic depictions of mental health challenges may worsen symptoms and emotional discomfort.

b. Social Isolation: People suffering from mental illnesses may feel social isolation or difficulty forming and maintaining real-life social connections. Using social media to engage with others might worsen feelings of loneliness and isolation.

c. Reinforcement of Negative Thought Patterns: Social media can promote negative thought patterns and cognitive biases in those with mental illnesses, increasing their symptoms.

Fake News and Information

The spread of fake news and misinformation on social media is a major worry that can have a negative influence on vulnerable people. Fake news is material that is intentionally incorrect or misleading and is presented as genuine news. It is frequently manufactured to deceive or manipulate readers for a variety of reasons. The propagation of bogus news on social media can have a negative impact on mental health, especially among vulnerable persons.

a. Anxiety and panic Amplification: The spread of false information about health, disasters, or dangers can magnify anxiety and panic in vulnerable groups. Rumours about public health crises or exaggerated threats can cause heightened stress and worry, negatively impacting mental health.

b. Impact on Well-Being and Coping: Consuming fake news can cause negative emotional reactions such as anger, despair, or powerlessness, especially if the material is disturbing or alarming. Exposure to fake news might

disrupt coping strategies and increase symptoms in people who already have mental health issues.

c. Trust and Social Connection: The propagation of fake news has the potential to undermine trust in social media platforms and the information shared on them. The spread of incorrect or inaccurate information can damage the trust that vulnerable populations have in their online communities, resulting in feelings of isolation.

MODERATION AND COPING STRATEGIES

Responsible social media use and moderation are critical in protecting mental health and reducing the harmful effects of social media. Here are some reasons why it's essential:

Limiting Exposure to Triggering Content: Individuals might be exposed to distressing or triggering content on social media, which can have a detrimental influence on their mental health. Being conscious of the content ingested and avoiding exposure to dangerous or disturbing material constitutes responsible use.

Reduce Information Overload: The constant flow of information on social media might result in information overload and cognitive weariness. Moderation in social media use can help people maintain a good balance between online activity and other elements of their lives, decreasing feelings of overwhelm.

Excessive social media use can lead to frequent social comparison, which can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Individuals who use moderation are able to focus on their own objectives and successes rather than continually comparing themselves to others.

Prioritising Real-Life contacts: Excessive social media use can lead to less face-to-face contact. Prioritising real-life relationships and social interactions is part of responsible use.

Promoting Digital Detox: Taking regular social media breaks, often known as digital detox, can help individuals recharge, reduce stress, and enhance their overall mental health. When people are feeling overwhelmed or nervous, they should take a break from social media.

Coping Methods for Negative Emotions Caused by Social Media Use

Set Time Limits: Set specified time limits for social media use each day to avoid overuse and possibly bad feelings. Use apps or features that notify you when it's time to take a break and restrict your screen time.

Unfollow Negative Accounts: Curate your social media feed by unfollowing accounts that lead to negative emotions or feelings of inadequacy on a regular basis. Follow accounts that motivate, inspire, and overall well-being.

Mindful Use: Use social media mindfully by being conscious of your emotional reactions to the content. If you have sensations of anxiety or anguish, consider whether the information is good or harmful.

Seek Out Supportive forums: Join online forums that provide encouragement, empathy, and positive discourse. Connecting with others who share similar interests can help to build a sense of belonging and lessen feelings of isolation.

Diversify Offline Activities: Make time for hobbies, exercise, spending time with loved ones, and other enjoyable activities. Diversifying your everyday routine can assist you in balancing your online and offline activities.

Limit Pre-Bedtime Use: Avoid using social media right before bedtime, as it can interfere with sleep quality and contribute to increased stress and anxiety. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine instead.

Seek Professional Help: If negative emotions associated with social media use become overpowering or persistent, consult a mental health professional. They can assist you in developing coping skills that are personalized to your individual needs.

INTERVENTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several ongoing initiatives have been launched to address mental health issues associated with social media use. These activities are aimed towards raising awareness, supporting responsible usage, and assisting vulnerable individuals.

Here are a few examples: Social media platforms have cooperated with mental health organisations to increase awareness about mental health concerns, provide resources, and encourage discussions about mental well-being.

Online Support Communities: A variety of online support groups and communities have come up to provide a safe area for people to discuss mental health issues, exchange coping skills, and offer mutual support.

Reporting procedures: Social media networks have reporting procedures in place that allow users to flag abusive content, cyberbullying, and disinformation. This aids in the rapid removal of harmful materials and the provision of assistance to impacted users.

Interventions, policies, or guidelines that have been proposed

Here are some potential initiatives, policies, or recommendations that might be considered to further decrease the negative consequences of social media use and enhance the beneficial aspects:

Establishing age limitations on specific features and material on social media platforms can help safeguard

young and vulnerable users from being exposed to harmful content. Furthermore, giving effective parental control tools allows parents to monitor and manage their children's social media use.

Enhanced Content Moderation: Enforcing tougher content moderation procedures to remove harmful or misleading content can help to establish a safer online environment and prevent misinformation and cyberbullying.

Introduce digital literacy education in schools to provide pupils with critical thinking skills and media literacy. This education should emphasise the identification of bogus news, the awareness of online privacy, and the promotion of appropriate social media use.

Algorithms and Mindful Design Transparency: Social media platforms should prioritise user well-being through thoughtful design practises. Transparency about the algorithms that influence users' content exposure can foster trust and empower people to make educated decisions about their social media use.

Mental Health Screenings and Alerts: Use mental health screening methods to identify people who are at risk of developing mental health problems. Platforms can provide personalised alerts or actions to individuals who exhibit indicators of discomfort or overuse of social media.

Statistics Empowerment: Give users access to their social media usage statistics, such as time spent on the platform and engagement trends. This information can help people reflect on their digital behaviours and make educated decisions about them.

Collaboration with Mental Health Professionals: To build and spread evidence-based therapies and resources, social media platforms should work with mental health specialists. This collaboration can guarantee that mental health support activities are successful and relevant.

CONCLUSION

Addressing mental health risks associated with social media use necessitates a multifaceted approach that includes collaboration across social media platforms, mental health organisations, policymakers, educators, and users. We can limit the negative consequences of social media use while also exploiting its potential to improve mental well-being and social support by applying ethical practises, building friendly online communities, and providing mental health resources. Future initiatives should emphasise ongoing research, intervention assessment, and the development of evidence-based policy in order to build a healthy digital ecosystem for all users.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Ellison NB, Steinfield C, Lampe C. The benefits of Facebook "friends:" Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *J Comput Mediated Commun.* 2007;12(4):1143-68. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x.
2. Berry N, Bucci S, Lobban F. Use of the internet and mobile phones for self-management of severe mental health problems: qualitative study of staff views. *JMIR Ment Health.* 2016;3(2):e32.
3. Arria AM, O'Grady KE, Caldeira KM, Vincent KB, Wilcox HC, Wish ED. Suicide ideation among college students: a multivariate analysis. *Arch Suicide Res.* 2009;13(3):230-46. doi: 10.1080/13811110903044351, PMID 19590997, PMCID PMC2709750.
4. Valkenburg PM, Peter J, Schouten AP. Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' well-being and social self-esteem. *Cyberpsychol Behav.* 2006;9(5):584-90. doi: 10.1089/cpb.2006.9.584, PMID 17034326.
5. Kross E, Verduyn P, Demiralp E, Park J, Lee DS, Lin N, *et al.* Facebook use predicts declines in subjective well-being in young adults. *PLOS ONE.* 2013;8(8):e69841. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0069841, PMID 23967061.
6. Kowalski RM, Giumetti GW, Schroeder AN, Lattanner MR. Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychol Bull.* 2014;140(4):1073-137. doi: 10.1037/a0035618, PMID 24512111.
7. Levenson JC, Shensa A, Sidani JE, Colditz JB, Primack BA. The association between social media use and sleep disturbance among young adults. *Prev Med.* 2016;85:36-41. doi: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2016.01.001, PMID 26791323.
8. Primack BA, Shensa A, Sidani JE, Whaite EO, Lin LY, Rosen D, *et al.* Social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults in the U.S. *American. Am J Prev Med.* 2017;53(1):1-8. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2017.01.010, PMID 28279545.

Cite this Article : Yunus M. Understanding the Link between Social Media Use and Mental Health Issues. *J. Clin. Res. Applied Med.* 2023;3(3):31-6.